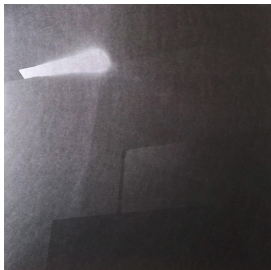


## Brainwashed - Jon Porras, "Light Divide"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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I have noted in the past that few artists are quite as chameleonic as Barn Owl, an observation that Jon Porras seems to have taken as a challenge, as he has now gone and made a dub techno album. While I do not think that he should necessarily quit his day job, the better moments of *Light Divide* make it seem like Porras has been doing this forever. In particular, the opening, "Apeiron," is 7-minutes of warmly hissing greatness. The rest of the album is not quite on the same level, but it is certainly a pleasant and well-executed stylistic departure nonetheless.

### [Thrill Jockey](#)

As divergent as dub techno initially seems from Porras' drone-heavy past, the connecting threads are evident right from the very beginning of "Apeiron," as it is built primarily upon a single sustained synth chord. The key difference is that Jon now leaves that backbone alone to quaver gently over a deep bass thump and echoing, processed percussion rather than using it as a foundation for more layers of guitars and synthesizers. Porras' old melodic/harmonic sensibilities still remain as well: they are just a bit buried this time around—pleasantly so, actually. By the time "Apeiron" finally ends, there is enough subtle darkness and complexity swirling in the warm and eerie haze that it ultimately sounds a lot more like Angelo Badalamenti than, say, Pole.

Jon does not quite keep that remarkable feat going for the remaining four songs, but he is not short of good ideas nor is he a slouch at executing them. In fact, the sole flaw with *Light Divide* lies mostly with Porras' odd compositional choices, as every other piece takes some kind of momentum-sapping detour around its midpoint. "Recollection," for example, is a bit more active melodically than its predecessor, weaving together a ghostly nimbus of drifting and shimmering synths. Unexpectedly, however, Porras undercuts that with a cavernous thump and rumble that almost veers into singularly dancefloor-unfriendly Lustmord territory before the piece ultimately

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dissipates into a beat-less coda of woozily rippling synths, hissing swells, and reverberating chords.

The following "Divide" initially ditches the dark ambient tendencies to take another crack at the successful formula of "Apeiron," but abruptly dissolves into gloomy rumbling and clattering after about two minutes as well. That disappointed me, though the piece is redeemed a bit by the gradual fade-in of some gently flanging and hallucinatory synth chords. "New Monument," on the other hand, is a warmly drifting drone piece augmented by plenty of echoes, hisses, and buried shudders. Unfortunately, Porras again decides to completely stop the song and changes motifs halfway through. The problem is not that the new motif is particularly weak—it is just that it feels sudden and puzzling. A five-minute song is probably too short for multiple movements unless an artist is a master at seamless, organic-feeling transitions, which is one skill that Jon cannot currently boast.

*Light Divide* concludes with the strong "Pleiades," which reprises the album's themes of echoing clatters, buried throbs, and quavering synths, but does it a bit better than some of the previous pieces. I especially enjoy how overloaded the sub bass sounds. Naturally, that theme does not last, but the pulsing drone that replaces it is perhaps even better. Ultimately, that all adds up to a characteristically likable, but somewhat minor and exasperating effort from Porras. I definitely wish the rest of *Light Divide* had lived up to the great promise of "Apeiron" or at least given its various grooves and themes more time to properly unfold, yet I suspect the drone-damaged, "fits-and-starts" nature of these pieces was an intentional move in order to do something distinctive rather than lapsing into mere dub techno pastiche. I bet *Light Divide* could have been quite a great pastiche though.

Samples:

- [Apeiron](#)
- [Recollection](#)
- [Pleiades](#)