Pandemic *Pets de Soeurs*: Connecting French-Canadian Food, Culture, and Nostalgia Online

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From traditional, celebratory feasts to "game day" food rituals, food is something that connects people, families, and communities. But what happens when people are bound to their homes and cannot meet up to share in these social bonding food rituals? For many, they turn to sharing their food on social media. Of course, sharing food pictures on social media is nothing new (Abbar et al.; Rousseau), but during the lockdowns of the COVID-19 global pandemic, there was a shift from hosting family dinners in person to sharing pictures of food on social media

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an influx of social media posts and images of people baking bread for the first time, sharing stories of their first sourdough starter, and revisiting recipes familiar from childhood (Easterbrook-Smith). Indeed, these recall McLuhan's axiom that "the medium is the message" in so far as the digital platforms mediate and shape the experience in and through the sharing (23). Simultaneously, the scarcity of certain items invokes not only the primacy of staples, but also reveals the bias of the mediation and its accessibility in attempting to produce authentic versions of traditional recipes (Innis, *Empire* 23; Innis, *Bias* 6). French-Canadian ex-pats like us, living in the United States and elsewhere, can turn to *L'encyclopédie de la cuisine* by Jehane Benoît or *The Acadian Kitchen: Recipes From Then and Now* by Alain Bossé as a source of nostalgic authority. The simultaneous needs to provide and to "make do" during lean times overlap with the need to connect with others while also providing a

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playful alternative to the *de rigeur* performative element of posting to social media as simply "doing it for the 'gram" (Vautier 1, 56).

More than a time filling activity, over the course of the pandemic what people were making revealed deeper connections to their personal histories and a sense of nostalgia (Gammon and Ramshaw). Sharing images of the food in various stages of preparation and offering the recipes online serve to maintain family and friendship bonds as well as the cultural memory of a home with which we are no longer geographically connected. Thus, the combination of social media and food creates an opportunity to rethink the performance of ritual (Tambiah 126) and the ways symbolic consumption "can evoke personal nostalgia and community pride" (Shortridge 507). Here, the individual can simultaneously "collect and extract portions of their culture" in the role of what Heldke calls the "food adventurer" while also being the source of the nostalgia (42). Within this context, the social media approach highlights issues of keeping score and collecting achievements through the accumulation of posts, likes, and comments. While a focus on likes alone frequently becomes indicative of the outcome becoming the rationale, this need not be the case. Here, as Faucher explains, the like button becomes perhaps the most familiar current example of McLuhan's frequently misunderstood axiom, "the medium is the message," whereby the medium becomes more important than the ostensible content and, indeed, becomes the content (24). Said another way, there is a temptation to only produce and consume the like button for the sake of the like button, but we found a different result. Social media posts are often framed around accumulating likes and keeping score, gamifying the social experience online, with an emphasis on the shared aspect (Lampe; Peyton).

The social media interactions we experienced reflect a playful and performative means of passing cultural and ethnic traditions from one generation to another while turning cultural identity into a presentation of the "ludic self" on social media (Deumert 27). This becomes significant because this kind of performance lends itself to light-hearted interactions and relating to others in a playful manner and documenting that experience. These sorts of playful phatic gestures, reflecting the ability of the medium to change the scale, pace, and pattern of interactions, offer a key means not only of maintaining but also establishing new friendships and contacts through periods of jarring transitions and interruptions.

On Method and Context

The convergence of social media, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the topic of food occasioned the discovery of the extent of the authors' shared cultural experiences and nostalgia around the recipes they grew up with. This article is grounded in an autoethnographic approach, which can be defined as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience. […] A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product" (Ellis et al. 1). This approach enables the authors to delve into their separate personal histories and connections with traditions around French-Canadian recipes stemming from two connected, yet distinct lived experiences. It is important to recognize that while French-Canadian culture is sometimes viewed as a homogenized one from the outside, the traditions and vernacular vary depending on the different French-speaking regions in Canada (Moogk). This is clearly exemplified in each author's section detailed below. While both authors identify as French-Canadian, they hail from different parts of Canada, and as such it is important to acknowledge the role of autoethnography in situating the central ideas of tradition in this article.

Autoethnography permits the authors, both professors teaching and researching within an academic frame, to not only reflect but to connect their cultural histories and lived experiences within the broader scope of the literature on media, play, and nostalgia in an informed manner that is indeed, both "process and product." While the role of professor is one of privilege in our society, it does not negate the lived experiences and deep connections to the culture and traditions of the authors. As Ouellette iterates, while the opportunity to discuss the recipes reflects his current position as an academic, he writes elsewhere that this is never done without some nod to his multiple and simultaneous roles as a husband, father, and someone from a working-class background. These were the recipes with which he grew up, because his mother, the oldest of nine and told to leave home at eighteen because the family needed her bed for the last one, learned of necessity to stretch food and pennies. In contrast, Ouellette's father, though an educator, grew up with the significant stigma of a single-parent home in a French-Canadian Catholic community in southwestern Ontario in the 1950s. Ouellette's paternal great grandmother, who took in washing to supplement the income from his great grandfather's carpentry and other seasonal work, was the one who baked and

stretched the precarious budget. Given that the first dozen years of Ouellette's academic career were precarious ones, frugality remains as more than a memory, and food offers a material connection to each generation and those memories.

For Boudreau, only one of three individuals from both sides of her extended family to go to university and the only one to go beyond a bachelor's degree, the connection to the food and recipes described below is not simply a form of nostalgia for some long-lost Acadian culture but is the very real experience of being raised by parents who were married at sixteen, bearing two children by the age of eighteen. Her mother, always making sure there was enough for everyone who came to their table, taught Boudreau how to be frugal with ingredients and how to stretch a meal without sacrificing flavor or tradition. This was a lesson that Boudreau has carried close with her as she entered her first years of university as a single mother, and one passed on to her daughters. As an academic, Boudreau values the skills she learned to critically reflect on those memories and situate them within the context of French-Canadian and Acadian food traditions so often borne out of scarcity and necessity.

From these situated autoethnographic perspectives focusing on the authors' experiences with cooking and sharing traditional recipes and pictures from our shared background on social media, this article will explore the connections between a resurgence of cooking traditional and nostalgic recipes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media as a shared space to connect with others when physical gatherings are not possible, and how the playful and performative nature of social media reshapes the traditional patterns of interactions and cultural framing around making and sharing of food.

Playful Social Media

Mapping out such an approach occurs in and through the simultaneous centripetal (inward) and centrifugal (outward) movements inherent to any playful performance. Following from Brenda Danet, Deumert develops the concept that there is a "primacy of play" in online interactions and that the "playfulness is visible in the types of interactions people engage in online – they play games, joke, flirt, or just hang out with one another – as well as in the language and multimodal imagery they use" (23). Here, Deumert is indebted to de Mul's earlier work in enumerating the ways a ludic identity both differs and proceeds from the established practice of considered identity as produced in and through scripts and

narratives and their performance. As de Mul elaborates, games do not have the same sort of closure as other narratives. This becomes a key entry point for understanding social media interactions as a kind of ongoing play or game, because games "that have no or hardly any narrative content [...] invite us to play again" (259). Indeed, the call to play again reflects the fact that games are "insistent" technologies, as Ruggill and McAllister highlight (9). The same can be said for social media, which insist on interactions through constant notifications and status updates.

Moreover, they are always on. Even though a series of likes or impressions are not precisely a "win" or a "loss" criteria, they are very clear indices of the building of an audience and collecting their responses or engagement. Thus, what Deumert calls the "ludic identity" develops through "an image of who we are – for others and for ourselves – through the way we act, move and dress, the music we enjoy, the food we eat, the beliefs we hold and the stories we tell" (24). Here, Deumert draws heavily on de Mul's earlier theorizing of the ludic identity, for which he argues, "In the case of ludic identity the predominant tendency is an increase of openness. [[...]] ludic identity is a creation of our imagination that creates real life effects in our daily lives" (261). It is this last aspect that is key, particularly in performing the social media exercise of sharing recipes and the results of baking them, as well as the responses in the comment thread by friends and family who support the posts and reinforce the shared social and cultural imagination created through social media.

In terms of the ritualized aspects of playfulness, Tambiah cites Huizinga and the "magic circle" of play to highlight the dual aspect of ritual as performance. Ritual, then, reproduces via repetitions, copies, mimicry, seriality, and iterative processes, but importantly, "no one performance of a rite, however rigidly prescribed, is exactly the same as another performance because it is affected by [...] certain variable features such as the social characteristics and circumstances of the actors" (125). Here, the dual aspect of ritual as performance maps onto the dual aspect of interactivity that Deumert argues is essential to the playfulness of online interactions. In the first case, we can participate in what appears online, as opposed to being mere consumers. In the second case, since everything appears in an always already social context, "we are always also responding to others and their representations" (25). The result is a "playful, experimental, yet social, state of mind" (26). This becomes particularly important in the current context since, as Deumert elaborates, there has been a "general ludic mood in the digital world from its inception" (26). She attributes an *a priori* playfulness in digital spaces to the

subculture of hackers, gamers, and programmers whose playful use of language – notoriously "spam" which was borrowed from a *Monty Python* sketch – has contributed to "the ritual construction of the internet as a place of enjoyable and playful interaction" (26). Thus, the medium is not in and of itself the driving force underlying the process. Rather, it is the ritualized, social, and playful interaction that occurs in and through the medium that is at the core of the experience.

Pets des Soeurs and Playful Pandemic Postings

One of the things that even the most experienced and well-intentioned Cultural Studies scholar can forget or overlook is the transformative potential within any definition of transculturation. The potential for positive transformation occurs by virtue of the fact that transculturation involves both choice and necessity, but – contrary to an understandable assumption – necessity need not be the result of an imposition of hegemonic power. This is not to say that the necessity created by depression, pandemic, drought, wartime rationing, and other times of extreme shortage are not horrific, but rather to offer a reminder that sometimes necessity can be so simple as running out of shortening when the shops are closed or the ingredients are simply different where you moved, or all of the above.[1] The change in food traditions and recipes happen over time through generational contexts that are shaped by a wide range of influences both locally and globally including the socio-economic situation of those making the food. Yet, even when hardships are no longer the backbone of necessity, the recipes and their ingredients reflect those hardships (Cashman & Farrelly).

Given this knowledge, (at least) two things become clear. First, "authentic" always entails a willingness and/or an element of using what is at-hand, a feature of games Conway and Trevillian adapt from Heidegger to highlight competency and the limits of intentionality. Second, following from the first, there is an in-built element of play and/or playfulness in the process (70-72). Indeed, this is part of the nostalgia of passing along the recipes and the process, if not the results, to our children and/or friends. Whereas certain platforms emphasize the final product, the era of the "live tweet," or "Twitter thread," Instagram Stories, and posts, as well as

[1] In the United States, margarine has milk products in it, Crisco™ shortening has a different formulation, and milk has an acidic preservative in it. These affect the taste and the texture of baked goods as compared to the original, Canadian recipes.

Facebook comment threads, allows the process to unfold. As Rob Gallagher explains, users of digital media "express themselves via "autobiographical performances" and playful acts of self-presentation, from selfies, blogposts and tweets to videogame "Let's Play' videos" (3). This creates an environment built on a sort of spontaneous call-and-response model which is "manifest in the multiplication of feedback mechanisms (likes, follows, subscriptions, replies, retweets)" (3). In this environment it is not so much the outcome as the process that matters, opening the possibility of playful, often asynchronous, interactions that unfold over time. Play in this context emphasizes the ability to adapt to new roles and contexts. Gallagher concludes, "Flexibility becomes a key attribute: as consumers, digital subjects are expected to seek out new products and experiences; as professionals, they are required to adapt to the changing needs of a volatile labour market; as performers they are expected to keep their personal brands fresh and relevant" (3-4). Certainly, adaptability and using items at-hand applies to baking. No two recipes (and rituals) exemplify the variety of aspects – playfulness, transculturation, enculturation, and authenticity – like *pouding au chômeur* and *pets de soeur*. Indeed, the playfulness is in-built owing to the names themselves. In the first case, the meaning derives from the second half – *Chômeur* is directly translated to "out of work" or unemployed even though its "official" history suggests it was created by women working in factories during the early stage of the depression, and in the second case, *pets de soeurs* means "nun's fart," after all. [2]

[2] Here, it is worth nothing that the "*au*" in the recipe title sometimes appears and sometimes does not and sometimes spellings can be variable on handwritten recipes descending from grandparents, like Ouellette's, who might not have completed elementary school. In addition, as Boudreau notes, "growing up, we had a handwritten recipe called "Arseholes," in New Brunswick." It also has the name, "*Grand-Père au Caramel*," in Québec. Both of these, as with pouding au ch*ômeur* and *pets de soeurs*, reflect the connection between food and socio-economic status through the use of crass recipe names that reflect the vernacular of the lower class. Even the regional accent of the speaker can be cause for social approbation, no matter the content of the speech.

Baked Beans & Bread: Boudreau's Social Media and (Failed) French-Acadian Traditions[3]

Within the French-Acadian tradition, the recipes often share the same name, but the ingredients and histories differ. There is not necessarily a definitive recipe book that frames the recipes within a unified French cultural context. The history of the maritime provinces of Canada, which are partly known as Acadia (or Acadie in French), where I grew up, has an intertwined culinary history with French and Irish settlers, influencing the ingredients and processes. While the handing down of recipes through families is not unique to this region, the "bibles" of local recipes often derive from churches charity drives made up of curated "family recipes" from the local community and tell the story of the local ingredients and their histories (Ransom and Wright). Many of these cookbooks have been handed down through generations, often resulting in the ingredient list being technically the same but the contemporary formulations differing, often resulting in the need to tweak the original recipe based on memories of taste with current ingredients.

Baked beans is one of the many recipes that is often found in most of these church curated collections. Of course, baked beans are not a French-Canadian specific dish, but there are regional variations. Growing up, it is something that my mother would make during the long cold winter months. It was an economic meal that would sustain our family for an extended period and was an addition to any meal of the day. My mother's recipe was an adaptation of one from a recipe book she bought from her parish many years before. The beans were light, the molasses-based sauce was thin, and besides beans, the secondary ingredient was onions. Several decades later, my stepmother, who hailed from Labrador, a northern province of Canada connected to Quebec, introduced me to her family's baked beans. Hers were dark, rich, with a thick molasses sauce and the secondary ingredient was bacon. Lots of bacon. It is probably no surprise whose recipe I preferred. Whenever I would visit home as an adult, my stepmother would always make me a large batch of her baked beans. For Christmas several years ago, she gifted me a cookbook from her local church community with the recipes she grew up with, including the one for baked beans that were made for me.

[3] This section details Boudreau's experiences using an autoethnographic account. Thus, the first-person and other references reflect her experiences throughout this section.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, no longer able to make the pilgrimage home due to stay-at-home orders and border closure es between Canada and the United States I tried to make the recipe in the cookbook she gave me. I shared my progress on Facebook, chronicling the entire process with photographs, tagging my stepmother in the post. The first attempt failed spectacularly, as the instructions were vague. After a few failed attempts, and some comical comments on my Facebook post, I came to realize that the recipe was not something to follow, but something that lived in the memories of those who made it and wrote it down to share with their community with the expectation that everyone already knew how to make it. After a few calls home, looking for help with the recipe, my stepmother could not articulate exactly what she put in her version and how much of the things she did know. But she knew how to make it by instinct and memory, and it always turned out amazingly delicious. It took me at least five attempts, tasting and adding a random amount of various ingredients to get it to taste almost, sort of like how I remember it. As a shared social media post, friends asked for the recipe (see Fig. 1) and shared their own variations creating a shared experience around nostalgic flavors of our localized pasts.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, bread making burst onto the social media scene with a vengeance (Easterbrooke-Smith; Mohabeer), and I was no exception among the crowd. Though bread was still readily available in the stores (luckily not one of the things that fell victim to shortages), yeast and flour were not. In the late spring months of 2020, many baking ingredients were sparse due in part to supply chain issues and panic buying/hoarding by those who had the means. I recall finding a 20kg bag of flour that I bought and divided up among my adult daughters and me. When my son-in-law found a baker's block of yeast, I made him buy two. Even though I had always baked growing up and taught my daughters how to make cakes and knead dough, it was something that had often fallen to busy schedules, left for special occasions and holiday seasons.

Figure 1. Community cookbook, recipe, and failed baked beans

As my Facebook and Instagram feeds filled up with sourdough starters, artisanal breads, and fancy focaccias, I yearned for my mother's homemade white bread. My parents married very young, and we grew up in a world of homemade and make do. I called her for her recipe from an old *Five Roses Flour* recipe book. She took a picture with her phone and sent me the recipe – complete with her notes in pen from so many years past.[4] The recipe called for milk, but my mother said she used to use water in the early days to save money, but that milk really was better for the taste and texture.

Eager to share my pandemic breadmaking experiences with my friends and family, I documented my progress, took photos, and posted them to Facebook (see Fig. 2). Like every social media post, comments ranged from support to sharing of their own family recipes and the many versions of nostalgia that came with it. These posts were never intended to be about accumulating likes, but rather to share

[4] This is the same recipe book Ouellette's mother has, despite being in English only, and which she passed along because she never made bread.

personal memories with colleagues, friends, and family who were all isolated due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. Bread baking framed for social media.

The candid and amateur nature of the photographs and brief write ups in personal social media posts were in stark contrast to the recipe blogs and Instagram accounts that weave the recipe through an often-verbose narrative and professional quality food shots (Cesiri; Lofgren). Unlike the more carefully constructed recipe sites with full narratives built around the process of baking/cooking, the playful and performative nature of social media contributes to a sharing and reshaping of traditional patterns of interactions and cultural framing around making and sharing food with friends and family. Through the sharing of memories related to food and the attempt to recreate them during times of isolation, there was a sense of socially networked community regardless of cultural background or geographic location. For me, and many others we spoke to, these posts were the closest things to kitchen conversations and family dinners many of us would have, which helped us feel connected to a home that we could not, even temporarily, return to.

Playfully Sweet: Ouellette's Social Media, Desserts, and Substitutions[5]

Pouding au chômeur is essentially a simple sponge or white cake with a syrup or sauce. Here, there is a pun on sauce, which can also refer to gravy. The dessert may include apples – if available – on the bottom, along with the sauce, which can be made from brown sugar or based on maple syrup. The key is that it is simple, quick, and has few ingredients. One series of live tweets, for instance, caused a minor controversy among my followers because I included apples on the bottom of the cake. Not everyone's grandmother did this, but it is among the "official" recipes of a dessert that should never actually become a codified, a process Tambiah calls a "marriage of form and content" and indeed has regional variations that are based on local availabilities (129). Interestingly, the website for the popular celebrity chef Ricardo Larrivée lists a recipe with and another without maple syrup. This is important because including both recipes shows recognition that the formulation of the recipe is at once spontaneous and conventionalized. It could also be considered an inclusion effort, as maple syrup is more costly than a simple brown sugar sauce, and there are other regions of French-Canada where traditionally maple syrup was not as readily available as it was/is in Québec. No two examples of a *pouding au chômeur* will be or even can be identical. They are meant to be improvisational and to use whatever is on hand, or at hand, which Conway and Trevillian explain is an essential component of play, as opposed to a game (71). No two apples are the same. Here, the process is as – if not more than – important as the outcome.

The very contingency of *pouding au chômeur* (and also *pets de soeur*) is to use what is available. My mother's recipe reflects the dual aspect, one which echoes the duality of subjectivity: one is at once the thinking subject but also subject to external forces such as time, scarcity, and limited resources. There is a minimal amount of salt, sugar, and spice. Indeed, the last ingredient is an optional ½ teaspoon of nutmeg. When I make the version with which my kids are familiar, there may be cinnamon, ginger, allspice, and nutmeg, as well as honey drizzled over the apples and ice-cold butter grated over that. Moreover, at an early age, my son Pascal decided that his trucks could accommodate the spices (see Fig. 3). As Ouellette writes, this becomes a means for spontaneous, free play to become scripted and pedagogical (n.p.). Pascal eventually decided that he would make his

[5] In this section the experiences refer to Ouellette and his family specifically and this is reflected in the first-person references and references to family members.

own pre-mix of "secret spices" in an empty spice jar, but it had too much salt in it for the amount of other spices. Even so, it was used in apple pies instead, because it produced a salted caramel effect, one which reflects the adapting tastes of our children and the developing of popular tastes too. In this last regard, "sea" salt and caramel has become a relatively common flavour and reflects the processes of global capitalism and its role in shifting food tastes.

Figure 3. The author making *pouding au chômeur*

Similarly, the ready availability of multiple spices reflects the changing expectations and availability of ingredients thanks to globalization (Adams and Collinson-Jones). Moreover, the addition of fat – here in the form of butter instead of lard – reflects not only changing economics but also changing locations. Although it is a popular myth that everything is cheaper in the United States, even accounting for exchange, this is not always the case. However, one of the more dramatic instances is milk products, with butter being roughly half the price in the United States as compared to Canada. Conversely, margarine is several times more expensive in the United States because all-vegetable margarine is rare and hard to find. Thus, we find ourselves cooking with far more butter in the United States than we did in Canada. All of these have come to the fore not only in adjusting the

recipe(s), but also in terms of people's responses to the varying social media threads and posts.

One of my former students commented on the salty caramel flavour always being a winner, regardless of location. However, the apples in the *pouding au chômeur* met with some approbation from a colleague on Twitter, who reacted with "that's not how I remember pouding au chômeur" (Neveaudit).[6] In fact, what happened was more of a continuation of an earlier online conversation about sourcing ingredients and as well as a recipe to fit them. The ensuing searches resulted in finding a recipe in French and Madame Benoît's recipe, among others. The latter becomes more important as a resource, as a history, and – to accurately and properly use the currently fashionable term – a curated collection of French Canadian and/or Québecois recipes. Madame Benoît's recipes stand as the sort of indexical symbols Tambiah describes as central to significant cultural rituals (128).

Moreover the social media posts become playful versions of the Austinian speech act, whereby the utterance is its own performance. Here, the performance includes multiple and simultaneous layers including parent, play, Canadian, French-Canadian, Franco-Ontarien – as we learned – and a social media presence. At the same time, a key contradiction emerges insofar as we were trapped in our home because of the pandemic, and we were trapped in a foreign country by virtue of Visa rules and the closure of international borders. Sharing and discussing baking online was our connection to home, a sort of one-way phatic gesture to establish contact with "home" in the imagined sense and to provide a record of what we did and how we did it. Indeed, this lies somewhere in a liminal space between oral and written traditions since the recipe is ultimately a guide. Making it is passed on through the performance of the recipe, but that always includes deviations, adaptations, and variations.

Having seen and studied the phenomenon of "doing it for the 'gram," (Vautier 1, 56) each picture went from being legitimately candid or spontaneous to being carefully composed and surreptitiously spontaneous. Among our earlier such posts were entirely playful and spontaneous images, including a catalogue of "worst dad moves," such as Pascal using a toy dump truck to funnel chocolate chips into his mouth and a flour handprint on mom's black leggings, among other things.

[6] This account was later suspended by Twitter after radical right-wing trolls attacked the owner, but a screenshot of the post has been archived.

As posting continued, the images became more staged. The comment from a colleague that she likes the tea set reflects the planning. Admittedly, the teapot has never had tea in it, and the saucers are rarely used, except as weights when we make something that needs compression while curing (see Fig. 4). Thus, we find ourselves knowingly conforming to multiple and simultaneous sets of audience expectations. There clearly are rules, and we delight in playing with them, including knowingly and admittedly using a tea set only for the purposes of social media posts, mimicking the "staged candid" shots of influencers. While the obvious aspect is to highlight the differences between *ludus* – games and play with rules – and *paidia* – free play – at least two other features of play emerge in and through the sharing and the responses.

Figure 4. The tea set that only emerges for pictures

Indeed, one of the key aspects of social media that intersects with games is that the core elements of insistence, building, exploring, and collecting apply (Ruggill and McAllister 9). Social media insists that you use it, via the routines of notifications, responses, and checking for both, but also through the score-keeping routines of building a follower base and collecting likes. However, it is also worth noting that these become part of the "metaplay" aspects, which Hamari and Eranti define as user-defined achievements and/or achievements outside the actual gameworld (3). Moreover, these two types of achievement highlight one of the effects of seriality, which Maeder and Wentz note in playful social media postings

(130-131). Here, seriality also has a dual valence, so that it refers to the idea of one item following another, in serial fashion, as well as the notion of being imprinted with a serial number. In the latter regard, seriality refers to a particular sameness, of the sort afforded by a recipe on a card. This is reflected right away in the notion that the *pouding au chômeur* is not quite right even as it is necessarily a playful recipe, with a playful name, and is made in the spirit of making do in rough times. On its face, dessert is not a necessity, but it is a kind of achievement that says things are not so bad, even in the face of depression or pandemic. Thus, I was absolutely serious in offering that I was collecting recipes to experiment with and to maintain and sometimes to establish as connection to "home."

Intriguingly, there is a further contradiction in the notion that a recipe derived from things on hand needs reifying and fixing. My mother's recipe for *pouding au chômeur* – my Mémé had two apple trees and a pear tree and pears can be a lovely substitute – was not "authentic," at least according to some traditions as equally valid as my own. That is a nice way of saying I broke a rule, even as others were denouncing actual, legally enforced rules, such as lockdowns, social distancing, mask mandates, and vaccine requirements. Nothing highlights this more than the eponymous *pets de soeurs*. The very name reflects a longstanding French Canadian linguistic playfulness with the church. At the same time, *pets de soeurs* are made from scraps of pie pastry, butter, brown sugar, and things on hand. Yet even as this has an "official" or "authentic" method of making them, which again I managed to transgress, despite the fact that this was at least a four-generation method and other Franco-Ontarians noted a similar family history. One must imagine that a treat made from random scraps – items that some would throw away – and therefore has no recipe still has a set of indexical-symbolic signs attached to it and indeed is one itself (Tambiah, 128-130). It evokes a set of nostalgic memories that render each instance unique and yet similar. However, one friend, a Québecois now living in Boston, tweeted back a picture of a box of store-bought, ready made "fudge swirls" with an agreement that *pets de soeurs* are among his favorite.[7]

The mass production vs the home made, with both posted to the internet, begs a consideration of Marshall McLuhan's axiom, the medium is the message. For McLuhan, a medium is any extension and the message is the "change of scale, pace,

[7] Although space does not permit, it would be interesting to consider (at least) a pair of implications regarding the myth of French Canadians as a homogeneous lot in terms Québec as metonymic for francophone and the ways commodification informs that representation and its concomitant perception. Indeed, neither of us is québecois(e).

and pattern that it introduces *into human affairs* (emphasis added)" (24). It is this last that is frequently overlooked even as the axiom is misunderstood. Following from McLuhan, if you want to understand a medium, look at the change, not the content. Indeed, the content of any medium is another medium. Here, the message is the change of pace, whether it is the lack of time to make the pie, the scale and pace of industry to the make the dessert, or the change of scale, pace and pattern wrought be social media, as well as the change to scale pace and pattern wrought by the pandemic. The practice of "doing it for the gram" offers a terrific example that demonstrates McLuhan's viewpoint. The medium shapes and conditions the experience of the content, but it also has a material consequence in terms of "our work, our leisure, our cities" (24). Rather than labour saving, the devices and media create work and new roles for us. Notably, the "work" of nostalgia takes the material form of the food and the social form of sharing with family and friends. These material consequences shape not only the production, but also the distribution and consumption to foster connections in a system – the internet – that works in and through its disconnectedness. At some point the "content" is not important; instead, the likes and engagements become the content. Playful pandemic posts, however, are not just about collecting likes even as the medium does become the message, for the content is the change of scale, pace, and pattern of connectedness to home, happier times, and people with whom to empathize, to share and to play.

Let's Play Again: Conclusions

Ultimately, our conclusions could only be written at the very close of the project, as the hope of vaccine effectiveness and distribution faded into a second holiday season in lockdown and the prospect of living with COVID-19 became yet another risk of everyday life. As we reflect on the shared experience of cooking and baking our way through a pandemic, one thing stands out. The change of so-called Web 2.0, or interactive online social media, was supposed to be the ability of individual content users to become producers. Instead, what we have witnessed has been simply a shift in the deployment of corporate media rather than the prophesied restructuring and democratizing. However, readers still make texts – and beans and pies – and use things in idiosyncratic ways, sometimes with unexpected consequences (McLuhan 23-24). Even as the Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen reveals the intentions of social media conglomerates to foster divisiveness, our own anecdotal experience, with and among a cohort of Canadian ex-pats

stranded in the U.S.A., reveals the powerful potential of play to facilitate positive social experiences (Fisher 1322).

At a time when headlines proclaim "*Fortnite* to alt-right" (Condis) as an inevitable outcome of online play, this becomes a particularly important reminder of the ongoing importance of everyday acts and rituals. This should not be as surprising as it is given the hopefulness underlying de Certeau's original offering of the methods and "tactics" – including cooking – that inspire the current reflection (40). In connecting play and tactics as a means of instantiating control in moments when the individual might feel as though control has been lost or taken away, Rolf Nohr explains that the "immanent logic of the society of control and its decentralized and meandering formations allow for realizing a potential to overcome dominant forms of power" (215). Indeed, Nohr highlights the power of idiosyncratic forms of play to become "tactical actions," and in particular those that re-orient forms of work and labour into moments that appropriate the means of production.

Likewise, Priscilla Ferguson notes the operation of "opportunitistic tactics" like "poaching" and "making do" as a means of empowerment in and through the production of food, particularly in resisting the prescriptive rules of recipes, rules, and mass production (142). It is in these regards that playful cooking also reveals the productive dimensions of appropriation (i.e., poaching) and transculturation (i.e., making do) by teasing the limits of seriality. Since these operate at the levels of tactics, they always depend, as Nohr points out, on time and our experience of it. Yet, as Ferguson notes, nostalgia always depends not on time, but on space, which has "its own hierarchy, which responds to the question implicit in all of these locations in space: *whose* home, *which* peasants, *what* restaurant, *which* region, and so on" (23).

As our title and the names – *pets de soeurs* and *pouding (au) chômeur* – reveal, playfulness, both textual and otherwise, has a deeply rooted place in French Canadian culture at the most quotidian of levels. This has been true even in the face of the diaspora, the depression and two world wars; in other words, over time. Far from simple nostalgia, our experience of playfully cooking through the COVID-19 pandemic represents an opportunity to be part of and contribute to an ongoing conversation with and through food, one that spans multiple generations. Where Ferguson notes the production of cookbooks and pamphlets as a means of resisting the nostalgia produced by distance, the internet and social media offer the latest medium for sharing the tactics of making do. Our making do also extends to the

practice of sharing, but this should not be surprising, either, for as Nohr also notes, playful tactics are always already their own commentary (199-200). In this case, the commentary reflects our resistance of the ongoing commodification of food-based nostalgia (Duruz 23) and the insincerity of the "like" button (Faucher).

Yet, there is a temptation – one which we should resist as strongly as we resist the divisiveness the corporate masters of social media seek to exploit – towards deterministic approaches that echo the inevitability of "doom scrolling." What has been unstated, then, is the productive potential of nostalgia. Long derided as inauthentic, mass-produced, formulaic, and worse, nostalgia is at its core an indexical sign, pointing to and giving measure of memories. In the social media age, memory has become the victim of the "auto-amputation" McLuhan details as the cost of my automated extension of the self (43). Nostalgia, then, offers a counter, as it were, to the algorithmic version of memory, yet another kind of prescriptive seriality, and inspires the sorts of memories we hope to pass on to our children. We want them to remember that we did more than just "make do." Our lives, and hopefully this paper, are better for it.

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