

# Small Sounds in Familiar Places

## A Poetic-Visual Inquiry on the Gravity and Synchrony of Love in Pandemic Times

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Article abstract

In this article, the movement between the gravity and synchrony of love in pandemic times as revealed through the creative practices of poetry and cellphone photography is addressed. Informed by literature on slow scholarship published prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author explores the ways in which listening to and caring for the small sounds of a familiar place—here a rural backyard—can act as a generative theoretical space to reconsider the meaning of love and its implications for academic work. The principal questions include: how can the practice of writing poems and taking photographs foster the intentionality of slow time? How can immersing oneself in this time provide insight into perhaps worn-out conceptualizations of what is considered precious? What implications, if any, can these insights have for understandings of love and the need for slow scholarship post-pandemic?

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## SMALL SOUNDS IN FAMILIAR PLACES: A POETIC-VISUAL INQUIRY ON THE GRAVITY AND SYNCHRONY OF LOVE IN PANDEMIC TIMES

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**Abstract:** In this article, the movement between the gravity and synchrony of love in pandemic times as revealed through the creative practices of poetry and cellphone photography is addressed. Informed by literature on slow scholarship published prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author explores the ways in which listening to and caring for the small sounds of a familiar place—here a rural backyard—can act as a generative theoretical space to reconsider the meaning of love and its implications for academic work. The principal questions include: how can the practice of writing poems and taking photographs foster the intentionality of slow time? How can immersing oneself in this time provide insight into perhaps worn-out conceptualizations of what is considered precious? What implications, if any, can these insights have for understandings of love and the need for slow scholarship post-pandemic?

**Keywords:** sound; place; love; slow scholarship; poetry; cellphone photography

## COVID-19 Preamble: Personal Experiences of the Pandemic

### Rhymes In Between (May 9, 2021)

I live in this in-between,  
a narrow stretch of sand.

From this point, I see  
the wind re-shape the land.

In-between is all I have,  
a poem for the dark.  
From this point, I can hear  
voices brewing, clear and stark.

I cannot move the constellations  
brightening the evening sky.  
I know, even as I breathe,  
the sea may break these ties.

Pulled into a kind of dream,  
I struggle to meet the crest.  
Waves that have battered,  
the worries in my chest.

Rhymes are poor reflections,  
but they sweep the structures bare.  
To reveal a trembling heart of sorts,  
A spark against despair.

The night, the night is growing,  
the wind and swells submerge.  
And I dig my feet into the sand,  
Awaiting a vicious surge.

My body filled with silence,  
Little to give relief.  
These anxious thoughts,  
A world away, and below,  
sounds of a city street.

## Introduction: What moves you?

*The house where I grew up is what my family affectionately calls ‘a big square box.’ At the centre of the conventionally square structure stands a black front door with decorative—circa 1980—white, wooden trim. On either side of the front door are two sets of large windows. A similar window configuration can be found on the second floor with the slight deviation of a third window above the front door. The roof is black, and a tall, red-brick chimney rises on one side. My mother insists that the siding on the house is a pale grey. She recounts how she intentionally chose the siding for its colour. No one else can see the pale grey siding. It has always just looked off-white to me.*  
 Imagining Home, May 2022

In her a/r/tographic exploration of walking and writing as contemplative inquiry, Kristen Blinne (2018) asks: “I want to know ... What moves you?” (p. 80). Reflecting on this question after two years of living in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am not sure I can remember how I would have answered prior to March 2020. Now, as I write and listen to news updates on vaccine mandate protests (CBC, 2022a) and the outbreak of violent conflict (CBC, 2022b), the answer is visceral, crystallizing in the tension between my shoulder blades (Li, 2021): love and the sounds of familiar places.

In this article, I explore the relationship between poetry, cellphone photography, and the sounds of a rural backyard. More specifically, I reflect on the ways listening to the sounds of a particular place can become a catalyst for creative practice, namely writing poetry (Wu, 2021) and taking photographs (Rajabali, 2020). This practice emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning in October 2020, when lockdowns and shifting public health measures permitted contained outdoor visits (Public Health Ontario, 2021), I began to document what Seán Street (2019) calls the “aural minutiae” (p. 18) of a familiar place: my parents’ backyard—a two-acre plot in a small, rural village in Eastern Ontario, populated by grass, trees, wild strawberries, flower and vegetable beds. According to Street, aural minutiae are the small sounds that inhabit the places that shape our daily lives: the sounds of a city street, the rustling of fall leaves, the crunching of footsteps on early morning frost, the whistle of a boiling kettle. Speaking of the significance of such “tiny sounds” (p. 3), he writes:

... sound is within us. Rhythm, timbre and volume are part of our being, and because we are creatures of call and response—two-way wireless communication systems—together they form our most intimate means of connection with the world around us. They are fundamental characteristics of life. (2019, pp. 21–22)

While Street (2017, 2018) argues that these sounds are part of explorations of what it means to be human in different contexts, he notes that finding the time to listen

to them can be a challenge (2019). Sonically, our individual and collective lives can be loud and “cluttered” (p. 14), making it difficult to slow down and listen attentively. “Yet even when a room is full and noisy,” Street reminds his readers, “the sound is still there; listening by hearing—like seeing by looking—can be a learnt skill, the sweet art of noticing things as the circumstances dance around us” (p. 4). Drawing on these ideas, the questions arise: how does one learn to slow down and listen? How do creative practices such as poetry and photography create space to do so in the shifting and uncertain circumstances of a global pandemic (Markham et al., 2021; Gammel & Wang, 2022)?

In a short editorial for *NJ: Australia Drama Journal*, Susan Davis and Joanne O’Mara (2021) provide potential answers. They suggest that creative practices can help individuals and communities tap into memories and imagination as well as remind them of what they love. Describing their own art-making during the pandemic, they comment, “Our memory worlds have become increasingly precious, sources of solace and joy, reconnecting us with past loves and inspirations” (p. 1). For Davis and O’Mara, past loves and inspirations include an immersive search for wildflowers to paint and the crafting of a biker’s jacket with embroidered patches of “all the places [Joanne] has visited on the ‘5 km tour’” of her local area around Melbourne, Australia (pp. 1–2). Although confined to particular places, these scholar-practitioners turned to art, imagination, and memory to “travel back and forth across worlds, space and time” (p. 1). As they note, the particular conditions of the pandemic pulled their attention to the possibilities that their “local worlds and areas” provided catalysts for interconnecting art, love, and moments of inspiration (p. 1).

*A storm passed through Eastern Ontario over the weekend. You sent me pictures of the trees that had fallen. I called and we talked about the loss of beloved trees and how the old Ash tree may need to come down. We, your children, pushed you to inoculate the Ash against the invasive beetles plaguing the Ash trees in our region. As loving parents, you conceded while, periodically, reminding us of the cost. I used to sit under the Ash and imagine I was a Druid Princess. Where will I sit now?*  
Imagining Home, May 2022

Of particular significance, Davis and O’Mara (2021) affirm that the relationship between creating, longing, and loving through art-making helped them to make sense of their pandemic experiences. They explain:

The works we create, the processes we engage in, through drama, through creative work, through love—these are things that are still important. We are passing through a realm of becoming that feels as if it will never end, but we can use the tools we have, the memories and imaginings to make something of it,

creating the models and markers of meaning making of today, and for tomorrow.  
(p. 5)

Although they do not explicitly define what they mean by love, Davis' and O'Mara's (2021) ruminations bring to mind the "space of possibility" (p. 1) generated through creative practices, a space where feelings, memories and imaginings can constructively intermingle. Mark Burrows (2021) sees this intermingling as pointing to a profound sense of interconnectedness in pandemic times, of our belonging to each other. He comments: "In the midst of this pandemic, we have found ourselves face-to-face—often quite literally—with a sense of the interconnectedness we share with each other on the physical level" (p. 132). We are reminded, as Burrows asserts, that through our very breathing, "my exhalation might well become part of your next exhalation, if we are close to each other—hence the call for 'physical distancing' and mask-wearing in public spaces" (p. 132).

To work through the implications of this interconnectedness, Burrows turns to the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, in particular the works titled, *The Duino Elegies* (2021, pp. 136–145). By observing the dialectics of suffering and beauty in everyday life (pp. 142–144), he suggests that the poetry of Rilke witnesses the ways in which "we belong to all things, and they to us and how we—together with something as inconsequential as the laurel—are somehow part of the 'all' of it, 'because being-here matters so much, and because it seems/to us that everything needs this hereness'—including us" (Rilke as cited in Burrows, 2021, p. 138). He goes on to argue that Rilke's focus on the hereness, or small details and moments, is an invitation to take notice of the intimacy and presence of those people and things that lovingly animate our lives. Love, Burrows implies, is "a call to an intimacy with the 'hereness'—and 'witness' of our lives" (p. 140).

This understanding of belonging to each other in the hereness and witness of life has also been brought to bear on the importance of slowing down and attending to immediate needs emerging from within the COVID-19 pandemic. Tanya Behrisch (2021), for example, explores these possibilities through the loving act of cooking for her parents and a community elder. More specifically, she describes how cooking enables her to navigate the anxiety provoked over the consequences of COVID-19 on her loved ones as well as an inability to keep up with the relentless neoliberal values of productivity and performativity. Behrisch explains:

What's Slow? Slow resists Fast time, instrumentalism, and neoliberal values, like outputs and efficiency and turns toward wise old practices grounded in the embodied experiences of the 'here' and 'now.' Slow leaves room for self-doubt, ambiguity, even futility. Slow is rebellion and love. (pp. 667–668)

**Figure 1.**

*Personal photo by author.*



The poems and photographs presented here are framed by these conceptualizations of love and rebellion as a slow time in which, as scholars, we can attend to the hereness and withness of life shaped by COVID-19. Stated differently, such love and rebellion involves working through my own COVID-induced anxieties around how to be present and care in my roles as a colleague, daughter, friend, partner, and professor. As Behrisch argues, “Our jobs [as academics] do not preclude us from engaging in the most intimate aspects of care we can offer another” (2021, p. 673).

**The Wisdom of Hollows** (June 11, 2021)

I run circles around the tree,  
 hoping the roots will rise,  
 something to hold all this in place.  
 Otherwise, I fear the wind will take me.  
 And I will feel my own hollowness: acutely.

They say: "Wisdom comes with age."

I am still waiting to feel  
 the weight of such statements.  
 So, I wear heavy linen dresses,  
 hoping the sway of the fabric  
 will convince the roots  
 to  
 rise  
 up.

While the act of taking photographs is new, writing poetry is a wise old practice that I had abandoned for many years (Levesque, 2001). This abandoned practice re-emerged unexpectedly during the pandemic, and frequently focused on the intermingling of memory, imagination, and a longing to create and love differently in what felt like catastrophic times (Faulkner, 2020, 2021; Lahman et al., 2021; Pelias, 2021). In this regard, the poems and photographs examined can be considered examples of efforts to generate spaces of possibility, even if fleetingly, by attending to the small sounds of my parents' backyard: the caw of crows during their early morning chats, the branches of trees laden with ice after a storm, and the constant hum of the pool pump at the height of summer.

Leveraging Behrisch's (2021) articulation of slow time as an act of love and rebellion, I ask: how can the practice of writing poems and taking photographs foster the intentionality of slow time? How can immersing oneself in this time through creative practices provide insight into perhaps worn-out conceptualizations of what can be considered precious? What implications, if any, can these insights have for understandings of love post-pandemic?

With these questions in mind, this article is divided into three sections. In the first section, I address the use of poetry and photography to make sense of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, connections are made to calls to engage with slow scholarship. In the second section, I present original poems and photographs from October 2020 to February 2022. These poems and photographs will be discussed in light of ideas on sound articulated by Street (2020) in his most recent book, *The Sound of a Room: Memory and the Auditory Presence of Place*. In the final section I explore



implications emerging from this poetic-visual inquiry on the need to reconsider love and notions of what is/will be precious post-pandemic. In the conclusion I present a final poem and photograph written in response to the ideas reflected on in previous sections of the article.

### The Slow Time of Creative Practice

The call for academics to slow down and practice slow scholarship is not new (Black, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015). In a chapter titled, “Responding to Longings for Slow Scholarship,” Alison Black (2018) remarks that such scholarship involves, “Engaging mindfully in small everyday experiences, and relationships, being fully present in precious moments of time” (p. 26). She pinpoints writing, including poetry, as a primary practice through which to seek this mindful engagement and presence.

#### Pollen (May 16, 2021)

I watch the afternoon sun slant,  
pollen scattering through its light.

There is a certain fatigue in  
our conversations,  
as though the pollen pulls  
lazily at our words.

As the pollen gathers around us,  
I wonder where this life will fall.  
Unfortunately, in this moment,  
I am more a tired soul  
than a bright spring garden.

For Black (2018), writing is conceived not only as a “way to think” (p. 26) about “scholarly *being/becoming* within and beyond the academy” (p. 23). It is also an immersive process that relates to one’s experience of “the present moment” (p. 26). In this understanding, writing is portrayed as a slow, reflexive, and intimate practice with the capacity of directing scholars toward “ways of being *differently* though our [written/poetic] unveiling” (p. 27).

In a collective project, Black and her colleagues, Catherine Manathunga and Shelley Davidow (Manathunga et al., 2020), explore these ideas further. Describing the incorporation of beach walking, poetry, and cellphone photography into their research, they stress that one of the principal objectives of their “collaborative walking/working/writing project” (p. 11) is to participate in “creative and critical thinking, feeling, and writing” (p. 8). As with Black’s (2018) earlier chapter, the authors creatively represent the meanderings and wanderings that contributed to their collective efforts to walk, read,

and write “towards a more valuable academic life” (Manathunga et al., 2020, p. 16). Of particular relevance are the authors’ reflections on beaches as key sites of their efforts to push back against the relentless machine of the neoliberal academy. Walking/working/writing at local beaches became, in other words, an avenue through which to embrace, document, and share their “visceral experiences” of slowing down together (p. 12). “We have experienced walking research,” they write, “as a sensory and life-giving inquiry of motion, listening, story, solitude and friendship” (p. 12). Poetry and photography are included in the article as artefacts, providing a glimpse into this sensory, collective, and life-affirming inquiry.

Brooke Anne Hofsess (2020) makes similar connections to her own creative practices and the need for slow time. She notes, “Drawing the same marks repeatedly and slowly attuned me towards spiritual and embodied wisdom related to the daily repetition of my experiences with mothering” (p. 280). She goes on to examine her use of the mantra “*milk, heat, time* [emphasis added]” (p. 283, 290) to “make sense” of “the fullness of my complicated existence as a mother, artist, teacher, and researcher” (p. 300). Contextualized by Jasmine Ulmer’s (2017) concept of “slow ontology” (p. 283), Hofsess elaborates on how the inter-relationship of this mantra and her art practice—lumens infused with mother’s milk, for example—acted as a way to “slow my questions, and my capacity to listen, down” (p. 283). As with Manathunga et al. (2020), one of Hofsess’ aims was to “open spaces for knowing differently” (p. 280).

While these examples pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers across disciplines and methods have engaged with creative practices, including poetry and photography, to address, document, and/or grapple with the impacts of the pandemic on their personal and professional lives. In her poetic inquiry titled “Buttered Nostalgia: Feeding My Parents During #COVID-19,” Sandra Faulkner (2021) questions the entanglement of the personal, familial, and professional that many found themselves living during the pandemic. Resonating with Hofsess’ (2020) recognition of her own complicated existences, Faulkner uses a mix of “poetry, menus, recipes and images” (p. 1878) to narrate the anxieties, tensions, complex family relationships, and acts of care experienced during the early days of the pandemic. She understands poetry as “the language of emotion,” a tool that can leverage self-reflexivity and narrative to demonstrate “the emotional labor of caring” (p. 1898). As Faulkner underscores throughout her article, this emotional labor is not simply the purview of individuals and/or single families but also a calling into question of established “private-public binaries” and often overlapping realities between our personal and professional lives as academics (p. 1898).

These overlaps are also attended to by Amy Scott Metcalfe (2021) in a photo essay documenting the first three semesters of the pandemic at her Canadian university campus. Speaking of some of the unforeseen impacts on her own professional life, she

writes, “The inability to enter or use my campus office was unexpectedly wrenching. I longed for a quiet space to hear myself think again” (p. 8). At times, she describes her photographs of an empty campus as “both desperate and cathartic” (p. 8), reflecting a mix of feelings: gratitude for continuing to have a job, recognition of the “elite academic privileges” this job provides (p. 11), as well as the destabilization that blurred work/life boundaries for faculty and students in the transition to online teaching.

Metcalfe’s (2021) final sentences, set against her analysis and photographs of empty places, brings into sharp relief the pressures experienced as universities sought business as usual in the shifting and uncertain dance of a global pandemic. She remarks, “Recreational facilities are re-opening, and a mandatory mask-mandate policy is in place for indoor campus spaces. Graduations and other events will be held online, business as unusual” (p. 17). As a professor myself, I do not remember the last time my own small Canadian university campus really felt like business as usual. Perhaps I turned to poetry and cellphone photography to find an anchor amidst my own shifting and uncertain circumstances and the emptiness reflected in the glass doors leading to my department on campus. Contextualized by Metcalfe’s writing, in the next section I present further poems and photographs that emerged from my need to immerse myself in the slow time of creative practices, practices that rebelled against ideas of business as usual during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Loving Sounds in Familiar Places**

In his book *The Sound of a Room: Memory and the Auditory Presence of Place*, Street (2020) writes, “Every person on the planet *is* their own room, and carries their own sonic space with them throughout their lives, subjectively interpreting the physical rooms of the world through which that particular life takes them” (p. 122). This conceptualization of people as rooms undergirds his exploration of the multiple and interwoven sonic spaces that make up contemporary lives. Street further suggests that these sonic spaces, or rooms, can be physically demarcated (e.g., the rooms that make up our own homes) or ephemeral (e.g., a song heard on the radio) (pp. 19–34, 121–136). They can also be expansive, without conventional walls to contain our experience (e.g., a park, a beach, a cherished landscape) (pp. 68–88, 89–106). A room in this sense, as Street argues, “is more than an inhabited physical space, it is a field of consciousness, a sonic energy field with ourselves at the centre” (p. 3).

**Figure 2.**  
*Personal photo by author.*



**On hearts, twigs and worn green jackets** (April 17, 2021)

A heart of moss and twigs  
surrounded by the crackle  
of curled leaves.

The late afternoon light hums.  
A click of the camera, accompanied  
by the creak of my knees.

Out of the frame, you chop wood.  
The crinkle and swish of your  
worn green jacket faint, but steady:  
crinkle, swish, chop—stacking  
wood for winter.

Looking down, I wonder  
whether this heart will beat  
when the weather turns cold?  
Or whether it will echo the rhythms  
of footsteps in fallen snow.

As suggested in the previous sections of this article, the COVID-19 pandemic led many of us to question what it means to make sense of our personal and professional circumstances in different and, perhaps, new ways (Markham et al., 2021). In one formulation, resonating with Davis and O'Mara's (2021) observations as well as those of Faulkner (2020, 2021) and Metcalfe (2021), Annette Markham, Anne Harris, and Mary Elizabeth Luka (2021) ask, "How does this pandemic moment help us to think about the relationships between self and other, or between humans and the planet?" (p. 759). Their response was a collaborative, autoethnographic, and arts-based project examining the interrelationships between "the granular or microscopic practices of everyday life and inquiry and the macroscopic aspects of this moment" (p. 759).

Similar to Markham et al. (2021), the question of how the COVID-19 pandemic has reconfigured our lives and relationships to self, others, and familiar places, has become a preoccupation for me (Levesque & Levesque, 2022). As discussed, the creative practices of poetry and photography emerged as a means through which I could slow down and attend to the sounds of familiar places—most frequently between lockdowns and changing public health measures. Through the slow time of creative practice, I was able to find an anchor in the rhymes in-between that foregrounded cherished places and relationships: my parents preparing supper in the kitchen, the old Ash tree swaying in their backyard, Frida, our family dog, stocking through a new flower bed.



**Figure 3.**

*Personal photo by author.*



Poems and photographs, in other words, became portable “sound rooms” (Street, 2020, p. 125) to address the loss of connection to family, friends, and places that brought meaning and purpose to my life. In line with Burrows' (2021) reflections on the insights that Rilke's poetry brought to his own experiences of the pandemic, the poems and photographs presented in this section, and throughout this article, emphasize “a call to an intimacy with the ‘hereness’—and ‘withness’ of our lives” (p. 140), particularly the need to slowly and lovingly attend to the precious sounds of familiar family places. Street (2020) affirms:

The sound of a room surrounded by its context: atmosphere, moving air, creaking timbers, and you, listening, while from the room outside the door, there comes the sound of music, voices, the weather pressing on the glass, birdsong, time. (p. 135)

**Figure 4.**

*Personal photo by author.*



**Sunhats and flower gardens (August 25, 2021)**

I try to imagine  
My life, empty:  
No oatmeal on the stove,  
No books on the night table,  
No skis propped against  
the back door.

The other day,  
I peeked around  
a corner:  
That odd-shaped sunhat,  
You, seated, surrounded by purple  
flowers, I can never remember  
their name.

You looked quiet, and I laughed.

“Meditating in the garden?!”  
 An emerging quirk, old-age?  
 Innovation, you would later say, with  
 the grubby green hose at your feet.

In the afternoon, you added a book,  
 mapping the yard, contemplating  
 the present from your  
 garden seat.

Death frightens me, the  
 emptiness that will follow.  
 “We have lived a good life.”  
 The sound of those words  
 knock against the image:

Sunhats  
 Flower gardens  
 Water  
 flowing absently  
 at your feet.

## On Poetry, Photographs, and the Synchrony and Gravity of Love

For Black (2018), a key implication of slow scholarship is the agency to approach work and life “with *care and attention*, and in meaningful, thoughtful and pleasurable ways” (p. 25). Here, agency is understood as the capacity to make informed choices about one’s scholarship, despite concerns over what universities may, or may not, count as legitimate research (Black, 2018; Levesque & Rozuel, 2022). With these ideas in mind, Black concludes her chapter with the statement:

*But there is a richness to our individual life experiences and stories that must not be reduced. From these can emerge a collective vision that speaks to our individual, emotional and embodied lives—lives which the neoliberal university too often deems insignificant.* (p. 33)



**Figure 5.**

*Personal photo by author.*



**This Place** (August 9, 2021)

This place, every inch  
spun with the lightest  
of threads.

Black-eyed Susans and  
garden boxes, surprised  
yelps on the porch and  
spiders in jars,  
gently coaxing  
arachnoids into  
the backyard woods.

This place, every inch:  
bedtime stories and  
lullabies, sibling squabbles,  
and attic writing,

frowns of disappointment  
softened with age.

We are older now.  
Bound by 6 a.m.  
coffees and that  
cardboard-tasting  
oatmeal.

This place, all of it:  
You and you and you.  
Spun with the light  
blanketing  
a sleeping dog,  
and a hallway floor.

As demonstrated in the pieces by Behrisch (2021), Faulkner (2020, 2021), and Metcalfe (2021), creative, embodied, and care-oriented practices such as cooking, writing poetry, and taking photographs can be mechanisms through which scholars push back against a reduction of the richness of life experiences and stories. These experiences and stories include not only the joys, inspirations, and loves that mutually shape personal and professional lives but also the anxieties, tensions, and complexities. In the context of a global pandemic, however, where multiple and unexpected anxieties, tensions, and complexities have shifted experiences and stories in different ways, Black's (2018) statement brings a certain gravity to a reconsideration of Blinne's (2018) initial question, 'I want to know...What moves you?'

By gravity, I mean a sense of "seriousness or importance" and a sense of "solemnity or dignity of manner" (Nelson, 1997, p. 595). This is a gravity that can be anchored in Burrows' (2021) invitation following Rilke to love and be with the hereness of daily life: the gravity of not being able to accompany a loved one to the hospital as they undergo surgery; of not always knowing how to comfort students as their own lives are wracked with stress and anxiety; of trying to hold things together when you feel as though you just c a n' t

f a c e

a n o t h e r

Z o o m

m e e t i n g.

The poems and photographs discussed in this article are examples of my own attempts to take up the invitation to be with the hereness of life and work as they suddenly and unpredictably overlapped and/or were pulled apart during the COVID-19

pandemic. An insight emerging from these creative efforts is a perception of movement between gravity and synchrony where pandemic experiences are concerned. Here, synchrony is defined simply as “simultaneous occurrence” (Nelson, 1997, p. 1382). The poems and photographs shared capture some of this movement: the gravity and synchrony of listening to my father chop wood while I maintained social distancing; of late-night conversations outdoors with chairs set at least 2 meters apart; of lying in a bed of black-eyed Susans, hoping the large spider from the porch didn’t hitch a ride on my dress or the mask tucked into my pocket. In pandemic times, poetry and cellphone photography created a generative space to know the sounds, memories, and relationships of a familiar place in new and different ways. Moving between presence and absence, gravity and synchrony, they underscored the ways in which a loved rural backyard can be the centerpiece of creative, embodied, and self-reflective scholarship (Pelias, 2019)—a scholarship that helped to hold what was meaningful, thoughtful, and pleasurable in the midst of anxiety, isolation, loneliness, and loss.

This scholarly insight connects with Street’s (2020) assertion that listening to the sounds of particular places is itself a deeply embodied and meaningful practice. Referring to recordings of aural minutiae in an urban park, he writes, “We deceive ourselves if we believe that listening belongs only to the ears, and this aspect of awareness becomes crucially important when we consider the sounds that surround us” (p. 79). Stated differently, the poems and photographs presented herein are efforts to navigate the gravity and synchrony of listening fully—in Street’s understanding of the practice—to the small sounds that accompany daily acts of care, attention, and love. While they represent the sounds that accompany the acts of a single family and, most significantly the relationship between myself and my parents, they also reveal the hereness and presence of non-human inhabitants sharing this particular outdoor room: spiders, trees, flowers, sky, soil, and Frida, our aging cocker spaniel.

Corroborating the importance of these navigations, Anne Harris and Stacy Holman Jones (2021) open their contribution to Markham et al.’s (2021) project *Massive and Microscopic Sensemaking During COVID-19 Times* with a reflection on clouds. They pinpoint those moments in the morning when they wake to observe the sky and the shifting presence of clouds. This shifting presence leads them to reflect on connections made between clouds and the “thisness of our personal becoming” exemplified in their own critical autoethnographic scholarship (p. 862). Outlining movements between the gravity and synchrony of COVID-19 in their own lives and work, they remark:

You move in the extreme slowness and vertiginous speeds of now, your capacity to affect and be affected taken down to the microcosm of home—you, your chairs, your dogs, your mindfulness meditation podcasts, your sea. Your window, through which you can watch the sun rise and set, marking the changing

seasons in the shape and colour of clouds. And though you wish you could ride in a hot air balloon looking for signs of better weather, you stay put. You stay inside watching the clouds and wondering about the capacity of matter, air, and energy to affect and be affected. (p. 863)

The presence of clouds; a small, precious moment of observation; an acknowledgement, as Davis and O'Mara (2021) describe, that one can “travel back and forth across worlds, space and time” (p. 1) through art-making, imagination, and memory. As many scholars attest, in pandemic times, the local places of our homes and neighborhoods have become substantial catalysts for this travel as well as theoretical musings into the movements between massive and microscopic, gravity and synchrony, love and rebellion. Similar to observing and reflecting on the presence of clouds, listening fully to the aural minutiae of a particular backyard through poetry and photography, can create a space to re-evaluate what is precious and vital to academic inquiry. Behrisch (2021) asserts:

Caring for self and others takes time; there's an opportunity cost to caring, which is not rewarded within neoliberal culture. This cost is offset by the imperative and opportunity to strengthen, nourish, and protect our loved ones and to show respect for each other and the earth. (p. 673)

Perhaps the small and precious sounds of familiar places can be sonic threads that link our own rooms with those of our loved ones, colleagues, and communities. Like observing clouds and cooking for parents and friends, perhaps they can act as catalysts for renewed understandings of the complex, multiple, and diverse need to create, slow down, long for, and love—individually and collectively—post-pandemic. Street (2020) gives us a starting point for such renewed understandings:

Listening to the present around us, we shall acknowledge existence, and our place within it, if only for the here and now. When I leave a space, my consciousness, my awareness of the sound of that place moves into memory, but the place continues, with its own acoustic poetry, layered successively, more and more, subtle until the base note, the foundation of the blank canvas. (p. 116)

What is your base note? What will you draw/write/walk/sense/capture/sound as the blank canvas of possibility post-pandemic?

## Conclusion

So, “what moves you?” (Blinne, 2018, p. 80)

I would like to know

To understand the changeability of clouds (Harris & Holman Jones, 2021);

The acts that hold together your “rebellion and love” (Behrisch, 2021, p. 667);

The pantry lists and recipes (Faulkner, 2021);

An invitation to consider the fullness of listening (Street, 2017, 2019, 2020)

to all the hereness of our collective (Rilke cited in Burrows, 2021)

*beings and becomings* (Black, 2018),

to cascades of ice overhead

and a single leaf

lovingly clinging to its branch,

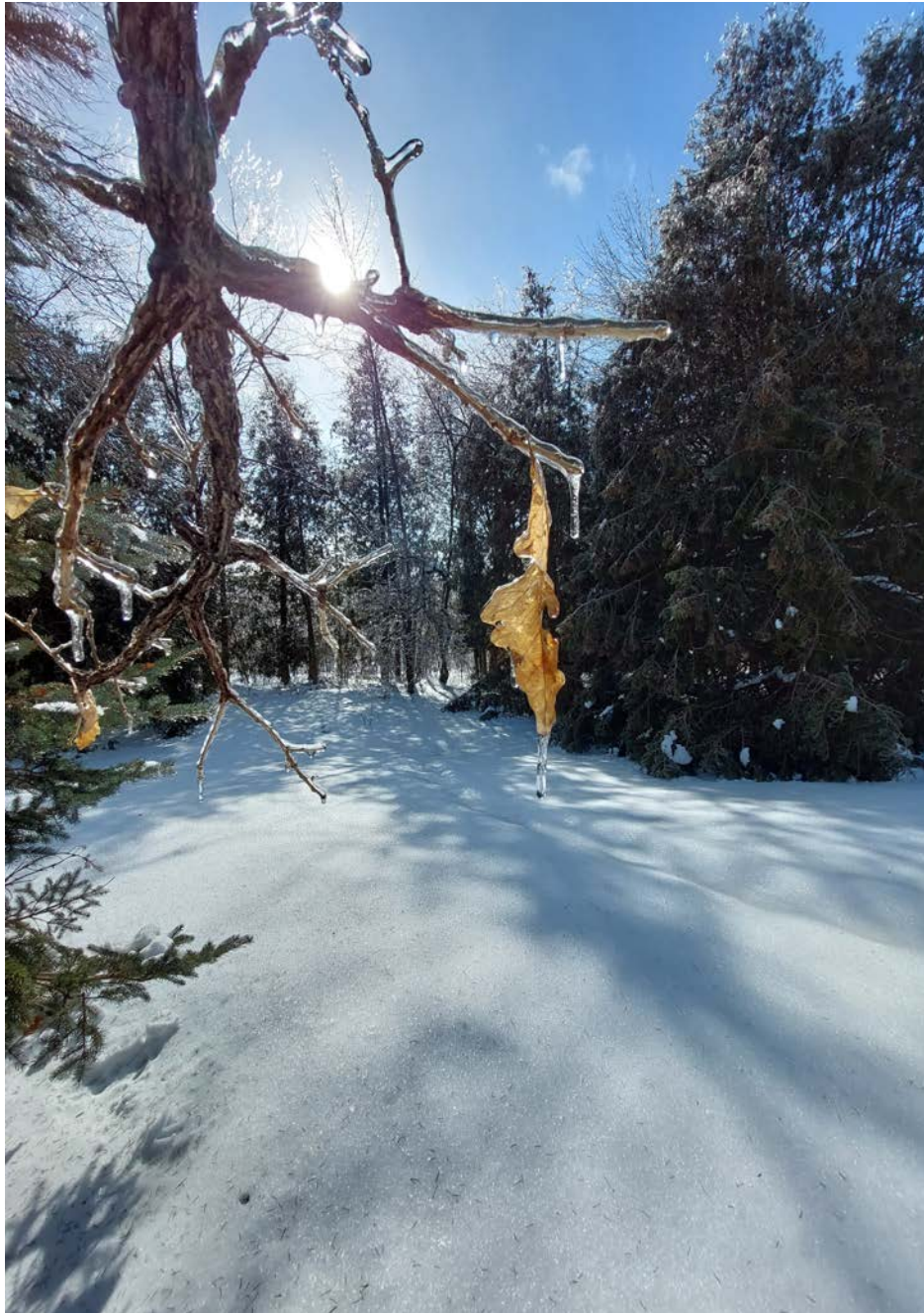
refracting the February light.

*I love our conventional square box of a house. I love it because it is where you are and where we have been. Even without the old Ash, I am sure I will find another place to sit and dream. Maybe from a different angle, I will finally see your light grey siding.*

Imagining Home, June 2022.



**Figure 6.**  
*Personal photo by author.*



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