

An Edited Interview With Levi Frydowski

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–Some have found it hard to classify what you do. Are you basically a philosopher ?

–I guess. But then a philosopher digs endlessly into the most basic concepts, including the concept of philosophy.

–How does your sculpture, music, and fiction connect to your philosophy ?

–Expressions of world in different media. Literature and philosophy are closest in that both deal with concepts. Literature is indirect philosophy. A vision of the world is implicitly used as a kind of generator of what happens to be the case in the narrative. The reader is expected to deduce the implicit model from all the details.

–So *Brave New World* is a work of indirect philosophy ?

–Yes. And so is *Ulysses*. And so on. The novelist gets to be more suggestive, which has certain advantages.

–Such as ?

–Well I don't think a philosophy is ever perfectly and finally expressed. I very much agree with my friend Kleiss when it comes to ideas versus their instantiations. For instance, there is the one and only letter **A** and then there are instantiations of this letter all over the place in various texts. None of those instantiations “exhaust” or completely specify the letter. *But* the letter is unthinkable without instantiations in general. It's the same with species and particular organisms. The old old issue of the one and the many. The river and the water rushing through or as it.

–So any expression of a philosophy is just one instantiation that doesn't fully specify or exhaust it ?

–Yes. And in that sense all philosophy is indirect or literary, though some of it “fights against” this status through being as direct and abstract as possible.

–Like mathematics.

–Yes. And this interview is close to that. The *TLP* is even closer. A

novel like *Steppenwolf* is farther away but still fairly direct.

—And a novel where the narrator and characters don't philosophize at all would be as indirect as possible.

—Exactly. And it could be a great novel. The plot itself could say it without saying it.

2

—Recently you read the original scroll version of *On The Road* and found it nihilistic.

—I thought it was great, and yes it's nihilistic in a certain sense.

—In what sense ?

—The world is presented, largely implicitly, as passing spectacle. Jack and Neal are bisexual cunt-struck fuckboys. Like soldiers they risk their flesh and sacrifice the usual comfort for the mission.

—And that mission is ?

—Jack articulates the spectacle of the world. And he implicitly articulates the world as spectacle. And, as Kleiss might put, he ultimately suggests transcendence. Which fits what an older Ginsberg has to say about Kerouac too.

—So really *On The Road* is a portrait of “sound and fury signifying nothing.”

—Yes. If that phrase is understood appropriately. What is the meaning of woman ? And what is the meaning of spiritual brotherhood ? These are the two deep themes in the book — and in life. For masculine (if bisexual) types like Jack and Neal ... and the philosopher as I mostly imagine *him*.

—So Frydowski is a sexist ?

—Some would say so. But most would do so in such a clueless boring way that I couldn't agree with them.

—How does this issue of woman connect to the vanity of all things ?

—The world isn't truly empty unless the woman is empty and profound friendship is empty. Now profound friendship can be understood as a

synonym for philosophy.

–Is it possible to see woman as empty ?

–That is the question. I'd say that one can bluff conceptually — and mean it on that level — but it is hard for a proud creative replicator to stop hoping for *her*, even if he knows better. Perhaps *because* he knows better.

–Because?

–I just mean that transcendence in the dark sense is an intensely masculine pose. All gods are overthrown. Our hero is astonished at nothing, completely irreverent and fearlessly critical. A sublimation of the warrior, a grim king.

–But also an obscenity.

–Exactly. To all believers and optimists, our hero is a threat. He doesn't oppose them directly (take the other side on a political issue.) He scorns the issue itself. He mocks the game in which their identity-securing Cause has meaning.

–But he doesn't really mock it.

–If you mean he doesn't go around preaching, then you are 100 % correct. For that would make him another boring purveyor of another boring Cause. Our hero is a black hole, mostly concealed.

–Out of a sense of shame ?

–A young philosopher-in-progress may indeed feel shame, still undecided and fearful that he is sick rather than knowing. But the black blossom itself is definitely proud and assured. So this matured philosopher is taciturn out of decency. And because of a recognition of futility.

–Decency because he doesn't want to hurt feelings when it will all go nowhere ?

–Right. Philosophy is accidentally esoteric. Most people *can't* want it. Because of what Kleiss calls "Moloch." Basically because we are replicators and philosophy is a kind of parasite on a more basic "purpose."

–I take then that futility is part of that.

–Right. So the philosopher is taciturn because it's pointless and hurtful to even try to talk about it with those aren't banged into the shape of

a proper receptacle or host.

–Do you agree with Kleiss that philosophy is the purest form of science ?

–Yes. “Man by nature desires to know.” The pure scientist may work entirely unrecognized as such — may look like a creep or even a criminal to those who have only a cartoonish sense of science. In the practical world that prioritizes replication and therefore prestige and resources, the scientist is paying career. And all things are paying in order to be real. Titles and salaries. But I do not claim that titles and salaries never land on scientists. Of course they do, especially on nonphilosophers (often implicitly or explicitly antiphilosophers) who contribute to the building of devices and the rationalization of policies.

–So some real science is to be found where one expects it.

–Yes. Real and even pure. Because justified by practicality. So some useless pure math might hitchhike on the hope that some related piece of math will lead to a better missile or cold fusion finally. And even institutionalized philosophy can carry a pure parasite. It’s just not easy to draw the boundary, and people — genuine scientists — are drawn to the pure. But also to more income and more prestige.

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–Let’s jump back on women.

–Sounds great.

–What is this belief in women ? Or the lack of it ?

–Conceptually (*merely* conceptually) the grizzled old philosopher knows (“knows”) that a woman is just a woman, just another person on this ball of mud. Not magical salvation or completeness.

–But ?

–But the beauty of women continues to make its promises and *get itself believed*.

–Are you making a sexist point ?

–Yes and on. Men, myself include, tend to go for the most beautiful woman again and again.

–While still calling women shallow.

–Exactly. The philosopher can be intensely shallow when it comes to women. He doesn't "reward" female philosophers unless they happen to ("more importantly") be beautiful.

–So this is the point where the pessimistic philosopher is the slave of replication.

–Exactly. And Jack and Neal lived without many things, but they didn't even try to live without beautiful women.

–What about you ?

–Me personally ?

–Yes.

–I'm possessed by that demon, yes. It's the only god I can't stop believing in. Unless we count science as a god.

–You know better but you don't know better ?

–I can't deeply know better, though maybe eventually testosterone levels will be low enough that I don't care. I'm not sure that hormones alone govern such a thing. Anima projection. Jungian stuff. Every rigid pose casts a shadow. The man and the woman are created simultaneously, just like left and right. Interdependent pair of concepts.

–You are married, right ? To the same woman for a long time ?

–Yes. And I picked a pretty one. And I was handsome back then, so she too was shallow. But we were also both poets artists somethings.

–Any comments on marriage ?

–A window into reality. I love my wife. But our marriage works because we don't pretend to be entirely fulfilled by the marriage alone. Young infinitely sweet romance whispers a promise of the impossible. And I still see the pretty face of a stranger and hear that promise. But I know that what is promised can never be performed. And no one speaks the promise out loud. It is projected on a pretty face. O tender curiosity. But the teeth of that curiosity are red with blood.

–Possessiveness ?

–Yes. All the grimy aspects of sexual "love."

–Which you can't stop believing in.

–Right. So I, Frykowski, am a clown. The film opens with me or some other philosopher giving a cynical speech that reveals the futility of sexual love. Right after the pontificator bumps into a beautiful young lady in the audience and she seduces him. He falls in love.

–His deeds say more than his words.

–Philosophy is proved a parasite in such moments. The circle is not easily broken. Replicators first, scientists second. The black flower of pure science is a late strange blossom, a rare and fragile blossom.

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–Why aren't you a professor or something? Why are you, in your own words, an “underground” philosopher?

–To some degree it's time and chance, by which I mean a merely personal issue. I may just be too snarling and proud. Publish or perish, right? But publishing means getting your peers to acknowledge you.

–Is that not something you could do?

–I don't know. Maybe. But it feels a bit like squirting out knowledge paste, or what passes for knowledge paste.

–I can hear the contempt.

–It's there, but it's not aimed at every academic. Professors wrote and write some of my favorite books. They somehow got the job done, but I'm more like Schopenhauer than Hegel.

–So your kind of philosophy is maybe exactly the kind that is problematic?

–Yes. But maybe no. I also find myself drawn to anonymity. I don't want to become a mere politician, basically a greasy salesman of my own persona.

–So you maybe even need some kind of Clark Kent boring mask.

–Yes. Tho the philosophical me is maybe more anti-hero than hero. The good stuff is automatically esoteric, against its own will, you might say.

–The philosopher, at least the pessimist, brings an unwelcome theory.

–Exactly. As Kleiss puts it, the message of any institution (the subtext of all its texts if not one or more of its texts explicitly) is the necessity *of that institution*.

–So the university’s fundamental message is the glory of the university itself.

–Exactly. And this is the self-love of lifeforms mentioned by Feuerbach and Schopenhauer. Persistent forms are self-loving. Almost a tautology if understood correctly.

–At the same time, so-called transcendent philosophy “goes beyond” the world entirely, putting in question the value of every cause and every institution.

–Exactly. What people might call nihilism. Or aestheticism. No perfect final name for it or anything else for that matter. Various smoke signals try to say it. All is hevel. All is vapor breath mist smoke. Even hevel, the metaphor, is hevel, the elusive impossible final meaning of the metaphor.

–You’ve mentioned Kleiss more than once. What are the differences between your similar philosophies ?

–I agree with Kleiss and just about everything. It’s eerie. But I don’t focus much on phenomenology. I respect it. But I have made a strategic decision to hammer away at one point. I am willing to make myself a cartoon, you might say.

–And Kleiss is not ?

–Correct. And his strategy may be better in some sense. I don’t know. Two mortal humans taking their chances. We are very much on the same team, so it makes sense that we might explore slightly different paths. Note that Kleiss is more like Stumpf. He’s not at daringly or obnoxiously offensive, but he offers something like a system. And my system is close to his. But I don’t talk about my whole system.

–Does everyone have a system ?

–Maybe in some sense. More or less blurry. But mostly I’d say it takes years to develop a system. You have to have considered various issues or problems and settled on a least wrong solution or thesis or framework.

Kleiss and I have apparently come to many of the same decisions on these issues. But when one brings one's views to market, one has to decide whether to leave anything out.

–And you leave out almost everything.

–Yes. But by saying so and agreeing with Kleiss, I am going against this general principle.

–What you like to hammer on is, roughly, pessimism.

–Transcendence, pessimism, etc. Yes. Lots of ways to try and name the vision of the bloodslinging funwheel.

–Which is the life-cycle.

–Yes. Darwinized Schopenhauer. But that's no final expression either. The dark side of biology. An *authentic* response to the darkness of Darwin's theory.

–As opposed to Socratic optimism ?

–Exactly. Humanism, technological utopianism. Evangelical party favors. An orgy of mystification. Cheap talk of “science” but a flight from implications.

–So Fryskowski is a philosopher who *comes after Darwin*.

–Who “suffers” Darwin. And this is how Duffenhauer described himself.

–I'm not familiar, but that sounds like a pseudonym.

–I think it is. But Duffenhauer was (is?) an anonymous pessimist who influenced me. Scattered online posts. Primarily focused on the sentimentality of pro-science talk that ignores the terrible implications of Darwin's theory.

–Such as ?

–Anti-utopian implications. Anti-religion-of-progress implications.

–And so anti-progressive implications.

–Exactly. Darwin is still (or still “should” be) problematic. Science is not your friend, mister progressive, mister saver of the world. At least not in any simple way.

–But isn't that known in some sense ? Don't we live in an age of dread

?

–Yes. A dread of technology, to name just one. And today’s progressives are hard to think of as optimists. The tone is shrill and desperate, on both sides to be clear. Apocalyptic conspiracy theory everywhere. As if the meaninglessness (“meaninglessness”) of human things was becoming more apparent, and the resistance to that realization had to become louder and more shrill.

–You, in contrast to the shrill panic, are presumably calmly facing the meaningless mess or “meaninglessness.”

–Yes. And this is a the crude simple center of my philosophy which is of course very far from being only mine. An ancient insight, pose, or attitude. To grasp the world as spectacle without substance. As (mere) procession — in contrast to the durable truth of the absence of its substance. So the philosophical “Self” is the indigestible stone in the mouth of time. Time that eats its children.

–It sounds like nihilism. Too simple even.

–Yes. And there are crude and anti-social ways to express it. And there are gimmicks one can use to dilute it, make it acceptable to the householder and the shopkeeper. A little poison in the bowl of chicken soup, just enough for self-deception, for a false assimilation.

–I look at you here before me and see a very clean cut person. Stylish but understated. The point I’m getting at is that you clearly have values.

–Yes. Truth and beauty and all of that stuff. So “nihilism” is always a slippery word. Pure science. Pure aesthetics. That’s more like it. The philosopher (the ideal toward which I strive) is a heroic figure, a mythic center. I’d say that my religion is a modification of something Luciferian. The pessimist rebels against the demiurge, hopelessly, pointlessly, you might say.

–So nihilism is what a replicator might call you.

–To be specific, it’s what an ideologue of replication would indeed call me.

–“Be fruitful and multiply.”

–Yes. They worry about the birth rate, are disgusted by abortion. The

role of woman is an indicator here. Is the mother sacred ?

–You wrote that the woman getting an abortion is a kind of contemporary hero.

–Yes. I still think that. Not without ambivalence. But imagine a brilliant young woman who is realizing her brilliant ego-attached *particular* possibilities. She is culturally pregnant. She terminates a biological pregnancy in the name of this cultural pregnancy.

–You said in that same context that such a woman is just Jack or Neal in *On The Road*.

–Yes. Our programming is such that hooligan fuckboys are less offensive maybe than this woman rebelling against the sacred mission of motherhood. But this heroic abortion is the essence of our culture. And there is already pessimism, at least the seed, in this diversion of energy from reproduction to sophisticated culture.

–As Spengler noted too.

–Decline of the west indeed. Awakening of the West. Awakening is death, one might joke. But the woman who gets that abortion is eager for the orgy of life, eager to hack the system and get kicks without consequences. As we all are, good greedy capitalist atomized egos.

–And you don't her.

–Or anyone else really. I have my monkey emotions like anyone. But I try to think beyond them and take in the spectacle and articulate its essence.