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Interview: Derek Piotr

[Liam Doyle](#) x 10th September 2018 x [Interviews](#)

Poland-born, New England-based producer Derek Piotr has been putting out original and challenging electronic music for a few years now, including 2014's [Tempatempat](#) and a [collaborative album](#) with Paul Heslin.

grunt, the latest Derek Piotr release, is his eighth solo album. Described in the press release as “a set of short-form brutalist shards of human-digital noise,” the album utilises vocals, acoustic instruments and found-sounds and deconstructs them with distortion. The result is something harsh and insistent, both prescient and ominously topical. As the press release continues, the album ventures into “uncharted hinterlands of biodigital sound [...] new worlds both organic and cybernetic that celebrate the nuances of non-heteronormative identity.”

We last spoke to Derek [back in 2015](#), when we chatted about his album *Bahar*, and it was a good experience, so now, three years later, we've taken the opportunity again.

Hi Derek, thanks for speaking with us. You're about to release a new album, *Grunt*. Would you like to give readers a short introduction to what they can expect from the it?

Ugly, direct beats, free time sound structures, grinding glitching samples. Voice across the frequency spectrum, sub bass drone, occasional tender vocal performance. Distortion and #voicenoise.

The album is very much of the digital age, and the songs sound quite removed from nature or anything organic. But lots of it is made from analogue sounds and acoustic instruments. What was your process for making these songs? And what is it about this relationship between organic and digital that appeals to you?

I think for me as a listener I get quite bored or made uneasy if i am listening to music that is only electronic. Like Autechre or Kraftwerk never appealed to me, all the pure synth stuff doesn't speak to me. That said i do love editing away on the laptop when making music. But i also listen more and more to acoustic music, and always sort of have. So it's about taking my natural tendencies towards music making and braiding them into the kind of music I myself would want to hear. I guess the result is a mashup.

The album is thematically ambitious, and in some ways reading about it feels like reading a panel in a contemporary art gallery, as opposed to an album preview. Do you see grunt as music, or sound art, and is there a difference?

I just did another interview yesterday and got asked the exact same question: "is Grunt music or art?" The liner notes were not written by me. But it is good once the music is done to go hard on the concept so it can be presented as completely as possible. but make no mistake: it is 110% music.

As a follow on, I'm curious about creative influences that extend beyond the musical. The preview mentions dada sculpture and surrealist cinema, so were these explicit influences? And what other aspects of art/culture inspired you when making grunt?

Again, the liner notes were not written by me. I do love dada and surrealism though. Always will. ubuweb is a great resource for those things. And in a way it's kind of nice to think of these songs as mini sculptures that punch their way into reality rather than lying flat on an iPhone. I want to ultimately make music that does not lie flat. The only real visual cue I had while making this music as inspiration was brutalism in architecture.

Talking of influences, the final track was reworked by Kevin Drumm. Is he someone whose worked has had an influence on your own? And how did the collaboration come about?

Kevin is amazing. We're on the same label for some stuff and we've emailed for years. When Drono was all done i thought Thomas Brinkmann would be good to tie a ribbon on the album, so i contacted him. Same with Kevin, I sent him some demos and he chose Redirect to work with, and I thought his contribution fit neatly into the world of Grunt, to tie a bow on the whole project. Kevin's ambient works are what excite me best, but he has a hell of a knack for noise.

Another central theme of the album is Queerness. How does the album challenge preconceptions on identity, and why do you think it's important that music (and all art) makes such challenges?

Queerness capital Q is such a big part of people's discussion palette now. I have always felt queer, just kind of never adjusted my own vernacular about myself and didn't make a big deal out of it. To me i think making "Queer" art is as dangerous as making "Political" art or "Environmental" art = none of those things are bad but it boxes you into this one territory and you get known for that. So i am hoping people don't focus too much on that. I existed as a musician for 7 years before i decided to include this notion in my work, and it's not super important to me to be known for that. On the other hand Grunt's melting humanoid feels pretty queer, and one of the tracks samples a sex toy. So it was just tipping my hat to all of that. Also I have become more expressive or queer in my press photos because I don't want to rest on the privilege of assumption that I am a straight white male. I want to be truthful to where I'm coming from so I don't get a free pass.

Its ambitious to make an album that confronts big intellectual themes like posthumanism. Is it important to you that the listeners have this context when listening? Or are you happy for them to draw their own conclusions from your work? Do you think about the listener at all when making music?

I really hope people see their own shapes when they hear this music. I do not think about my audience when I make the work; only later during artwork, packaging, press liaison. I have no audience in my head when i am writing an album.

Could you name 4-5 artists you think we should be listening to right now, be they related to your own work or otherwise?

[Don't DJ](#) > did a remix for me and we did one track together

[AGE](#) > we work a lot together

Jean Ritchie > vocal inspi

[Dirty Projectors](#) > vocal inspi