Migrating Methods in a Pandemic: Virtual Participatory Video with Migrants in Hong Kong

Julie Ham1, Vivian W Lin2 and Merina Sunuwar1

Abstract
Can methods travel the way migrants do? We reflect on this question through the development of what we call ‘virtual participatory video’ or the delivery of participatory video methods for migrant domestic workers and asylum-seekers in Hong Kong – transnationally, online and over Zoom during the pandemic in 2020. The pandemic realities that we grappled with as migration studies scholars and participatory video practitioners reflect realities that working-class and precarious migrants were routinely required to navigate long before the pandemic (e.g., family separation, restriction of personal mobility, maintaining connection through technology). Therefore, we paid particular attention to the challenges and opportunities posed by virtual participatory video, particularly on resultant changes to attention, creativity, and relationality (core tenets of face-to-face participatory video) when time and space are, by necessity, fragmented. The fragmentation of time and space in virtual participatory video entailed a greater presence of migrant realities and demands into the method itself, perhaps most notably a tangible sense of competing demands that participants were expected to negotiate at any particular moment. Attentiveness to competing demands can be particularly valuable when working with members of communities that may experience varying forms of scarcity in relation to time or space, such as migrant domestic workers or asylum-seekers. Re-thinking fragmentation as part of the texture of virtual participatory video illustrated the durability of creativity when day-to-day realities are permitted to intrude on learning over Zoom.

Keywords
participatory video, pandemic, migrants, participatory methods

Introduction
Can methods travel the way migrants do? This is the question that we considered as we sought to reconfigure a participatory arts project on migrant narratives over the course of the pandemic in 2020. Pre-pandemic plans originally included extensive community engagement and face-to-face participatory arts workshops in video, photography, writing and other creative arts. The pandemic obviously necessitated a different approach. Initial attempts to reconfigure the project to accommodate pandemic realities were challenging and frustrating, but there was also a lingering disbelief about the extent of our frustration. Part of this disbelief was in part grounded in our experience as migration studies scholars and scholars with both lived and research experience with migration. The urgent need to adapt participatory arts methodologies during the pandemic in some ways mirrored longstanding migrant realities, such as the inability to connect face-to-face with others, the restriction or containment of personal mobility, family separation and the attempts to maintain connection and community through technology. The

1Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
2Department of Media Arts and Culture, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Lei Shi, Research Center of Fluid Machinery Engineering and Technology, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, China.
Email: Lei.shi@ensam.eu

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Correction (November 2022): This article has been updated with minor content corrections since its original publication.
pandemic realities we were grappling with as researchers reflected realities that working-class and precarious migrants were familiar with long before the pandemic (e.g., Dorfman, 2020). There was a lingering doubt as to why migration studies scholars such as ourselves would not be more responsive or adept at negotiating barriers that working-class and precarious migrants were routinely required to navigate. This raised the question of whether the participatory methods we originally planned could travel or adapt the way migrants are routinely expected to. Or, in other words, how can methods become more migrant in order to respond and adapt to pandemic realities? We consider this question by analysing the development of what we are calling ‘virtual participatory video’ or the delivery of participatory video methods transnationally, online and over Zoom during the pandemic in 2020. Specifically, we explore the recalibration of practices and expectations when moving participatory video online. First, we examine the fragmentation of time, space and attention and the resultant impact on participation and relational dynamics between facilitators and participants. Second, we explore the relational and creative potentialities that are present in fragmented encounters. Third, we analyse experimentation with visual language conventions that emerged in videos produced by participants.

Claire Bishop (2006) posits the following as key characteristics of participatory arts: (1) people’s engagement in art, particularly members of communities who may not typically be recognized as cultural producers; (2) a more inclusive definition of authorship and artist identities that go beyond “the fetishization of the individual elite artist” (Jiang & Korczynski, 2019, p. 6); and (3) an emphasis on the creative community and solidarity that emerges from interactive art practices, including the nurturing of a ‘safe space’ “where art can be created outside of dominant aesthetic standards” (Jiang & Korczynski, 2019, p. 22). More specifically, participatory video is a dynamic media creation process with the potential to centre communities that may be situated at the margins. An objective of participatory video is the act of ‘giving’ technology and teaching the standard conventions of ‘filmmaking’ to a community that may not typically have access to video-making technologies or opportunities. A principal value of participatory video is the introduction of video production techniques into communities as a means of providing opportunities “to record and to review, and to revise and organise what they have recorded, before using it to represent their views to others” (Braden, 1999, p. 119). Central to participatory video are the interactions and relationships that emerge during video production such as the formation of teams in which participants rotate roles such as directing, producing, camera work, acting, and creating costumes and makeup (Lin et al., 2019). Working in conversation and in collaboration, participation is embedded in the reciprocity of perspectives made possible by dialogue between facilitators and participants and between and among diverse communities.

Virtual participatory video necessitated revisiting the concept of participation and re-envisioning what it could look like in an online environment when physical proximity poses a health risk. The opportunity to re-think participatory video arose during team debrief meetings after three participatory video workshops in December 2020, when one of the authors said she felt humbled by the experience of working with participants over Zoom. Other observations and sharing that emerged in our team reflection included a sense of wandering, doubt, the uncertainty of not being able to anticipate a particular outcome, not knowing if the recalibration that we were attempting would lead anywhere, and a sense of incompleteness in the workshop process. In seeking theoretical guides to understand these experiences, we revisit fundamental tools of inquiry to reflect on the possibilities that emerge when methods or researchers are ‘humbled’. This includes “taking an attitude of inquiry” (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 369) that calls for a curiosity, humility and attending to emergent processes including a willingness “to act in circumstances of radical uncertainty” and “to start from where you are without necessarily knowing where you are going” (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 376).

In our analysis, we centre the experience of being humbled as facilitators and what that may mean for participatory arts processes. We see the experience of being humbled as encompassing a curiosity about uncertainty and an attentiveness to the process when outcomes are unsure. We argue for a creative humility as a means of solidarity with migrant communities. Scholars have conceptualized an “intellectual humility” that centres a recognition of the limits of one’s knowledge and a receptivity to new forms of knowing (Christen et al., 2019; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2017). Yanow (2009) proposes a “passionate humility” that affirms the utility of doubt in reflective inquiry and an attentiveness to the potentiality produced by surprises, including “a degree of mindful openness or ‘permeability’ that enables perceiving an ‘event’ as surprising (it does not arrive so identified), acknowledging it as surprising might not require rethinking as such, but rather spontaneous, in-the-moment readjustments” (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009, p. 1343). Yanow (2009) further argues that the willingness to engage with surprise implicitly challenges the equation of expertise with an ability to predict and adhere to expected trajectories. Encountering the unexpected can throw the role of ‘expert’ into question as an ‘expert’ may be assumed to more commonly mitigate surprises rather than utilizing them.

**Mobile Media-Making Workshop Methodology**

Three Mobile Media-Making workshops were conducted by Vivian (the second co-author) of Voices of Women Media and co-facilitated by Julie and Merina (the first co-author and third co-author, respectively) in November and December 2020.
These workshops featured training for migrant women in Hong Kong on using their mobile devices to capture lived realities during the pandemic. Participants included migrant domestic workers and one asylum-seeker. These workshops centred a methodology created by Voices of Women Media to provide migrant women communities the opportunity to capture and convey their stories through media technology. Since 2007, Voices of Women Media’s work has included a variety of formats such as disposable photo cameras, mobile phones, sound recorders, high-definition video cameras, as well as digital single-lens reflex cameras. Media technology training typically occurs in carefully cultivated, safe and inclusive spaces to foster an equitable and non-hierarchical learning environment. This involves forming relationships, often in a compressed amount of time, through individual discussions, small group meetings, the sharing of home-cooked meals, and most often during informal or unplanned moments during the process. In 2020, these encounters were transferred to breakout rooms on Zoom, and direct messages on WhatsApp. This raised the question of how to make these digital encounters more intimate or comparable to the camaraderie that is typically developed through face-to-face encounters (Figure 1).

From Tokyo, Vivian conceptualized a virtual participatory video workshop where she would work with participants in Zoom breakout rooms, while Julie, Merina and the on-site team in Hong Kong worked with socially distanced participants in person. Julie, Merina and Jimmy Lo, a project volunteer, welcomed participants on campus while simultaneously projecting Vivian and remote participants on Zoom. The goals of the first session highlighted technical skills for media production, but also focused on creating camaraderie within the hybrid environment. Participants were asked to view their mobile devices as a tool for creating media and were prompted to re-create camera angles, composition and framing within their own Zoom boxes (see Figure 2). The first session was marked by an uncertain technological learning curve, as participants familiarized themselves with Zoom and as we managed participants’ varying WiFi connections. For instance, we could not get the audio to work in the classroom on campus so we asked participants to listen in through their earphones. One of the participants in the classroom did not have headphones and was given one of the facilitator’s headphones. While these incidents may seem minor, we were concerned with how such disruptions might hinder participants’ interest and attention, and how often these disruptions might occur.

Interactions during the workshops initially did seem more muted, given the constraints and technical interruptions mentioned above. In face-to-face participatory video workshops, gauging participation would be fairly straightforward through observing the informal sharing of ideas, personal experiences, and hands-on involvement with the equipment in video production. In a hybrid learning space, where some participants were masked and socially distanced, there was an ability to read cues and body language even if facial expressions were obscured and voices were slightly muffled.

Figure 1. Co-facilitators Zooming into the workshop from campus.

Figure 2. A lesson in close-up/detail shots over Zoom.
Offsite participants Zooming into workshops were more often framed in close-up shots confined within a rectangle, where buttons to mute audio and video allowed for an immediate disconnect from the exchange. This duality of encounters created an experimental space for participatory video training.

**Fragmenting Time and Space in Virtual Participatory Video**

The fragmentation of time and space was an immediately felt difference between virtual participatory video and a more traditional participatory video that prioritized face-to-face interactions. In 2017, we conducted a participatory video workshop series (Lin et al., 2019) in which time and space were organized very differently. In that series, eight workshops were held for approximately 50 domestic workers, asylum-seekers and members of ethnic minority communities. The workshops were held on consecutive Sundays in an exhibition space on campus that also featured participatory arts facilitated by Voices of Women Media.3 Entering the exhibition space on Sundays signalled the start of time and space exclusively devoted to a collective, creative endeavour separate from other responsibilities and obligations.  

By contrast, it became apparent very quickly that we as facilitators would have to recalibrate our organization of time and space for virtual participatory video. Virtual participatory video allowed greater flexibility for participants who could now Zoom in from anywhere, which increased access but also altered the relationship between time, space and attention. As facilitators, we wondered what would happen to attention, creativity, and relationality when time and space are, by necessity, fragmented. The relational rhythms of creative solidarity and rapport are a crucial feature of participatory video (Lin et al., 2019). These dynamics were still very present in virtual participatory video but manifested in different terms.

The recalibration of time and space are all the more salient considering the political, social and economic implications of time and space for precarious migrants, domestic workers in particular. Tensions around time and space are often linked to workers’ right to time off and, by extension, right to a private life (Sedacca, 2019). In Hong Kong, migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong are entitled to one rest day a week under the Employment Ordinance (Labour Department, 2017, p. 12), yet the precarity of a continuous 24-hour day off, reveals the boundedness of domestic workers’ time to employers’ temporalities, such as the expectation of constant availability to employers (e.g., Boersma, 2016; Sedacca, 2019). Since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, domestic workers have reported significant increases in employers refusing to grant domestic workers a day off or prohibiting workers from leaving the household on their day off (e.g., Chan, 2020; Summers, 2020; Chau, 2021).

For domestic workers, time that is their own and space that is their own may not necessarily coincide. The typical day off for many domestic workers is Sunday, the one day per week that is their own, if their employers adhere to the Employment Ordinance (Labour Department, 2017, p. 12). For many domestic workers, time off necessitates leaving the employers’ household, due to a common consensus that staying in the employers’ household on one’s day off will often result in working on their day off (Boersma, 2016). Creating space of their own during time on their own often requires the repurposing of public spaces outside the employer’s household. On Sundays, time and space are repurposed in Hong Kong to centre domestic workers’ other lives and identities in public spaces as performers, artists, activists, and community members (Boersma, 2016; Lai, 2010). Time becomes space as Sundays become “a home away from home” (Ortuzar, 2020, p. 81). The maximization of Sundays for domestic workers’ social, personal, cultural, creative and intellectual lives presents unique challenges for virtual participatory arts practitioners and requires a re-thinking of participation.

In virtual participatory video, the video production process was woven more directly into participants’ lived realities. Participants Zoomed into workshops from various locations: from their employers’ homes, their own homes, restaurants, the street, parks and other public spaces, MTR stations (i.e. the subway), buses, and doctors’ offices. Virtual participatory video revealed the significance of location in shaping the relational and research encounter: Antona, (2019) argues that the “location in which knowledge is produced is important to any kind of research, whether it be from a desk with a data-set or in the field” (p. 698). In our workshops, virtual participatory video revealed the spatiality of domestic workers’ lives and the simultaneity of domestic workers lives as they sought to negotiate the competing demands of different spaces, whether they were Zooming in from their employers’ home, a public park or elsewhere. The location from which participants were Zooming in shaped their interactions with us and in turn, the communicative cues we picked up from participants shaped our responses in turn. The encounters bridging different spaces were shaped by what a particular environment would permit, what participants could share, and what we felt as facilitators would be the most appropriate way to respond. In this sense, our responses as facilitators were not only to foster participation but also to signal that we recognized the context participants were Zooming in from, and that we recognized the demands that their environment required of them.

For example, one participant Zoomed into the participatory video workshops from her employer’s house. Although workshops were held on Sundays (the day off for many domestic workers), she informed us that she had gotten permission to join the workshop. She reported that her employers did not want her to leave the household during the pandemic but added that her employers were also strictly managing their own movements as well. Her participation during the workshops was engaged and attentive, but at times, required her attention elsewhere or careful responses to facilitators’ questions. Her participation spoke to employers’ expectations for domestic workers, as well as the employer’s...
unseen presence on the participant’s time. It was unclear whether Sunday could be claimed as a day off – her presence in the workshops suggest that she was permitted time away from work for personal activities, yet this seemed to be precarious. In turn, we as facilitators were conscious of taking cues from her presence by mirroring her body language and affect over Zoom, and met her careful replies by taking greater care in how we responded. More broadly, we took cues about participants’ environments and the kind of participation different environments permitted, by observing participants’ body language and how their bodies were situated in the environment they were Zooming from. Although it can be a common strategy to reflect participants’ body language and affect in research interviews as well, our shifts in tone and body language become another way of receiving signals or information about the environments that participants were Zooming in from that may, in other contexts, would have been communicated verbally in an in-person encounter.

Another participant Zoomed into one of the Sunday workshops from what looked to be a bunk bed in her employer’s household with her young ward in tow, a young boy determinedly settled in the foreground and crying energetically. The tone of the child’s cry elicited sympathetic and knowing laughs from others in the Zoom call. She explained that her ward was not allowed by his father to play with anything and sought comfort from her because of this. We continued the conversation around the young boy’s cries, with others in the Zoom call taking turns to soothe or distract the boy from his discontent. The participant later moved to what appeared to be a living room area with an older child quickly popping her head in and out of the frame. As with the participant above, the fusion of work and life was clearly evident in the Zoom workshop. Although her care of her ward on Sunday raises questions about work expectations on the typical day off for most domestic workers, her comments about her wards and her relationship with her employers also evinced a particular authority concerning her position in the family as a caregiver.

Another participant, Realyn, a Filipino domestic worker, provided a revealing glimpse into how domestic workers carve out time and space on their days off when she Zoomed in from several spaces over the duration of one of the Sunday workshops. She initially joined the Zoom workshop as she walked through an MTR (subway) station while she attempted to find a calmer space to talk. Later on, she Zoomed in against a tree in what appeared to be a quiet spot in a park, while she shared her reflections about the creation of her video. While this was happening, inaudible talk could be detected in the background which caught Realyn’s attention and momentarily intruded on her sharing. Soon after, she reported that she was told by a security guard or park staff that she was not allowed to stay where she was and that she would have to leave the space. She caught up with us later as she explained that she had to move out of the space while others in the Zoom call expressed sympathy and criticized the guard’s actions. This scenario reflects broader issues concerning the control of domestic workers’ movements in public spaces (e.g., Tam, 2016). Realyn later Zoomed in from what looked like a small diner or café leaning over a bowl of noodles as she continued to share her thoughts about the production of her video. This last Zoom afforded us a glimpse of her maskless face as she ate, a contrast to her masked Zooms from the MTR station and from the park.

Initially, we believed that Zoom offered the only available compromise for participatory video workshops considering that many people were immobilized to varying degrees by the pandemic. What we did not expect was how Zoom could foreground other kinds of mobilities and the information that could be shared about participants’ realities over Zoom. Interestingly, place seemed to become more salient through a technically-mediated mobility as participants Zoomed in from different locations or Zoomed on the move – whether walking, on public transit or in liminal spaces including doctors’ waiting rooms. Virtual participatory video revealed the durability of collective creative endeavours that could be woven into the day-to-day as we and the participants negotiated varying immobilities and mobilities.

### Potentiality in Fragmentation

We initially viewed the fragmentation of time, space and attention as limitations of practising participatory video over Zoom, but realized that different connections and relations were still possible through intimate entanglement (Latimer & López Gómez, 2019) with participants’ realities. As researchers who are aware of issues affecting migrant communities, virtual participatory video provided us with unexpected opportunities to dwell alongside (Latimer, 2018) participants and propelled us into their immediate realities. Kindon (2016b) notes that in participatory video, much value is placed in taking people out of their ordinary lives to do something new, fun and creative that can reorient their gaze and enable reflection. In virtual participatory video during a pandemic, participants were much more tied to their immediate surroundings. As participants Zoomed from different locations and in between different tasks, we as facilitators were pulled into participants’ lives through Zoom in real time.

The fragmentation of time, space and attention necessitated a re-envisioning of participation. To do so, we utilize the conceptualization by Springgay and Truman (2018) who posit participation to be “rhythmic, created as a pattern of difference, and which is composed of endlessly moving decisional vibration” (p.77). Participation is to be considered as something immanent to the event itself, made up of decisional movements and affect, moving us further from the simple inclusionary logic that reduces participation to a volitional act. There is an emphasis on participation being “decisional”, which Manning (2016) defines as “the cut, in the event, through which new ecologies, new fields of relation are crafted” (p.19). These movements cannot be mapped prior, are
activated by “mobile cues” (Manning, 2016, p.18) and are mutational. These movements carry the potential to alter the course of events within the event, creating different possibilities determined by the course of prior decisions and movements. This calls for an attentiveness to the relational rhythms (Lin et al., 2019) created throughout the process rather than a singular focus on extracting outputs such as videos.

Almost all of the participants were visibly multitasking during at least some of the workshops. This included participants who were expected to work on what typically would be a day off, participants who had to attend to employers or wards during a session, those who were attending multiple Zoom workshops or webinars simultaneously and those Zooming in while running errands. Off-screen, employers and children were an unseen presence, which presented a challenge for privacy and the capacity to share and discuss ideas freely. However, the online environment provided an alternative “promise of social repair” through a mediated form of connection (Kafer, 2021, p. 1). For instance, two participants joined the virtual space from a Hong Kong bus descending a mountain after a hike. For the first time in participatory video workshops, we were taken directly into working environments and also witnessed the impact of unseen employers on participants’ communication. In these moments, we were slotted into participants’ lives and spaces, in contrast to an in-person workshop, where participants are expected to carve out time to come into ‘our’ space (Lin et al., 2019). This gave our participants agency in managing their own schedules and joining when convenient for them, echoing other community-based research projects where remote environments were preferred (Valdez & Gubrium, 2020).

Initially, we were uncertain about how much participants would be able to retain content from the workshop and how we could nurture connections and a collaborative spirit with participants that is central to participatory video. It was easier for facilitators to gauge and evaluate the quality of participation directly during in-person participatory video workshops through hands-on tasks. However, these cues were not available during a virtual session as participants worked remotely on their own. Being unable to closely observe the process of participants shooting videos was new to us and this arrangement necessitated a greater trust in our participants and their capacity to create. It meant exercising more trust towards participants and the unfolding process despite the lack of visible cues ensuring us of certain outcomes. And although collaborative teamwork was not extensive, this did not reduce the value of participatory video as participants were able to gain more control and ownership over their work by directing, shooting and at times editing by themselves.

To illustrate, it was the first time joining a workshop for two domestic workers, Grace and Marilou. Interaction during discussions seemed sparse and it was unclear whether they grasped enough of the workshop content to produce a rough cut, i.e. a first draft of their raw footage placed onto an editing timeline. These concerns proved unnecessary as they produced multiple videos that employed various settings and angles, and that reflected feedback and guidance offered by the facilitators. For example, Marilou’s video was a clean, one-take shot of Victoria Harbour using the panning technique taught at the workshop. She replied it was her first time making a video when facilitators asked if she had prior experience making videos, given the overall quality of her footage. Grace also did not have much prior experience in shooting and editing video. Her video required subtitles and although we had planned to assist her with it, she was very clear about editing it on her own with VivaVideo, a free editing software for mobile phones. After the workshop, we as facilitators reflected on the need to be more comfortable with and around silence when engaging with participants’ physical absence. This was the case with participants such as migrant domestic workers, for whom transnational, virtual communication with families and multitasking is a routine part of their everyday realities (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018; Madianou, 2012; Peng & Wong, 2012).

In virtual participatory video, facilitators need to be comfortable with uncertainty and be prepared to fully immerse themselves in the process while engaging with the “complex relational field that process itself calls forth” (Manning, 2016, pp. 33–34). It is important that the methodology for virtual participatory video be situated in the “middle,” where:

“immanent modes of thinking-making-doing come from within the process themselves, rather than from outside them. In the middle, the speculative ‘what if’ emerges as a catalyst for the event. The middle is a difficult place to be” (Springgay & Truman, 2018).

The emphasis is in the becoming and doing rather than meaning-making, or what Springgay and Truman (2018) term “thinking-making-doing”. In virtual participatory video, this translates into using uncertainty as a resource rather than seeing it as a limitation and allowing for a process to unfold rather than driving a process along a pre-structured trajectory.

**Cultivating New Migrant Visual Languages**

Conducting workshops over Zoom affirmed that technology and media literacy were not the foundation of these trainings, but rather the relationships and discussions in this space. In this new space, many of the rules of conventional filmmaking were broken - with framing of shots, composition and text expanding outside of the standard frame. Making do with what would previously be considered mistakes, the virtual space required letting go of the subjective line of horizon and what would be considered the viewer’s eye level. Instead, we considered multiple ways of seeing by proposing that there is not one standard cultural viewpoint for what constitutes a ‘good’ image. Kindon (2016a, p. 498) rightly raises concerns
about the use of Western cinematographic conventions such as white balance (i.e. adjusting color balance and temperature to make sure white objects appear white) and framing the horizon line (i.e. the composition and placement of visual lines to draw viewers’ attention). These standards reinforce a hegemonic perspective and, as such, Kindon (2016a) argues that participatory video practitioners should scrutinize the root of these techniques in a dominant Western ideology of aesthetic and production. The Zoom format can encourage practitioners of participatory video to think beyond the frame of filmic conventions by letting go of previously held standards as a means of critically analysing media production.

For instance, there were technical difficulties to consider due to sharing and accessing files created on mobile phones. A challenge for facilitators included varying formats of mobile phone video recordings, differing resolutions, and most importantly the landscape versus portrait aspect ratio, or the height and width of the image. Intuitively, handheld video recording on a mobile phone is done in a portrait aspect ratio of 9:16, which is taller than how moving images such as film and television are viewed on screens in a landscape ratio of 16:9. Mixing these two aspect ratios often proves disastrous and signifies an ‘amateur’ video production. By instructing participants to use their own mobile phones, we re-assessed and relaxed our standards on resolution and aspect ratios. Participants used equipment they owned and were already familiar with, whereas traditional face-to-face workshops would typically involve learning how to handle more complex video cameras and sound recorders (Lin et al., 2019). Using ‘cell-philms,’ i.e. short films shot and/or edited entirely on a mobile device, in participatory video research re-thinks the participatory video ‘rescue’ model of importing more sophisticated video equipment and using the tools already available to the community in “support of creative production” (MacEntee et al., 2016, p. 8).

In the first workshop, participants were given the assignment of ‘creating a video portrait of yourself or someone you know’ in regards to living, working and connecting during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were given the following week to reflect on their video portrait ideas and to begin capturing and collecting their footage. Participants uploaded their rough edits and sent photos and videos directly to the WhatsApp group with text messages for consultation. Given the remote environment, we were able to continually check in, ask for clarification, and request additional footage. In contrast to traditional face-to-face participatory video workshops, there was no waiting from workshop to workshop, but an instantaneous flow of being able to directly and quickly access media. This was particularly helpful for Nadeeshani, an asylum-seeker from South Asia who had been living in Hong Kong for over 10 years. She created a rough cut assembled from video clips she had shot of her daily life which was reviewed during the second workshop. There was one clip of Nadeeshani filmed front-facing with a ‘selfie’ stick as her daughter sat on the back of a bike while she cycled up a mountain road in Fo Tan (see Figure 3). Even though both mother and daughter were masked in the video, their exhilaration was apparent as trucks speeded precariously past them. It was important to use this footage to capture this emotion, but there was no audio track recorded with the video which meant that an alternative sound source was needed. Nadeeshani was tasked to find an audio track to fill this silence. Over the course of the Zoom call, she was able to locate and find a video of her daughter singing an acapella version of “Prom Dress” by mxmtoon (2019), and used that audio to serve as the soundtrack to the rest of the video that she titled, “Live Your Life”. A montage of archival family footage, Nadeeshani takes us through cooking roti, waking her children and seeing them off to school, to the joie de vivre that embodies her personality and invites the viewer on her adventures of

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Figure 3. An editing lesson over Zoom.
screaming on a roller coaster and jumping into the ocean. She chose two ways of framing: (1) a handheld selfie perspective; and (2) a point of view from her eye level. The audience sees what she sees during these personal exchanges, privy to a glimpse from her personal archive.

Ailenemae, a migrant domestic worker from the Philippines, wanted to create a video poem using archival family photos provided by family members in the Philippines through WhatsApp. She viewed the video portrait assignment as an opportunity to create a tribute to her mother, who passed away when she was a young child. The photos themselves had clearly been handled over the years and photographed as snapshots from a phone, rather than scanned. Despite the low resolution, the rough and grainy slideshow of her mother’s last years represented Ailenemae’s attempts to connect to her. The use of photographs is typically discouraged in face-to-face participatory video as participants are more often encouraged to maximize the opportunity to create their video with moving images. However, Ailenemae’s initial idea to film the sunset during a walk outside was met with her employer’s resistance which necessitated adaptation and experimentation with participants’ own archival footage. Ailenemae, a published writer who leads writing workshops for fellow migrant domestic workers, wrote a poem called “Beyond the Sunset” dedicated to her mother. She filmed herself reciting this poem in selfie portrait mode, framed in a medium shot focused on her face, the resulting audio serving as the voiceover narration. She speaks directly to the memory of her mother: “Where are you now? Please let me feel you, show yourself even only in my dreams and let me see you.” The audience hears this voice while viewing overlaid images of the sunset and her face in close-up segues into the photo slideshow of her mother’s pivotal life moments: childhood, high school graduation, wedding, birth of her children and ending with her funeral.

Given constraints imposed by the pandemic, participants experimented with the rules of this visual language to frame how they see their lives and help the viewer to see it from their perspective. This re-thinking of the participatory video framework harkens to movements in reflexive filmmaking by making the act of filmmaking visible to the audience. For example, in Au Bout de Souffle [Breathless], Godard (1960) broke filmic conventions by filming a conversation from the back seat of a car with the camera focused on the back of Jean Seberg’s head and neck instead of a medium or close-up shot of her face. This pivotal scene consists of a series of visible and disorienting jump cuts or essentially ‘jumping’ in time and space due to a section of time being cut within a shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 336). The audience is relegated to the backseat viewpoint, lurching through the Paris landscape fixed solely on the back of Seberg’s head, a disjointed perspective that signals to the audience the placement of the camera. In Yi Yi [A One and a Two] (Yang, 2000), the young boy explains taking the photographs of the back of people’s heads, “You can’t see it yourself, so I’m helping you.” In these films, the cameras reveal a space often unseen.

Figure 4. Realyn shifting the gaze.

This unseen space is captured in Realyn’s video “Many Hats,” where she chose to set up her camera and frame herself from a high, rear angle. The camera is positioned from behind and above, creating the sensation of a third party observing and surveilling her from behind in action as she performs her daily routines as a migrant domestic worker from the start to the end of the day. It is not until the end of the day that she breaks the fourth wall, a theatre and filmic convention where the audience or camera represents an invisible wall, and directly gazes and speaks to the camera (see Figure 4). In chronicling her actions, she offers to the viewer a direct gaze into her life and creates new ways of seeing the migrant worker’s experience. The audience switches from passively observing Realyn to being on the receiving end of her gratitude for viewing and acknowledging her day. Her video, as with others that were created, demonstrated that participants could still produce compelling short videos that spoke to their lived realities and priorities through virtual participatory video.

Conclusion
The objective of this inquiry was to reflect on the potential of Zoom-mediated methodologies rather than seeing Zoom-mediated methods solely as a compromise during a global pandemic. We argue that Zoom-mediated creative methods are not just about ‘making do’ but about opening up other possibilities that should be assessed on its own terms. Our workshops revealed strengths or potential that could be realized more richly through Zoom and related technologies,
and a need for researchers and practitioners to utilize experiences of uncertainty and frustration.

Key differences between virtual participatory video and a more traditional face-to-face participatory video are the fragmentation of time, space and attention as part of the process rather than a series of obstacles. The fragmentation of time and space in virtual participatory video entailed a greater presence of migrant realities and demands into the method itself, perhaps most notably a tangible sense of competing demands that participants were expected to negotiate at any particular moment. The question is then how to work creatively with such fragmented encounters. This can be particularly valuable when working with members of communities that may experience varying forms of scarcity in relation to time or space, such as migrant domestic workers.

Re-thinking fragmentation as part of the texture of virtual participatory video illustrates the durability of creativity when day-to-day realities are permitted to intrude on learning over Zoom. The fragmentation of virtual participatory video can also refer to the fragmentation of expertise as facilitators navigate the possibilities and limitations of Zoom-mediated methods alongside participants. We initially felt a great deal of uncertainty progressing through the workshops but it may have been more productive to think about the possibilities that uncertainty allows rather than seeing uncertainty as something to mitigate. Doing so requires a return to the basic tools of inquiry, such as a creative humility and an openness to understanding the direction as it evolves rather than steering participants along a well-worn trajectory. As facilitators, this requires ceding a certain amount of control, a greater emphasis on trusting the process, and recognizing the generosity afforded to us by participants when technical or other glitches occur. In operating in this uncertain terrain, we felt grateful for participants who gifted their time and presence to us, which in turn leads us to reflect on how to best receive and reciprocate their generosity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Research Grants Council, General Research Fund, Hong Kong [17621119].

ORCID iD
Julie Ham https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8607-4443

Notes
1. https://www.mmmk.ca/the-stories-we-tell
2. https://www.voicesofwomenmedia.org/

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