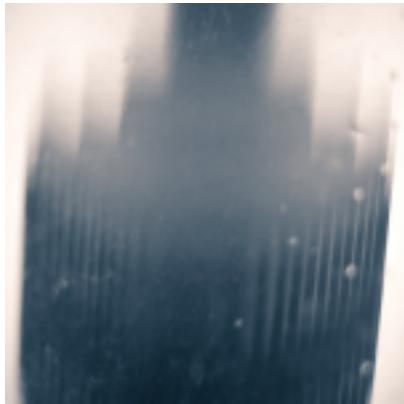


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Fall-out from the cloud /// Stories from Update Hell

Derek Piotr – AGORA (Bitsquare, 2011)

[August 5, 2012](#) · by [violetcurrents](#) · in [Album reviews](#) ·



[Derek Piotr](#) is a Polish-born, US-based poet and composer with a sizable portfolio of glitchy, forward-thinking music. On his extensive [liner notes](#), Derek describes **AGORA** as “a meeting place”, and yes, it is a busy melting pot of influences. Fora and bazaars alike tend to be busy, disorienting even, and can turn into a maze for those who enter unprepared. The opener *Invoce* does exactly that. But no fear: *Overtaker* – filtered ethnic singing, slow-burning techno – is already there to dispel any suspicions about lack of structure.

The blueprint of AGORA is a beauty: rigid in form, but rife with variation. Built with simple tools, and difficult to grasp. Atonal, but never abrasive. Sparse strokes on a blank canvas. Lab-grown industrial ambiance. Less is more confusion. Yes, it’s grafted on old-school minimalism, but the record avoids the latter’s fashionable pitfall of forsaking all but the abstract: on a platform erected from walls of feedback, looped snippets of distortion and near-sterile sonic artifacts, the human voice is set free – stripped naked, rather – to reveal an estranging picture of its emotional range.

Just to be really, really clear: AGORA is strange as hell. Case in point: *From whiteness*, a piece tip-toeing from uneasiness into a near-catchy “terrible hiss”. On moments like these, the suggestive power of the human voice helps unveil AGORA’s humorist side: reverberated *clanks* become glaciers’ ambiance, and an off-scale, cartoonist ice-scape turns into a deadpan setting for a disaster story. The really out-there vocal gibberish on *Focus*, though, goes beyond tongue-in-cheek, very ridiculous and just as earnest.

Again and again, each new movement presents a new take on sound manipulation or some strange trinket of foreign sound. Recurring tools are the sheets of dry resonance and stuttering loops. They provide semblances of a rhythm section, and if you were to pin the album down on any defining genre or aesthetic, your best pick would have to be ‘glitch’. Or techno. Or whatever Autechre come up with after a night of cowbells and [From Here to Infinity](#). Until the very end of closer “Winter Consummation”, where sacral voices clear the stage, AGORA keeps coming up with such daring ways to blend the natural voice with abstract and manufactured material that it stops being only ‘pure sound’ or noise, and enters a territory of some to-be-created, hidden organic meaning to sonic art. Something our scary trans-humanist kids might be able to figure out.

Highlights/directions for the lost: *Overtaker*, *From Whiteness*, *Focus*, *Behaviour State*, *Winter Consummation*

Available, among others, on [Bandcamp](#). There’s physical copies on [Discogs](#) and [Experimedia](#).