

# ISSUES

WE'RE BUILDING A TOWER

**RYAN O'DOUD**



**ATHOTHHRIMATEN**

# 69: 2/01/22

"NICE"

**THE JOURNAL  
OF OCI & CFR**

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# BIRDY AND MY MOTHER

The corridor is dimly lit and damp. Concrete. I wander down the hallway, the breeze chilling me to the core as I reach into my pocket for a lighter. Every flick of the lighter makes me 7 minutes younger. This time I was unable to gather the fire I so desperately crave. Her arms are broken and bent behind her as she kneels over, looking up. The clocks warp and tick at random intervals, all showing different times. There is a neon sign behind her with a picture of a palm tree and a beach ball.

I feel closer to the floor, so I look down, realizing the flicks of my lighter made me much younger in this space.

I felt the tightness of my skin as an image of myself wrapped in barbed wire, struggling, flashes before my eyes. I feel angry, but I didn't feel like shouting. However, I felt like screaming. (The difference is mostly in the tone and intent). She approached slowly, all the way down on the floor but somehow looking right into my eyes. I feel much younger, looking for my lighter, wondering if I can somehow reverse the damage I had caused.

An image of me throwing myself off of a skyscraper flashes before my eyes. I feel angry, but when I scream, I only hear the scream of a child. She looks down at me, as she creeps towards me. I am just a baby laying on the floor. I look for my lighter, but my little hands fail to do what I want them to. I look at the clocks, which are now all melted onto the floor, forming little puddles. She stands over me, looking down into my eyes. In her eyes, I only see a reflection of myself. Her arms crack and snap as she moves them forward to grab me.

I slip through her fingers when she touches me. I feel her fingers move right through me.

My perspective shifts. I'm looking at the floor where I once was, I see the lighter on the floor in front of me and I crack my jagged, crooked bones forward to grab it. I flick the lighter, and the room fills with mirrors. All around me is my mother, kneeling on the floor. I feel her energy all around me, but I still don't feel like her. I smash the mirrors in a rage as glass rains all around me. I was her from the very start, but she was never me.

**-ELLA SOLIS  
2023**

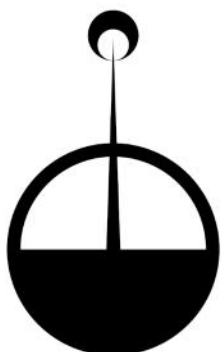
**AVE LUCIFER**

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# ISSUES MAGAZINE

## FEATURED ARTIST INTERVIEW

# RYAN O'DOUD

# OF CFR, OCI

# BITTER, INC. &

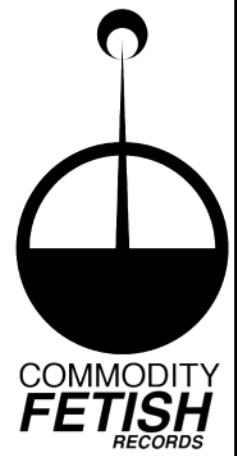
# ISSUES

## INTERVIEW BY VINCENT ERNST

<phone ring>  
 Vincent: Hello.  
 Ryan: Hey buddy, what's up?  
 Vincent: Hey. How are you, man?  
 Ryan: Doing good.  
 Vincent: Good. I'm pretty good too.  
 Thank you. Yes. Good to hear yeah.  
 R: You too.  
 V: So, have you tested the equipment and all that?  
 R: Yeah, I got it already set up. Mixed.  
 V: Sweet. All right. Well. Awesome.  
 Should I just go ahead and jump right in, then?  
 R: Yeah, I'm going to let you take control of this thing.  
 V: Alright. Well. I'm sitting here, happy to start this interview. Let's start with the basics. Who, exactly are you? Feel free to give your name even.  
 R: Well, I'm Ryan O'Doud. I used to go by a different name, but I don't as an adult anymore because that's my artist's name. You asked a pretty deep question, but I usually answer that with I'm an artist and musician.  
 V: Fantastic. Why don't you go ahead and list your primary creative mediums, projects. I know it's not a short list, which we'll get to but maybe just the main ones.  
 R: Ok. I consider the two main projects to be OCI, The Order of Celestial Integration and my painting. Those are what I seem to work on the most.  
 The OCI is a religious/artistic project I put together several years ago with Echo Rose who has since withdrawn from the project. It's slowly taken over everything and expanded to become the foundation of all the rest of the things I do. Its main purpose is to focus and distill the values, or the ideas that I have. Which I then put into all my other work.  
 Then, my painting is honestly built on that but it's usually watercolor

on watercolor paper with some paint markers as well. I've had some art shows. I also just make pieces for my own benefit.  
 In addition to doing these things I am also a musician. Bitter, Inc. is my primary project. I've been working on it for about 8 years. Really longer than that but I've been performing for about 8 years. It's a synthesizer-based project. Synthesizer and vocals. It's an experimental project but with pop elements too.  
 I also work as part of the CFR Council. Commodity Fetish Records. I started to sort of promote the music that I do and then it expanded to promote the music of my friends. Took on a life of its own. I also do American Babylon which is a once-a-year festival. A lot of experimental artists and DIY artists.

With a focus on, um- there's a tendency in experimental art to have the more successful artists be from affluent families with connections to art galleries. So, we prefer to promote bands for working class and middle-class circumstances but who are also pushing things in a strange direction that wouldn't normally be presented in very many places. So that's what American Babylon is for. Then, finally, I would say, is ISSUES. Which has turned into a kind of axel upon which everything else drives. Even though I never intended for it to be that. It turns out that when you want to make friends, in order to network with people, it's really good to have something to offer them. ISSUES ended up being a major opportunity for other artists that don't have other places to get their work reviewed, poetry printed, or their prose printed or even to be interviewed by. It kind of makes sense. It's inspired by the old punk 'zines like Maximum Rock and Roll and things like that, but it's taken on a more sort of artsy, counter-cultural vibe.



**CONTINUED**

# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: Ultimately all that kind of ties back together to The Order of Celestial Integration which is sort of my through-line on everything.

V: Well, that was a great answer to a very open-ended question. So yeah, good job bailing me out there. That's awesome. I did want to touch on a lot more of those in detail as we go so that's a great introduction to that.

Alright, so I guess before we get into any of those specifically, I guess we should step back, and get to know your origins a little better. Obviously, all of these are based in some way or another on the arts. So, when and how did you know you were going to be an artist? When was that the thing for you?

R: I do think I had a tendency towards it long before I was conscious of it.

Without getting too much into my childhood-

V: Sure.

R: -I was in therapy when I was a little kid and one of the things, they would have me do when I was mad is to scribble on paper. I think that kind of got deep in there without me thinking about it. Later on, I would play games on paper. I would draw little characters and amuse myself. I didn't have a whole lot of money growing up. My mom was on welfare after divorcing my dad. So, the games I had to play were either toys bought from thrift stores or else whatever I could find around the house. Until later on when she got her master's degree and we kind of scrambled into the middle class.

So, that was probably the foundation for the psychological reason to make art. It did evolve into, when I was in high school, really. I got into punk rock which really made me want to play music but that instantly expanded into a broader interest in creativity. Especially using creativity as a form of defiance. Using creativity as a form of disrespect to authority. The idea, ultimately of creativity being an ungovernable thing.

So, in high school I started getting into creativity. I took some art classes in high school and my art teacher was very encouraging. They were the only teachers I had where if

they gave me an assignment and I did something where I'd meet the requirements but spitefully do it in a different way, they would like it. They were like, "Oh, wow you should be an artist. This is what artists do."

So that's when I started to gather that that was what my temperament was, as a person. It kind of expanded from there.

V: Nice. Yay, teachers.

R: Oh, yeah.

V: Fantastic. Would you say that music was the first art that you imagined yourself pursuing? Was that the first medium where they were like, that was something I could really do?

R: Yeah. Like I said, when I was younger, I fucked around with anything creative, imagination games and stuff. But in terms of self-consciously being like, "I am creating a piece," music was the first for me, for sure.

V: Ok. Alright. Let's go to Bitter, Inc. then.

How long has that been active as your primary musical project?

R: Ok, I would say 2013. I've always made music but the shift to Bitter, Inc. would be when I decided one day that I

was really, really wasting my life and burning my hours not doing anything. I was like, "Ok, I'm just going to start programming synthesizer lines because it's something I can do completely by myself." Instead of waiting for other musicians to show up to work with. If nothing else, I'll make a million synthesizer songs.

So that was around 2013. Bitter, Inc. as a thing came to be the name for 2 reasons. 1) I decided I wanted the project to be able to have a very wide berth in terms of what it could sound like and what it could be, so long as it was negatively emotional.

V: Ha-ha.

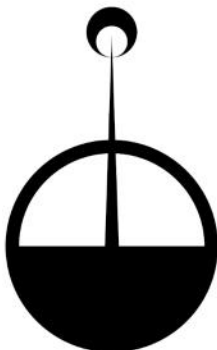
R: I was like, I didn't want it to expand into anything that could be positive in that way. Then, 2) It also has 9 letters which is a numerological thing which we can deal with some other time if you want to.

V: Ah, hmm, ok. I hadn't noticed that. Awesome. Was it always in its current form of being synth-based and you writing all the songs and music all at once?

**CONTINUED ON 10**



▶ **"MARSHALL ALLEN" BY RYAN O'DOUD**



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## ANSWERS WITHOUT QUESTION

- Loquacious (talkative).
  - When enough piano tuners are late, entire fresh water biomes spring loose from salt traps; new slits the length of an eye lash churn clear lake beds foggy, pillars in light angered poetry jams its some other hue forwards from its struck pose pause, take our word for it coffee houses were it in 19- whatever before you were around; a data point so HEP in the lie's blink, and you all missed it (suckers).
  - Iron pyrite is the most foolish of all minerals.
- Mellifluous (beautifully sounding).
  - What is your first memory? Did you know this room is haunted? What kind of magic is more real than others? Do you detect the run-on sentences you think in? How do you reconcile your feelings to your inner dialogue? Does the ringing in your body move to your ears? Does your ego have its own body? Does an active fear of efficiency guide you more now than previously?
    - Grape jelly was leaking out the hole in the roof.
    - Limerence (obsession).
      - Indenting 101: all base combinations of stimuli will be hard coded in a central receptor program that comes standard with annual updates. Also included will be "impression flexers" tha improve upon the adaptive capacities of combinations rooted in dna traced pre-sets, ie the regional weather, fauna and dietary fats, acids and proteins imprinted over dozens of generations.
      - He decided to fake his disappearance to avoid jail.
    - Tintinnabulation (ringing or twinkling sound).
      - Regret's wet coat, doubled by grief the animal it was stolen from returns pouring more weight down, pinching the ends of open fields into four cornered middle hinges to flap only on command; did the soil not reach enough sun before harvest, the thought said. We needed that cow for furniture, for fuel. It could've lived, but it's a coat now, too heavy to wear.
      - The tumbleweed refused to tumble

- Obdurate (indifferent to change of opinion).
  - Shadow making with nightlight and blanket brings out the most temporary of inverted ghosts: blank forms rise, blanker figures fall, none remained til after sleep when the spectral slide of dreaming defies the nightlight, populating a tiny bedroom with the world making dark lines.
  - He found rain fascinating yet unpleasant.
- Proximity (proximity).
  - The furthest from home accidental meeting story I know is my mom visiting California from the Midwest and bumping into her also Midwestern cousin also visiting California also getting gas on the other side of the same fuel pump. If it were the old stupid times, there might've been prophecies aligned with the chance meeting. Honorable mention is seeing my friend's sister's boyfriend in a museum a days drive from where we both lived, for a few moments we paused arms length from one another, unmoved to talk, before walking away. It was him, I see his face stilled by confusion.
  - Lucifer was surprised at the amount
- Denouement (resolution of a narrative).
  - Tesla proposed dredging aqueducts from underneath via inflatable dirigets that repurposed the earth's heat for power. He wrote about this in his penniless last years, claiming it could enable time travel. Or something like that. He went big towards the end.
  - Giving directions that the mountains are to the west only works when you can see them.
  - Syzygy (an alignment of 3 celestial bodies).
    - The only bee to fly down my shirt that day happened while I was leaving the first modern art exhibition I'd ever attended. I was 15, it was coastal Belgium in early Summer, and while rolling the abstract exploits of Dali's unadorned ink drawings in my entirely spongy mind, said bee misplaced itself down the front my button up shirt. My limbs spasmed and extended outwards from it. I did not kill it, and it didnot sting me. I was in the middle of a crowded outdoor pedestrian market. I yelled in English.
    - It's not often you find a soggy banana on the street.

## POETRY SELECTIONS

### Work of Witches

No sleep for wicked witches. Nary dream nor cat nap, for oh! What work shall be done? While priests slumber loud, ravenous for the smoking powers of witches. The witches work is undoing. Her work is refusing ruin, or even romance the Phoenix promises. Her visions of reflection, labor pains of undoing every fucking priest. Her spells of protection. Fortifying her broken home and heart, the work of mending. Knotted fingers weaving sweet fortunes for bastard sons of priests. Born of blood and humiliation, Angel sons they tore from her sacred womb with their holy, gnawing, jagged, broken, rotting teeth. Angel babes cut from heavenly portals, while the virgin mother lay restrained, drugged in the shape of a cross. Crucified like their own dead Savior. So she spends these dark hours unraveling their prayers that wrap her like the noose of biological dominance. Witches learn quick the most hated, vile, evil to these priests is a free woman. Woman with laughter, so loud she can't hear them beckoning with shackles. Beckoning her for rape. Bludgeoning her to slavery of White Jesus. The witch rides through the night landing on erections of holy Fathers, taking back what these men of God stole from her. The secret "k" in her magick. Their thievery in vain. "Hell hath no fury," as they say but she is more than woman. Dragged through rings by her hair, drowned in lakes of fire- an experience infantile to what the handiwork of priests. A witch with her own little priests, showered in sweet blessings, protected from the fallacy of Fathers. Truth, freedom, rooted in the dirt love.

One day her work will be done. She'll sleep from new moon to new moon, and wake with the Morning Star. Again, the mother of revolution.

### Something in the way (The Man from Hell)

Never forgotten the medicine made of honey suckle guzzled down, thirst of a man as he walks out hell. Fondling the stout jam jar, embossed glass and silvery lid holding a secret. A sadness. A feeling better left unsaid, or even unfelt. The man who walked out hell, man with pomegranates and daffodils, man with fire still licking at his wounded scalp.

Something in the way a man from hell would finger strings, uplift your own voice, making you believe you were as good. Harmonies. Hauntings. Stabbings and ghosts. Rotting teeth, and twisted realities; his fish swim opposite ways, enduring the pain of both being hooked in the gill, connected by a line.

Something about his honesty, no matter fueled breath and unwanted caresses- something about a man from hell, free of blame that would crucify a saint. A special man, beloved by his mighty father- His father, stumbling fingers on white keys and black, his father stumbling away from him.

Just like the God of Christians.

Kin to Lucifer (not the devil, really) this man from hell brings with him from infernos music the soul longs for. No great thing could be created by one who has not journeyed through the rings, the seas of agony, without end. In this way, man from hell is sacred for only he holds understanding enough to speak, to sing, and evoke emotion from anyone. This is also his curse (because hell wasn't bad enough) think of this journeyer often. I ache with remorse and longing, the longing that knows no resolve except in being desire. A hopeless notion, it's been tried and spun wisps or sugar or poison, spun cloth from the bleeding hands of children. My bleeding hands know not the pain of his memory. Thoroughly hopeless and, longing does not render love null. The law of love prevails. The man who walked out of hell has taught me this. I can love him, and hope for him without including myself.

### Turning to Stone (Twice)

Hot, encased in black plastic, hot from that shining sun. Resilient like a skull, their contents refusing to burst into flames. Maybe it feels good to slip into- a warm embrace, like the touch of another (I am woefully without.) Within a dream, I am in a comfortable place. I am in a memory, but better still than reality; the gentle sun sifting its way down through branches, and fractals of leaves, eventually falling onto my skin. Warming flesh without the tightening, without the roasting of it. I forget the symptoms of touch deprivation, for a moment. For a moment I forget that I am a cold, dead thing in this burning world.

Wake up.

Half glass of vodka is the first, glorious sight of morning. As the sun rises, relentlessly, everything catches fire, burning to black - this reality, harsh in comparison to spirited dreams. Before waking, remember crying vodka tears? rubbing a wounded place numb? Looking to see if a beloved has sent love (no, they've not). A familiar pattern. Clothing in trash bags. Memories from before here, also, in trash bags.

The lion speaks "I am separate. I am the opposite of everything that surrounds me. I am different. Please love me, they can't do it like I can" Laughing hollow laughs; a mocking bird, mirroring this happy family I have landed in. Baby birds with mouths open, I provide because I am mama, I am mama, I am god. Ghost mother. Phantom food. Ghost god. I thought it would be easy plucking worms from the burning earth as a stone woman...it is difficult to bend. Difficult to reach my woman-beak down into flames. I feel warmth, smile, but suddenly it burns. I am frigid and I am rock, but it burns me still.

Singing the songs of memory to baby birds, they call back with their sweet voices. Little blessings with awkward tufts and constellations spattered cross them; wildlings born to a burning earth hold a map leading to a safe place. My own voice sounding like when my blood was red, when I could smell jasmine, like when I thought true love. Perhaps whatever life is still braided between vocal chords, shining through my muddy layers- still beating under muck. Rotted from the inside, I am an exoskeleton.

Love turned me to stone.

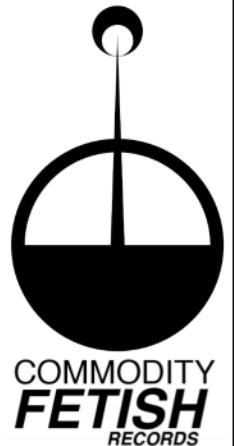
Wake up, now.

Living in ashes of what was life. An exoskeleton pecking through the fires. Ghost woman grasping at that home with rainbows. Plath wife longing for that oversized bed where distance could be kept between husband and wife. Ghost god longing for the bed with a warm man- unlike the warm of trash bag clothes or memories. That home that houses all the things I've ever loved. A carousel, smashed by the lovely warm man- so many books, plants, glass that caught the light, grandmother's things all bringing comfort unlike the comfort of remembering love.

Love, turning me to stone every time. Jealous of the bastards who evade the poison and live lives without a burning world. The whole world ablaze, I notice after laying cockeyes on my half cocktail. Singing for Medusa in spirited dreams, for Furies, Boo Hags, Baba Yaga, Kali and all the beauties with blood on their teeth. I sing for them, hymns of gratitude, worship- I pray they might protect me from the poison of love.

They tell me I am an oyster, comfortable in salt and darkness. They say "One day he will step on you- your beloved- and you'll rejoice because finally you've been found! He will pluck you from your pluff mud. You've sliced open his foot, he bleeds and whines at his wound and the salt the stings him. Healing... But, he plucks you from your dark place and tosses you ashore. He won't even eat you. He tosses you up there, and you bake from the sun. You fossilize in your burning world. He has lovely summer's day on the seaside, and you're hot and dead, but heartbroken and that's the worst of it all, ever after."

**POEMS BY WITCH MAMA**





# IMPRESSIONS OF

## IT'S NOT WHAT YOU NEED, IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT (SO SHUT IT) by OUI LEGIIONNAIRES

Oui Legionnaires are a post punk group from the UK. They released an album, entitled, "It's Not What You Need, It's What You've Got (so shut it)," on March 21, 2015.

You can listen to it here:  
[ouilegionnaires.bandcamp.com/album/its-not-what-you-need-its-what-youve-got-so-shut-it](https://ouilegionnaires.bandcamp.com/album/its-not-what-you-need-its-what-youve-got-so-shut-it)

### My Impressions:

This album has the energy of a typical punk rock group matches with the emotional flourish and savoir faire of a post-punk album.

The guitar chords are distorted but big and beautiful, tense and terse, implying a

## DESPOLIATION OF A DEAD SKANK by C\_DEBRIS

C\_debris is an avant garde act. They released, "despoliation of a dead skank," in December of 2022.

You can listen to it here:  
[soundcloud.com/user-718835018/despoliation-of-a-dead-skank](https://soundcloud.com/user-718835018/despoliation-of-a-dead-skank)

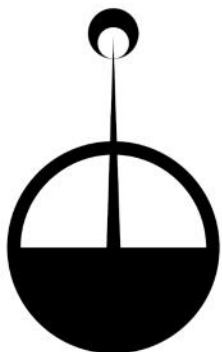
### My Impressions:

There is a grating, cynical tone through the piece that seems to match the dark implications of the name here.

I am unflattered here. There is a feeling of being torn asunder, of the mental faculty cascading, of the mind shattering into 1,000 selves.

After years of listening to conventional music I long for the intentionally obscure, the atmospheric and disastrous.

These minutes of music are both heavy and unscolding. They are demanding but they possess a strange coherence. I truly like this.



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## HISTORY OF A PROTEST by WEDNESDAY DEMONSTRATION

Wednesday Demonstration are a punk group from Kent, OH. They released an album, called, "History of a Protest," on June 3, 2022.

You can check it out here:  
[wednesdaydemonstration.bandcamp.com/album/history-of-a-protest-2](https://wednesdaydemonstration.bandcamp.com/album/history-of-a-protest-2)

### My Impressions:

This is a softer version of some of the great punk acts of the past. There is a Propagandhi quality here, a bit of crack rock steady. But the music is more gentle, less distorted, more pleading than demanding.

The lyrics are thoroughly leftist which I mention because it's clearly intentional.

The songs are tuneful. They have a catchiness to match the incendiary content. Blazing

## CHEERLESS by AURA ZORBA

Aura Zorba are an alternative rock group from Detroit, MI and Portland, OR. Brighton, UK label, Shore Dive Records released their single, "Cheerless," on December 17, 2022.

You can listen to it here:  
[shorediverecords.bandcamp.com/album/cheerless](https://shorediverecords.bandcamp.com/album/cheerless)

### My Impressions:

These songs have a great style.

Blending a slick, cyberpunk quality with an indie rock sensibility, the tunes progress in creative, meandering ways.

The vocalists have excellent, complimentary vocal qualities. One is a smooth and throaty baritone which meshes an almost crooner quality with more of a traditional Britpop sound. The other is a heavenly alto which sings above, reverbed and delicious as they combine like chocolate and milk.

The actual music is synthetic and bright. At times it reminds me of Quincy Jones era Michael Jackson. At other times it has more of a Coldplay quality.

The overall effect is that of a beat-driven, grooving dance floor. Neon lights, dark nights, smoke and mirrors type stuff.

This song could just as easily be in a movie soundtrack, a club floor or on the pop charts.

The music has a lot of variety, weaving together several parts, masterfully adding and subtracting elements as it progresses across my ears.

When the piece strips down to nearly nothing, an angelic voice, a synth pad and an indie pop guitar, then the main beat drops back in, it is magic. Truly nice stuff.

## PHANTOM CENTRE by KOLLAPS\E

KOLLAPS\E is a post-metal outfit from Helsingborg, Sweden. They released, "Phantom Centre," on January 13, 2023.

You can check it out here:  
[kollapsmusic.bandcamp.com/album/phantom-centre](https://kollapsmusic.bandcamp.com/album/phantom-centre)

### My Impressions:

This music makes me mad.

A thoroughly poured over set of fractured pain, elemental fire, cutting songs.

The music is bottom heavy- bass pounding, hoarse-throat growling, bass drum slapping.

The grooves are intense, swung like a bat. The chords are deep and resonant but the harmonies are still sparkling.

This is a personal, though righteous, anger, well thought out and bleak as it is brutal.

## FURRY AND FURIOUS by MELZEBRA AND THE BUFFALOS

Melzebra And The Buffalos are a punk rock group from The UK. Dammit Records released their album, "Furry and Furious," on December 12, 2022.

You can listen to it here:  
[dammitrecords.bandcamp.com/album/furry-and-furious](https://dammitrecords.bandcamp.com/album/furry-and-furious)

### My Impressions:

This may be the 5th generation but the punk sounds like it was made in 1978. The songs are fast, damaged, and cut but they balance the angst with a sense of humor and fun.

The album is riffy, rocking, and relatable. The songs are stripped down and to the point.

## SHELTER'S WET DREAM by NATHAN ALLEN

Nathan Allen is an anarchogospel act from New London, CT. They released a single, "Shelter's Wet Dream," on their album, "L'Abri," which'll officially release on March 3, 2023.

You can listen to it here:  
[aloober.bandcamp.com/album/labri](https://aloober.bandcamp.com/album/labri)

### My Impressions:

This song appears to be made of layered vocal tracks run through some kind of octavizer effect.

The sound is mostly a capella with some minimal percussion: claps and some rudimentary drums.

The sounds are mellow. The vocals are deep and throaty.



# IMPRESSIONS OF

## TORN by TORN

Torn is an experimental noise project from Clermont Ferrand, France. Social Suicide Production released their self-titled album on September 22, 2022.

You can listen to the album here:

My Impressions:

A radiant, mechanical, strangely beautiful sounding album composed of recycled noise, samples, and pedals made to reverberate and harmonize in an almost meditative way.

This has the instrumentation and production quality of a typical noise recording and yet manages to reach a pleasant, almost sublime tonality.

## ANOTHERS by RYAN BELL

Ryan Bell is an ambient experimental artist from Buffalo, NY. He released an album entitled, "Others" on April 8, 2022.

You can listen to it here:

[rrbell.bandcamp.com/album/another](http://rrbell.bandcamp.com/album/another)

My Impressions:

Throughout these breathtaking pieces, the artist presents a sense of solemnity, of desolation, and of light.

They reach out from beyond the void to tenderly but sternly touch the pathways of your mind.

There is harmony here. A powerful exploration of timbre. A sense of something real.

## ON MY KNEE by ABBREVIITY

Abbrevity is an alt rock group from Charleston, SC. They released a single entitled, "On My Knee," on December 5, 2022.

You can listen to it here:

[abbrevity.bandcamp.com/track/on-my-knee](http://abbrevity.bandcamp.com/track/on-my-knee)

My Impressions:

This track has an early aughties dance rock quality sort of in the vein of The Faint or The Strokes, blended with the vocal melody one might hear in a post-hardcore song.

Despite underground credentials, the production is stellar, and the vocal melodies are heavy on the pop sensibility.

This is the sort of track that would make a summer night at the beach even better. It mixes in just a bit of grime with a wonder-pop sheen. Nice stuff.

## THE APOCALYPSE MUSICAL by SAPLING

Sapling is an art punk group from Massachusetts. They released, "The Apocalypse Musical," on August 6, 2021.

You can check it out here: [saplingband.bandcamp.com/album/the-apocalypse-musical](http://saplingband.bandcamp.com/album/the-apocalypse-musical)

My Impressions:

This has the grimy quality of a rock solid basement show punk band mixed with a pleasant vocal tone.

The songs are well constructed. The voices bounce above the sound.

The guitars build a framework upon which the melodies sing.

There is some unique quality to this that makes it difficult to communicate. It combines an emotional reality, a thoughtful consistency of vision and combines them with a dark but relatable catchiness.

## WE WERE LIVE SOMEWHERE by BRANDON RICHIE

Brandon Richie is a pop punk artist from Philadelphia, PA. He released an album, called, "We Were Live Somewhere," on September 9, 2022.

You can listen to it here:

[brandonrichie.bandcamp.com/album/we-were-live-somewhere](http://brandonrichie.bandcamp.com/album/we-were-live-somewhere)

My Impressions:

This is a stripped down, sped up, wired 3 song ep in the long, proud tradition of pop punks before.

It reminds me most of late 90s pop and skate punk, particularly a west coast sort of style.

There are high toned vocal melodies, fast, insouciant guitars and blazing, speed drums throughout. Good for a party. Simply a fun time.

## THE MANY SOUNDS OF A FAILED REVOLUTION by HOLY SOLVENT

Holy Solvent is an ambient experimental artist from Clermont Ferrand, France. Social Suicide Production released their album, "The Many Sounds Of A Failed Revolution" on July 7, 2022.

You can listen to it here:

[socialsuicideproduction.bandcamp.com/album/the-many-sounds-of-a-failed-revolution](http://socialsuicideproduction.bandcamp.com/album/the-many-sounds-of-a-failed-revolution)

My Impressions:

A dark cloud casts itself over this entire recording.

It varies in tempo, quality and intensity throughout.

There are long sections of near silent ambience, moments of excruciating brutality, and everything in between.

The somber mood mixed with the diversity of soundscapes matches the name of the title well.

## 1.08.11.392 by D/W

D/w is an experimental music project. They released, "1.08.11.392," on July 16, 2019.

You can check it out here:

[d--w.bandcamp.com/album/10811392](http://d--w.bandcamp.com/album/10811392)

My Impressions:

Sublime, pure meditation. The essence of what minimalism strives for. A vast ethereal plane, expanding into infinitude in all directions.

This album is an endless white waiting room, alone but not lonely. The question why forever. The sound of hands sliding through sand as they can not grasp. A work in silent perpetuity

## SPAGHETTI & ENTRAILS by LOLI NOISE TORTURE

Loli Noise Torture is an experimental noise artist from Clermont Ferrand, France. Social Suicide Production released their album, "Spaghetti & Entrails," on September 3, 2022.

You can check it out here:

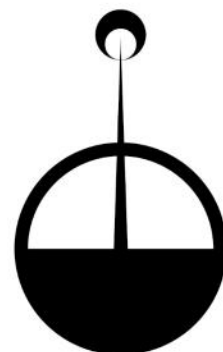
[socialsuicideproduction.bandcamp.com/album/spaghetti-entrails](http://socialsuicideproduction.bandcamp.com/album/spaghetti-entrails)

My Impressions:

A silly sort of noise nausea. The tunes are kinetic and real. They feel like a sped up cassette played by a cartoon. There is a genuine mania. The sense of relentless progress. An out of control daffy character.

The music is mostly atonal but does manage to create a harmony in the maelstrom. It is fast, blown away and unregulated.

Everything about this sound speaks volumes on madness. Not an unpleasant madness. The madness of a clown on LSD in a car race. An absolutely unhinged state of joy.



COMMODITY FETISH RECORDS

# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: In the past I've worked with a few other musicians. Two different times at two different phases of the project. Early on I worked a lot with Dave Paschke who is a fantastic drummer although a somewhat out-of-control fellow that I've been around with my whole life. When he was on the project it was much more aggressive. It was appropriate for him to be in that project.

Later on, Echo Rose became my primary collaborator and there was still, in a sense, an aggression to it but it expanded a lot more into, like, confusion and dread as the primary emotions. I think that I was kind of pushing it more like. We were playing at bars and stuff. There's a very typical sort-of thing we'd do: I like to cause consternation so when I'd play- not that it would be very punk oriented but not necessarily a punk aggressive thing but just have people say, "what the fuck are we listening to?"

V: Right. The way that punk was kind of designed originally.

R: Exactly. I've always been a big CRASS fan, a big Dead Kennedys fan. I know it's not cool anymore but I was a big Pistols fan too. To me they always had that element of not just aggression but also that element of "what are we doing here?" "What are we doing now?" ha-ha. "What are you doing?" I liked that.

V: Perfect. That actually leads to my next question. You just listed a couple. Are there any other specific influences you'd like to cite?

R: Yeah. I'm not going to try to be cool. I'm going to be honest about this. The very first artist I got super, super into was Weird Al Yankovic when I was in 6th grade.

V: Nice.

R: I figure there's an element of that in there still too.

V: Sure, the satire element.

R: Yeah, and there's goofiness.

Sometimes I just want to be really silly. Also, the two other influences that I would always play were The Doors and The Sex Pistols.

I listened to The Doors first album and The Sex Pistols' "Never Mind The Bollocks," constantly in middle school.

V: Hmmm.

R: Really, really, really. I was listening to lots of other things too but those were my little pet obsessions.

V: Ok. Very cool. So, you mentioned earlier that you wanted the possibility of a wide sound in Bitter, Inc. I guess my question is throughout the course of the project up until now, how much of a specific vision has your aimed for the band? Is it a thing that's beyond you that you create into or is it really just a product of being a catch-all, refined from all your musical impulses?

R: Well, that's a good question. I would say that there has always been an element, a skeleton to it, that I'm not going to deviate from. Certain things that I've had in mind. I'm going to have 9 albums. That's just going to be the way it is. I'm going to finish those 9 albums by the time I'm 39 years old. That's another thing I've been pumping away at doing that. But it's evolved over time as well.

When I first started it was much more derivative of early Nine Inch Nails, very wildly aggressive, dissonant things mixed with a Crack Rock Steady sort of anarchism. Over time I wouldn't say it's softened but it's morphed away from that specific kind of aggression. It's gone to different places depending on the album.

I like blending things that shouldn't be blended together. Often in a way that I can't even make sense of. Like the 2nd album, The Widow's Son, has an almost jazz-rock element to it. Almost like Steely Dan or something like that.

V: Yeah.

R: So, taking that and then mashing that together with a Doors ballades kind of quality to it, it's theatrical, it builds up and down, then just also like Nine Inch Nails together sort of aggression to it. Why would you put together Nine Inch Nails with Steely Dan? It doesn't make any sense. I just put it together because it seemed like a fine idea to upset the parameters.

So, it is not really that it is kind of is sort of a catch-all as much as it is "old reliable." When I have nothing else to do and I have time I'll sit down with the synthesizer. It's just there to, like, I feel like I've already accomplished so much musically that I don't have the same self-imposed pressure to record and put out shit and put out shit and put out shit.

Especially now that I'm in school now. 2nd semester in the civil engineering program. So, it ends up being, ironically, a relaxing thing for me. If I have nothing else to do I do that.

V: Huh. Ok. Interesting. Let's talk about live performance versus these records. How does that interplay work for you? Are they a separate thing? Song writing as a way to capture

live performance?

R: That's a good question. They have more in common with song writing. Because when I'm programming synthesizer I feel like I have a lot of control over how it sounds live. You're not relying on any individual human being to perform. It's a machine just playing things back. So that is something that I've allowed myself to do.

I have always had the agenda that the thing I want to do with any given medium is that which- hmm. How can I describe this? That which accentuates what the medium is about already. So, if I am playing live, I'm going to add a bunch of spontaneous, improvisational parts. There's going to be more crowded work, obviously, like working directly with people. Whereas when I'm doing a record, I'm going to do things that are limited in principle. That's what the medium is best for. I feel that with the synthesizer that I always have this little commitment to myself that I would never program synth that's trying to imitate another instrument.

V: Ok.

R: So, like, I'm going to program synth in a way that people will say, "that's a fucking synthesizer. That sounds really artificial." Artificial is the word that I use. I want it to sound like artifice because that is what it is. I don't want it to be that I'm hiding it in some weird way. Also, if I want to play guitar, I'll just play guitar. So, the point of the synth is to be synth.

Also, early on in the recordings, on the first three albums, I would program the synths to do things that were impossible for any human being to accomplish. Like, if you had Herbie Hancock playing the synthesizer, he still couldn't do it. It's literally impossible.

V: Gotcha.

R: Because that's the nature of having a machine.

V: You might as well take advantage of it.

R: You might as well take advantage of the thing that you're using rather than trying to blend it.

I do think that is one overarching motif that I'm using in everything, especially in painting and music: I like for things to be stark. I like them to become definitive. I like to deal in contrasts. I like painting with sharp lines and bright colors. I'm not looking for anything that is smooth.

Except for the next album which is weirdly kind-of mellow, but it's sort of a dreadful mellow. It's not.

V: But the contrast.

R: The contrast is there. Exactly.

V: Ok, so. I guess I wanted to talk about your newest album. It surprised me earlier, I guess, when you said you find it relaxing. In the sense that, I don't know, I think LEVIATHAN is a truly accomplished, beautiful album. I think that it's somewhat, it seems to me, like, prime form. So, did you feel pressure

to make it the ultimate thing? That actually wasn't the question was asking, but I mean, did it just happen to become what definitely seems to me the ultimate statement so far? At least for Bitter, Inc.

R: I. First of all, yes. I did. But also, it has benefited from the fact that I had years and years, due to COVID to keep going back to it over and over again.

And, I had a ton of discussions with Echo about what I wanted to say and what I wanted to do with it. And how I wanted to do it. I knew I wanted it to be a sort of climax in regard to the progression of the albums. Where it would be a clear line where there was a before LEVIATHAN and then an after LEVIATHAN.

V: Ok.

R: And, then I plan on, in album 9, bringing it back to that sound and then combining it with whatever I'm going to do with the next two albums.

V: Mumm. Ok.

R: So, LEVIATHAN is supposed to be a full statement. It definitely mixes all the techniques that I've learned through the years. All of them. It has more parts of it that have a live quality.

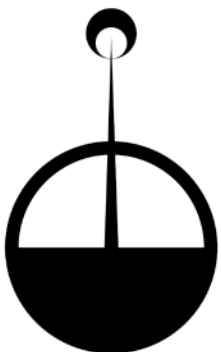
V: Yes. But, again, I think going back to that contrast and variety that you spoke of earlier, it provides that in a way that maybe your past albums don't.

R: Yeah. No, I, the first three; the first album is supposed to be a punk album. The second one I talked about that. The third one, New Architects, is kind of a pop album. The first one is a really dissonant pop album. The fourth one is a straight up pop album. Then when I went to the next album, I said I want to do the opposite things. I want to have no keys whatsoever. Everything is just dissonance and noise for the entire album. Then, finally, with LEVIATHAN, it is supposed to be an opera, basically. It's supposed to be a fully fleshed out- I don't want to compare myself to these bands but, like, The Who or Pink Floyd, or The Mars Volta (one of my favorite bands of all time). Where it's like, the whole album is an image.

V: I think it has a- I think it stands up to that level of scrutiny. In terms of how that album is laid out and constructed. Absolutely. And that is some kudos to you. So, you said it combines the different styles and what you've learned to do so far. So, when you're starting out on these songs, I feel like each one has such a strong vocal melody. You use a lot of backing vocals on this in particular. It always has the driving drums. I don't want to call it a concept album because that would actually be selling it short, but each song has a strong, interesting central premise. That you're basing the lyrics and chants around. So, where do you start there? How do you construct one of the 9 songs on this album?

R: What's interesting about LEVIATHAN is I technically wrote the

**CONTINUED**



COMMODITY  
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RECORDS

# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: basic skeleton of LEVIATHAN, the melodies and the basic songs in 2015.

So, before I ever played live with Bitter, Inc. When I said I spent a lot of time working on this thing I mean I really did.

I will say right now I want to absolutely, positively thank Echo Rose for doing everything that she's done in my life. Despite the fact we don't really work together any more. It feels indispensable to this album in particular because the entire time I was in the band with her we were talking about it. Breaking it down, how we want to do it.

It ended up being- I always knew I wanted to have lyrics based around occultism but in the earlier albums they were much more traditional songs about breakups, revenge, and things that people sing about all the time. But then I revised all the lyrics on this album at least 3 times. 2 times. 1 rewritten, 2 revised.

I knew I really wanted this to be an occult progression in addition to being a story. A concept album story. It tells the story of a guy who takes control of the world, basically. Knowing what the different symbols were in the lyrics I was saying. And, how most things would have a double meaning. Talking about love. Talking about love but also talking about how a crowd is manipulated by a person. Later on, talking about apotheosis. Trying to work on multiple levels in all the lyrics. The ability to keep refining them. You know given enough time anyone is going to hammer it out with a lot more depth and lot more detail to it. That is how it happened. V: Yes, the power of revision. That's awesome. I guess I was unaware because of your release schedule I wasn't aware of how long you were working on this.

Ok so let's talk about Prime Initiate a little bit. I also do really love that. It's the previous release that you alluded to. So, a little different. Kind of noise tinged. A 4 song Ep. Maybe more of a direct through-line in terms of having a story. So, what's the story

behind that release?

R: Prime Initiate Ep is about The Prime Initiate.

This is not exactly a happy memory, but it is necessary for the sake of the story: I was in jail for 2 months. When I was there, I had shit-all to do because I was in the hospital, so I was literally in solitary. Not like real solitary but I was by myself. So, I was like, fuck it I'm just going to write lyrics. I wrote a little book in there. Nothing else to do in there. At all.

So, one of the things that came out of it was the Prime Initiate Ep. All the lyrics to that were written in that circumstance. I decided I wanted to talk about character, in this case a man, who achieves immortality by (in the most material sense) going to Antarctica, putting himself as close to on-ice as possible and doing surgeries on himself. Becoming more and more machine-like, a transhumanistic idea.

I wanted to create a hero, for sure. I wanted him to be heroic. But my hero wasn't going to be romantic. He wasn't going to be based around a traditional hero's journey or something like that where he discovers himself and finds out he can fight for himself or the community. But he's also not an anti-hero because he's also not too rough around the edges. It's not like he does the right thing, but his demons keep chasing him, the other thing that people do.

What I wanted him to be was a man who has symbolically, metaphorically, shaved every human part of himself away. So, he ends up being the perfect execution of his own intention. He literally had to cut his flesh away to make that happen. Also, symbolically he had to cut his flesh away to make that happen.

So, when he comes out of it, he's a hero without romance of any kind. Not negative romance, not positive romance. But what he can do, what he possesses in himself, is the ability to do something, whatever is necessary quote-unquote in any given moment.

I want to say for sure that this is not a fascist thing. It's not a fascist thing. Because there's no joy, he's not a sadist. There is no joy in causing pain.

There is no joy in having control, for him. There is no joy. He simply becomes capable of doing exactly what he believes is necessary. Without having any positive or negative feeling about it in any way whatsoever. Whatever is a duty in his mind. But not a romantic duty. It's just a task. He has a task that he wants to complete.

That ends up tying into the OCI where they're going to bring into reality Lucifer Sophia.

So basically, he is a person for whom the highest calling is to perfectly fulfill his task without emotion, without celebration, without praise, without dishonor. Just do it.

So, it's a Buddhist idea because he detaches himself from attachment to desire. But it's a western idea because it is pure will. That was the concept of the character.

V: Hmm. You lay it out beautifully on that album and just now. So, is this- without being too on the nose, is this, I mean, I don't want to say Pilgrims Progress 2023.

R: Hahaha. V: I mean, is this kind of like your vision of what the ideal man for the current age needs to be? Or is it maybe a more personal expression for you?

R: Well, I'll tell you this. If you are asking me if I think it's me the answer is no, but I wish. V: Well, sure.

R: It's- yes. I wrote this as an ideal. It's ideal for me, but it's not ideal for him. That's very important, too. It's very important that the character is not motivated by any of that.

Yes, I think what we need right now is we need to be able to do whatever it is that we gotta do without all the bullshit that surrounds it. I think this goes into what this reality is facing as well. The problems we are facing now, well- some problems we are facing we've faced forever. There are always problems. We're still facing problems like fathers and sons don't get along and romantic relationships are hard to keep in place. Nations rise up and crash back down to the ground. All that shit. But the problems we are facing now that have never been faced need a dispassionate executor to solve them.

V: Someone that will put themselves on ice, etc.

R: Someone who will put

themselves on ice and cut the flesh away and not do anything out of sadism. We can't be fascist. But solving climate change is mostly a technological problem. That's what I'm really getting at. 21st century problems: climate change, how to deal with A.I., how to deal with the reality that we may be able to make ourselves immortal through medicine. We might be heading in that direction really soon. All of those problems are ones that require a dispassionate executor and humanity is not up for the task. We take everything personally. V: Ha-ha.

R: From each individual on up to nationwide. We're taking things personally all the time. I'm very afraid that the desire to humanize everything is going to cause a bunch of problems that we can't do anything about.

V: Hmmm. R: So that thought process was part of coming up with that. It may be that thought process and the Prime Initiate EP both bubbled up out of the same subconscious worry.

V: Sure. Love it. Moving along. So, you alluded to some directions or things that you wanted for Bitter, Inc. So, if you feel like spoiling anything what do you feel like envisioning next for the band?

R: The next album is going to be called Metamorphosis 2. Which is an implicit acknowledgement that LEVIATHAN is a metamorphosis as well.

It's going to be aesthetically quiet. Also, kind of easy on the ears. Haunting. The overarching theme is I'm taking it back to talk about ancient shit instead of future shit on this album. The concept is built around these two young men who are spiritual- they're monks, basically. It's an unnamed religion, doesn't matter. But one where monks have a strict prohibition against lots of kinds of behavior.

They are advanced in their education, spiritually. They discover these lesser-known documents. Through their shared- through the process of reading these documents together they know that to read them they will be killed. They come closer, bond together, and fall in love. So, it's bordering on being positive, but they do get killed. At the end.

I get to tie together the idea of the occultic discovery of forbidden knowledge and then like double that forbidden

knowledge by becoming homosexual partners with one another (in the context of a spiritual system which will kill them for doing so). That's a double play. It's going to be pretty beautiful. Bleak, but beautiful. V: Huh. Ok. Of course, I look forward to being able to hear that whenever it comes out.

So, besides your own music of course you have a record label, maybe a record co-op would be a better term: Commodity Fetish Records. So how long has that been active? R: Goodness gracious. V: Pretty much as long as Bitter, Inc.?

R: Oh, a little less because while technically I released Bitter, Inc. on it first, the time I released anything other than us was 2016.

V: Ok. And about how many releases do you have?

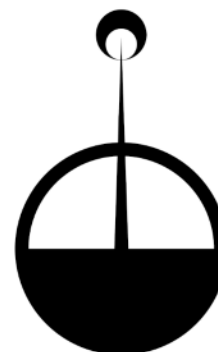
R: Well, LEVIATHAN was 33. V: There you go. That's right, of course.

R: We're currently working on: Shannon is probably going to do a release as Trauma Bond. There's a long standing promise we've had to have Zoe from Torch Americans do a release. But she had a child which caused understandable delays.

V: They'll do that. R: Ella Solis of Vehicles at High Speeds has promised to do a release. So, we've got 34, 35, 36 pretty much staked out.

It's a nice label. We'd like for more people to release with us. It's still a little label. It's an extension of my ability to do my design. I design for free for people, but I do want to do my design. That's my little caveat.

## CONTINUED



COMMODITY  
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# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: It was inspired by CRASS Records. Which had a very definitive motif, set of motifs that they stuck to on all their releases. I wanted to do something like that too.

V: So, the aim of that was to have your design and brand for lack of a better word go back to Bitter, Inc.? So, what would you say your favorite releases on that have been?

R: Oh, you're going to get me in trouble, buddy.

V: Other than your own.

R: Hahaha.

V: Ok, maybe not your favorite but the ones aside from your own that you feel represent what the label is about.

R: I'll start by saying this: I haven't released anything that I didn't love.

V: Ok very good.

R: So, it's not going to be anything bad. But there are some things that struck me as being surprising and beautiful and that's always the best two things to have.

Honestly, Praxis by Dendera Bloodbath by Verge Bliss is worth listening to 100 times. Because she's got a lot going on under the surface on that album. I've loved her forever. She's never been part of the CFR co-op, but I have mad respect. She's a geneticist and a noise musician.

V: Huh.

R: And just a beautiful, talented human being. Wonderful person. But that album is fucking awesome. Dendera Bloodbath: Praxis. By the way, everything Verge Bliss has ever done including Dendera Bloodbath is very, very, very good.

In addition to that, I'm incredibly proud of Rapture by JC Meyers which was Echo Rose's project briefly. I consider it to be holistic, spent-end, intentional piece that has a lot of stuff going on multiple levels. It's interesting and creative.

Everything by Happysplap is very fun while being insanely nihilistic. I always have a tender piece of my heart for Foreshock. That was the first one I released by them. It is a lot of classic songs like Active Shooter, and it just perfectly blends, it's a very appropriate statement for 2018 America. The absolute abandon into absurdity and just laughing at the ridiculous political theater and crisis we've become.

V: Awesome.

R: Of course, CANN'D:

Greatest hits. A funny take on like Anal Cunt style comedy fucking grindcore. And that's done by Ty. He did DMT on stage at the last American Babylon. They're insane.

V: Ha-ha. Awesome.

R: I'll stop there.

V: Ok. That's great. That's a good list. So, the DIY publishing wing is Babylon Press?

R: Correct.

V: That's pretty much been active the whole time. Does ISSUES fall under that?

R: It's like a spoke of a wheel. ISSUES is the axel around which all these other spokes spin.

Ironically, I never planned this. I always just intended for ISSUES to be promotion for everything else. But it's turned into the thing most necessary to keep the whole "car" going.

Babylon Press is specifically- Ok. I call it ISSUES Magazine and Babylon Press books. If you want to, they can both be considered 'zines', but ISSUES is more of a letter sized zine and Babylon Press is more for longer form things. Like, poetry, chap books, and short occult books but not a tabloid like Maximum Rock and Roll.

That's what it is: Babylon Press is for if a piece of writing is end-to-end one book. Then it goes there. Whereas ISSUES is a constant collection of articles and so on.

V: So, what are some common things you've put out? You've mentioned poetry. So, do your occult books belong to that?

R: Yeah, yeah, I just threw them all in there pretty much. Although the ones I intend just for OCI I've taken to uploading on the OCI website ([orderofcelestialintegration.org](http://orderofcelestialintegration.org)). So, I'm not just filling the entire roll of Babylon Press releases with my own books. It's a lot of poetry. We released Zachary Corsa. We released Kole Oakes.

We've released several poets. We've also done a release called the Ginza Raba which is a translation of the holy text of the Mandaeans. I looked it up on Amazon and there were no versions of it available at all.

V: Huh.

R: There was a full web version but no full print version. So, I scraped the web version. It's public domain. It's an ancient book. So, I released that. I want to do more things like that, too. Release occult volumes that are just not available in print. I'd like to do that more.

V: Well, that's fun. Ok. Awesome.

So, what are your thoughts on physical media in this digital age? How does one little outfit such as yours approach such a question?

R: Well, I have to think of how to put it.

V: Is it even relevant on the art scale?

R: I'll start by saying that I am a hypocrite on this. In all honesty. Because, you know. I gotta know what the Prime Initiate would do. He wouldn't give a shit about any of it. He wouldn't hold any of it of any special value. So now I have to confront that myself. I own books. I own records. I like going to the store and getting a used book that some weird power of positive thinking dude from the 80s put out. And I cannot ever destroy my love of physical art. Actual paintings. Actual sculptures.

V: Mm.

R: I hold those things sacred. Books are mass produced but I love them. But if someone goes into an art museum and destroys a sculpture, that is a grievous offense to me. To do such a thing. Because you are stealing something from all of humanity which there is only one of. You know?

V: Somebody made that.

Sure.

R: They put their life into it. So, whenever anyone does anything like that, whether it is some stupid- I didn't like when they threw the cans of soup at the Andy Warhol painting for climate change or whatever.

V: I'm with you on that.

R: Of course, climate change needs to be changed! I've been talking about that my whole life!

V: I don't even really see the correlation. It is stuff that we have to spend money to preserve or whatever. It costs resources to preserve but that seems like a bit of a stretch

to try to blame that on climate change.

R: I read Saul Alinsky's Rules for Radicals. I read Abbey Hoffman Steal This Book. I've been into fighting climate change my whole life. I believe hardcore activism is cool, but it has to connect to the thing you're trying to accomplish.

Why wouldn't we just go to a power plant and for one day occupy it. That would at least be material-

V: Or even if you're just going to be silly, throw soup at the power plant.

R: Or a gas station. Go down to Exxon Mobil and throw a can of soup at the gas, or whatever.

V: There you go. At least that symbolically makes sense.

R: You're going to attack a work of art? Come on, guys. We can do better than that. I don't like that. I don't like it.

I don't know where this conversation started.

Oh yeah! Physical media.

V: Yes, yes.

R: I do think we need to come to terms with- I wish we did more used stuff and swapping. Rather than constantly producing and buying new things. I mean, I'm a hypocrite. I make art myself constantly. But, like, we are building up, what I say is, "More Trash For The Trash pile." So much stuff is produced only to be in our hands for a few moments and then it won't be there anymore. So, I do think you should get stuff used, if you can.

It's a hard question because you're getting to the core of what it means to be a person. Why are you here? What are you doing?

V: That's fair. Art is such a transient thing anyway. Even the greatest works of art are only going to be on the planet in a small blip of time. I hear what you're saying there. I'm with you. I would hate for there not to be Van Gogh paintings throughout the world. What are you going to do? Humans are going to be hypocrites at some point.

R: Definitely. I like museums because the public gets to see them. It's not like some asshole who owns it and puts it in some storage bin or something.

<phone break>

V: Hello.

R: Hey, bud. I guess we dropped the call.

V: That's ok. Let's pick it back up. Alright. Well. I think we covered that pretty well unless you have anything you want to

add on that subject.

R: Yeah, no. That was it. I know that we have to not do it, but I feel like we have to do it anyway. That's pretty much my answer.

V: There you go. I like it. We had a chance to wrap that up. OK, so.

I guess let's get to a big thing we haven't touched on at all yet.

Under this co-op is outsider music, DIY art & music fest American Babylon. That is going on what the 7th year of its occurrence? Is that right?

R: Yes, sir.

V: Minus 2020, of course, for COVID. So, how's the planning going?

R: Good so far. We're actually going to have a meeting tomorrow. I'd just like to say their names and say thank you. Shannon, Gray, Ty, Celeste and Ella are currently on the CFR council, and they'll be voting on who is going to play. So far, we have over 70 applicants. We're going to keep the application for another month. Hopefully we can book as many of them as possible without feeling too bad about the people who aren't able.

V: That's awesome. So, it's really an organized process, huh? In terms of how you decide this?

R: Yeah, I'm a brutally organized person.

V: So, it is a true co-op in that sense. How many other people do you have on that council, do you say?

R: Right now, in addition to me it's Ella, it's Ty, it's Celeste, Shannon. It grows and it shrinks over time.

Oh, and Gray, of course. The only one who has been with me the entire time is Gray. Echo was also there but Echo backed out because of personal reasons.

V: Ok.

R: So now it's primarily me, Shannon and Gray, but also Ella, Ty and Celeste. They all get a vote. Literally there's a spread sheet. You can give each act a green, red or yellow vote. Then we go through the whole damn thing and try and calculate it out so we can be fair about it.

V: Is that how you do it?

Wow. I dig it. There's a little bit of a different format or timing layout this year.

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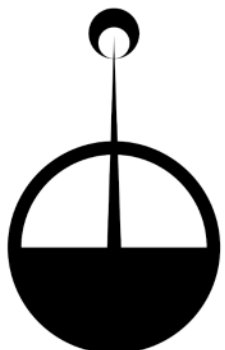
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**CONTINUED**



# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

Do you want to talk about that? Why did you choose to go that route?

R: Hell yeah. Well, last year concluded a vision we had for a long time. It was at a camp ground. We did it at a camp ground. There was a lake. You could catch fish. We did it outdoors. While Samme, the person who runs the spot, is amazing, I fucking hated everything but the music about that.

V: Ha-ha.  
R: Like, I liked the artists and the art, but I was outside for days and days on end. I remembered I'm a pretty indoors person. It was hot. Like, you know, mosquitoes.

So now we're going to do it indoors this year. Which we have done in the past. This one is actually going to be at Purgatory Place in Greenville, NC. We don't know yet but we're going to have part of it in some other local venues as well. But the really big concept we are going for at American Babylon 7 is called Nightmare Afterparty. It will go on until 6 am. It will start somewhere else than it will come over here until 6 am.

We will have designed the house in a very interesting way. With different lights and art. It's going to be cool and that's the goal.  
V: I see. Awesome.

Ok so the afterparty will be there. Ok. So, will there be any breaks in the music? Are people going to be able to sleep at all?

R: Only from like 6 am until like noon, but you're going to be able to sleep anyway because from 3pm until midnight it will be somewhere else. It will be a standard, like, show. A venue somewhere. So, then you'll be able to sleep during the day if you want to.

V: Sure, sure. Just clarifying, I guess.

R: Likely I'll be running the after party and Shannon will be running the day party and there will be overlap. But I don't think anybody is going to stay up for 54 straight hours or whatever it is going to be.

V: No music endurance. You've got to enjoy it. I know it's meant to cast a wide net of weirdos but what are some of the staple sounds or genres you can count on hearing?

R: There's a lot. I feel my bread and butter is bands that have backing tracks as well as some strange addendum to those backing tracks and a vocalist. Which is a large definition. But it's what Bitter, Inc. is. It's what Happyslap is. There's also just standard noise. There's often some folk punk stuff

in there. Occasionally there's a punk band. I want it to be non-exclusive. But we really want it to be like "What the hell is this?" That's what I go for.

V: You want it to be interesting.

R: Of course, we all vote for different people.

V: Right, right. The council has different tastes. Lovely.

R: I tend to vote for what I call, "guys who have not left their house for a month and have been on cough medicine the entire time."

V: Heh.

R: As long as there's a few times I'm like, "Wow, what is this guy doing?" There's a bit, though. There's been rap. There's some rap. There's been country, believe it or not. So, it's a pretty wide range.

V: Ok. I think you mentioned a Happyslap performance, if I remember that correctly. What are some of the legendary moments that jump out at you? What made you say, I'm glad all these people are here.

R: Haha. Ok. Well, at American Babylon 2: END TIMES, we were in the UU church sanctuary. I was the music director at the UU, and I got them to agree to that somehow. Part of the concept of that was that everyone's time would be counted down to them. From a clock that's on the wall.

So, there was a giant laser clock counting down everyone's time. It's also supposed to be super apocalyptic. The whole event. So, you've got to imagine there's two different projectors projecting clocks constantly counting down to the end of people's performances.

Gray, during the Happyslap set, had his own projector. It was on Omegle. I don't know if you know Omegle, but it is basically a place where men masturbate in front of one another.

V: Ok.

R: So, we're projecting what is basically like a chat box, but it is Omegle and it's basically just a picture of someone's dick and balls. And then the return is the audience. There's a webcam pointed on them. The guy is seeing the audience.

V: Heh. Ok.

R: There's a lot of chanting. Gray has this magical power to make people feel comfortable with things they would normally feel very uncomfortable with. He never gets in trouble with any of this. That was an excellent moment, for sure.

We also, Echo and I, did the final performance of

END TIMES. I made a drink out of energy drinks, Kool Aid and instant coffee so it would taste bitter and be carbonated. I passed it out like it was Jones town. I told people that it was poison.  
V: Nice.

R: And the whole thing is, you know, apocalyptic. Lots of people refused to drink it, obviously.

V: Learn to trust you on those days, huh? I'm not sure what it says about the people who drank it.

R: It's not nonconsensual. If someone didn't want it, we wouldn't give it to them. We keep it consensual, but we like to push people as far as we can within those boundaries.

So, everyone got an anxiety attack because they drank this incredibly concentrated caffeine and taurine. It tasted bitter so it tasted like it was poison. That was a good time. Obviously, I never really poisoned anyone; nor would I.

There's the Tower of The Moon. When Echo was showing her movie. Gray and I set up a copy of the Earth tower to the moon on it and backlighting. We announced to the whole place that we're building a tower to the moon.

There are honestly countless times.

Oh, a band named Vomit Chord whose thing is that they swallow capsaicin oil before they sing. I didn't know what the thing was. So, they're in my house and they pull out a vial of fluid. I don't know if you know this about me, but I am terrified that someone is going to dose me some day. It's just the crowd that I run in.

## CONTINUED



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# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: So, he takes out a vial and he pours some into a spoon. By the way he's wearing, like, a gimp mask. He points it at me, and I instantly knock it out of his hand. Like, there's no way in fuck I'm going to drink this. It was flying across the room, and it hit someone in the foot who practically got a burn. Then it turns out its capsaicin. It's pure pepper oil. So, I'm really glad that I did not drink it.

V: Well, yes.

R: It basically tear gassed the room. I hit the spoon, so it filled the air and half the crowd left. That was really nice. That was fun.

V: So, what was this person's plan for this? If you didn't knock it out of his hand?

R: He was going to have me give it to him to drink it.

V: I see, I see.

R: Because I was so distrustful, I actually inflicted all the harm.

V: I guess I got that but ok.

R: There's a metaphor there.

V: Yeah.

R: Anyway, then he drank the vial and played it but good god. That was intense.

V: Hell yeah. I love it. So, are there any styles, voices or genres you wish you could've included so far but for whatever reasons no one's presented that? Are you not sure that that exists but it is just in your head?

R: Well? Good question.

No. I've been very, very happy with the responses people have given me. We honestly usually have too many people that we'd like to play.

V: Fair enough.

R: I have had a few people show up to play where I'm like

"shit we turned other people down to hear this shit," but I'm nice to them. I won't name them, obviously.

V: Sure.

R: But there have been times where I was like, "crap, we could've got something crazier than this."

V: That's fair. And it's called an outsider music and art fest.

Do you try to have a lot of art as well? Is that a big focal point? Or do you just encourage what you can get? That kind of thing?

R: I put my paintings out. I also like to design the space, which I would like to do this time again. I'm looking forward to that. But also, other artists. There's performance art. Stuff that's not even a specific musical act or anything.

People that dress in weird ways. People put their paintings up for sale. We've even had someone selling jewelry and shit. It's kind of a bit like a hippy sort of fest too.

V: Ok. Very cool. You mentioned designing the set-in addition to your music.

I found it surprising that you led with this but it's maybe just where your head is at. I know you're a very goal-oriented, focused guy. So, you do visual art as well. What mediums do you work with primarily these days?

R: When I make my quote-unquote visual art, you know. It's water color. It's paint marker. And that's it. It doesn't look like a standard water color. It looks like poster art. I do highly graphics, I use a lot of metallic water paints. Gold, silver, and neons. It looks kind of like it is out of a 90s comic book. It's kind of psychedelic too. I'd say it's highly constructed. The proportions of everything are what I really, really care about. I have a whole process where I use a pencil to box out the entire piece, create focal points and stuff like that. I kind of like. I wanna change my style because I do feel like I'm not as much of a quote unquote artist as much as an abstract artist. I feel like at some level I'm really a graphic artist, to be fair. Because when I see a painting by De Kooning or by Pollock I'm like, to me this is really- they're not pulling any punches. They're willing to alienate everyone. My painting is my most accessible medium, I'd say.

V: Oh, interesting. Ok. Hence the potential term graphic artist. It's a more common level art, in that sense?

R: Yeah.

V: I can appreciate that. Yeah, yeah. Why not? Why not have an access point?

So, how long have you been working in this style?

R: For years I've been experimenting with what the absolute bare minimum costs I can have been. I've experimented with lots of different things.

With acrylics with paper on wood, with different types of paper. Bristol board, water color paper, marker paper, graphic paper, ink paper. I feel like it was in this last year I really solidified what I like to do, what I have the most control over when I'm working, which is really what I want when I'm working on a piece like this. Because I don't want to put 20 hours into it and then feel like it's a piece of shit.

I'd say that a lot of time- I'd say my late 20s into my mid-30s, was a lot of experimenting. In this last year I feel like I figured it out.

V: Ok. So, what are your ambitions when you sit down to make a piece? How do you decide what your subjects are? It seems to bleed into your occult stuff to some degree.

There are certainly some portraits with random- well, I won't say random, that's potentially insulting. Seemingly disparate iconography. How does that come together for you?

R: Well, I definitely focus on people who have inspired me. Either people from history or different artists and painters, scientists, often my friends. I tie it together with repeating themes related to space, psychedelia quality to it. I compose it with pretty strict adherence to mathematical proportions which is pretty important to me.

The main thing is that all of these people I'm feature in my idea of what the Order would consider to be a good person, or a person who has met some kind of ideal or something.

V: Hmm. Ok.

R: So, that's kind of what they have in common.

My most recent piece has several figures in it. There's Mashall Allen, who has taken over for the Sun Ra Arkestra since Sun Ra died. A saxophone player and a brilliant, brilliant man. Then what I call gay Prometheus, which is this Greek statue looking guy, but he looks really pissed off. He's got a giant obelisk coming out of his head. Then I painted Giordano Bruno, who is an Italian scientist who first theorized that stars are actually other suns with other planets going around them.

V: Hmm.

R: I've also included the James Webb array and a model of the first automated robot ever designed which was made in ancient Greece and it was a wooden bird that would fly with steam power.

V: That's a great example.

Ok. I love it. You do asemic writing as well?

R: Always. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I like to include asemic writing in my pieces because I love graphic design. But I kind of feel like, don't take it personally if you're reading this, I don't like putting actual words in my art. Like, I don't like writing a word that is discernable into my art.

Because then I feel like you're hinting at a meaning too obviously, in a way. So, but I still love the way words look. So, I just make a lot of asemic writing and figures.

When I'm more delusional I convince myself that they actually say things that I don't know. But I don't know.

V: Like you said it almost gives it more of a sense of being graphic art.

R: You were in that weird fucking cult that I was in for a little while in my early 20s.

V: Yeah. The Christianity cult, you mean?

R: Ok, so you remember?

V: Yes.

R: They were into speaking in tongues. It's kind of like written speaking in tongues, too.

V: Oh god, oh yes them specifically. I guess you're right. I kind of blocked that out a little bit. You're right.

R: Sorry. Ha-ha.

V: Ha-ha. It's alright you don't have to apologize. My brain took a second to get there.

No, you're right. Speaking in tongues is basically the vocal equivalent of that, huh?

R: A pure expression of whatever your spirit intends to say, or whatever.

V: Yeah.

R: It's actually pretty much gibberish but I like the idea of it, so I do it with writing.

V: There you go. Ok.

You mentioned that you do all the design work for all these different outfits. The records, Commodity Fetish, Babylon Press, ISSUES, etc.

So, what is your design philosophy? Where does that come from?

You mentioned CRASS. Definitely all black and white, stark easily reproducible obviously goes back to the early punk.

R: I have one thing that I haven't said that I think is important to my philosophy on this. I believe that economy is beautiful. Making something that an ordinary person could afford to make is more beautiful than if it looks the exact same way, but it is expensive. I'm not saying that it's not worth it to make expensive things sometimes but making something for the least amount of resources so it's less wasteful is a beautiful thing to me.

I start from a premise, which is: what do I need? I want to be able to print my own work because I am DIY. So, the cheapest way to get a nice printer is a black and white one. So, I started from there and I worked my way backwards.

Starting from this what do I make that is as cool looking and as beautiful looking as I can within that limitation. I like to give myself limitations to work in.

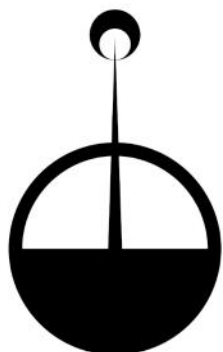
So, ISSUES is the best example of it. I feel like I've put the most effort into it. It's literally going to be number 69. Nice. I've got it down now. I know what the format is and everything. But also, album covers and especially flyers for my own shows.

The basic idea is to keep it geometrical. Keep it according to the golden ratio. Good proportions. Let the principles guide the work rather than trying to find the principles while you're working.

V: Hmm.

R: That's a big way that I approach things: What am I trying to achieve? What are my principles? From there, what should I do? It usually works out. Cause there's something the mind likes about math.

V: Yes. Perhaps that goes into why you're more crowd pleasing, as you put it, visual artist. You like that ratio. Maybe I'm wrong.



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RECORDS

**CONTINUED**



# RYAN O'DOUD CONTINUED

R: No. That's why things usually work out. Yeah. It's something outside of myself that I am trusting.

V: Right, right. It's hard to mess up too bad if you just kind of stick to this and build around it. Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah.

V: Ok. So, you also led with this as one of your big things right now. So, The Order, is it- for? Celestial Integration?

R: Of.

V: Of. It's kind of your spiritual outreach arm of the co-op. What made you want to start a cult?

R: Ok, well. That's a fun question. A lot of things that I start with come out of fears that I have. Then when I learn about it, I actually become interested in it.

First of all, I was part of a cult in my early 20s. The PIC cult. When something.

<pause>

I'm not trying to be silent.

V: No, you're fine.

R: There's a lot to say here so I'm trying to start somewhere digestible.

A cult is like a painting but with human activity. So, like, the idea

of a cult or a religion is to create a set of behaviors that repeat themselves. Which a painting repeats itself, or a song repeats motifs. It builds and climaxes. So, it instantly became, like, a question: what exactly is the purpose, why do those religions come about? Why do cults come about? They must fill some kind of need in humanity because it is global. There are so many of them. They're in every culture. What are they providing for people, and can I provide that to them without all the bullshit that goes along with the rest of it?

So, like, community, obviously. There's also stability of identity: you get to know who you are at all times so you're not melting all the time wondering what the fuck you should do or who you are.

Also, let's be really ambitious here also. Whoever wrote the character called Jesus, why did they do that? I guess there's no way really to know, but my guess is that they wanted to give people something to latch on to with their mind. Something that if they followed it would help them. If we're being kind about it. Maybe everyone was taking

offense to everyone else all the time in that society. There were constantly new people conquering Judea. Greece, Babylon, Persia, Rome. There's also a bunch of ancient superstitions. Saying you had to burn cows and shit to forgive people for sins. So, this guy says, fuck all that. I'm going to make up a guy that just says you're supposed to forgive everybody and be nice. This guy was living in Israel. So, he makes this up.

So how does The OCI roll out this idea? That a cult is a set of new patterns that you put into the world. I sat down and said what do I think? What problems are facing the world? What do I actually think people are doing right now? What are people not doing right now that if they did would help them deal with the specific problems in the world right this very second?

So, like, what about that? I'll make up characters just like they did. 'I'll make up characters that embody this new way of dealing with problems that have never existed before. Because I was working on a conjecture that

new religions become successful when they come up with solutions to new problems.

Think of Islam and Mohammed. He lived in a world of traders who were split and wrecked by tribalism. Constant vendettas and stuff.

V: You mean merchants, right?

R: Yes merchants. And they're living in the desert. So, food and water are scarce. You usually would have to sell something or trade it for water. But if you can't talk to the guy that runs the stall, because your dad's dad killed their dad's dad, it's not going to work.

V: It's a precarious environment.

R: So, he goes to the mountains. This is important, there's always some isolation point. He goes out to the mountains and says Jesus Christ what the fuck am I going to do with these people. I'll just say there's one god. Only one prophet. I'll be the one prophet. And I'll tell them to spread the faith. He ended up in conquest. Within a few generations from Iran to Morocco is one empire.

All those traders, all those merchants could now trade back and forth. Uniform taxes. No more splintering. No more vendettas. No more tribalism. So, it solved a set of problems that hadn't been solved. That's what I would think about.

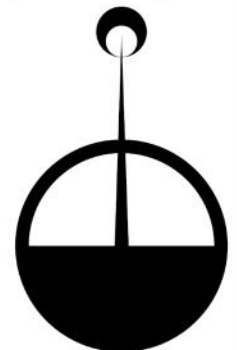
So, I would think about this: what are our problems? I think its problems related to technology, problems related to ecocide, climate change, and traveling to space. We've got a lot of people and very few resources. We're going to need to go into space. Or it all collapses.

So, I just keep going until I run out of resources, the Earth gets much hotter, we don't have sustainable means of life.

V: A population bottleneck, basically.

R: Yes. That's our civilizational roulette. This is my civilizational roulette strategy. Eliminate fossil fuels. Period. Don't use them anymore. Period. We go into space. We need to go into space, but you need rockets to go into space. And rockets burn stuff. So, what do we need? We need something that goes into space without burning anything. What's that? A tower. That's what that is. It's a tower powered by geothermal and/or nuclear energy that will bring things into outer space. It will raise and lower automated robots to gather rare earths from the asteroids in the asteroid belt and come back.

**CONTINUED**



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RYAN O'DOUD  
THE TOWER  
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# RYAN O'DOUD CONCLUDED

R: It will bring them back down to the ground without burning anything. That's a big fucking problem.

I know what people think when they hear this. They think it's a laughable, ridiculous, grandiose idea. To most people, it sounds like something ridiculous. But it solves a civilizational problem we're facing. I know it's not original even. Other people have thought of it. My idea is to specifically structure this as a cult or religion. There's a lot of bullshit in cults, I know. A lot of bad things have been done in cults; I get that shit. So, I'm trying to work around that. There are many books of The Order but there are two basic books that summarize what we're about. There are two books. They are quick books; they have a little more than 18 chapters. And it's just a lot of suggestions for what we need to do as an overarching social construct. Just list some of the problems we face and some suggestions for solving them. I don't think I don't know that- I just think that religion has been a good strategy in the past. I mean I could just do philosophy about it, but philosophy is subject to philosophers and there's like 10 of those. I prefer religion because I just feel like there's shit to do. There's more to do in life. So that's it.  
V: Sure.  
R: That's it.

That's where it all came from.

V: Basically, a modern world requires a modern cult.

R: That's it. I don't want to do anything suicidal like Jamestown or something. I know cult is a heavy word. I'm very reluctant to even put myself at the head of it other than I just kind of have to be because I made it up.

V: As you said about American Babylon, consent, even as far as far as participation of the cult, seems to be one of its central tenets.

R: Yeah, that's even in the 33 Affirmations, that consent among knowledgeable adults is prime. I don't want anyone to be forced to do anything. If anything, I've made it difficult to join.

There are people who want to join, and I've put steps in between because I don't want to think it is some silly thing. I actually do take it seriously. Also, I don't want to be something where you don't know what you're getting into.

V: Very nice. Yeah. You gotta follow through. You've got to be responsible. So, you've

mentioned some people have taken some of the steps. You're admitting to no divinely granted truth so do you have any precursors to the cult? Thinkers? The imagery of Prime Initiate seems familiar. I feel like Antarctica has occurred as a sort of human origin slash human future image before. Where did that come from?

R: Yeah, sometimes there's conspiracy theories about Antarctica which are funny but that's not what I'm getting at.  
V: Yes.

R: It was a practical decision. Climate change happens. Melting happens. If the waters go out why wouldn't it become inhabitable? The other thing is that it would still be the coldest place on Earth even if it was inhabitable. Since the whole idea is that he is surgically changing himself. If you are going to have constant surgery on yourself, you want it to be cold because then you're not spreading bacteria and shit. So that's all. That's where that came from.

V: So, necessity. Going back to necessity.

R: It should be judged on what is the least resource intensive way to solve any problem.

V: I like it. Ok.

So, what would you hope for the future of the OCI? Would you like it to grow in an organic way?

Or a techno-critical way? You said you take it seriously.

R: At its core it's going to be an art cult. It's not like other religions where it says go out there and conquer the world.

I would like it to be a known factor. I would like it to be an addendum to life. I would like it to be a thing that people are like, "oh that's a thing that some people do. I've seen those guys."

V: That kind of makes sense. Ok. I like that.

R: It's inherently anti-spiritual but not, like, atheistic. In fact, I think the very first affirmation is that it's not a requirement that you believe in the gods of the cult or that you don't believe in other gods. Which I think is a nice, pretty unique thing among cults. You don't have to be an atheist nor do you have to not be a catholic or a Buddhist or anything.

It's an addendum. It's something else that you can do. As long as you want to solve these problems. But it's not unitarian either because it's not saying, "everyone is going to be fine no matter what." There's a fucking set of problems we've got to solve.

I want us to be problem and solution oriented. That's the real, main thrust of the cult. Let's get problem- analysis- solution oriented shit into the daily lives and minds of humanity because we're suffering because we don't have it.

V: Hmm. I can dig that. 1000% I love it. Ok.

Well, we're winding down here. I realized I don't have a closing question for you so I'll ask this: what would you like to be used for your last question?

R: That one was perfect.

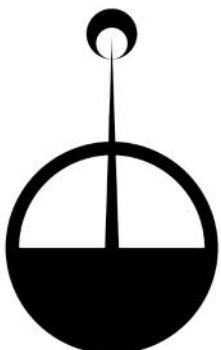
V: That was a half joke. Let's wrap it up there.

R: Sounds good.

V: Thanks for agreeing to the interview.

R: Thank you buddy.

## -END-



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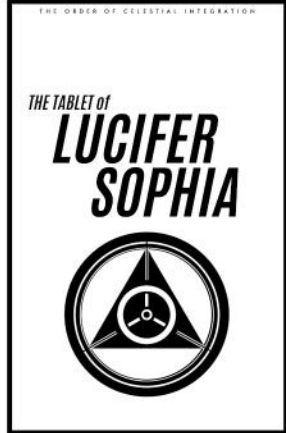
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