



Don't go into the crypt!

Description

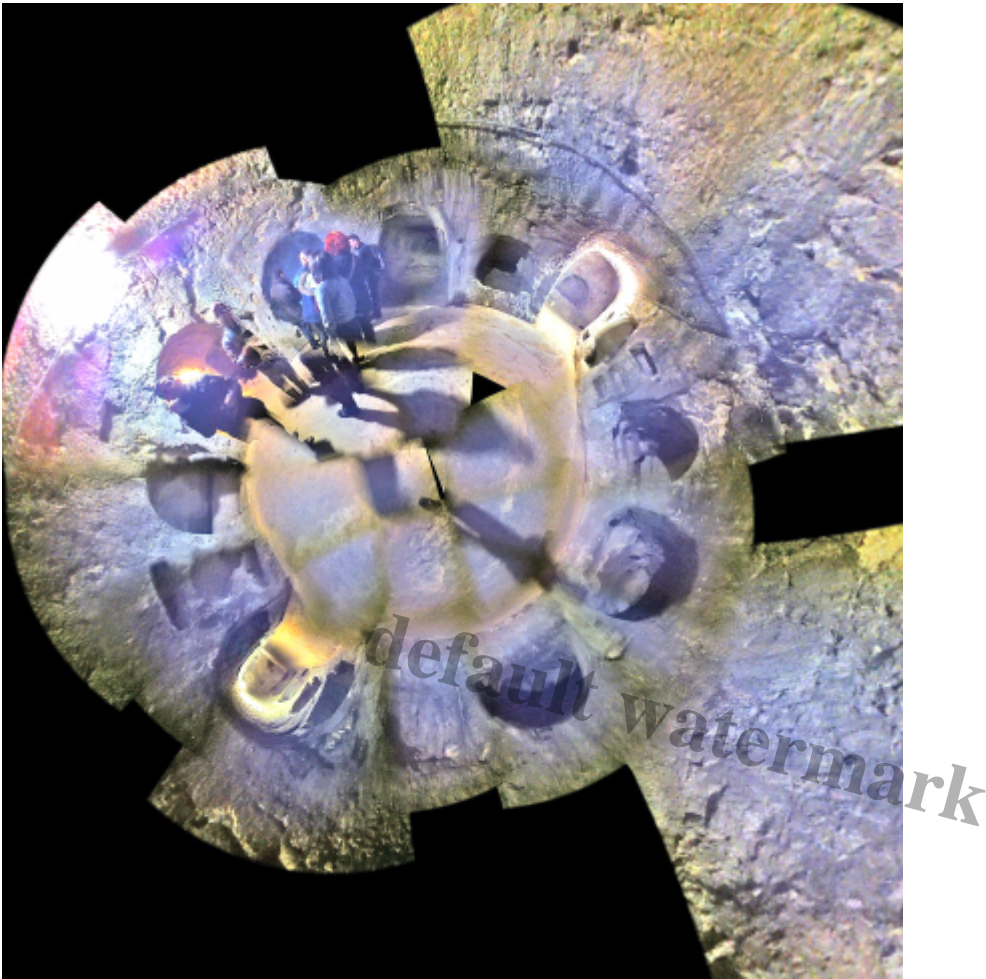
Those who couldn't fight, or were too important to lose in battle were told to hide in the crypt of the capital for safety. Meanwhile those above ground battled the White Walkers and their army of the dead (called wights).

Zombie logic

I wasn't following *Game of Thrones* closely enough to realise that the crypt is the last place you want to be when the Night King, the leader of the White Walkers (and the wights), marches on the city. If he raises his arms then those who just died in battle or those long dead in a crypt will rise up and continue the fight as his relentless zombie army.

A crypt is a secure and hidden underground vault to protect the dead from desecration. But it turns into its opposite when the dead become the threat. The dead rise up and attack any living being within reach, and make more dead and more murderous wights according to zombie logic.

I'm researching the city, its codes, ciphers and hacks. The connection between encryption (turning a message into a secret) and the underground crypt in a church or castle (a hidden place) is obvious. Less obvious are the contradictions and imaginary perils entailed in housing the dead.



Necrocracy

Architects have certainly paid attention to memorials, monuments, tombs, vaults, mausoleums and necropolises.



The contemporary Iranian architect Mehrdad Iravanian even said, “In order to study architecture, one must first investigate necrocracy” (51).

At least, that’s as reported by his compatriot the author Reza Negarestani. *Necrocracy* is not in the OED. It presumably means a system of governance where people are ruled by someone who is dead, or perhaps indirectly when people venerate the dead.

Such ancestor worship is common enough in autocracies where the dead founder is represented in portraiture or statuary, or embalmed in a crypt to encourage pilgrims. Negarestani doesn't elaborate on the term *necrocracy*, though the book in which he quotes this is infused with themes of death.

Negarestani's book is called *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, and amongst its other characteristics forms an unrelenting compendium, or unstructured encyclopaedia, of necrologisms – I mean *neologisms*.

Crypto-fiction

I'm grateful to [Asad Khan](#) for introducing me to this genre. Negarestani's book is a work of *philofiction*, which ought to mean *lover of fiction*, but the *philo* refers to *philosophy* as a whole. In a helpful explanation in a blog by [Terence Blake](#) the prefix *philo* refers to the compulsory course in French schooling known casually as *philo* – a bit like the abbreviation *maths*. The genre is also known as *theory-fiction*.

Like those terms and the book title, the content of *Cyclonopedia* is cryptic or simply difficult. As it happens the book also refers explicitly to code systems, ancient and modern, involving numerals, cuneiform and Arabic script, and geometrical diagrams.

It also plays on themes of the crypt, with portmanteau terms such as *cryptogenic*, *crypto-fractal*, *cryptomilitary*, *crypting*, *decrypting*, *cryptological*, *crypto-nihilist*, *cryptospores*, *crypto-vermiform*, *crypto-bureaucratic*, and *cryptic outsidedness*.

Here's a sample from Negarestani as he worries through the implications of the crypt.

What horrifies the living is not an empty tomb but a messed-up and exhumed tomb. The architectural policy of the solid does not reject destruction or deconstruction but escapes exhumation – deflowering the face (white wall / black hole – Deleuze and Guattari), marring and mangling it – by messing up the surfaces, scratching – skinning – eating – turning to dust – cutting into the core, with bare hands, daggers and crises, nails and enzymes – saliva and breath – shovel and plow. Exhumation is wholly criminal and immoral, but further, it is basically polluting and infecting as it undergoes surface collision, necrotizing the architecture, proliferating hot and cold surfaces into each other, letting the cold space of a tomb evaporate and the reek of bodies rise up – resurrection of the defiled body. The cold cannot be reheated; only messed up (51). [ellipses are in the original]

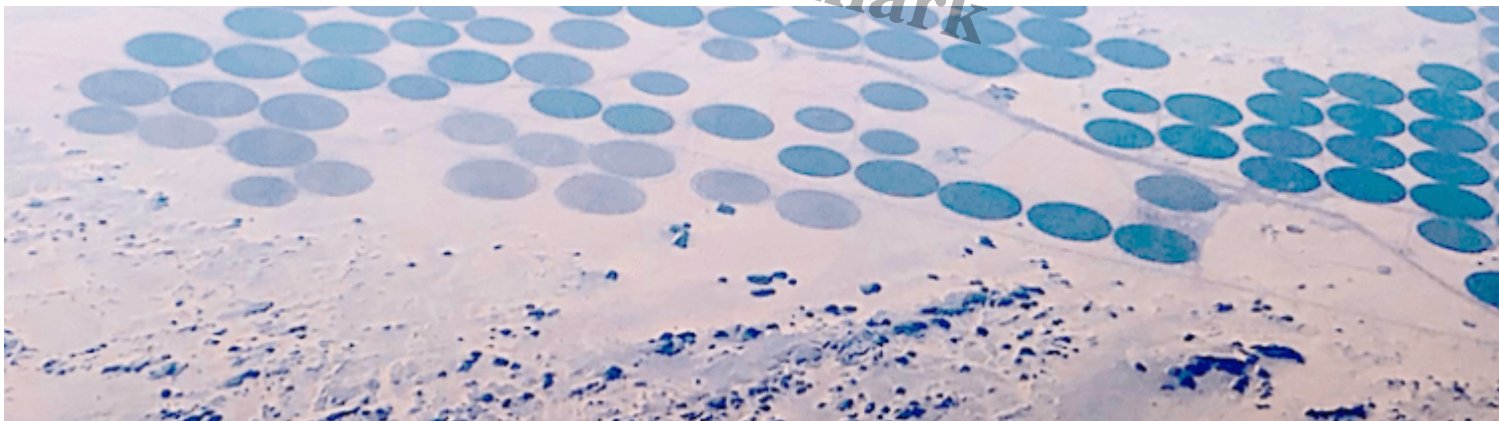
Crypto-agency

One of the disarming aspects of this style of writing is to sidestep human actors in favour of non-human *things*, as if humans and their actions are symptoms rather than causal agents. For example, in so far as people matter at all in such narratives, they are caught up in the self-propelling momentum of the processes of production, in the case of this book, the means by which oil is produced, organically and geologically.

Most commentaries seem to take their cue on this interpretation from the quote on the back cover of the book: 'The Middle East is a sentient entity – it is alive!'

That serves as the major take-away from the book for most commentators. Marx and others wrote about the capitalist machine, as if we are all under its control. Deleuze invoked the war machine, and the body without organs.

Negarestani adds the desert, oil, monotheism and Islam, amongst a panoply of agents. Arguably, the book adds weight to such perversely autonomous agencies by its relentless and multiple assertions from every angle. The pragmatic reader is then left to answer, what difference does it make to hold to such autonomies?



Bibliography

- Blake, Terrence. 2015. Philo-fiction. *Agent Swarm*, 21 November. Available online: <https://terenceblake.wordpress.com/2015/11/21/philo-fiction-2/> (accessed 9 June 2019).
- Fest, Bradley J. 2016. Geologies of finitude: The deep time of twenty-first-century catastrophe in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* and Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, (57) 5, 565-578.
- Negarestani, Reza. 2008. *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Melbourne: re.press.

Note

- Images in order: the Catacombs of San Giovanni, Syracuse, Sicily; Peter Eisenman's Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe; Western desert in Egypt; flying over Sudan's

centre-pivot irrigation plots.

Category

1. Architecture

Tags

1. ciphercity
2. crypt
3. GOT
4. Negarestani
5. philo-fiction

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