

ALL OF A TWIST

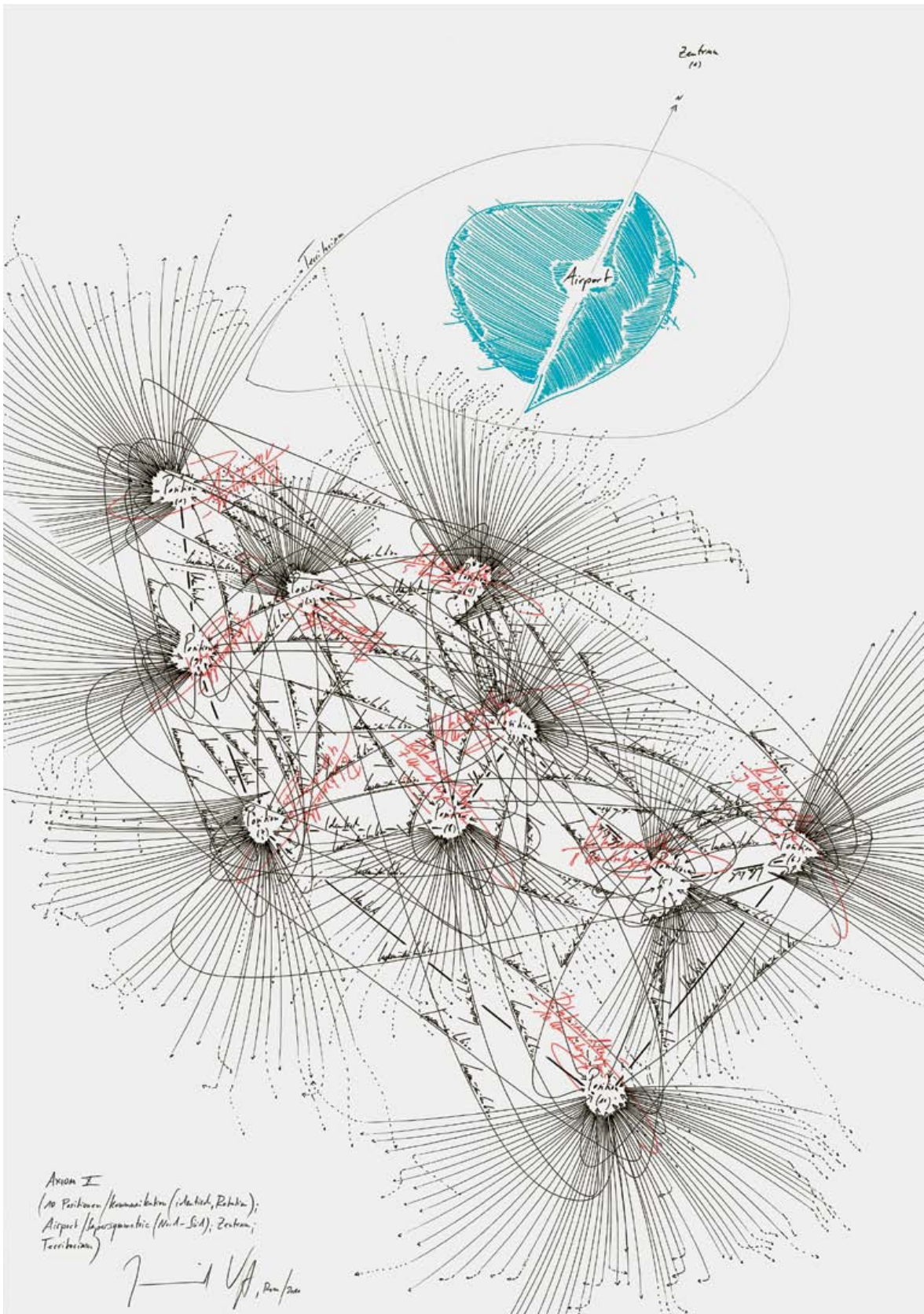
Reza Negarestani

Philosopher and writer born in Shiraz, Iran. He is the author of *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), a work of theory-fiction on the Middle East. He has also written for such journals and anthologies as *Collapse*, *Angelaki* and *CTheory*.

In order to think narration in a world that is devoid of any narrative necessity – an expanding space into which all ideas of embodiments dissolve and an absolute time whose radical contingency aborts any necessary difference to which a narrative can be applied – first we must redeploy the hierarchy of thought in nature as the view point or locus of speculation and narration. The exteriority and contingency of the real or the cosmic abyss is not what should or can be objectified by thought; on the contrary, it is thought that is objectified by the exteriority and contingency of the real, which simultaneously and in every instance gives rise to thought and usurps it. The very hierarchy of thought that was supposed to bring the possibility of reflection on the object or event X is turned upside down and inside out, the space of reflection itself becomes a playground for the exteriority and contingency of object X. Now if narration is both ‘to know’ and ‘to relate’, not only is the narration of/about the contingent reality twisted with a logic endemic to tales of spirit possession (when I think, it is actually the outsider, the demon inside me that thinks through me), but also it is unfolded with the dynamics inherent to conspiracy theories (all relations, adventures and plots are twistedly driven by a secret agreement – or complicity – between contingent and indifferent objective worlds. . . the more epical the narration, the thicker the conspiracy, the more elliptical the depth of the complicity).

In this hierarchical corruption of the narrative, the narration of any trivial or non-trivial reality turns *from being a reflection on the world and objects to being an inflection of the world and objects themselves in their exteriority and contingency*. With regard to the narrative nomenclature, twist is the name given to this troubling turn whereby contingent aspects of the real reclaim the plot and fundamentally shake the course and hierarchy of narration. In the wake of a twist, whimsical imagination and extravagant plots are hardly more than intuitive errancies since any mundane and superficial world will turn out to be a local mode of dynamism or materialisation of an incalculably weird universe. The twist, therefore, has a spontaneous ability to reclaim and remobilise all forms of plot, perspective and history by force, collusion or contamination on behalf of a contingent outside. It is this ability that gives the twist a veritable narrative capacity that is asymptotic to crime, horror, conspiracy and detective fictions.

When the twist occurs – that is to say, when it seizes the trajectory of the reflection on behalf of the contingency of the objective relations and contorts the course of the narrative orientation – it forces a sweeping or perhaps even a pulverising re-evaluation of the entire narrative trajectory. This is especially evident in variants of pulp fiction from horror stories to detective thrillers, crime novels and conspiracy fictions. The so-called plot twist seizes the reflective space of narration or simply turns the ‘knowing’ of the



Jorinde Voigt
Axiom X, 2010
Ink and pencil on paper
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narration into the narrative object of contingencies and, therefore, subjects the narration to an inquisitive speculation from the perspective of complicity between objective resources, which in radically contingent ways play their influence over the narrative causality. What used to be 'knowing' is now, all of a sudden, revealed to be a literary gimmick facilitating a plummet into what was always already there but could not be reflected upon – a short-lived resolution (*dénouement*) degenerating into a cosmic conspiracy at the speed of a trashy airport thriller.

In the wake of the twist, the causal meshwork of the narration is forcibly revised to a new system that is determined by the contingency of the twist. For this reason, the twist, far from being mythoclastic, is at once pro-narrative and mytho-accelerative; rather than shattering the plot (mythoclasm), it remoulds and accelerates the plot through reconstructing the causal system from the viewpoint of an ineradicable alien presence that has suddenly erupted or has long resided in the narration as an alien seed around which the plot has been crystallised.¹ Yet this alienating shift of perspective is precisely equal to a descent wherein the narrative has to unconditionally adopt any (alien) point of view as the plot loses its established ground and the contingent depth is traversed. Sometimes this alienating descent is only registered as a vertiginous effect or a shock (cf. the plot twist as a shock in pulp narratives, especially *giallo* fiction). Other times, the descent becomes the narration itself. In the crime novels of Jim Thompson, such as *Pop. 1280* (1964) and *The Killer Inside Me* (1952), the first person voice of the narrator is itself the twist that forms the narrative while calmly – under nonchalant influences of a global unconscious – pushing the entire (narrative) world off the cliff.

The speculative power of the twist on the causal configuration of the narrative is analogous to the shock of trauma that sometimes simply overthrows all that has been narrated. Yet there are also times when, instead of inflicting a shock, the twist perforates the causal system of the narrative from all directions, changing the plasticity and the formation of the narrative to a new narration whose every relation is a twist, a contingency in complicity with another

contingency *ad infinitum*. The twist, in this sense, becomes another name for *speculation from the other side*, one whose endemicity to the narrative dynamism makes its role creatively problematic and whose irrepressible persistence for a thoroughgoing re-examination and reconstruction of the narrative world through the medium of contingency and from the outside allies it with the force of trauma. Since trauma is both an overthrowing contingency and a restructuring building process that changes the horizon according to contingent forces and objective resources of the Outside.

Now imagine a narrative book focused on a place on this planet called the Middle East, with its oil and dust-driven everyday life, with its controversial yet terrestrial politics, its religions, its arid and hot climate. What would be a veritable narrative of this place? One possible candidate would be a geo-political narrative shaped by embracing a Middle Eastern viewpoint (the victim, the other, the Middle Easterner). Another alternative would be a global/planetary narration (the Middle East as technologically, ethnologically and economically inhomogeneous, the breeding ground of terror or the land of ancient wisdoms). Yet both these narrative viewpoints harbour a twist that might creep on them at any moment for no reason whatsoever, confiscating their narration on behalf of a chasmic reality that can be narratively fabricated by the complicity of cosmic viewpoints – a narration accreted by the perspective of anonymous (cosmic) materials. In narrating the Middle East, the triad of the narrator, the narrated and the narration turns into the narrative object of cosmic contingencies, extra-terrestrial gravitational fields and alien influences: its petropolitics become the epic of hydrocarbons from a nether point of view, its religions, politics and demography are revealed to be links in complicity between terrestrial dynamics, solar radiations and stellar death, its wars the tactical mobility of nested geo-cosmic traumas and strategic perspectives spawned by contingent distribution of cosmic matter throughout the planetary body. What was supposed to be a theoretic or fictional speculation on the Middle East turns out to be a narrative from a chasmic point of view. It is not so much that this narrative is horrific or suspenseful; it is the usurping nature of this alienating

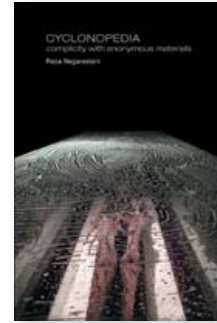
¹ One example of this resident model of an object that randomly or homogeneously constructs the plot around itself is the so-called Chekhov's gun, an object that early in the story is introduced to the reader, then it is abandoned and only later toward the end resurfaces to overshadow all human characters, narrative events and their relationships. Contrary to Chekhov who believed that an element introduced in the story must be used at some point, the gun is merely a force of contingency that might or might not (for no reason at all) resurface later in order to seize the trajectory of the plot. Hence in order to understand the function of Chekhov's gun, one must twist Anton Chekhov's own words: 'One must put a loaded rifle on the stage even if no one is thinking of firing it.'

twist that finds its narrative asymptote in horror, conspiracy and crime fictions. When it comes to astute realism, the regional or local speculation must be rethought and reformulated from the universal or cosmic point of view, but to do so means to affirm the vertigo of the twist that opens the regional (the Middle East) into the cosmic and to prioritise the role of the contingent turn by which the cosmic fabricates global and regional localities.

Here the twist as the force of the realist speculation (realist in the sense that it is asymptotic to the contingent reality that drives the universe) approximates the function of the philosophy of Speculative Realism in which speculation is not driven by our grounded experience or reflection but by the exteriority and contingency of a universe that always antedates and postdates us (that which thinks us from the other side). Ironically, philosophy seems to have strived this long only to become, belatedly, a crime fiction, a conspiracy thriller in order to embrace the force of the radical twist and paint itself yellow. This calls to mind the image of a philosopher who has realised that in speculating the world, it has been the world and its 'strange aeons' that have twistedly narrated her all along.² The philosopher's vocation is to recognise the abyssal cosmic twist that has given birth to her speculation and to adopt the cosmic perspective as the only viable commitment to reality. Thus spake Sutter Cane in *The Mouth of Madness* (1995): 'For years I thought I was making all this up, but they were telling me what to write.'³

2 H. P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 156.

3 *In the Mouth of Madness*, directed by John Carpenter, written by Michael De Luca, 1995.



Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Melbourne: re.press, 2008.

Cyclonopedia is the first horror and theory-fiction book from and about the Middle East. It is a Middle Eastern odyssey, where the author connects the appalling vistas of contemporary world politics, the politics of oil and the War on Terror to the archaeologies of the Middle East and the natural history of the earth itself. As a work of speculative philosophy, *Cyclonopedia* addresses the everyday life and politics of the region in the form of a pulp horror novel in which voices of human narrators are gradually replaced by inorganic noises. The story is meticulously told from the ever-twisting perspective of cosmic processes of formation. Reza Negarestani's forthcoming book *The Mortiloquist* is a hybrid of classical philosophy and play. It draws on various genres of drama and performance such as Greek tragedy and Viennese Actionism. In *The Mortiloquist*, the history of Western philosophy is staged by barbarian outlanders.



Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development. Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2010.

Launched in 2006, *Collapse* is an independent, non-affiliated journal of philosophical research and development. Each volume of this internationally-recognised journal has a specific theme and brings together new works by and in-depth interviews with contemporary artists, philosophers and scientists who are leaders in their fields. Through this cross-fertilisation, the journal attempts to develop new and productive inquiry at the forefront of current cultural, political and philosophical debate. Reza Negarestani is a regular contributor to *Collapse*; he is also an associate editor of the forthcoming volume. The next issue of *Collapse* will be vol. VII: 'Culinary Materialism', to be published in 2011. For further information, visit www.urbanomic.com.