

# Introduction

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This special issue of *Mosaic* celebrates the journal's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and gathers together a number of papers and events presented at a symposium to mark that occasion. The symposium, titled *Living On*, was initiated by Dawne McCance and held at the University of Manitoba on March 9-11, 2017. The theme and title come from Jacques Derrida's "Living On: Borderlines" (1979) and were to acknowledge a range of issues including the journal's interdisciplinary mandate, *Mosaic's* own recent conference on lifedeath (48.1-48.4), and the increasingly fraught and troubled times that we all face. More pragmatically still, *Living On* was to point to the journal's next half-century and its life under a new editor in the wake of McCance's seventeen years at the helm. Finally, *Living On* was to showcase the critical work of select participants from a diverse set of fields from which *Mosaic* welcomes contributions.

But things never go exactly as planned. Much is lost in the transition from lecture to print. The issue itself departs from the initial call for reflections on the futures of architecture, art, literature, music, and philosophy. In many cases, the theme of living on simply serves as a spur for thought. At other times the issue happily approaches the form of a *festschrift* in honour of McCance's tenure. Moving a set of presentations to publishable form has its hiccups, too, and not only for authors weighed down by administrative and teaching responsibilities or other professional commitments. In the case of this issue not all of the participants—including Geoffrey Bennington,

Peggy Kamuf, Patricia Patkau, H. Peter Steeves, Danielle Meijer, and Axelle Karera—could submit their memorable contributions. For instance, “Literal Life,” Kamuf’s impassioned account of her daily participation in demonstrations against the Trump Travel Ban of January 20, 2017, does not appear although it will be remembered. This, too, is the case with the sobering word plays of Bennington’s lecture, “Living Off”—not only the land or grid but also the image and text where life is underwritten by a vampiric function of prosthesis or attachment. Similarly, how can one convey the visual impact of Patkau’s “Work/Play,” other than by saying that this architect’s sensitivity to site understood as an accretion of histories, as place in the present tense, and as an openness to the unexpected uses to which architecture will be put is precisely a paradigm for living on?

Paradigms for living on: one could say the same of the other contributions that do not appear as much as those that do.<sup>1</sup> Living on as it is instanced again and again in these pages is really about these difficult, troubled, and always unexpected breaks or ellipses in continuity and flow. Living on has death built into its very bones. Its language is periodic and discontinuous. As David Farrell Krell suggests in this very issue, its main drivers are “accident and contingency” (“Living” 42), and now more than ever, technological change which ushers in the new with frightening rapidity. Living on now means living in the thick of a new set of relationships, ecologies, institutions, or systems of support. Life is lived on credit, a temporary visa, the reserve, death row, or borrowed time, more and more on screen, “meds,” after work. And as should be clear from these turns of phrase, living on bleeds into “survivance,” a word coined by Derrida to capture something of the spectral form that now haunts the living. Living on addresses this limit condition that defines so much modern experience, and it speaks to a set of very real life-worlds here in Canada—classed, gendered, raced, generationally-keyed, and indigenous life-worlds whose borderlines seem more conducive to crystallize and conjure an image of things as they are. In an important sense and in spite of its good, honest origins in the multicultural landscape of Canada’s Centennial year, *Mosaic* at fifty is a very different creature than it once was. The cracks show, as undoubtedly they should with anything that lives on.

The issue begins with a set of installation shots from the exhibition *Lidwien van de Ven: Living On*, which was part of the larger symposium and mounted at the School of Art Gallery at the University of Manitoba. McCance and I invited the Dutch photographer to respond to the theme of living on alongside the other participants. For van de Ven, who works within and against the institution of photojournalism, living on served not only as a thematic for the turbulence and precarity of life in the Middle East, but referenced a set of recurrent tropes in her practice that consistently

turn on thresholds of visibility—the censures of Western media, the tangled prohibitions of religion and politics and state, the moral restrictions against display in the white cube, and a certain iconophobia pitting text against the spectacular economy of the image—all of which fence off experience from contemporary events. In the exhibition, poster-thin photographs taken in the streets of Gaza, Beirut, Ramallah, and Cairo were pasted onto specially painted walls. To frame the experience of the installation in terms as pragmatic as possible—i.e., with an eye to the format of the poster, which is van de Ven’s preferred medium of display and is keyed to a majority of the works in the show, which focused on various types of writing (street-based graffiti, signage, or the trace of yesterday’s events)—not only was the complex life of the street introduced to the space of the gallery, but through a process of chiasmic inversion and exchange, each viewer’s participation and engagement in the unfolding events depicted in these streets placed unique and urgent pressure on their responses. It was as if, beyond all the obstacles and prohibitions that work to debilitate an encounter, van de Ven’s exhibition attempted not only to stage an encounter but to begin a dialogue between these worlds.

The photo insert of van de Ven’s exhibition is accompanied by a short text by David Farrell Krell that focuses on a single photograph titled *Ramallah, 11/09/2006, (boy sitting)*, an image which was intentionally damaged by Israeli border authorities at Ben Gurion Airport. The way Krell moves between photograph and the poetry of Hölderlin and Trakl will make every reader want to return to all of the latter—not to mention spend a life in the footsteps of Krell himself, his reading and thinking. He effortlessly threads these poetic excursions into an argument on concealment and disclosure, which speaks not only to the photograph and broader issues in van de Ven’s practice, but also to a set of ideological, temporal, technological, and presentational tropes that recur throughout her practice. “All of life is a *fort/da* game” (xi). . . a sentence to love, an idea to mull over—indeed a leitmotif of the issue—and a game wonderfully instanced in this beautiful and thoughtful response to a boy sitting.

In Antonio Calcagno’s “On the Possibility and Impossibility of a World,” the philosopher hunts back the passive processes (?), tethers to what he calls the “givens” that make “the appearance of things appear” (3). For Calcagno the persistence of a world, or the possibility of a world’s living on, hinges on affect, and more specifically the circular (?) or self-sustaining (?) system of auto-affection that precedes Husserlian intentionality. This is an essay to be read and reread, and my brief introduction does it little justice. What can be said with less doubt is that Calcagno’s graceful gesture to *Mosaic’s* place and impact on the landscape of Canadian letters is much beholden to contributions like his. For *Mosaic*, the very possibility of living on depends on this

mutually parasitic relationship. “In Spite of the World” by Diane Enns adopts Hannah Arendt’s metaphor of world as desert and contemplates making a world worthy of one’s life. What makes the essay and its gentle notion of worldmaking so striking and amenable is the author’s use of the personal correspondence between Arendt and Karl Jaspers. As much a recipe for living on in the post-war period as a cornerstone for political engagement now, Enns unearths one of the great and prescient points of Arendt’s thought that lends it longevity, turns it into such fertile ground for reinterpretation, and makes it count again and again.

In Daniel Fischlin’s “Moving On/Living On... Toward a Theory of Improvisation and Interdisciplinarity,” the author and musician focuses on how to be on, which he describes as the capacity to encounter difference and be put into an “affective state of connection.” Backed up by a lifetime in Jazz and a history of “in-the-moment improvisation” with the *Vertical Squirrels*, Fischlin singles out improvisation as the hinge-pin for living on. He strategically poses it against singularity so as to reveal being-on as the site of a relational exchange that he suggests is a model for rethinking interdisciplinarity. In “Living On—with Monsters” we again encounter the thinking of David Krell. The primal soup out of which he draws his lesson is the German Romantic tradition. Krell tells us the future is a monstrosity that is unpredictable; that living on amidst change means living on—with monsters that alter and end all we know; and finally—with an ongoing allegorical gesture to politics reaching a crescendo—that given this eventuality it is still best to work within our variously evolving institutions than burn them to the ground. “A Hard and Brutal Mysticism” by Alphonso Lingis broaches that most difficult and cryptic topic that attracts us all: the love of nature. From a perspective once removed from the call of non-human forests and the mineral silence of mountains that are his focus, Lingis, who is an adventurer as well as inveterate traveller and translator of note, looks for answers in the genre of adventure writing. Beyond the valleys of usage and instrumental function, Lingis finds the temptation to merge with nature or become one with nature, a reminder that we remain still very much in the shadows of Novalis, Paul Cézanne, Jackson Pollock, Tom Thompson, and so many others.

In “Behind the Scenes of the Derrida Seminars Translation Project,” Elizabeth Rottenberg offers playful and tantalizing glimpses into a handful of heavy problems raised by the ongoing translation of Derrida’s texts. With cathexis, functioning as a general watchword for repression and over-determination, Rottenberg traces the difficulties of translation between French and English, from French to and between the many varieties of the English language, and lastly, within and between Derrida’s own texts on Freud. It is on this last point especially that the work of translation really sets

interpretation on fire, for in tracing the path of Derrida's texts from his initial lectures to publication and between texts from different periods, we see the thinker performing the real work of psychoanalysis on himself. For if Freud's grandson Ernst is shown to be both on and off the crib during his famous game of *fort/da*, then not only does Freud spend time on Derrida's couch, but even this Derrida has to endure a session on a bed of his own making. In "Quicksand," Nicholas Royle leads the reader into the treacherous and bottomless word world of quicksand. For Royle the word is a metaphor for a linguistic predicament, and among other things an excursion to a very strange intrauterine existence that precedes our own, as well as a kind of heuristic that he uses to open up Derrida's text "Living On: Borderlines." Though Royle skips gingerly between a number of examples in this classic miscellany, there will be very few readers who manage to work themselves free of the sinking feelings unique to each. Best to have a look at Bear Grylls extracting himself from uncertain death in the quicksand of the Sahara (on YouTube) as Royle directs us, for there is much danger afoot.

Finally, we offer the presentations and subsequent question period of a Graduate Student Panel, focused on living on as graduate students, that was integral to the *Living On* symposium. Gwynne Fulton discusses the overlaps between the theme of survival and the question of images. Alyson Brickey talks about the list in American literature as an aesthetic category. Ryan Fics broaches Derrida's notion of the "unconditional university." Carrie Reese discusses intermediality and the film works of Ana Mendieta. And Riley McGuire speaks on voice, specifically sketching out a project that amounts to an analytic of the transmission of vocal norms from Romantic poetry and the 19th-century novel to the phonograph and stage. Rounding off these interventions are a wide-ranging set of discussions surrounding the precarity of life for graduate students, the importance of politics in the humanities, and the future of interdisciplinarity.

Lastly, as a supplement to this special issue on *Living On*, we have pulled two essays from the archive: a first by David Wills that speaks to the theme of living on *avant-la-lettre*, and a second by David Krell that provides a sort of creeping bracket to his other contributions by framing photography as the stills from a monster movie. In Wills's "Order Catastrophically Unknown," first published in 2011 (44.4), we encounter both Freud's and Derrida's paradoxical quest for the ways in which life is underwritten by death. With specific reference to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and the game of *fort/da*, among other things, Wills shows that life is the form death takes when it lives on. For some, this twining of fortunes may come off as something of a theoretical game. It is anything but that for Wills. Like those living on in the street of van de Ven's *Gaza 12/11/2014 (Shu'jaiya)*—in particular that figure just visible in the

shadows at lower left—life outside the West does not always make the ontological cut for that which constitutes the living. Krell’s “Shudder Speed,” first published in 2004 (37.4) broaches similar terrain. Here we see the philosopher’s early thoughts on the monstrous, specifically as it relates to photography, and importantly as it hinges on suddenness and the idea of tragedy, what we might point to as one of the origins of expression in van de Ven’s unique version of street photography.

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#### NOTES

1/ Thus the strained relationship inhering within the collective action performed by Danielle Meijer (in dance) and H. Peter Steeves (on powerpoint) titled “*Herzesschatzi Komm: Our Future Handedness and Collaborative Being*,” or the non-dialectizable crossing of Axelle Karera’s “Asymmetries of Suffering: Race and the Visual Scenes of Exile.”