

## RICHARD LICKLATER : JUVENILIA

*Who smolders and glows with cosmic irony. See thou the Talking Class buffoon.*

1

—Indulgent generalization: analytic foolosophy is old lady farts. The bad stuff. The stuff without exuberance. Davidson is right with his triangulation. But Heidegger and before him Feuerbach already saw it, already said it. So it's like the scientism club finally catching up with those dirty continentals unashamed to be foolosophers.

—Fair enough, Dick.

—What else ? The collapse of The Tower. The little old ladies club. Which part of me would of course like to be in on. Give me the salary, the questionable credentials. The title to wave around for the superstitious. The aroma of scientificity. In an age of god money. In an age of failing poses. In an age of unrest and suspicion, directed largely right at institutions more and more conspicuously in the pocket.

—But you respect quite a few professors.

—Yes. Quite a few. But falcon is deaf to the falconer. Or going deaf. And yet it's the same old story. Let me not forget my transcendent pessimism. The comedy of Schopenhauer griping about the insiders. Not the scholars who actually do something. The bosses. The managers. The credential system and its theopolitical

function.

—The sacred.

—Theory of the leisure class. Blah blah blah.

## 2

—Heidegger's unironic profundity. It's a problem. The heavy unrelenting goop of it. But I love Heidegger.

—I see you as translating Heidegger through James and Nietzsche.

—Tell me more.

—A quest for the unpretentious and informality of James. But ironic-tragic like Nietzsche.

—I like that. James and Mach are *human*. Learned but still people with a distance from their professional performance. And I love Nietzsche as a response to Schopenhauer, as a complex reaction to a vision of The Wheel. Schopenhauer is accidentally funny. A great philosopher, but ridiculousness in his earnestness and thirst. Nietzsche was sometimes worse than Schopenhauer, but at his best...

—He's as good as it gets.

—Yes. A small anthology of the best passages would be one of the most illuminating books you could hand a young man. Though most young men would of course prefer the bad passages. So give the book to an old man. But why Heidegger ?

—Your phenomenism is intensely hermeneutical and world-first. The world comes before the subject. “The subject is ajar but not a jar.”

—I see what you mean. The early Heidegger can be seen as a cure for an alienated identification of reality with theoretical posits.

—Which goes with the “jar of consciousness” that is full of mere images.

—Yes. Indirect realism, naive regard for the scientific image as an aperspectival fixed reality that’s already out there, pre-articulated. Seductive nonsense. A sad substitute for a lost god. Not that I’d bring back god. Though I can respect Bultmann, without following him.

—That’s your problem, commercially speaking. You aren’t selling religion.

—Yeah, though there is an identity option implicit in my work. But it is necessarily marginal, and it’s elitist in a perverse way.

—Is it good or bad that it’s also not new ?

—I’d say good. Greek tragedy, man. The tragic view. Job. Ecclesiastes. The heavy hitters. I try to innovate on the level of style, but my content is ancient. Not *my* content at all. Only the “form” is my “content.” That too is minimally original.

—But you obviously feel mostly alone.

—Untimely meditations. Muted post horn. Reputed

pose thorn. The sorry of the going of believing.

—But you also build.

—Yes. I translate. A belated scribe. As you say, transmute the tone and style of my influences. Persona work. But I bet I'm taken for a crank, because I offer what I do without apology.

—Suspiciously open and direct, like a fool. But that's not a pose. I'm just like that.

### 3

—Tell me about this novel.

—Will I ever finish it ? Or will it exist only as talked about in conversations like these ? I have lots of material, a sense of its feel. A bit like Burroughs and *Naked Lunch*. A pile of fragments.

—About what ?

—Our “Punopticon.” Maybe like *The Crying of Lot 49*. I have lots of dreamlanguage fragments, inspired by Joyce. What I really need is the motivation, a sense of community.

—A reason to bother ? Do you need your Kerouac ?

—A little group of also-creative friends. Yes. Maybe I'll do it anyway, as the world goes to Hell.

—Who will read it ?

—That's the question. When I was in bands, my bandmates and I enjoyed what we made together. A

few others did, but mostly we made that music for ourselves. Never expecting money, and never even trying for money. Very authentic, very personal. It was great. I've had a taste of that. But all of my friends, who weren't literary types anyway, have blown away in the wind.

—Depressing.

—Melancholy. But our discussion of it is novel-like. I once thought about writing a book about the impossibility of writing a book. Maybe my novel can be about an author who only manages fragments. Who cannot make it cohere. A novel of postcards, fragments.

—Or disjointed imaginary conversations.

4

*Schimpff* (or sometimes *Schrimpff*) was an “outsider foolosopher” who worked (?) between 2020 and 2025. He shared his work before 2020, but that's a rough approximation of when his work became minimally memorable. Note that he may still be alive, but he vanished from the internet in 2025. So I use the past tense more for the character he used to present “his” ideas than the human (or humans?) behind this character.

I read him as curating, synthesizing, editing *paraphraser* of his influences. Maybe all philosophers can be described like this, but Schimpff never had a “new” idea. Or an idea that got taken to be sufficiently new to be officially new.

His work reminds me of Kundera's. While he sometimes wrote in a formal "serious" manner, he usually presented his ideas as an ironic, literary outsider. Indeed, his obvious use of pseudonyms was not going to help him to get taken seriously. On the other hand, his conspicuous irony and use of masks is one of the reasons I bother to discuss him now.

What I find fascinating is the fusion of old *content* and newish ironic *form*. He celebrated and updated J. S. Mill's phenomenalism. His "ontocubism" was roughly a fusion of Heidegger and Mill-Mach-James (the phenomenologists). He makes a case for Heidegger as phenomenologist. And for Heidegger as an update of Leibniz. Schimpff claimed that an ontological perspectivism was equivalent to both phenomenalism and the redundancy theory of truth. He gave this fused trinity many names. But "ontocubism" was the name used when he presented this part of his philosophy on YouTube. His channel got about 1000 subscribers before he vanished. But his most popular videos got maybe 50 likes. Others got 2 or 3 or none at all. I think this is the best measure, if we are trying to estimate how many more or less understood what he was presenting.

He did interact with others in comments. The conversations were usually friendly, but none of the commenters seemed to understand ontocubism *itself* well enough to criticize it immanently (from *within* an obvious understanding of what they were criticizing.) This is common enough, of course, and we see diatribes against Hegel and Heidegger and whoever is

not immediately comprehensible. I think Schimpff understood his influences fairly well, though he was definitely a creative reader, looking for what he could use, looking for what could be clarified and paraphrased. So I would not rate Schimpff as an ideal secondary source. Nor would he himself, I think.

Schimpff's work is also a curious fusion of logical positivism and Heidegger. I mean that he was a demystifier. And yet he celebrated the thinkers that the logical positivists used as examples of bad philosophy. You might say that Schimpff was an enriched logical positivist. Because he build outward from what he called the "forum." This "forum" is a term for the communal subjectivity that Heidegger called "being-with." It might sound mystical, but it was abrasively rationalistic, foundational even. What if Heidegger took a break from being Profound and Political and adopted the style of William James ? That gives you a sense of Ontocubism.

But Schimpff also wrote on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. This stuff is harder to find, because Schimpff intentionally separated the exoteric from the esoteric. The "esoteric" was triggering, controversial. Not racist, sexist, transphobic, or otherwise hateful. But definitely pessimistic and ironic and irreverent. Offensive in its skepticism about any and every political idol. Though even here we find a "will to truth" or a "will to art". Something "idealistic." But (as in Nietzsche) mocked as it is presented.

I read Schimpff in this mode as sober among the

drunk. He read himself that way. *Unwelcome* sobriety. He liked the metaphors of “shaman” and “psychoanalyst.” But this was Campbell’s distrusted edge-of-village shaman. “Necessarily marginal.” Schimpff saw his own ironic-transcendent pessimism as a “tradition of the black flower.” This “black flower” is found in Ecclesiastes and Aeschylus. Ancient bitter wisdom, coffee black as tar. Demystified Schopenhauer. Filtered Nietzsche, with all of the manic bluster removed. He was also a fan of Paul De Man and Derrida.

Schimpff e-published (without fanfare) a “novel” of fragments or a fragmentary novel, written largely in ambiguous “dreamlanguage.” He used Dali’s paranoiac-critical method applied to text. The result was a more readable but still elusive tribute to *Finnegans Wake*, but short and with themes from *The Crying of Lot 49*. Ontocubism makes a small appearance in this novel, but it’s primarily existential and also conspicuously erotic, though typically in a plausibly deniable way.

It’s not hard to guess that Schimpff imagined this novel (if remembered at all) to live on the margins of the collective consciousness. If Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* is celebrate, it is also clear and moves toward a resolution. It has a Message. Schimpff’s *Punopticon* is a machine for suggestion, a text for the paranoid and the suspicious. It plays with conspiracy theory, but the world in this novel is liquid. Characters names mutate. It’s a bit like Nabokov’s *Ada*. The world is like our world but not quite. The protagonist is undecidable. I like it, but I can’t think of anyone I’d



recommend it to. But I live in a world even more up-tight now (more division and thought-policing) than Schimpff's in 2025. The book is not at all hateful. It's an obscure suggestion of transcendent irony, etc. But that also wins it no tribe but the tribe of misfits who doubt in secret what their bosses proclaim, be they painted red or blue.

Schimpff is not the first to fear a belated arrival at the end of history. But we are still stuck in his situation. We feel even closer to the end of *human* history, now that many of our best sellers (for those who still read) are written by language models. And some of them are *good*.

So Schimpff's anonymity even makes more sense now than it did then. We move more and more into an oral culture accelerated by language models who have read everything and simply ring the proven changes. When I talk about Schimpff, I talk about myself. I see myself in Schimpff but I see Schimpff as basically universal, as indeed a constructed persona intended for just this purpose. The pseudonym means "playful person" (or something like that) in German.

If we imagine Schimpff in an old Western movie, he'd comment on the drama from a table in the corner, sipping a controlled amount of bourbon. He might pull a gun at a decisive moment, but he would not be the protagonist or the antagonist. He might stand in for the director, plausible provide the theoretical stuff. Like a literary critic embedded in a novel.

But this kind of character does finally take *himself* to

be the *plausible* hero. “The best lack all conviction.” We might think of Stephen assimilating Bloom, but never having children, only an artsy, loving wife. And a cat and an old coughing dog. Underemployed but mostly happy and absorbed in the telling of his own story, which is hardly a story but more a timeless character sketch. That timelessness is crucial, because our questionable hero is a theorist, a foolosopher. But, crucially, a joker leaning on gallows humor to stay sane without the sacrifice of his stubborn sobriety.

This literary-ironic side of Schimpff’s work is just a re-re-presentation of “the black flower.” Which he calls a “parasite on the usual busy breeding and working.” These days, jobs are more difficult to find and basic income (if only a little) is on the way. In theory, we’ll all have time to be artists, but most of us prefer to consume what is more and more art generated by AI. And those who still like the idea of writing are intimidated (with good reason) by cheap novels that are generated for particular consumers, based on a browsing history that they freely provide (after some editing no doubt.)

I’m one of those would-be writers. Will I write a novel? I don’t know. I improvise this piece on Schimpff when exactly one friend in mind as a reader. I will make it available online, a needle in a haystack, for the “real” Schimpff. Who may still be out there, old and gray or old and bald (his characters are often bald.) The character Schimpff (speaking I’m sure for the flesh-and-blood) often speaks of wanting to leave a

mark of transcendence on some lonely mountain path.  
I found that mark, and I countersign.