

Engineering the World, Crafting the Mind

Interview by Fabio Gironi. Images courtesy Quayola, from the projects [Laocoön](#) and [Captives](#).

When I first heard of Reza Negarestani—sometime in 2009, through the then-extremely active philosophical blogosphere coalesced around “speculative realism”—his was the kind of name whispered in dark corridors among initiates of an esoteric cult. Almost nothing was known about the mysterious and exotic Iranian author of [Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials](#)—an incestuous amalgam of Lovecraftian chthonic horrors, Islamic theology, Deleuzian hallucinations, numerology, and not-so-fictional middle-eastern geopolitics. In this period the new wave of “Weird” fiction, having undergone a massive growth in the previous few years, was finally breaking into the mainstream (and into fringe philosophical circles like the speculative realist one), and Negarestani’s theory-fiction text was surely among the weirdest and most arcane of these. It is not too much of a stretch to claim that, for a few years, Negarestani has been considered, by many wide-eyed anglophone graduate students, as a kind of philosophical [Abdul Alhazred](#): where feverish interest for this obscure and provocative writer/philosopher was shot through with a kind orientalist fascination for the middle-eastern outsider.

Haven’t you read Negarestani? The prophet of the gospel of “mad black Deleuzianism,” proselytizing on little-known niche philosophical blogs? This veil of mystery was also wryly exploited, in a characteristically tongue-in-cheek manner, by his editor and good friend Robin MacKay—mastermind of [Urbanomic](#), which will soon, with collaboration with [Sequence Press](#), publish Negarestani’s second book, [Intelligence and Spirit](#)—who a few years ago infamously stated, during a symposium, that “Reza Negarestani does not exist!” I wouldn’t be surprised if many, at the time, suspected that MacKay’s revelation could have been truthful: was Reza Negarestani really just a *nome de plume*, the product of MacKay’s cynical self-marketing move? The reality is, as it is often the case, more prosaic and trivial than this extravagant series of rumours and half-truths suggested. When I first met Reza, he didn’t quite match this awe-inducing persona, as the thin, bespectacled, and soft spoken man looks more like a mild-mannered piano tutor than a crazed theoretical alchemist.