RADIX is a student-centred magazine providing literary and artistic space for expression on spiritual themes, produced by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. Visit us at: mcgill.ca/morsl/radix-magazine

Cover artist Jassim is a Bengali student of Computer Science and Philosophy who prides over his ability to read people’s minds.

Back cover artist Wakaba is a McGill Master’s student from the Rocky Mountains with Japanese-Shinto roots. Full bio on page 9.
“God is alive, magic is afoot. God is alive, magic is afoot.”

So sang the patron poet-priest of this town upon a mountain beside a river which is soon to be unfrozen. For eons people have sought spirits in the green and growing world which surrounds and abounds. Dryads and Naiads of Greece. Apsaras and Yakshis of South Asia. Countless more, too.

Do trees still sing? Can waves be read? Does the Mountain King still hold court? In this issue of Radix, we call you to listen in and realize the eternal energy and endless delight of Nature, and to ask, what is our Nature? To create? To destroy?

Revelation came to Moses in a burning bush, and from bearing witness to this encounter he knew what he must do to save his people. In 2017, 3.4 million hectares of forest burnt in Canada alone. What shall we do to lead our world from the precipice? In August I stood atop a mountain on the west coast of this continent while my eyes stung with smoke and I waited for an answer. As of yet, I do not know it. The fires still burn—more every season—but it is humanity that will be consumed by our consumption before this Earth is through forever, unless things radically change. Let’s start today.

With love, hope, and endless awe,
Lucas
The water drops dot the metal maze.  
Neon glows through falling glass beads,  
like stars seen from an Asian haven.

The burning gold yawns its slow roar,  
Churning through the leaves, pouring her grace.  
The green ribbon’s lace forming light;  
they grasp tightly loose vines  
so as not to lose a sunshine’s embrace.

The white lights, crawling cracked columns,  
last fickle lamps against brittle winds.

The lanterns are beautiful, bright, elegant, and white.  
They perch elegantly and seep their sweetness.  
Unassuming, yet readily strong;  
Shy, yet moving in the golden light.

The lamps and lanterns grab as they sway,  
Heavy-weighted pendulums of decision,  
seeking warmth through the shadowed leaves.

Swings settle after wrestling their lucid minds,  
pounded walls trembling  
like the bruised fists that hit them.  
Brazen fists match the swift changes.

Fall into white  
And her fiery friends.  
Turn the warm tides bright  
and sail the clandestine spine.  
Glide the kind rivers, the kinds  
that give, that guide lives from blizzards.  
Ride the bone shivers and miss her home.
A grassland orchestra

Gentle breezes kiss her knees 
like the songs kettles sing. 
Like the whisper of winter and the scent of snow, 
the sound purity is met with apricots and peaches. 
The golden jaune of fresco sundowns 
melt into stars like honey pots, drooling 
into teatime.

The strings rhyme with windchimes, 
both swaying into moonlight.

The wheat waltzes with the band, 
swaying, exalting in their liberty, 
Carrying the tempo of the winds, 
dancing in the meadows of birds, 
marrying the breeze to the beat.

Fallen petals dot the treble clefs like 
the freckles of bees, speckled among the forest trees, 
searching their heart's delight.

Kite's fly at the dock, strung by their feet, 
set to untie, to be free in their plight. 
Knowing of their blowing intentions, she, glowing in the 
evening peach, slowly floats 
her fingers from the strings, 
sending her birds far long from the beach.
Teatime

It trickles like a waterfall in slow-motion,
Seeping, leaking into lulled, molten oceans.
The drips are sweet and smell of flowers,
They sugar our words, leaving no acrid tastes
On a non-acid palate

The lakes are bitter, and aromatic still,
Liquor’s half-sister, and much less dramatic.
The leaves of their love breed breath into us,
To awaken or to sleep. Acidic, half-caustic,
So citric, we’ve lost it,
Until sugar oozes to rescue,
Astringent savor, in slow instants, they meld into one.

Dribbles and drools her spools into pools,
That coil and collect and sink.
The amber-blonde candy, sing candor, and bond
The sweet and the bitter together.
Planted

They accumulate
to desolate white. The flakes
exquisite. Soft, non-resonant.
They float elegant and coast and land
and collect like sediment in sand,
kept, then swept against the waves of winds.

Impressed by rubber red,
the layers stutter under soles.
The cold sands give way, reverberators
in their craters, till the cardinal turns
Scarlet white.

Vincent’s night of stars

Hues of blue and yellow dance in the black
And the stars cheer them on.
Under the cypress trees, see the recital;
A celestial ballet on a Milky Way stage.
A town sleeps and really they are stars,
A steeple summit peeking through,
Preparing a lift-off, to join the ensemble.

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He writes because the world needs explaining.
See his work at andrewlhyang.com
The boy looked at his grandfather and blinked. He took in his face: the creases leading one into another like a complex maze. He noticed the tough blemished skin starting to sag slightly. Yet to him, the most beautiful of all were the bushy gray eyebrows sticking out above his eyes. Oh, how a physical appearance can evoke an aura of wisdom, of strength, and equanimity. Of course the boy could see the scars or remnants of previous hardships in the face of his grandfather, but it all disappeared with that smile, a seeming acceptance that life had brought him to this moment.

“Grandpa”, the boy asked, “why won’t you let me pick any flowers?”

You see, the two were walking through a big garden with a pond in its middle. The garden was full of vegetables growing from the ground, fruits growing down from trees, and the most beautiful flowers scattered throughout. There were birds of course, flying about, lightly singing their songs. Bees also buzzed as they frolicked from flower to flower, spreading life throughout the garden. The sun radiated down to the perfectly still water of the pond and the boy could see the clouds reflected on its surface.

“Son, let us take a moment and observe this one flower, then maybe can I answer your question.” The grandfather took his grandson’s hand and brought him down to the pond and they knelt in front of a blossoming lotus.

“Now here is a thing of beauty. Son, tell me what strikes you most about this lotus.” The grandfather let go of the boy’s hand and looked at him expectantly.

Eager to make a good impression and try to find the correct answer to his grandfather’s challenge, the boy knelt in silence for a while. It was in pondering the aspects of the flower, that he decided that what struck him most was the transition of color of the petals. The lotus’ outer most layer of petals was a pure white and yet this changed to a deeper and darker shade of pink as it progressed to the center. In wonder at having made this discovery, the boy excitedly exclaimed: “Grandpa, this flower is so beautiful! Its colors are what strike me most.”

“Ah, my boy, I’m very proud of you. You thought very hard about what you
would respond and for that I know you spoke truthfully.” The grandfather smiled and hugged the boy. “Let me now impart to you what I find most striking about this flower:

All day long, it will sit here in this pond and breathe, just like us, the air around it. But, this lovely little lotus does much more than just simply breathe, it releases into the air the substances necessary for us to breathe, oxygen. So, my boy, do you not see, we live, we share each other’s company, on account of this little flower in the pond. You say the beauty from its color is what strikes you most, but I ask you to see deeper. The beauty of the lotus does not lie solely in its aesthetic, no my grandson, it lies in the potential of life it brings forth.”

The boy nodded his head to signal that he understood his grandfather’s words, yet in his eyes remained a tinge of confusion. “But grandpa, you didn’t answer my question. Why won’t you let me pick flowers so I can bring them home and give them to mom, so she can enjoy their beauty too?”

In response, the old man stood up and lifted the boy onto his shoulders. He began: “Look out my grandson at all this garden has to offer. Take in the different colors which you enjoy so much. Take in the smells emanating off the flowers. Take in how the light drafts of wind feel on your face. You are here now in this garden surrounded by the beauty of life. It’s not always going to stay this beautiful. The flowers will die, the bees buzzing around them will die too without the pollen, and slowly but surely, the city will move closer and closer until the whole garden is replaced by houses and condos. You love your mother so much and she would be overjoyed that you showed her this by bringing her back the lovely flowers all around us, most people are by such gestures. But, the beauty of a flower lies in its LIFE! Lies it its capacity to give us life and moments such as these. Today, on this walk, we don’t pick flowers so that when another boy (or girl) comes with their grandfather, they can witness the same beauty we did today.”

The grandfather took the boy off of his shoulders and put him on the ground. Looking into his chestnut brown eyes, he blinked. He noticed the soft skin, clear of blemishes, wrinkles, or folds. Brimming with innocence and wonder, the eyes twinkled and shone, almost as bright as the sun’s reflection on the
pond. He felt within himself a tremendous flood of emotions, with hope at the forefront. “Will you remember this, for me?”
The eyes responding back were devoid of confusion this time around. “Yes,” the boy replied and he smiled. “For you grandpa, I will remember anything.”

The boy looked up at his grandfather and blinked. He looked over his face: the labyrinth of creases, folds and wrinkles, the blemishes, the saggy skin, the bushy gray eyebrows. He was surprised though. His grandfather’s usual stoic demeanor was replaced with a smile the likes he had never glimpsed before. It was this smile, this happiness, this love and caring that the boy internalized as his definition of being over the moon.

They continued on around the garden, the boy now smiling too.
Wakaba is a McGill Master’s student from the Rocky Mountains with Japanese-Shinto roots. A mountain girl turned city girl, Wakaba is a lover of plants, natural green lighting, and capturing in-the-moment experiences.
Ethics for an Enchanted Ecology: An Essay of Sorts

“The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.” - William Blake

Despite prevailing thought, might there be other beings in this cosmos who are possessed of a subjective point of view and who are currently at work towards their own ends, beyond the will and knowledge of humanity? That this might be the case, that the world might be enchanted by entities existing above, beneath and beside human beings, is no new notion. The epigraph of this very article attests to such a conception long being the purview of poets and mystics, but it is also a normative framework within which various peoples across time and across the globe have understood the relationships which mediate between humans and non-humans. The category of the non-human, of course, is broad, but not so broad as to not be useful to think about. To give an idea of just what I mean by the term, I will borrow a definition from Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who describes this latter group of the nonhuman to include beings as diverse as “gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, plants, occasionally even objects and artefacts” and, of course, animals (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 470).

I would argue that this enchanted view has been superseded in the globalized world-society which has arisen in the wake of the Western Enlightenment. In its place has arisen an anthropocentric ontology that sees humankind as the lone subjective and willful actor in an otherwise clockwork cosmos. This contemporary understanding is manifest in the entwined institutions of modernity -- industrialism, the modern nation-state, neoliberal capitalism, and so on -- that together have ushered in the current epoch of the Anthropocene, hereby defined as that era which can be identified with humanity’s recently adopted role as agents which operate on a massive geological scale, holding dominion over the most basic physical processes of the earth. Think huge dams flooding thousands of kilometres of terrain, or suburban sprawl so extensive it can be seen from space. Or, you know, climate change. If the Anthropocene constitutes the pinnacle of human domination over natural forces and resources, then this definition would seem to leave little room for other agencies. “Just as supernature was banished as a source of energy and meaning by the onward march of modernization … so too will non-human nature”, writes the scholar Bronislaw Szerszynski, warning of the implications of such a conception of the Anthropocene (Szerszynski 2015, 2).
In recent decades, however, this notion of a disenchanted contemporary has been problematized within ecological thought, resulting in a movement towards what Szerszynski considers the ‘desecularization’ of the Anthropocene, wherein these other agencies might regain a place in the conversations surrounding ecological issues (Szerszynski 2015, 1). I must emphasize the word ‘regain’ here, for I hope to make clear with this essay (of sorts) just how such ‘enchanted’ ontologies have been understood and lived with through time and across space; in this endeavour I am particularly indebted to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s analysis of Amazonian animism. I will also discuss how the processes of desecularization and enchantment may be envisioned, and what implications that these processes might have on contemporary ecological ethics in the face of impending climate crisis. Ultimately, I aim to show how contemporary ‘secularized’ discourses on ecological issues, climate change in particular, have failed to apprehend and represent the matter at hand due to their perpetuation of an anthropocentric cosmology. I further hope to explain how an ontological shift toward an ‘enchanted’, animistically informed perspective, one which ascribes selfhood and agency (the two being intimately associated) to entities ranging from animals to weather events to the earth itself, might open a space for new, and hopefully efficacious, ways of understanding and accompanying ethics which might steer political, intellectual, and dare I say it, spiritual action (An admittedly debatable aside: Can these domains ever really be separated? I say: Any political or social movement, insofar as it bears an accompanying ideology, has a metaphysical/spiritual component).

Szerszynski and Viveiros de Castro, along with the anthropologist-turned-novelist-turned-ecological-cum-literary-theorist Amitav Ghosh, all conceptualize modernity as being founded upon (and, I might add, enabled by) a division of the cosmos into things describable with two basic and distinct categories: Culture and Nature. The former is associated with all intentionality and capacity to make meaning of the world, what might be called ‘culture’ in our usual usage at the level of society, and ‘soul’ at the level of individual. Culture is seen as the exclusive domain of humanity (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 469-70). Meanwhile, ‘Nature’ encompasses the physical substances and forces that underlie the cosmos and that are shared by all beings and phenomena; thus a generalized modern Western understanding would concede that the water in a human’s cells is indistinguishable at an atomic level from the water in the sea, and furthermore that the processes within a human’s cells work largely along the same chemical pathways as those of a dog, starfish, or fern. All motion and reaction occur in line with the dictates of certain natural laws -- those of gravity, thermodynamics, and so forth -- from the orbits of the stars to the recurrence of the monsoon. Nature, then, in modernity’s idealized sense, is predictable, subject to forecast and ‘knowable’ by metrics of probability. Ghosh
touches on how this view has been codified within the stylistic expectations of the modern novel, to which he also finds a genealogical relation in the ‘gradualist’ approach to geology:

[In the modern novel] instead of being told about what happened we learn about what was observed . . . Why should the rhetoric of the everyday appear at exactly the time when a regime of statistics, ruled by ideas and of probability and improbability, was beginning to give new shapes to society? Why did fillers suddenly become so important? Moretti’s answer is “because they offer the kind of narrative pleasure compatible with the new regularity of bourgeois life”. . . this regime of thought imposed itself not only on the arts but also on the sciences. That is why [Gould’s] study of the geological theories of gradualism and catastrophism is, in essence, a study of narrative . . . the catastrophist recounting of the earth’s history [occurs through] events of “unrepeatable uniqueness.” . . . The gradualist approach . . . privileges slow processes that unfold over time at even, predictable rates. (Ghosh 2016, 19).

In the end, a compromise of uncertainty was established around the matter of cataclysm versus gradualism, but not before the latter held out for some hundred years as the accepted consensus (Ghosh 2016, 20). By Ghosh’s account, both the ubiquity of ‘filler’ in the modern novel and the widespread acceptance of gradualism within the scientific community find their origins in modernity’s reliance on a predictable nature that might be expected to support the “new regularity of bourgeois life”. Yet, as Ghosh makes clear, nature is far from predictable. This especially holds true in the case of today’s rapidly changing climate (p. 24). Ghosh in turn argues that another, non-probabilistic, approach might be better equipped to understand and deal with catastrophe. This approach is found, he states, in the long standing religious, folkloric, and literary traditions regularly disparaged by proponents of modernity (p. 20-21): “Before the birth of the modern novel”, he writes, “wherever stories were told, fiction delighted in the unheard-of and the unlikely” (p. 16). The energies setting these unlikely events in motion are not computable forces, but rather a dynamic cast of animate entities:

“Nowhere is the awareness of nonhuman agency more evident than in the traditions of narrative. In the Indian epics . . . there is a completely matter-of-fact acceptance of the agency of nonhuman beings of many kinds . . . they create the resolutions that allow the narrative to move forward. In the Iliad and the Odyssey, too. the intervention of gods, animals, and the elements is essential to the machinery of narration” (Ghosh 2016, 65-67).

Rising seas and erratic weather may prove the various religious/literary traditions, in their tales of deluge and other eschatons, to have a perhaps more realistic
Secularization may be understood as the process of divesting from the supernatural; that is, of depriving such entities as gods and spirits of both their status as conceptually useful explanations for the causes behind natural phenomena, as well as their ontologically existent state as beings possessed of the power to make change in the world. Perhaps to clarify the alternate position we must analyze just how it is that supernatural entities are to exist and constitute themselves in the world. In discussing ‘supernature’ as a category useful for “defining a third type of intentional beings occurring in indigenous cosmologies, which are neither human nor animal”, Viveiros de Castro characterizes supernature as the “form of the Other as Subject”, that is, the ‘supernatural’ experience is marked by an encounter between an individual and a “being which is seen first merely as an animal or a person, but then reveals itself as a spirit” by speaking to the interlocutor (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 483). By establishing a subject-object relationship with the human, wherein the spirit makes clear its subjectivity through speech, its possession of experience as an ‘I’, the human is reduced to an ‘it’; the human is to spirit as animal is to human. However, if the human, through shamanic prowess can establish an intersubjective relationship with the spirit, wherein both participants may converse as ‘yous’, then the fatal dehumanization is avoided (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 483).

The supernatural, the spirit, arises from the act of noticing and being noticed. Although Viveiros de Castro is speaking from within an Amazonian context, there does seem to be something generalizable about this paradigm. For example, Ghosh speaks of his experience surviving an exceptionally rare tornado in Delhi: “. . . later did I realize that the tornado’s eye had passed directly over me. It seemed to me that there was something eerily apt about this metaphor: what had happened at that moment was strangely like a species of visual contact, of beholding and being beheld” (Ghosh 2016, 14). Must we follow Ghosh in calling this a metaphor? Might the spirit of the tornado become manifest in a moment of mutual recognition between Ghosh and the event itself, when he looked upon the storm not as an ‘it’, but as a ‘you’? Others were not so lucky; failing to recognize and respond to the subjectivity of the storm, falling outside its ‘eye’, they, the thirty something who perished, were forced into the position of ‘it’ to the tornado’s ‘I’ (p. 13).

In considering the world to be inhabited by such spirits, given immanent form in natural phenomena, we are provided with a new ontology with which to move forward in understanding and responding to the climactic events that present an existential threat to humanity. While it is true that human action has brought about these events, ascribing to an understanding of the Anthropocene that places exclusive agency in human hands only perpetuates the anthropocentric cosmology that saw the natural world as a field for extracting the resources that fuel infinite awareness of the precarity of man in the face of events trivialized by modernity as ‘improbable’: how may one predict the wills of animate, intentional forces, realized as supernatural beings?
growth. Indeed, even modern political action against these harmful practices has appropriated the attitude that justifies them. For example, the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions ends with the signatures of the delegates sent by nations-states who are by no means bound to its targets, targets set under the assumption that technological progress will provide the means to efficiently capture carbon at a large scale. Altogether this is an act that Ghosh characterizes as “an expression of faith in the sovereignty of Man and his ability to shape the future”, which recalls to my mind Szerszynski’s ‘Anthropos’, Man as a despotic (and tragic! He knows not what he does) god (Ghosh 2016, 153, 158; Szerszynski 2015, 5). Thus the ethical imperative is to escape this paradigm to the extent that we can, seeing the life in the world and the life that sees us, and the spirit that is manifested through these relations.

We need not face the struggles of this age upon a lonely earth. Though our antagonized cohabitants may more often than not be working against us or are trying to reverse the imbalances our actions have caused, or at the very least are indifferent to our will, their presence does lend a mystery and majesty — an enchantment — to the forces at work on this living planet, which may motivate us to take exceptional efforts in preserving our communal domain. Let us be allies and responsible assistants, or otherwise let us stand with solemn respect before those who have been here from long before and who will be for long after we have gone.

In a conclusion of sorts, I do as nature does and bring things round to where they began with another quote of Blake’s which serves to exemplify the ethic towards which we may strive, along with the reverse attitude which, unfortunately, rules the day:

“The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity... and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself.”

Works Cited (and recommended; check your local campus library!)

Oscar went for a walk in 1999 and hasn’t been back since.
Tree Hugger

As my arms embrace this same tree
I enter a zone of peace and lovely
Rocking-chair-type-of-air
Where love goes deeper than my underwear
It is with love and fear that I hug you
In broad-daylight, arms around you
The same old tree
You make me feel less lonely
Some will call me crazy
Or even Snapchat me
But when I hug
I never bug
You give my arms meaning
Because I feel my Self
When I’m loving
You
Tree

Samuel is a recent graduate
from Latin American Studies,
now full-time poet.

Photo by Wakaba (bio on page 11)
GHETTO SHUL
Ghetto Shul is a student- and volunteer-run Jewish organization in downtown Montreal. We hold weekly Shabbat services and dinners, as well as art nights, learning events, and more! We welcome people from all walks of life and love having newcomers to our services. Check our Facebook page (Ghetto Shul) for updates on our upcoming events!
GhettoShul.Wordpress.com

POWER TO CHANGE
Power to Change is a Christian club that invites McGill students to engage with the Gospel through Bible Studies, prayer & worship evenings, social events, and more! We also have events & discussion groups for people of all beliefs to explore faith-related questions. Like our Facebook page for more info!
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AM MCGILL
Am McGill is an egalitarian Jewish group on campus, whose mission is to provide an inclusive and safe space for all Jewish students at McGill. We host monthly Shabbat dinners and services, as well as events for Jewish holidays throughout the school year. To learn more or to get in touch with us, please visit our Facebook page, Am McGill, or email us at JewsofAMMcGill@Gmail.com!

HILLEL
Hillel Montreal supports and facilitates student initiatives that promote Jewish values. With an open-door policy and no membership fees, everyone is welcome to contribute to maintaining a vibrant, young Jewish community through grassroots programming and volunteering. Hillel promotes developing leadership skills to equip tomorrow’s leaders today.
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MUSLIM STUDENTS’ ASSOCIATION (MSA)
The Muslim Students’ Association brings together Muslim students to provide resources, essential services, and educational tools needed to enhance their university experience. Through the services and events provided, the MSA aims to facilitate the spiritual and social growth of its members and the larger McGill community, supporting student needs. Our “Discovering Islam” event will take place on March 22nd 2019. Like MSA on Facebook to get updates on this event, as well as all our other initiatives! Email Communications@MSAMcGill.com to join the listserv.
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The Chabad Jewish Student Center at McGill University is one of over 100 on-site Chabad on Campus centers across America. We offer the anchor and embrace of ‘family’ for Jewish students regardless of background, observance or affiliation. Consider our address one you can turn to for any reason at all 24 hours a day.
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We are a group of inter-denominational Christians on campus who have come together because of our shared faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We strive to create a community that encourages dialogue from varying perspectives and exploring what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We welcome you to join us on our weekly bible studies on Mondays and Tuesdays. We also have a discovery group that meets every week to explore big questions about Christianity. Lastly, we have bi-weekly large group gatherings called FUSE! Come as you are to join us for a time of community and fun, we welcome anyone from different faith backgrounds! Follow our facebook page & group and Instagram for more info!
Facebook.com/IVMcGillCF
Instagram: @IVMcGillCF

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The Newman Students’ Society is the Catholic student community of McGill University. Based out of the Newman Centre of McGill University, we seek to make our Christian faith alive through social activities and community life, faith formation and spiritual enrichment, charitable outreach and service, and a strong sense of friendship and fellowship among our members. You can find more information at our website or on our Facebook page.
McGillCatholics.ca
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MCGILL PERMACULTURE CLUB
The McGill Permaculture Club is a club for students who are curious and/or passionate about permaculture. The objective of this club is to increase awareness and understanding of permaculture among the student population, and to get students appreciative of the benefits of permaculture. This club engages with the Macdonald Permaculture Showcase Garden and the Permaculture Food Forest, both at McGill. Club activities include workshops, farm visits, guest speakers, discussion groups, movie screenings, hands-on farm work at the food forests, watching permaculture design course videos, and more!
Facebook.com/McGillPermacultureClub