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RADIX magazine is produced by students for students with support of the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life

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the bottom line: “The truth is: Belonging starts with self-acceptance. Your level
Back in 1965, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and the US-Vietnamese War an obscure Vietnamese Buddhist monk called Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote a letter to Martin Luther King Jr. relating the suffering and the resistance of the Vietnamese people to the suffering and the resistance of African Americans in the mid-20th century Deep South. Fast-forward to 1967 and we find Martin Luther King Jr. nominating Thích Nhất Hạnh for a Nobel Peace Prize. Central to Hạnh’s thought, and to the letter King received is the concept of the Order of Interbeing; an investigation into the intricate and mysterious structures by which we are all bound.

Rewind now to 3rd March 1947 and we find Albert Einstein describing his problematic theory of quantum entanglement to a friend Max Born as “spooky action at a distance” (“spukhafte Fernwirkung”). Just as entangled particles can puncture time and space, acts of togetherness can obliterate divisions of ethnicity, nationality, theology and gender. So though generally our ties of entanglement, be they biological, theological, quantum physical or just plain lingual, burn most for those closest, it’s worth being reminded for some, like Martin Luther King Jr. and Thích Nhất Hạnh, togetherness burns for us all.

Submissions for our fall issue range from the confessional, highlighting the potentiality for playfulness when thinking belonging within the intersection of body, place, and well-being (by Sara Parks), to the fictional, considering the vitality of human connection (by G.H.Y.), to the poetic, considering the basis of belonging as a convergence of the inconsistencies of language and the instabilities of memory (by Victoria Tattinger). We also have Yelu Zhang’s thought-provoking consideration of the dark faces we all have, which we often become blind to and which in time come to form other people’s perceptions of ourselves, and last but not least, a wonderful poem by my fellow co-editor Edward Ross, who also provided us with the beautiful cover image of the stained glass windows of a Montreal metro station.

James is a first-year graduate student in English Literature.

We hope you enjoy!

James Reath
Co-Editor

of belonging, in fact, can never be greater than your level of self-acceptance,
Normally, for the first Radix issue of the school year, I write a cheerful welcome to new students, and I talk about “fresh starts” and “blank slates.” This time, though, I’m attracted to the issue theme of home.

I came to Montreal in 2003 to do a Master’s degree, thinking I would be here for a quick two years, and would then head quickly home to the Maritimes. I lived in a temporary mindset—everything was “just for the time being.” I guess it’s because I’m from the sticks and I don’t generally feel happy in cities where there isn’t enough visible sky. And I sure don’t feel quite right being more than half an hour from getting an eyeball full of the Atlantic Ocean.

I felt a bit of cultural discomfort too, coming from Canada’s only officially bilingual province (New Brunswick), where the relationship between French and English is very different from Quebec – much friendlier and more laid-back, like most things are in the Maritimes. I didn’t like the fast pace at which people talked and lived, the surprising lack of eye-contact on the street, and the way people seemed comfortable walking past homeless folk without handing over half their student loan in panic.

I missed original poutine, which has nothing to do with French fries, garlic fingers with donair sauce, fricot, Pizza Delight, Halifax donairs, fresh seafood, especially fried clams, summer savory, the skit-based silly-voice humour, the chats with strangers in the line at the grocery store, the fact that no-one needs to specify that a party means you bring your musical instruments, and the dropping of polite words like “please” and “thank-you” because they feel like a waste of energy when the goodwill is so obvious. I missed the object-at-rest-tends-to-stay-at-rest mental outlook. I missed that optimal tree-to-human ratio. I missed going to Tim Horton’s in the afternoon to pretend to do a crossword puzzle while I was instead eavesdropping on the accent and vocabulary of retired Acadian men, one of my favourite soundscapes on earth. “Mwa, j’ai right l’envie des fried clam pour lunch!” I didn’t open my heart to Montreal, because I was just doing my time.

because believing that you’re enough is what gives you the courage to be
However, things don’t always go as expected, and I somehow stayed on to do my PhD at McGill, as luck would have it, in the only Faculty that sticks to the Harvard ten-year model (except, without the funding). This past year, it hit me that my “temporary” time in Montreal had lasted over a decade! Yes, I hoped to return to the Maritimes one day, but… wasn’t it time to start living in the present?

I wasn’t sure how to go about it, but I started by moving into an apartment with a backyard, where I proceeded to dig around in the dirt at a brisk pace on a daily basis, ripping out the gravel to replace it with grass and mint and flowers. There is also a tree in my backyard, which I am not ashamed to say I sometimes hug if I need a forest fix! (Hey. Don’t knock it ‘til you’ve tried it.)

I also began the practice of making mental lists that start with “I’m so grateful that…” or “I love that…” and finished them off with something that is only possible in Montreal. “I love the Giant Orange Julep.” “I love the walk up Mount Royal.” “I love being able to walk to bars” (instead of the 45-minute drive it would be from my home in New Brunswick!) “I’m so grateful that I can eat almost any sort of food in this city.” “I’m so grateful I met this friend.” “I’m so grateful I get to work in a joyful, multi-faith environment.”

authentic, vulnerable and imperfect. “~Berne Brown • “In thinking about
The single biggest change though—the magic spell that cured me—was my tattoo. That wasn't my intention; I had decided that when I finished my dissertation I would celebrate by getting my first tattoo. I got the New Brunswick area code, 506. Simple, a bit of an inside joke that other New Brunswickers would notice, and something that would mark me as a Maritimer wherever I went.

Lo and behold, that 55$ bought me more than I bargained for. Since the moment I emerged, branded, I haven’t felt homesick in Montreal! Yes, I love the East Coast and its rugged scenery and goofy, down-to-earth, too-familiar-for-some people ways. But all of that is inside me wherever I go. Now, I am open to Montreal, and respectful that there are Montrealais/es who have all the same homesick feelings as I do when they leave this city, with its bagel wars, its cops in pyjamas, its boisterous culture, its Habs, its international flavour, its cuisine. I am open to Montreal.

If you’re homesick in Montreal too, though I can’t promise that getting a tattoo will work for you, I do invite you to stop by MORSL and chat! We are open from 10 to 4, Mondays through Fridays. We have a big team of chaplains from all different world faiths, always up for an appointment. The Peer Support Centre is here Tuesdays from 5pm to 7pm for non-judgemental listening, and they’d love to talk about what you miss from home, and brainstorm strategies for feeling good. We keep tea, hot chocolate, and apples on hand, and we have a meditation room and a lounge with plants and soft lighting. Also, more often than not – there’s a CD of the ocean playing in the background. I like to think it’s the Atlantic Ocean, but you’re welcome to think of it as whichever body of water you like. Come make yourself at home!

_Sara is a crazy cat lady, the Director of MORSL, and a PhD Candidate studying women in Greco-Roman Judaism and early Christianity, in that order._
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About faith from doctrinal debates to the larger question of how it might inspire...
Edward Ross is co-editor of Radix Magazine, and is also a U2 Religious Studies and Classics student from Cornwall, Ontario.

us to strengthen the bonds of belonging that redeem us from our solitude,
Just like a puzzle,
we all have a place.
Each one of us different."Not once the same face.

We long to fit in
with the ones made for us,
but finding that spot
can be quite a fuss.

Sometimes it’s easy,
like corners and edges.
Sometimes it’s harder
to fit all those wedges.

We toss and we toil
to close in our gap.
To fill in our sides
with one little snap.

It may be so hard,
you feel you are lost,
but in a wrong box
you may have been tossed.

“You’ll never belong”
is a thing you will say,
but right down the street
could be your place to stay.

Keep testing and fitting,
is my advice for you.
Don’t give up quite yet.
You may find a clue.

Though it’s rough,
and is quite a toil.
Just when you’re snug,
I know you will smile.

helping us to construct together a gracious and generous social order.” ~Jonathan
It wasn’t even a good-looking pie. Probably made weeks ago, it was wrapped in wrinkled, slightly opaque film, with “5.99$$” scribbled under a scratched-out original price. It was completely unremarkable, and Heather wouldn’t have noticed it if she wasn’t already looking down. She tended to do that nowadays and not just when at the supermarket at nine on a Saturday, although that didn’t help. She thought that if she avoided eye contact, kept her head down, she could walk around unnoticed and unjudged. Of course, she still felt the other shoppers were scrutinizing her and she couldn’t wait to head back to her dorm room.

But now she had seen the pie. Now she was stricken with a sense of fear and waves of anxiety rose up in her mind, dragging doubt and panic up her body. She didn’t even consider continuing her shopping. She simply set down her basket and rushed out of the supermarket and into the dark, windy street. She was certain the other shoppers noticed how she made sure to touch the fruit counter four times as she left the store.

Despite her speed, fueled by panic and cold, it seemed to take forever for her to get back “home.” Her roommate was gone, for which she was thankful. She didn’t want to come across as a crazy person.

In her room, she pulled out a large soaked book and did her best to pry the pages open. The book, a cookbook of allegedly “easy and delicious meals,” had had the misfortune of having been left outside during a thunderstorm a few days ago, along with her backpack and the notes she had meticulously taken for her first week of classes.

But at the moment, only the book was important to her. She finally worked her way through the ruined pages of the book to page 190, which featured a chocolate cake recipe that was declared, in cheery pink font, to be the “best in the hemisphere.” She didn’t care about that, but picked up a small index card that she had placed in the cookbook weeks ago, an index card that she had forgotten about until now.

Her breathing became ragged and her vision blurry as she saw the index card had being ruined, the text illegible.
She was awoken by the blaring of her alarm clock, a piercing sound that was the auditory equivalent of dunking your head in cold water. She dragged herself across the room and turned it off. Putting the alarm clock in the corner was inconvenient, but it kept her from touching it too often. In her mind, it was one of many little reminders of how different she was.

She always knew it would be difficult for someone like her to attend university so far away. Even back home people didn’t quite understand her. They simply couldn’t figure out why it was so difficult for her to face new situations or why touching things four times was better than touching them once or why objects had to be placed in a specific order to make them feel “right.” But here it was worse. She had no one to turn to. She felt adrift in a river of anxiety and fear, holding on to a tiny piece of driftwood. At any moment she knew she would be submerged and drowned.

She did what she had done every morning since she had remembered the index card. She would walk around the city dressed in the dull light of dawn and try to convince herself that she could survive the rest of the day.

It was as she wandered around the empty streets that she encountered an aroma that gave her a fleeting sense of hope. At first she thought it might be her imagination, but soon realized it was real. It was the aroma of freshly baked goods. She rushed into the bakery and breathlessly ordered a slice of apple pie, reaching out a crumpled bill as if it was the homage of a desperate supplicant.

She sat down, making sure to touch the chair four times. And then another four times because the first four hadn’t felt quite “right.” Her hand trembling, she scooped up a piece of the warm, inviting pie and took a determined bite. It did not feel “right.”

So a new routine developed. Instead of wandering the city in the mornings to psych herself up for the rest of the day, she would wander around the city looking for bakeries, searching for a specific apple pie. One that would get rid of the nagging feeling in her mind. A pie that tasted just “right.” When she could not find one, she became more desperate. She realized that she would have to take a more hands-on approach.

She had a vague recollection of what had been on the index card. So she began to bake pie after pie after pie after pie. She tried them all, but they were never “right” enough. Every time she pulled a pie out of the oven she had a glimmer of hope, but it was always quickly dashed, her piece of driftwood bobbing back under water.

*longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone.*
Her quest was taking more and more of her time, which is why her roommate found her at 1:00 am that day, her hands white from the flour, a slice of pie before her and an anguished look on her face.

“What the hell are you doing?” her roommate asked.

Heather could feel the judgment and criticism in her voice.

“Nothing,” she replied weakly, as the panic and anxiety flooded her body.

“Well you’re definitely doing something,” her roommate accused. “Your obsessive baking has been keeping me awake for days.”

“It’s nothing,” Heather replied once more. The panic was so overwhelming she felt she would pass out.

And then, as she looked down at her hands, at how the flour had mixed with her sweat to form a disgusting paste, something snapped. It was as if all the effort she put into seeming normal finally gave way. The driftwood slipped from her bloody hands and she sank in the torrential waters.

“It’s not nothing,” she finally admitted. “It’s not nothing. It’s something. It’s something stupid and pathetic, but it’s something. I had this recipe and it was important to me. It was my grandmother’s and it was for the best apple pie I’ve ever had. I told you it was stupid, but this pie always calmed me down, made things easier.”

As she said this, the words rushing out of her at tremendous speed, her hands started digging into the dough that was meant for the next pie in the long succession of attempts.

“And I lost it, this recipe. So I’ve been trying to get it back, so my head will feel ‘right’ again. I’ve been to one bakery after another, every single day, but they were all wrong. So, I started baking my own. But I bake and I bake. And I bake and I bake. And every time I do I get more and more exhausted. But I have to keep baking. Because even though I really want to stop, to be normal, I just can’t fucking do it!”

With that she tossed the dough, bowl and all, to the ground, where it shattered. And she ran to her room, keeping her head down so she wouldn’t see her roommate’s judging eyes. She collapsed on her bed and, exhausted, drifted into sleep. She awoke to find her roommate looking over her. Heather didn’t know how long she had slept, but it felt like mere moments. Her sense of panic had not

You belong.” ~ F. Scott Fitzgerald • “Perhaps home is not a place but simply an
“Open it,” she said, her voice no longer angry or critical.

Heather opened the box, which she saw was filled with snow globes. “My father used to bring me one when he went on business trips,” her roommate explained. “He’s gone now. From time to time, I’ll be walking down the street and see a snow globe and I just have to buy it and add it to this box.” Heather felt a sense of relief come over her. The snow globes glowed calm. Her hands grabbed on to the driftwood once more.

“There are 45 so far,” Her roommate said. “It’s not as much as 74, but still….” “What’s 74?” Heather asked, still entranced by the glittering objects.

“That’s how many bakeries are in the area. I figure if we hit one every other day, we can get through quite a lot before finals. We all have our issues, but we don’t have to deal with them alone. Oh, and we need to buy some shortening. You were using margarine for your pies. Rookie mistake.”

Heather looked at her, her eyes welling with tears, but her mind free from the panic and anxiety she had felt just moments ago.

Her roommate reached out her hand and Heather grasped it eagerly.

“Come on,” her roommate said, “let’s clean up the kitchen. My name’s Michelle, by the way.”

They headed to the kitchen. Heather felt an impulse to touch the doorway four times, but she managed to fight it.

“Do you know that five of the bakeries have something they call a ‘poutine pie’?” Michelle asked.

“That sounds disgusting,” Heather replied.

“Totally,” Michelle said. “I can’t wait to try it.”

“Me neither,” Heather agreed.

GYH hails from Montreal and is currently pursuing a Diploma in Environment as a supplement to his Bachelor in Biology.

irrevocable condition.” ~James Baldwin • “Some of us aren’t meant to belong.
the language that belongs

Victoria Taittinger

Synthetic, clean cold clinical linoleum,
The solemn wheels in tandem turn.

Down the corridor they go and know;
All come in but not go.

Ponytailed and blue coated they push,
Rattle, tattle the cart goes,
Because down the corridor they go.

Sometimes you smile. Then sometimes you don’t.
For they know that they don’t belong.

Death and mourning are adjourning.
Death, death she thinks…but wait!

The glimmers, the blips…
The shrieks, the moaning.
Stillness to commotion. Quiet, they wait.

For the dead or for the living?
How can she belong. No waiting, here there is no knowing.

Remember?
One week she was there.
She lay in bed, right there.
Fernande and her Raymond.

The one commotion’s companion, the pains of memory.
Loss…all lost. 5 years she did not know. Gone and Gone.
Tick’o de clock, 15 tops, her tongue clicks back -
Again and again, down the fog of memory lane she goes.

Her eternal lover. The 40 years he knows. Came and Remain.
Belong young love of the age, belong for you cannot gage that go it may.

Encephalitis, Neurosis, Dystonias.
In this iss she cannot be…not see…

Some of us have to turn the world upside down and shake the hell out of it until
For if you don’t belong you cannot be? 
Yet be you must, in words you can.

You see, the wheels once turned into a room. 
Lone room of one. Lively and well, in they went. 
Neck braced, immobile, she lay.

“No French, no English” the lone woman said.
She looked, I saw. Belong I thought, insist.

Resist she did not, Farsi it was. 
Iran I did not see. Swipe of my screen.

At Salam, a smile. To Haleh shoma chetor ast? 
A nod, a tear, hope in a glim.

Smiles returned, a life’s battle message passed, good luck my friend. 
Inch’Allah you replied, Inch’Allah you spoke. 
I do not know of any God. I do not know where you begone.

But there, on the clean cold clinical linoleum, we spoke and we belonged.

Language tied and cast its net. For if there is one in who I know, albeit distrust be such. 
Language divine is such. For sometimes, if the language we all speak we hear, then we can be.

Language in Babel did not disperse. For two hearts know the Language that belongs.

Victoria Taittinger is a U2 franco-chilean Londoner with a love for poetry and cooking. Currently studying Political Science and English Literature.

“But there, on the clean cold clinical linoleum, we spoke and we belonged.”

we make our own place in it.” ~Elizabeth Lowell • “I been with strangers all day
Yelu Zhang

We all wear masks, be that for a few minutes, a couple of hours, several consecutive days…weeks….months.

We learn how to have a smile plastered on our face all of the time. We learn how to dress, how to impress, how to act, and how to say the right things in the right situations.

The mask creates a perfect person, someone who is smart but not arrogant, caring yet rational, approachable yet independent, motivated and inspirational, dedicated and responsible, a leader and a team player.

It makes us likeable. It makes us fit in. We get to achieve new goals, and reach heights that we never ever imagined to reach. We can win people’s hearts, we can get attention, we can be acknowledged. Most of all, it makes us feel like we belonged- to something, somewhere, with someone.

Yet in the process, our hearts get slowly depleted, as if there were pairs of hands reaching into our chest and slowly digging pieces out of it. Of course it doesn’t hurt. Of course it doesn’t matter how we feel. Of course not—at least we tried to convince ourselves.

We start wondering if anyone cares about who we really are. We start wondering if all of the other people around us have a mask on as well, and that nothing is real. Why are we even doing what we are doing, when our mask does it much better than us? Why should we even bother taking the mask off, when people like us better with the mask on? We become afraid to take the mask off, even in front of our best friends and our family. We become fearful at the thought of not belonging.

We wear the mask for so long, to a point that we forget we even put it on in the first place. The mask has taken over, and we become empty puppets, servants to society. Something that was originally used as protection has become our own personal jail cell. Yet we still lie to ourselves that it’s okay. “It’s okay,” we told ourselves, because we belonged.

We created a lie, we lived in a lie, and we lived in the lie until the lie became our life. The lie becomes the truth and our mask becomes who we are. We forget the lie—what lie?

and they treated me like family. I come in here to family and you treat me like a
The truth is, we didn’t belong.

And now we know, we can’t just live a lie, we have to live a life too.

And then we start feeling again—the sadness, the pain, the despair—of how we are getting further and further away from what we wanted, and away from who we are in the first place. The frustration at how what we intended and dreamed of ended up becoming the nightmare that haunted us.

The truth is, we didn’t belong.

And now we know, we can’t just live a lie, we have to live a life too.

*~ August Wilson • “I wonder whether there is such a thing as a sense

stranger.” ~ August Wilson • “I wonder whether there is such a thing as a sense
The Rabbit Hole Café
Food for Thought’s vegan collective, The Rabbit Hole, cooks up vegan lunches every Friday at 1:00 p.m. Drop by, pay a toonie, enjoy the company and eat up! All proceeds go towards maintaining this Yellow Door program (3625 Aylmer) along with their Food For Thought student food bank, sponsored by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

Mid-Week Quaker Meetings
During the academic year, the Montreal Mid-Week Quaker Meeting meets every Wednesday, 17:30-18:30, at McGill’s Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street in the Ryan Library (2nd floor, end of the hall). For the rest of the year (summer and winter breaks and exam periods), keep an eye on our Facebook group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/mtlmidweek/) as the location may change from week to week.

McGill Student Parents’ Network
The MSPN provides a support network for McGill students who are parents. We have grown! No longer based in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, we are now housed with PGSS. We still offer regular “Study Saturdays” at Thomson House, where parents can study while the kids enjoy free programming, and more. Interested families can contact the MSPN at mcgillspn@gmail.com.

Newman Centre
Newman Catholic Centre, 3484 Peel Street, is a home away from home for Catholic Students. Visit www.newmancentre.org to find out more about this centre for Catholic spiritual, social, and intellectual life on campus!

The McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)
MORSL, a proud member of McGill Student Services, is located in the Brown Building, suite 2100. Please feel free to stop by our Meditation/Prayer Room any weekday from 10:00am to 4:00pm! You’ll find a full-spectrum light therapy lamp, CD’s for guided relaxation, a serene space with floor pillows and meditation stools, and some suggestions on how to meditate in different traditions. Take time for some serenity and zenity! Stay connected with MORSL on Twitter @SpiritualMcGill or like us on Facebook: fb.com/morsl

Radix is looking for Volunteers.
Like what you see? Believe in student creativity, and inter-faith collaboration? Help us do it better! We can always use help in marketing, web-development, research, distribution, writing, layout, and much more! Email us to join the community. radix@mail.mcgill.ca

of individuality. Is it all a facade, covering a deep need to belong? Are we simply
Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Orthodox Christian Students
Join our twice-monthly student meeting, Orthodox Christian Fellowship!
We also have monastery visits, picnics, and movie nights. Contact McGill’s Orthodox chaplain, Father Ihor for details: ikutash@gmail.com.

Winter Coats Needed!
Donations of clean winter coats in good condition are desperately needed for the Winter Coat Project. Smaller donations can be dropped off at MORSL (Brown Suite 2100) Mon-Fri 10am-4pm and large bags of donations can be dropped off at the Newman Centre, 3484 Peel Street, 10am-2pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Please mark all bags clearly as “Winter Coat Project” and drop them in the Newman lobby via the lower entrance.

Mondays at MORSL
The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life hosts “Mondays at MORSL” – a variety of free Monday-night events, including art therapy, yoga, zen meditation, Quaker meditation, Om meditation, talks on World Religions, Orthodox icon-writing workshop, movie nights, and more! Like us on facebook at fb.com/morsl to find out more or email morsl@mcgill.ca.

The Jewish community at McGill
Visit www.hillel.ca, www.chabad-mcgill.com, and ghettoshul.com for information on shabbat meals, holiday celebrations, educational programming, and fun social activities!

My Neighbour’s Faith Series
This series of monthly visits to Montreal’s places of worship provides a guided experience with various world religions being practiced in Montreal. Email morsl@mcgill.ca to join the mailing list.

Local Gnostic Community Meetings
The Holy Grail Narthex is a study group of the Apostolic Johannite Church. We gather for fellowship, study, discussion, ritual, and generally uplifting times. Please feel free to get in touch with our lay leader, Jonathan Stewart, at holy-grail@johannite.org or at 514-437-2948 for further information, to get details on upcoming meetings, or if you just want to chat.

Weekly Zen meditation
Every Friday morning at 8:15am, McGill Zen Buddhist chaplain, Myokyo Zengetsu, offers guided Zen practice in the Birks chapel (3520 University Street, 2nd floor). Free of charge. Must arrive early or on time in order to join!

pack animals desperately trying to pretend we are not?” ~Rabih Alameddine
WHAT IS THE PEER SUPPORT CENTRE?

The Peer Support Centre is a service that offers free, drop-in, confidential and non-judgemental support and resource referral to all members of the McGill community.

WHO ARE WE?

We're a student-run organization of volunteers trained to listen and offer support for any issue. Stop by to chat one-on-one with a peer supporter about anything on your mind.

Students often face a wide variety of challenges. You don't have to go through it alone. If you need help but aren't sure where to turn, we're happy to connect you with other McGill resources.

Find us at

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/PEERSUPPORTMCGILL

for hours, locations & more!