

**theguardian**

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A collective of designers and film-makers who operate in the grey area between club visuals and film, The Light Surgeons were established back in 1995, out of a "foolish dedication to car boot bargain super 8's and thrashed slide projectors" Sean Dodson talked to them.

They may term their dedication to super 8s and slide projectors 'foolish', but The Light Surgeon's list of 'patients' has been far from foolish: they include FilmFour, Warner, onedotzero, Mo Wax, Skint, and Ninja Tune.

At last year's onedotzero retrospective, the collective premiered Electronic Manoeuvres - part road movie and part political essay on the state of the American nation and its obsessions with consumption, control and corruption - to great acclaim. Following the success of their first narrative-based work, the collective will be performing Electronic Manoeuvres 2 at this year's festival.

**SD** You've often been sited as part of a lo-tech revolution in film. How true is this?

**LS** Pretty true. We used to get our equipment from car boot sales and jumble sales. We didn't need brand new stuff, video wasn't accessible when we first started club visuals, and this was the place to get the 16mm projectors etc. It fitted in with our retro-sampling aesthetic, the cine thing. The main thing was we could get our hands on it for the right price at these places.

We used film in a lo-tech way, differently to the way it was being used. We approach film from the back door, playing with it creatively by putting it into a space, making up and appropriating material and film loops, approaching it as you would music. Sampling images, layering and creating references and juxtapositions.

**SD** You have worked with musicians such as the Propellerheads and Sneaker Pimps as well as corporate launches for the likes of Sony. Do you change your approach much or is corporate hospitality the new rock n' roll?

**LS** Doing a stage event for a independent label or a live show for UNKLE is totally different to corporate hospitality events. Live gigs like Propellerheads and Cornershop mean we have to make it more theatrical, you're performing as the band are performing, illustrating the music with visuals. We produce visuals for each track and then jazz it out. For UNKLE our visual set was very tightly laid down and orchestrated. A DJ or turntablist thing makes it more important to have visuals because there's no singer to dribble over. Corporate events pay the rent, and we give them credibility and transform a space for them. We're not anti-commercialism, we mix both. Luckily the commercial clients we work for are buying into what we do, so it's not like we're forced into doing something we wouldn't want to. If you can combine them that's perfect.

**SD** How long until you make your first feature film?

**LS** We've just got our first short film - Thumbnail Express - out the way. It makes up part of EM, which is a live exploded documentary. But Thumbnail Express will also become part of a larger series, Gilligan's Travels, that we've been developing with onedotzero. Once complete this should be consumed on TV, but the live event is a different experience. We've a plan to make a short sci-fi film next using the methods we've explored with our experimentation with projection and graphics. There's always a question of funding when you're doing something different and not through the usual routes, and all the time learning about a craft too.

**SD** . . . and why did you choose to make a documentary?

**LS** It seemed a logical extension of what we'd been doing. We worked on a design exhibition in 99 and collected material in the states, including audio. It was the first time we captured our own audio, started showing this with projections, and thought one of the interviews would work well as a short. This was commissioned for onedotzero4. Our background in listening to music and illustrating it visually, means it came together as 'inverse film-making', back to front. Don't do it at home. But the interview meant we had a ready made script so didn't have to make this bit up.

**SD** A lot of well known film-makers - Mike Figgis and Ken Russell come to mind - are experimenting with new forms of film and new ways of making them. How do you view this?

**LS** What holds film back from being really mad and experimental is where it's shown. Cinemas only show formula stuff. That's why forums like the onedotzero festival or organic film clubs like the Halloween Society, or hybrid club events are so important now. Ken Russell has always made pretty unconventional films, but nowadays what defines a film is getting it shown - the definition of what a film is is changing. The convergence of traditional film, graphic design, new media and internet means that people are exposed to and are more accepting of these new forms. But you'll always get the purists too. Technology shouldn't lead you into a film form, it should just open the creative possibilities, and give more access to do it. The tools are there now. It's easy for us to make film now because we've got [software video-editing package] Final Cut Pro and a G4.

**LS** We want it to be online, beginning of next year - but we've got so many events and projects that it's hard to find the time. The 'me tv' idea is pretty crazy. I'll like to use the internet as an imagebank for us, so people could see the process and how we make up a visual show. We want to communicate to more people and this is an amazing way to do it. We don't see ourselves as part of a movement, we're not stuck on digital either, we've used analogue methods so long. But we see the possibilities and want to use them to get our messages and stuff out to more people.

• The Light Surgeons will be performing at onedotzero5 on Saturday May 5 at 9pm.