Introduction

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Mosaic 56.4 is the second of three issues hinging on the subject of suicide. The idea was suggested to me by the French post-Conceptual artist Saâdane Afif and Yasmine d'O, whom the former describes as a kind of alter-ego who works beside him especially on projects of a curatorial nature. Giving this second self the space to work edges Afif's practice towards the threshold between inside and outside, and a kind of collective making. Thus, the previously published essays that appear here from the *Mosaic* archive under the past editorships of Dawne McCance, R.G. Collins, and Kenneth McRobbie, open up the question of suicide through the death-drive, self-authorship, symbolic thought, self-exhaustion, anti-foundationalism, melancholic witness, regional literature, ecocide, and unconditional hospitality. The issue begins with David Farrell Krell's meditation of suicide and silence and ends with François Dastur's "Mourning as the Origin of Humanity." In between lies a range of perspectives on the issue of suicide and death, which Krell and Dastur will foreground respectively, many will equate with qualifications, and others will distinguish.

In his essay "Lifedeath and Suicide," David Farrell Krell offers a few thoughts on what he describes as the "radical exteriority and the silence to which we others are abandoned in virtually every instance of suicide." This doesn't leave much to go on,

but what thoughts he has are galvanized by the thinking of others: in response to Françoise Dastur's thoughts on the impossibility of "overcoming" and "neutralizing" death; in deference to Albert Camus's "stunning claim" that suicide is the "only […] truly serious" philosophical problem; and, with some relief, two fragments from Novalis that read, "The genuine philosophical act is killing oneself [*Selbsttötung*]" and "The first kiss […] is the principle of philosophy." "If the beginnings of philosophy are shared by Thanatos and Eros," he asks, "who would not prefer to go with the livelier god?" From Novalis and "*Selbsttötung*," which conjures death and "the mortification of the flesh" away by introducing a spiritual relation with the dead, he takes up Nietzsche's alternate use of "*Freitod*, 'free' or 'voluntary' death," and contemplates his paradoxical statement, "Let your dying come at the right time," and, in particular, how exactly that "letting" might work. But this is no how to or hermeneutic and in a few swift strokes treats the search for "deathlessness" by Gilgamesh, the "blind hopes" planted in human beings by Prometheus, and the singular conditions of one's "ownmost" death in both Heidegger and Freud as testament to the fact that we poor mortals are not privy to any of this. More than anything I take Krell's essay as a supremely cautionary lesson in humility, a directive that establishes rules to remember when confronting the question of suicide, but by no means a prohibition to thinking it, for writing comes out of the exteriority of death.

"'cease to exist in order to be': *Worstward H*o between Badiou and Deleuze" is Christopher Langlois's meditation on Samuel Beckett's penultimate novella of uncertain subject, cryptic process, minimal means, and mis-interpretable intent. The interest and strength of the essay is in its theoretical flexing of muscles, which pits the deepest presuppositions of Gilles Deleuze's theory of art against those of Alain Badiou to determine who best speaks for Beckett's "worstward" prose. The choice comes down to whether the work exhausts itself in the process of coming into being along the lines of what Deleuze describes as the rarity of "pure creation," the work's "constitutive finitude," the "contingency of art's immanence," or finally "a creative process of self-exhaustion" where the infinitude of the work exposes its "aporetic finitude" "through the sensible plane of composition." Though modelled on a romantic notion of nature, we learn from Deleuze that the work's emergence is complicated by a nihilism and destructive impulse born of its human manufacture (135), which Langlois is careful to remind us also invests the work with a temporal dimension and framework of "concepts, or functions, or sensations," which differentiates it from the notion of the symbol. Deleuze's insistence on immanence, and the heightened risk this exposes his philosophy to as its own undoing or deconstruction, not only turns out to be a virtue, but a mirror of the processes animated by Beckett.

On the other hand, we are given a generous serving of Badiou's resistance to Deleuze as one example of the anti-philosophical stance representative of the linguistic turn. In particular, we are guided through Badiou's reluctance to relinquish truth altogether through the importance allotted to truth processes and the fidelity accorded to their continuance. Related to this, Langlois zeroes in on Badiou's uniquely conceptual approach to *Worstward Ho*, which treats the text as a metaleptic correlate to a philosophical project. Because "Beckett is concerned primarily with delineating conceptually a vision of being that is present, more or less, throughout his entire corpus," philosophy's late arrival on the scene allows Badiou to position it anterior to composition or immanence. And because being is an empty set that is recurrent throughout the corpus, philosophy will think being in its primordial form. "Being, Existence, Thought" will be reversed by descending from thought to existence towards the "ontological impossibility" of being. Beckett's poetics of subtraction corresponds to formulating language as the event of being without siding with being or tipping towards the event. Thus, the series of time stamps strung together at the beginning of the text which reads, "On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Til nohow on. Said nohow on." And more importantly, Badiou's emphasis on the "ill-said," the limit of the "no-said," and the general "Worstward Ho" of language over a few stanzas at about the halfway mark…

> …A pox on bad. Mere bad. Way for
> Worse. Pending worse still. First worse. Mere worse. Pending
> Worse still. Add a-. Never…
>
> …Be that shade again. In that shade again. With the other
> Shades. Worsening shades in the dim void.
>
> Next—
>
> First how all at once. In that stare. The worsened one. The
> worsening two. And what yet to worsen. To try to worsen. Itself.
> The dim, the void. All at once in that stare. Clenched eyes
> Clamped to all.
>
> Next two. From bad to worsen. Try worsen. From merely bad.
> Add-. Add? Never…

Langlois's ultimate question is whether this is a "poetics of stuttering" or of linear subtraction that leads "worstward to the Event." His answer will side with the image and its blocky intensity. But don't go West. Drop the "e" and hold onto the "or." Read and decide for yourself!

In "Tell My Story: Freud, Hamlet, and the Burdens of Self-Authorship," Andrew Barnaby turns from the classic tension between self and other to plumb something more primary, *another* relation that precedes the interpersonal. To do so the textual figures of Freud and Hamlet are treated as test cases for overcoming the law of the father through self-fathering, or writing by the self as opposed to being written by the father. Acknowledging what Lacan calls "the frustration inherent in the very discourse of the subject," Barnaby's interest is in tracking the recurrent processes by which self-authorship can only culminate in the subject's death. The key emphasis is not placed on the Oedipus complex but the "crisis of belatedness" that is the working-through of this dynamic in later life. In the case of the long shadow cast by Freud's father, we are introduced to the distance Freud travelled beyond his progenitor in terms of satisfaction felt as well as the burden of guilt experienced in doing so. The double tension between "Filial piety" and the "son's superiority," which "had haunted [Freud] for forty years" is never overcome, but rather temporarily neutralized and necessarily revisited through a series of textual attempts that finally culminate in 1939, the year of Freud's death, with the publication of *Moses and Monotheism*. To this end Barnaby presses upon us the importance of the problem of a constantly "deferred obedience" and Freud's successive attempts to overcome this: first in his "Autobiographical Study" from 1926, in the rough draft of *Moses and Monotheism* in 1934, in the additions made to his "Autobiographical Study" in 1935, in his reflections on escaping the shadow of his father in "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis" from 1936, in a refusal to allow a biography written on him, and finally, in the publication of *Moses and Monotheism* at his death. "Freud, in short, must be his own author," and as Barnaby emphasizes, even the veiled truths these successive resistances to self-authorship produced are far better than biography—where "truth does not exist."

For Hamlet, the play's the thing. Catching "the conscience of the king," Barnaby tells us, is one of a number of conjunctures when the Prince struggles to overcome the commandment uttered by the ghost of his dead father: "Hamlet, Remember me." The erasure of self in face of the revenant is played off the increasing erasure of self that must transpire. So, the play-within-the-play is illuminated in such a way as to reveal the doubleness of the story: at once a mirror of nature and at once Hamlet's version of things. Further, Barnaby isolates Hamlet's participation in the chorus which bends the player's role as "chroniclers of the time," but he also focuses on "Hamlet's charge to Horatio—'tell my story.'" Here, theatre's capacity for truth telling is placed in tension with storytelling, biography, and finally autobiography. For the subject of these inquiries into truth are as much in question as the truth of the object that is variously placed under erasure. Thus, Hamlet's leap into Ophelia's grave is not so clearly the

heir of his famous soliloquy, but a secondary function of that more fundamental "frustration inherent in the very discourse of the subject," which similarly troubled Freud. It is an immersive act of identification with the dead, i.e., with his sister and more importantly the King. The "I" of "to be, or not to be" is a "fluid" thing that increasingly stands on its own but not without finally gutting itself—a reiteration of the crisis effecting the subject. Barnaby's ultimate reading is that Hamlet goes about the play believing the tragedy concerns his father's murder at the hands of his father's brother, but only realizes at the end that the real tragedy is that of his own failure to be anything other than the embodiment of his father.

Unfolding ecocide, water wars in the Himalayas, gated communities on Finland's Arctic coast, swathes of Helsinki underwater, a climate doomsdayer with violent intent. "Food running out, clean water running out, everything running out. […] Cannibalism? Plague? Everyone at war with everyone else." So goes the apocalyptic logic of Pasi Tarkiainen, "the last voice of truth in a world headed towards destruction—a healer for a sick planet" and perpetrator of the murders of a number of Helsinki's elite deemed inordinately responsible for climate collapse. This is the subject of Sarah Dimick's essay "From Suspect to Species: Climate Crime in Antti Tuomainen's *The Healer*." With her eye on one of the earliest examples of Nordic noir cross-wired with the genre of climate fiction, Dimick tackles how issues of criminality, collective culpability, impossible scale relations, and the multitude of causal, interrelated factors and cascading processes around the issue of climate change are condensed and reduced to the genre of the Scandicrime detective novel. Not a lot will fit within the narratological bounds of the murder mystery, but Dimick argues that the narrative of this crime novel and the metanarrative of climate catastrophe mesh in ways that negotiate the moral righteousness of some, the climate skepticism of others, the uneven development in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, and as the culpability and species shame heaped upon us all.

Making matters worse still, we learn *The Healer* is grounded in a world without environmental controls, with no checks placed on human agency and founded on the "inexhaustible supply of fossil fuels." One would think that in this messed up world so similar to our own, where individual culprits bleed into the thermo-industrial complex of corporate interests and geopolitical petro-states, all is lost. But with its amateur sleuth (read: middle class poet) and climate refugee sidekick on the one hand, and on the other with its vigilante justice meted out on the basis of heat maps, Dimick argues that *The Healer*'s distributed and scaled notions of agency juggle the tension between criminal intent and the excoriation of agency on the global level in such a way that climate justice might just be a possibility.

You would think that in featuring two essays on Shakespeare in an issue devoted to suicide that at least one would turn on Hamlet's great question of whether "to be or not to be." But no. High school *Hamlet* went the way of Maynard Mack and the *Norton Anthology*. "Tragic Foundationalism" by Jeffrey R. Wilson puts Alain Badiou into dialogue with Shakespeare's Hamlet on the issue of *hamartia*, which the author usefully defines as "tragic mistake," "error," "character flaw," or "weakness" of the "personality" and ultimately condenses and distills into Badiou's notion of the event. The twists and turns of fortune that mark the critical history of *hamartia* from Aristotle's *Poetics*, through Romantic philosophy and the vagaries of post-Freudian thinking, provide Wilson an analytic to read Hamlet's actions, or more precisely, his lack of a decisive act—as "everlasting broodings" (Coleridge), "indecisiveness" (Goethe), "hesitations" (Hegel), "unexecuted resolutions" (Schlegel), "mistake of fact" (Sherman)—as a repetitive structure played out over the course of the tragedy. Hamlet's hesitation to kill Claudius at prayer, his mistaken killing of Polonious, or Ophelia's subsequent suicide and so on, add up to a catastrophic end that orients Wilson to the problem of beginnings, in particular a rich discussion of the fragile tension between Hamlet's tragic foundationalism and the anti-foundationalist tradition so important to contemporary critical thought. With the revenant or ghost hanging over the proceedings, with productive detours into Stanley Fish's and Thomas Kuhn's versions of anti-foundationalism, but with priority given to *Being and Event*, Wilson digs into the rupture in the fabric of reality that is so crucial to Badiou's event, the fidelity necessary to unfolding it as a "truth-process" and the philosopher's "theorem of the militant," where the singular experience inevitably tips towards the universal. The essential paradox as Wilson frames it here: "—*betrayal,* the abandoning of fidelity to an event, 'stopping'—is precisely what is needed to achieve what [Badiou] sees as the universal good of perpetuating the truth process ('Keep going!')." Thus, Wilson argues "that Hamlet's *hamartia* is his foundationalism, specifically his decision to devote himself entirely to revenge" and the ghost's commandment "'Remember me' […] to 'remember' through 'revenge.'" Whether this spurs Hamlet's "fantasy of annihilation" that will ensue, or whether Hamlet is an empty emotional void filled with a foundational purpose by this call from beyond the grave, presents a challenge to reading at every step of the way. The utter contingency of the original encounter doubles this challenge, as does the asymmetrical relationship between Badiou's notion of the subject and the event. Ethics especially comes under a lot of pressure here, to the point that the limits of every ethical regime are troubled by each and every event, fidelity to it, literalization of it, and the truth processes necessary to its ongoing process of unfolding.

"The Theme of Suicide in the French-Canadian Novel since 1945" by M.G. Hesse was first published in *Mosaic* in July 1972. I think it is best read as a supplement to Garry Sherbert's "Canadian Cultural Autoimmunity," which appears in *Suicides I* and which also touches upon Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* (1965). There is little of what one might consider contemporary critical value here. It is a sociological and historical document whose value lies primarily in spotlighting the pervasiveness of suicide in the French-Canadian novel, but one must always approach such things with openness. In republishing Hesse's essay here, we do so not to exhaust the writing on suicide in the *Mosaic* archive but to register the gravity of the issue in a place that is not so distant from us now. What is remarkable about the essay is the author's extensive knowledge of the literature. Hesse brings together an extremely wide swathe of Post-war French-Canadian literature and a roughly contemporaneous criticism that touches on the question. And although the sub-headings are predictable, they cut a path through a difficult subject. Under the banner of the hero, whose individualism places them in conflict with the conformity of society, Hesse discusses Robert Elie's *La Fin des songes* (1950) and Anne-Marie's *La Nuit si longue* (1960). Against the background of nuclear annihilation, he broaches the absurd world of Marie-Claire Blais's *Le Jour est noir* (1962). With the disintegration of traditional values and the general anomie of modernity in mind, he broaches Jacqueline Mabit's *La Fin de la joie* (1945). Against the backdrop of interpersonal relations and the filter of postwar psychiatry he examines Jean-Paul Pinsonneault's *Evadé de la nuit* (1951) and *Les Abîmes de l'aube* (1962). All somewhat pretentious and arty titles, certainly, but as Hesse admits this is "*une littérature qui se fait,*" something which is interesting to keep in mind if one knows the early practice of Jean Francois Riopelle or that of Paul-Émile Borduas and the Automatistes. Indeed, Hesse's essay on "the theme of suicide in the French-Canadian novel" might be considered a supplement to the writing on modernism in the visual arts in Quebec.

Melancholia as the traditional affliction of the suicidal is the subject of Josephine Carter's "The Ethics of Melancholic Witness: Janet Frame and W.G. Sebald." With the examples of Frame's *The Carpathians* and Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Carter argues that the unending process of mourning a lost object that is so symptomatic of melancholia is an affective response to the other which not only bypasses the functions of the ego but is the paradigm of an ethical relationship to the other. The paradox of melancholic witness comes into focus here, for it is not the experience of trauma, nor even the act of witnessing trauma, that robustly connects the self and the other—even empathy and sympathy turn out to be weak responses. Rather, the melancholic witness is that subject who has not witnessed anything, but where responsibility hinges on the very

undermining of that subject that is born of the melancholic's assumedly inward rather than outward orientation. To this end, which is as much a beginning, the essay turns to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" and Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989). Conventional psychoanalytic wisdom that treats "melancholia as a narcissistic disorder" or pathological drama which concerns the self alone—say, the "cannibalistic" incorporation of an identifiable lost object then fed upon—is overturned for what Kristeva describes as "the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound." The aesthetic suture, Kristeva identifies, militates against the identification of traumatic causality and instead opens the door to something bordering on a parasitic relationship with the world past. On an affective level, the melancholic is a kind of unmediated mirror of the other's trauma lived out on the level of affect. The temporality of the other is lived in an affective sense, though of course at a cost, that of preventing the melancholic to live out their own narrative. Forgetting the present is not an ethical lapse but instead the recipe for a truly ethical relationship, wherein the other is untiringly given the space and the voice that is otherwise precluded by the filter of the ego.

With the help of Kristeva, Carter describes an especially porous subject where the image or object is replaced by the open wound of the lost object. And through recourse to the reading of a Levinasian ethics proposed by Simon Critchley—the author since of *Notes on Suicide* (2015)—we catch a glimpse of this open wound as the negative moment of ontological closure and the heimat tradition in Levinas's metaphor of opening the door of one's home to the call of the other. The melancholic's sound advice to the ontologist is to do away with immunity. With the defensive fortifications of the autonomous ego opened up, just how much exteriority or expression enriches the impoverished subject is revealed. With emphasis on the allegorical nature of the narrative "I," and with some reference to the biographical and autobiographical issues implicit to the literature of both Frame and Sebald, the melancholic witness emerges for Carter as a conduit between the past and the future; in the case of *The Carpathians* and *Austerlitz*, the concept forwards a kind of blood memory to successive generations of unspeakable traumas specific to the national contexts of New Zealand and Germany. In *The Carpathians* especially this is concisely argued in terms of the story's central mystery: "the astrological phenomenon of the Gravity Star." This galvanizes the threads of both a colonialist narrative and something far deeper in the figure of a tourist who is the main protagonist of the novel. A "thwarted" ethics altogether suited to the superficial figure of the tourist becomes something else: a tourist savant who feels what cannot be seen and in that feeling gives voice to both the trauma of others and another time.

Subjectivity is placed under considerable strain here. And though melancholic witness is certainly not suicide, the destructive energies at play have one walking a razor's edge between life and death. It all begs comparison with those other shadings and gradings that approach suicide—the "Werther effect," the death drive, autoimmunity, ecocide, Beckett's journey "worstward"—but I leave that grim organization and clean up to the reader. One thing we should note is that the ethics of melancholic witness is distinct from the great example of Dürer's *Melancholia I.* If similarly troubled by the question of death and the poverty of means, the shadowy face of the pensive thinker—as much a heavy-set man as a woman—with the wings of an angel seems rather more obsessed with the tools of its own trade. In face of the dawn of a new day, technics themselves present the limiting condition for Melancholia. Building a world, painting or engraving one on the model of nature, is the impossible task that must be faced with dogged perseverance. The hang-dog expression of the oversized animal—not a sleeping cow but "man's best friend"—who lays amidst the cluttered ruins of culture, geometric objects, mathematical tools, and technical aids that fill the scene is proof of this.

Reading Ginette Michaud's "*Courir à toute* vi*etesse. Note télégraphique sur un poème de pensée de J.D.*" is one of those moments when we wish that French was our mother tongue. There is just too much work behind the scenes. Reading is too laboured, too dead, too mechanical, just metal on metal without the kind of facility and ease provided by, say, the meshing of well-oiled gears that can bring reading up to the speed of writing. But then "Running at any speed. Telegraphic note on a thought poem by J. D." presents far more problems than this. Michaud's essay, first published in 2007, confronts what she calls then "an unpublished fragment" from Jacques Derrida's seminar from 2002 on *The Beast and the Sovereign,* where he provides commentary on two lines by John Donne reading,

> I run to Death and Death meets me as fast
> And all my Pleasures are like Yesterday

It is in the thick of speaking about the moment Robinson Crusoe confronts footprints on his "island of despair" and flees back in terror to his castle, not knowing if they are his but wondering just the same, unable to recognize himself in his own footprint and hence living out his past as a terrifying future, that Derrida is reminded of Donne's "infinite line." All of this, and the incredible flurry of dizzying interpretative possibilities that Donne's lines raise for Derrida—including, we must wonder, the unsettling thought that Derrida finds himself in Donne's footprints—are incorporated as subscript beneath Michaud's text on the note or letter itself, which she tells us had fallen

into her hands in 2006. In her playful text that mirrors the jouissance of Derrida's own, and that never once sinks so low as to suggest Derrida's project might have all been done before, Michaud calls upon us to speed up our reading, not only to the *vitesse* of a reading that is faster than sight, but to the speed or vi*etesse* of life.

Alongside a set of threads that spin together the omnipotence of literature and its telegraphic speed, autobiography, the questions of death and pleasure, in particular the play between pleasure and mourning that makes the very condition of pleasure, Michaud isolates close reading as the great legacy of deconstruction. The time that separates us from the text is condensed and compressed to rival the infinite dilation of the present that any one text presumes to the extent that we are positioned *avant l'lettre,* in a temporality where the pleasure of the original writing is "not experienced once again as if past," nor even felt in the present it is read—for the reading makes even the language of the text disappear—but in a time when Jacques Derrida meets his maker John Donne and conversely does one better than Donne by breathing life back into him. Thinking of this "collision," and mangled metal that folds J.D. into J.D., Michaud calls the letter "a crash course in time." From our perspective now it also fleshes out why jouissance and the pleasure of the text held such meaning and resonance. "The scene of reading," as Michaud puts it, "is an event that effects time," to the point that pleasure and "affective intensity" are rolled up in a style of writing that now seems very *dépassé*—undoubtedly, the best reason not to translate it, but instead paraphrase it, which is a lesser kind of suicide than the identification and blurring of initials.

Alongside a flurry of startling claims like "all culture is mourning" or conversely mourning is "the origin of culture," that culture and technology are secondary to the foundational role of funeral rites, and that "we become human only after experiencing the anxiety of death," in "Mourning as the Origin of Humanity," Françoise Dastur reverses Descartes's well-known philosophical adage, *Cogito, sum*. Instead, following Heidegger she would have us consider the profound nature of *sum moribundus*. In a philosophical shorthand that is familiar to most, but which can only reduce Dastur's highly wrought argument: Not, "I think therefore I am," but I am dying. The hitch for Dastur being (and it is a big hitch connected to a number of other human "ruses," as she calls them) is that we have no experience of death, that like our birth we cannot know our own death, but only the death of others, whom we are close to. With no experience of death as such, mourning is all we get, which again caricatures her argument, for mourning is a two-for. When in mourning or re-membering we are also in thought and "thought is a symbolic death," as she puts it elsewhere (Dastur 35). Not much of a consolation, but this is how Dastur—one of the leading voices in phenomenology and contemporary French philosophy—rolls.

Mourning as a philosophical mode of thinking gains its profoundest dimensions for Dastur by virtue of this relationship to the other, and more importantly still, when this relationship with the other is adopted by the self. With recourse to examples drawn from *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Sophocles's *Antigone*, Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, and Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* and *What is Metaphysics?,* the death of the other and the congeries of anxieties this promotes awaken in us the "latent consciousness" of our own mortality. And with a strange inversion of origin for destiny, mourning as we know it best becomes one more evasion of the void, because a sublimation of death. Ultimately, mourning is an allegory of our own passing which we can never know, but then I also understand much of what Dastur argues in terms of the ontological questions Paul de Man takes for literary criticism. Dastur does not have much time for suicide, which she describes as one of many ways of avoiding death—of birth and death she writes simply: "we have not chosen to be born and if we have the possibility of accelerating death in provoking it by suicide we cannot choose whether or not to die"—but her two-fold account of philosophical thought is keyed to a recurrent notion of bodily death that not only singularizes it but makes death "one's ownmost" in a manner that bears on the issue as a lifelong process. On this point she redefines Derrida's notion of "originary mourning" by dropping the other and foregrounding a relation with time understood in a "distributive" sense as a structure of existence portioned out in and as time, wherein the destiny of being is an inevitable movement towards death. With this in mind she says, "alterity is swapped for temporal alterity," something which makes me think that the constant passage from feeling to reason is not only a funeral rite, but a funeral cortege which is equally the accumulated history that is a culture, an individual's literary legacy, or man conceptualized on the basis and "direction of his *humanitas*."