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## Sound Shaped at Derek Piotr's Hands: Entering the AGORA



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Derek Piotr (known as Piotr to some) dashes ambient sounds in his new release, *AGORA*, like sudden revelations from the dark. His record allows the listener to surrender themselves to the all-surrounding scape of intense sound. The record took him over a year to produce, and now finished, he is preparing to tour it. While he travels across America (a country he was raised but not born in), Piotr will bring the cross-cultural sound-art project that is *AGORA* to several cities.

One motif that I noticed while listening to the record was Piotr's repeated reference to hands -- be they at his side or raised in praise.

The initial track, "Invoice," invites the listener to experience the depth of minimalist sound, as it is presented through the fading in and out of a beginning. As if the invocation is the unknown birth of the persona's life, the industrial touch of a saw presents an attempt at gracefully balancing his first winks of light and darkness.

"Overtaker" relays a scientific abstraction, much like that of an irrational number found through the pulse of a Jacob's ladder. The additional blending of field recordings speaks of traveling through indigenous lands, which soon transition into the spiritual vocals of giving everything to an omnipresence resembling both science and spirit. Additionally, the whispery chants and dark beat resemble the confessional void found in [Nine Inch Nails'](#) song, "Closer." The persona's diary is a haunting wound, hinting at a life we know very little about. All that is questionable is answered with sound "" which is seemingly both the question and the answer. Be prepared to delve further inside, as Piotr's whispers elliptically trail into the song's ending -- finalizing only temporarily.

Perhaps my favorite track on the album and the most resembling human sounds is "Flood Circuit" which begins with a meditative hum that is similar to Tool's Salival. The gradual wavering static, intermingled with the beat of an arrhythmic heart, becomes flooded with distant waterfalls of hums and sparse electricity. The electric surge of the track allows one to almost picture an android, as the persona attempts to find humanity through the most intense of emotion.

As if the levy of emotion has been broken, "Scrape" introduces beauty in the form of a mixture: deep peals mingle with the light jingles of surrounding life. Guest vocalist Carahanni compliments with a haunting alto background that gradually fades into static radio transmissions, revealing what a scrape would sound like when combined with the mid-scale of a singer's warm-up.

"From Whiteness" begins like part two of "Scrape," with bells and distant, crashing beats. Posing as bombs of sound, the song reads like the persona's reaction to the "iron fist" -- that clenching reality as it is experienced by a growing child. Perhaps as a witness (a possible play on "whiteness") to this change of life, the persona lies scared; the lyrical lingering of the words "abandon ship" add to this element mid-song. The emphasized "s" sounds seem to also be a subconscious call for help; the SOS Morse-codes its way through the song, along with the repetition of a single, lonesome note that grows louder with the persona himself.

The lighter, higher-pitched chimes of "Focus" escalate the listener, while a low bass frame is filled-out by keyboard tones and tenor vocals. In fits of tongue reminiscent of Italian, Zach Thorpe practices for some apocalyptic opera, desperately announcing sounds in an attempt to decode answers to all that is complicated. The electric hums and whispery beats transcend into a reflective rewinding, depicted figuratively and literarily through the sound of a cassette. The song then marches sparks of rapid machine guns in a 4:4 beat, as if headed toward another unknown -- possibly love? "Focus" is an emission and partial submission to witnessing this beauty. The inner demon of bass surfaces throughout the song with a quick dampening, requiring the persona's hands to rise. This time he surrenders with desperation, an act of acquiring peace -- somehow, someway.

"Behaviour State" is the record's pivot-point, containing the most electronics in any piece, the moment where the composer hands-over the material to the technological overlords he had been battling up until now. It is the aftermath; reminiscent of the previous crashing radio static, bells, and snippets of lyrics from previous tracks. The reliving of an emotive state fades in and out with "equals" sung in the background (along with other electric unknown lyrics), showing a logical contemplation of the illogic that is emotion. Antye Greie (aka AGF)'s, influence on the track remixes the stirring feeling of finding a focal point, producing an array of questions and intuitive thought: "Function equals false," Piotr repeats. Piotr's lyrics are composed of the facebook code that we are subconsciously subject to in our everyday life stream. The overall expectation of behavior is well-captured both lyrically and sonically on the track.

"Remain" is a short mixture of an American Indian drumbeat combined with electricity, the harmonizing sounds of a possible nature versus nurture awareness in the key of F. The song is essentially the persona's environmental response to the intensity of the previous track.

As a "Value System" develops, we hear more low bells and ticking clocks that symbolize time as it awaits the actual humane part of life. I imagine smog surrounded by insects, depicted through the rushing electric waves shaking the air of song. The persona seems to struggle for clarity, as intense vocals add to the near-Biblical theme of what values can be comprehended from confusion.

With values comes "Belief," a track with the similar rapid-fire beginning of Nine Inch Nails' song, "Wish." Then, as if on a lone beach, the sounds of passing birds lead into echoic waves, like one would hear when listening to the ocean through a conch shell. The

question seems clear to the persona: Do I believe what I hear? Or, do I need to let it be before coming to a real conclusion? We are left with this thought, as the song trails into the next and final track.

The finale of "Winter Consummation" offers thought-provoking graces of harmonizing vocals blended with echoes of micro-sound. As a subtle piano is introduced alongside drizzling static, a crash of beat splices the song's simplistic beauty with a realistic depth. The field recordings hint the end of what is only the beginning; a winter snow trickles the end of another year. The persona allows it to be. As the record comes to this consummation, the human emerges triumphantly -- hands raised.

*AGORA* is what Piotr considers "headphones music" because every sound is precise and deliberately placed -- from one form of consciousness or another. The simplicity of the album strips down to the bareness of complicated life and emotion that will evoke thought from all who hear it.

In promotion of *AGORA*, Derek Piotr will be touring various cities throughout America. He is also curating a remixed version of *AGORA*, which will include multiple reinterpretations of the lead single, "Focus."

Sources:

<http://derekpiotr.wordpress.com/2011/03/05/agora>

From an interview with Derek Piotr.

[DISCLOSURE OF MATERIAL CONNECTION:](#)

This content was based upon a free review copy the Contributor received.