

Preface

(Continuation from previous volume)

What interests me most in Cuenca is his untold philosophy, nearly complaining under the poetic mask of his non-philosophy whose full complement he is nonetheless unaware, an anxious thread running through his verse, struggling for definition: *"The sun does not arise for me. If it comes, it comes mockingly."*²⁷ This is philo-fiction whose *logos* is rather repressed.

Laruelle is more uncompromising when he reveals this to be a philosophical 'classified' – "The Earth is Man's ground, the World his neighbour, the Universe his secret."²⁸ Any philosophy for that matter is revealed to be always already a repressed fiction, what of the unavoidable structure of every philosophy as intuitivity, nothing more. "Philosophy remains an optics,"²⁹ Laruelle argues, whose aim is to see through what lies between night and nothingness. It is no surprise it sees a medium – the in-between: "Man is this medium between night and nothingness Philosophy is the division of the eye – its doubling and redoubling."³⁰ It is a way of seeing, sans the

²⁷Cuenca, "Widow's Lament," in *Ways to Become Christ*, 81.

²⁸Francois Laruelle, "Of Black Universe in the Human Foundation of Color," in *Hyun Soo Choi: Seven Large Scale Paintings* (New York: Thread Waxing Space, 1991), 1.

²⁹Francois Laruelle, "Biography of the Eye," trans. Taylor Adkins, *Fractal Ontology*, entry posted November 21, 2009, <http://fractalontology.wordpress.com/2009/11/21/new-translation-of-laruelles-biography-of-the-eye/> (Accessed January 24, 2013).

³⁰*Ibid.*, np.

cuteness rather aspired by poets who wish to bud off anytime of the day: "I looked from where I stood, and saw a wood shaped like a rood. Until a carpenter came . . ." ³¹ That's Cuenca in "A Way of Seeing" yet short of a philofiction, a philosophy determined in the last instance by a poet that he is, a non-philosopher sadly unaware of himself.

It is in this light that Cuenca never reached a philosophy as he understood himself to be doing philosophy. He is blinded by his attempt to reach a philosophy; he too secretly believed that everything, including poetry, is philosophizable. But philosophy will always remain an attempt, never a *telos* to pursue. Philosophy can never be an accomplished task, or a radical leap into a decision which sets the terms of its relation to the object-cause of a search, such as an answer to a question. For instance, we may recall that in Heidegger the question is that of Being, *Seinsfrage*, whose answer is always the privilege of the name, Being; in short, without answering the question so that Being retains its license to operate. As long as Man is the heart and soul of this search, philosophy, as Man-in-the-last-instance, will always be a victim of an apprehensional process. If he otherwise believes he has come out of this process as having accomplished something (Heidegger's *Being*, Levinas', Derrida's and Lacan's *Other*, to name the most contemporary), making an impression of transcending the pathos of the victim, a sense of triumph, then he is indeed the philosopher par excellence by teaching Man, not sparing scammers of all types (as they too by natural right belong to the 'Category') that everything is philosophizable, that is to say, everyone must have a way of seeing things so as not to become a victim or suffer its fate (in contrast to a mode of seeing that is *always prior to the eye*, that of the blindness of the ordinary fellow).

³¹Cuenca, "A Way of Seeing," in *Ways to Become Christ*, 27.

Cuenca's fault is his ambivalent attitude towards seeing, towards the eye whose biography (biography of the eye, as Laruelle describes it) is deeply philosophical of which he is too unaware. The biography of the eye is the philosopher "[looking at man] from outside, in the eyes, [where] he can only see the void and the night, a haze that thickens into nothingness, or dissipates in the light of day."³²

In "Only With Eyes Entire" Cuenca is unwittingly trapped by the philosopher's eye:

Only with eyes entire
Do we enter love's kingdom
For whose adornment

The mouth of adoration
Opens in languorous speech
Or from whose grace

Learns its quiet acceptance

(For when she moves
How she touches us
With tips of wonder

How she bids them
Step out of time
Into here).

Stepping out of time into here: the movement from outside touching the inside. Cuenca wished to avoid the haze and the void by invoking the figure of the feminine as a marked property of the concrete, in fact the highest and most desirable form of the concrete, the object-cause of poetic ecstasy, and yet, even this desirability is laden with a philosophical motive—to see everything as philosophizable:

³²Laruelle, *Biography of the Eye*, Np; parenthetical emphasis mine.

“she touches . . . with tips of wonder.” In the last instance, the feminine dissolves into the World of philosopher-Man. The world of the philosopher-Man is however self-effacing (where lies allegedly His wisdom) whose chief end is to dissolve Himself, to become the most desirable image of the victim, a victim to emulate, not to discard or murder, or a victim that cannot be sacrificed *a la* Agamben³³: “*The philosopher looks man in the eyes to dissolve the World into man and man into nothingness. The philosopher does not see man in man and sees the nothingness of the World.*”³⁴

Cuenca, in another related poem, welcomes the night of the philosopher (he welcomes the philosopher, welcomes the eye of the philosopher), through the invocation of darkness as the poetic complement of nothingness into which the light must dissolve (or the bright light that compresses a “scene” in a Philippine city) because apparently the night can show everything we can wish to see:

I know the scene will soon darken, time
 In the wind will sullen with presentiment.
 I know the shadows will creep upon the street
 Where we have lived, and must foot again,
 Which now must pause, to let night in.³⁵

It is this sullen welcoming of the philosophical at his most unwitting poetic stroke that Cuenca sings (in his poem *Kalisud*) the praise of philosophy that has already apparently seen everything: “*Days are deaths already.*”³⁶ Laruelle is at his most scathing —

³³See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

³⁴Laruelle, *Biography of the Eye*, np.

³⁵Cuenca, “Afternoon in Novaliches,” in *Ways to Become Christ*, 163.

³⁶Cuenca, “Kalisud,” in *Ways to Become Christ*, 162.

The philosopher: 'we the seeing.' Man: 'we the blind, we see everything from the depths of things. We see prior to the eye. . .'

*'To look in the eye' also means: 'The Same is the eye and the eye – the matrix of speculation.'*³⁷

. . . .

Like all of us, Cuenca's limitations were the size of the universe, the universe as everyone's secret. But for those who knew him well, it was his incurable romanticism. For all the restraint he imposed on his ways of seeing to wear the mask of a philosopher while not trying to be—how he suppressed his own melodrama³⁸ (in the words of one critic) is a marked property of his prose and poetry—it was the figure of a woman who would take him to the heights of his incredulity vis-à-vis the Earth, vis-à-vis the God of heaven and earth. On the whole, his *'Ways to Become Christ'* is a way of seeing a woman he would never 'look in the eye' as he sought to avoid the speculative. Recall here the Sameness of the eye. For his part, Laruelle warns of the mendacity of philosophy in search of the in-between, between night and nothingness, yet failing to see the entire optical operation in play for which philosophy commits a terrible mistake, in short, by failing to shake its own hallucination before it gets real: *"This night is this human that looks man in the eyes; this nothingness is this human that looks woman in the eyes."*³⁹

For the love of woman, dearest to Medusa, Cuenca shows his mystical side; blighted by her figure, Magdalene, the object-cause of his heresy for which he would willingly sacrifice the earth. Magdalene—she who alone would have given him the inspiration to pursue a poetry of heresy, but

³⁷Laruelle, *Biography of the Eye*, np.

³⁸Mike Fernandez, "The Poet as Alter Christus," in Cuenca, *Collected Prose and Poetical Works*, 215.

³⁹Laruelle, *Biography of the Eye*, np.

a heresy of a different kind, despite obvious lines challenging the conventional wisdom on divinity.

Rather, I say his is a heresy of the earth without seeing, without Man, without the pretension that invented Him. But he would set out first with the wounded, this man of wounds (inflicted by love, at least for him and who knows his secrets?), perhaps, the Deleuzian exhausted “who has had done with the possible, beyond all tiredness,”⁴⁰ to give him the lines that would shock him in earnest, let alone the poetry he never dreamt of writing.

He would at least write the last lines in the past tense that he could muster if only to soften the blow of witnessing alas! the death of the human:

And he breathed the clean, pure air of his birth,
And saw the raw sunlight, the unending horizon. . .

Praise be to death, he joyed at last,
Praise be to the living ribbing earth,
Praise be to mankind without man.⁴¹

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⁴⁰Gilles Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” trans. Anthony Uhlmann, in *Substance* 24, No. 3 (1995): 3-28.

⁴¹Cuenca, *Ways to Become Christ*, 38.