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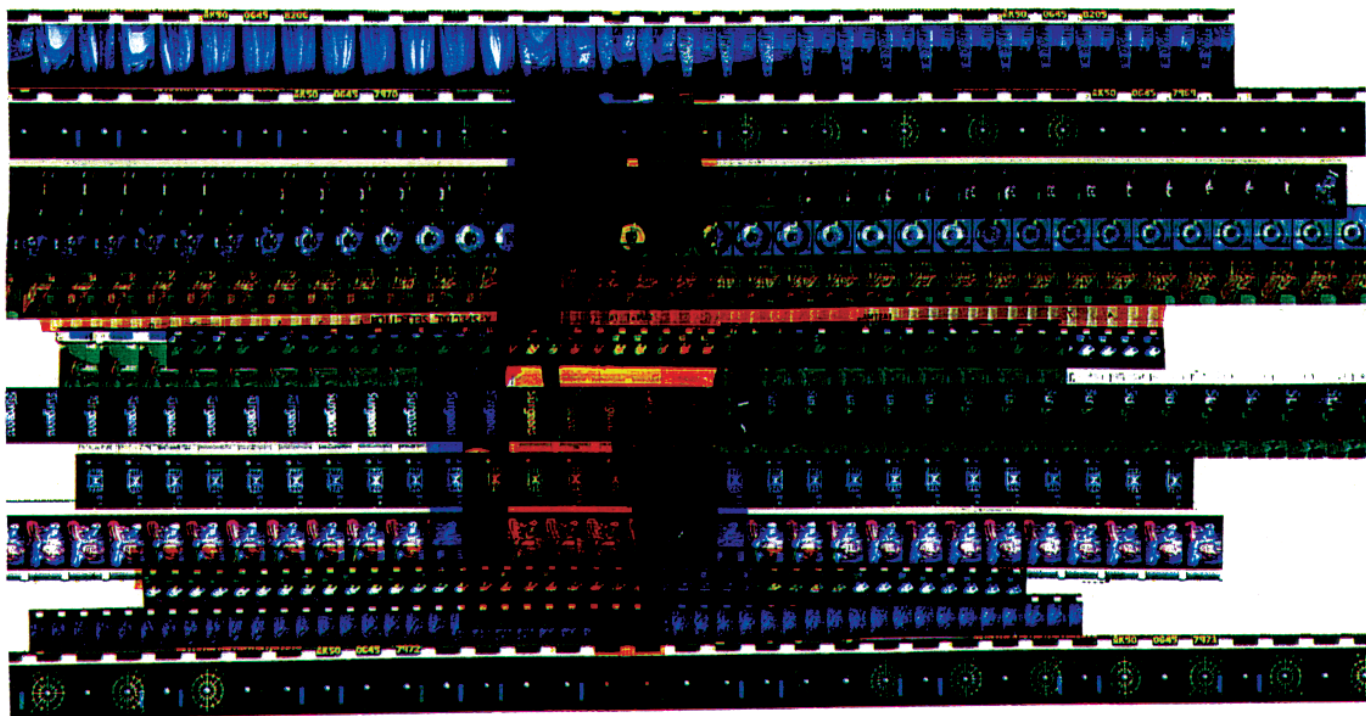
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ARTICLE ABOUT VISUAL ARTISTS
INCORPORATING FILM IN CLUB NIGHTS

THE FACE

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SHOTS IN THE DARK



A new generation of visual artists is using film to fight the supremacy of strobe, finds Rupert Howe

Back in the early Nineties there were two basic visual experiences offered during your average night out. One involved the megawatt laser rig advertised on Technicolor rave flyers (all saucer-eyed gurners and high-tech retina burn). The other was the two-strobes-and-a-smoke-machine affair beloved of the club underground (presumably based on the assumption that if you couldn't even see your hands in front of your face you wouldn't care if the club was half-empty).

Thankfully, things began to change. Snatches of grainy, scratched-up home movies, jerky animations and bizarre photo-

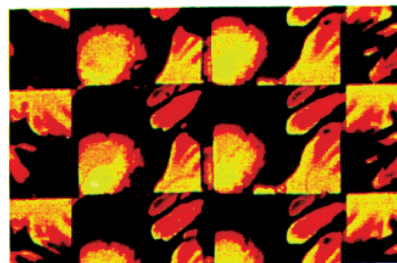
graphic montages began to appear on club walls. Events like Sabresonic, Club Head and Stealth were among the first to become purveyors of a total sensory experience – eye candy for clubbers tired of dancing with their eyes closed. Nowadays, it's commonplace for clubs, live bands and festivals to use slide and 16mm projections instead of Day-Glo stage lighting – the whole presentation of popular music has altered and expanded so that an evening out seems flat without a set of visual gymnastics.

As Noah from Vegetable Vision puts it: "It's probably got a lot to do with E and the whole acid thing, but people today are used

to visual as well as audio stimulation." A corporation of two, Vegetable Vision met while Adam was studying film and video at the London College of Printing and his partner in clubbing, Noah, was slowly working his way up through the ranks of the film industry. "We were both producing abstract film at the time, just as an interest of ours," recalls Noah. "We were going out, seeing really terrible visuals, and it was a classic case of 'We can do better than that!'"

Club events then, as now, were a cheap and culturally subversive alternative to the cinema. "You were free to do whatever you wanted, rather than being restricted by a college project or a client," says Adam. Their hands-on no-rules aesthetic quickly led them into freeform experiments with Mutoid Waste and Megadog, and when

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CLUBS



Andrew Weatherall started Sabresonic at Happy Jax down near London Bridge, Vegetable Vision were on hand to transform the dank, cavernous venue into an intoxicating prismatic experience.

"We're really into film and slides; we don't use video. So it's keeping the whole cinema tradition alive. People shoot promos on film and then transfer the whole thing to video and you only see it on a 14-inch screen. We use film the way it was meant to be used, projected big and bright and bold."

These days their talents are more in

have all played host to their beguiling brand of filmic cut 'n' paste. "We collect our stuff from everywhere," says Allen, glancing up at a shelf groaning under the weight of 30-odd Super-8 projectors. "Skips, car-boot sales – scavenging I think is the word. I've got quite a mad collection of other people's home movies which I'm planning to put into some kind of promo."

The Light Surgeons are now intent on pushing dance culture further into the realms of art. "I do get a bit wary of just being associated with club visuals, and we

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evidence at vast concert halls like Brixton Academy, forming blazing backdrops for the likes of The Chemical Brothers (for whom they are also directing a long-form video) and The Aloof. "It's very precisely done," says Noah of their wildstyle effects, "but when it comes together it's the most twisted chaos. When you put four different images on top of one another and then film on top of that, you're never going to get the same combinations coming up again."

"It's a DIY culture, basically: all the things I've been involved with are about just going out and doing it, as cheaply as possible," says Chris Allen of the Light Surgeons. While a generation of electronic musicians have invented their own sonic language by (mis)using existing technology, many visual artists inspired by club culture have followed a parallel course. Allen's first club commission came during his art foundation course, when he was asked to spice up the look of a jazz-funk night run by his brother.

Now based in a shared studio space in Hoxton Square, the Light Surgeons are a stone's throw from their main source of employment, the Blue Note, where Stealth, Bloodsugar and the Wall Of Sound parties

do try and keep an art-based edge to it. I'd like to get to the stage where we could have a set installation which would constantly change, with young photographers, illustrators and designers adding work."

Far from being the idle loafers their company name might suggest, Izzy and Spencer, the creative duo behind Lazy Eye, are irrepressible film splicers, with a CV stretching back over six years to a self-promoted club called Strum Plonk Boom Thump. Then they made do with a single slide projector: today their current Saturday-night residency at the Heavenly Social is a multi-projector riot of celluloid hedonism.

"To me it's come back to how it was when it started in the Sixties," says Spencer. "We always try and make our stuff look like party scenes from *Midnight Cowboy* or something." The Lazy Eye show is based around film projection rather than video, using anything they can lay their hands on. "We love film: we're low-tech kind of people," says Izzy. "There's something really pure about a beam of light shining through a bit of celluloid."

"The ultimate plan," says Spencer with a wide grin, "is to have people dancing to projections with no music at all" ●

