

Semiconductor: Brilliant Noise Touring Exhibition / Fabrica, Brighton

By Jack Sargeant

Thus far Semiconductor's work has been drawn to localised anomalies: to Parisian microclimates, the geological landscape of Northumbria, and the choreography of migrating starlings over Brighton's ruined West Pier. These works locate and examine the endless flux of forces that play across the apparent calm of the everyday. In *Brilliant Noise*, Semiconductor turn their attention to solar forces.

"Astronomy compels the soul to look upwards and leads us from this world to another" - Plato

Taking thousands of NASA satellite images, the artists have edited these pictures together to create a grainy animation of the Sun. The rigorous mediation of image selection and photographic manipulation undertaken by NASA is negated by Semiconductor, who engage not just with the subject matter but also with the mechanisms of reproduction that have dictated and framed the scientific documentation. The Sun is so dazzling that to gaze upon it renders the viewer blind, this inability to fully look upon the Sun is removed in carefully altered images, but for Semiconductor the possibility and risk of non-sight becomes part of the creative process. Rather than clean-up the image for easy sterile consumption Semiconductor use the digital blur and fuzz of the spectacular satellite images as a way in which to create and manipulate the sound of the piece, radio static and sonic rumbles changing according to the intensity of the footage.

Brilliant Noise differs from Semiconductor's previous pieces with its emphasis on the chiaroscuro it is devoid of the colour palate that has come to define much of their work. Through this emphasis on the black and white nature of the video via the sound design, the piece draws attention to the forces that shape and reshape the Sun. The lack of colour also adds to the contradictory nature of the piece, which is both a documentary of the Sun's numerous cycles and simultaneously a series of abstracted visual shapes that display the immense cosmological forces that play through and around the Sun's apparent immutability, revealing instead an ocean of ever changing forms.

Presented as a video triptych the ensuing film and installation serves to create a vast *Sunscape*, as the surface of the Sun and the boiling solar atmosphere ebb and flow across the screen in ferocious arching patterns and ejaculations of luminescent fluid. The extolment of the Sun has been central across cultures, from the ancient father of the gods Helios to symbolic godhead, as the face of the heavens or the solar anus of dissonant surrealism. In choosing to present the piece as a triptych in a deconsecrated church Semiconductor inadvertently contextualise *Brilliant Noise* within the traditional of liturgical art.

As audiences experience the piece it is becomes clear that there is a moment of immanence, of the sacred within the profane. But this is not a religious ecstasy so much as a brief moment of the sacred found in the understanding of the annihilation of the self in the face of the universe.

Like the chaotic elements that effect the urban landscape and wilderness, the Sun shapes our very existence, and like the forces of gravity and wind and bird flight it is largely ignored, a transparent phenomenon which commonplace renders invisible. Yet in searching for these hidden moments, in truly exploring the world – and now the Sun around which we orbit – the fragility and inconsequentiality of human existence can be truly understood. Jack Sargeant, 2008-01-07 www.jacktext.net