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### "Tide of Extinction: Review of Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*"

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Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008. 244pp.

#### REVIEW BY TIM KAPOSY

The category of narrative is widely understood as affirming the world's appearances, in part, by giving them coherence with a logical order and a communicable form. Though radical experimentation is standard in all narrative forms, standard narratives remain a linguistic and cultural category tied to acts of memory, intimate self-knowledge and the pretext for judicious History. Narrative theorists from Aristotle to Clarice Lispector have argued that without narrative one ceases to be human.

Archeologist Hamid Parsani, the central character of Reza Negarestani's genre-defying text *Cyclonopedia*, narrates his findings with an alternative purpose in mind. In Parsani's studies of the Cross of Akht, Persian dynastic coins, the myth of Gog-Magog, Wahhabism, and Middle Eastern languages, he queries how being coherently human is made possible by the geopolitics of oil. "Whatever Parsani encounters," writes Negarestani, "is immediately traced back to only one thing, Petroleum" (42). Parsani's *idée fixe* fissures its way through all he encounters in the Middle East. His obsession builds to a notion that narrative allows for a better understanding of humanity, but only insofar as it helps one anticipate the demise of the species (i.e., relics yield unheeded lessons). Without narrative one is prone to affirm appearances, and most appearances today present one with the idea that sustainability, communication and redemption are always collectively attainable. Parsani makes a valuable counter claim that "oil is...a vehicle of epic narratives," (69) and it is crucial to know the vehicles of narrative, rather than to speculate on how they might be transcended. Petroleum, too, is a relic with much to say about humanity's epic trajectory.

As animist as this may sound, oil is deposited too deep and spread too wide to have talking points of its own. Therefore, oil requires vigilant interpretation. Narratives

from Parsani's research surface in *Cyclonopedia* as if unannounced from the soil and with an unpredictability that might prove too hectic for minds more familiar with, say, oil industry journalism. Whereas journalists critique oil orthodoxy in remote dependency or with the help of the odd dispatch from wars taking place elsewhere, Negarestani's narrative explains the historical myths within vast petroleum fields and his sentences emit the stench of its exhaust. The desertified ground of Parsani's fieldwork is comprised of holes, dust, bitumen and critters that sink, shift and linger with an incalculable long-term effect on the archeologist's senses. Geologic formations thus seem to Parsani as sentient and responsive as any scenario above the soil. He recounts in his journal that "[b]urrowing sounds may be heard from within the earth. Once they have finished infesting the earth's solid part, the larvae will cut breathing holes and press their headless tails against the surface for air" (67). Very little "happens" in *Cyclonopedia* in the traditional sense of imparting a plot. The text consists of a series of exegeses of Parsani's thoughts, primarily from his lifework *Defacing the Ancient Persia*. The effect of reading Parsani within a Negarestani's text is disquieting and it causes one to question how fact, fiction, fantasy and theory coexist in contemporary accounts of oil culture.

Without a firm sensory footing, why assume that the value of narrative has its basis in stock-still and clear-eyed composition? What's more, the surfaces of Negarestani's oil rich terrains are charred, slurry-ridden and militarized for a more predictable rate of extraction and steady refinement. Unheeded lessons? Who has time to interpret relics? Who has the peace of mind or protection to interpret oil further than its use?

Aside from Parsani and an animated cast of mythic petroleum figures, Negarestani's *dramatis personae* consists of the largely anonymous "global war machine." Far away in networked office buildings, operatives are poised to hail rockets down upon those *exceedingly* attuned to oil. That is: beware to those who are defiant enough to stand their ground, slow things down, and who try to provide readers with coherent details of

petroleum's past. A surprising number of people die from petroleum wars every day. Parsani's paranoia is, apparently, merited; or, is not paranoia one of oil's narrative vehicles?

The overall aesthetic of *Cyclonopedia* verges on breakdown. Like many of the characters written into existence by Georges Bataille and H.P. Lovecraft nearly a century earlier, Negarestani's Parsani is elusive because he is summoned from 'below' and not from 'on high.' Lost deities, hidden numbers and script, the sun's detritus, corpses, generational layers of decay—Negarestani pulls the reader across the contours of Parsani's enervated narrative to exhume the sounds from this infested source of energy.

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