

*ON PROMISSORY FUTURES AND SPECULATIVE PASTS,
AS OBSERVED BY THE HYPERTHYMESIC RK*

On Promissory Futures and Speculative Pasts, as Observed by the Hyperthymesic RK introduces the thanatography, or death narrative, of the character RK. The initial installment of this epic tale, a life-long project-in-chronicles, is a postscript in which the character RK comments on the circumstances of his own end. Inspired by Giovanni and Gentile Bellini's *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria* at the Pinacoteca di Milano, *On Promissory Futures* proposes a "chronotopic fold." Coordinates of time and space twist into geographical and chronological transposition where impossible worlds are made coterminous. The forcing of this subtle gesture serves to reveal the artifice of systems too often taken for granted as natural or value-less.

In the twenty fifties, a century following the « participatory death » movement popularized by psychologist Herman Feifel's studies of death and dying, death attitudes would be characterized by the "performative turn." Unlike "participatory death" which appealed to the morality of an empowered autonomous subject, "performative death" was managed and planned for aesthetic posturing by patients-turned-innovative-entrepreneurs.

The character RK – born between the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the expulsion of Italians from Libya – suffered for a depth of education inappropriate to his social class. Destined to work in the service economy as a high-ranked bureaucrat in the private sector, he left the United States seeking political asylum elsewhere. And though his generation had exhausted the function of art in society, he had decided to identify as "artist" all the same. There was something of the religious in this gesture, he had thought. Though people still talked about "artistic practice", "aesthetic consultancy" was swift to assert its appeal to a world that coveted "creative leaders".

As RK approached his seventies, he began, like others, to plan his own death. He decided he would euthanize to better serve the donation of his hyperthymesic brain to an observatory. If, as has been asserted, the brain of the amnesiac Henry Molaison was the emblematic brain of the modern era, the superior autobiographical memory of RK made him the quintessential case study of the early twenty-first century.

Unlike brain banks and archives, the brain observatory was not a storage facility and cataloguing unit for the clinical research of tissue samples. Instead, it acted to preserve and maintain both material and context of brains for the interests of future worthy interlocutors. It was the nature of that particular historical episteme to consider the future boundless, therefore, the brain in the observatory had to be kept with everything that had shaped it. Shelved in a cabinet of cadavre scans, life narratives and emblems (referred to by the observatory as *KORPS*), the "observed" brain was no organ floating in a vat, but a series of microtomal slices mounted on glass slides. Digitized and scanned into a three-dimensional model, the holographic brain fossil would then be uploaded to the Internet, allowing for a figurative form of cryogenic preservation. Someday, in the not so distant future, developments in information technology would crack the covenant, opening infinitude to the eternal single individual.

The first object catalogued in the *KORPS* of donor RK is the last artifact he produced: a silent video essay of the day before his death. The video documents RK's wanderings around the grounds of the Aventine, a mixed-use development in Southern California designed by postmodern architect Michael Graves. In *On Promissory Futures*, a scenographic projection-to-scale portrays a screening of the video essay on a university campus somewhere in "biotech beach," a sinister oceanside town between a brain observatory and a highway to the Mexican border.

FINIS ABORIGINE PEDET.

Emily Verla Bovino (New York, 1980) writes essays and radio plays for scenography. She currently resides in Southern California where she is a Pre-doctoral Humanities Fellow at the University of California, San Diego. Like RK, she also grew up in Hong Kong following the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984. Upon returning to the United States in 1991, she attended a Quaker school in New York, and in 2002, graduated from Columbia University in Urban Studies. She travelled to Italy with a grant in 2001, and in 2003, began working as a certified ESL instructor to fund her own personal Grand Tour through various Italian regions. In 2008, she was invited by the Fondazione Spinola Banna in Turin to work with artist Adrian Paci and in 2009, was a resident at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti where she worked under visiting artist Walid Raad and lecturer Jalal Toufic. She has participated in exhibitions and residencies at FUTURA (Prague, 2010), ETC. Galerie (Prague, 2010), Cité Internationale des Arts (Paris, 2009), Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa (Venice, 2009), VIAFARINI (Milan, 2009) and Careof (Milan, 2009), and has written for Artforum.com, Frieze and Art Papers. Her favorite bird is the ivory-billed woodpecker, which has evolved to evade humans.