

SCREEN ZINE:

Special Edition - Oct 2021

Textures of Space

from the Singapore Pavilion at the
17th International Architecture
Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia



editorial note

In this special edition of Screen Zine, the Singapore Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia takes over to make connections between the moving image, cities and the narratives within! Taking cues from *Textures of the City, ArtScience on Screen* - the first half of the zine opens with a visual illustration by Architectural designer, Brian Khoo Zonghan referencing Salomé Jashi's *Taming the Garden* (2021) followed by a short essay piece by Dr Simone Shu-Yeng Chung ruminating on Kwon Min-pyo and Seo Hansol's *Jong Chak Yeok (Short Vacation)* (2020).

The second half shifts its focus to musings on the relationship between Venice and Singapore anchored by Professor François Penz's written piece *What I saw in Venice* which draws from the Cinematic Architecture Workshop conducted on 17-24 September 2021. While Melissa and Buwei's *Death in Venice* (2020) and Lu Yixin's *Untitled (Map of the city)* (2021) use collage as a way of creatively interpreting the two cities...

This zine is an open invitation to you, to explore the vast textures of space through and on film, and to forge your own experience of your lived environment!

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Displaced Memories

image: Brian Khoo Zonghan

friendship and way-losing

AT THE END OF THE WORLD

by Dr Simone Shu-Yeng Chung



image: Mary Ann Ng

Ensemble cast.

Medium long shot. Long take. Flat space. Real locations.

And,

A wander to the end of the world.

For a quartet of schoolgirls in the same photography club, the teacher advisor's instructions is precise:

I want you to photograph the end of the world over the summer vacation. [...] But for this time, these are [disposable] film cameras. Before phones had cameras. [...] You would put more care into taking each photo, right?

Short Vacation (2021), the debut feature of South Korean directors Kwon Min-pyo and Seo Han-sol, is an understated coming-of-age film that captures budding friendships and shared experiences. Unlike Kim Bora's singular focus on her young protagonist's heart-rending search for love and acceptance in the critically acclaimed *House of Hummingbird* (2018), *Short Vacation's* screenplay treatment of its teenage subjects evades emotional gravitas. Instead, glimpses into each character's backstory is revealed in dialogue, through recounting rather than portrayal. And without prejudice, new transfer student Siyeon is warmly accepted by the existing three club members. It is also her that suggests the group explore Sinchon for their photographic exercise since the station is located at the end of Seoul's extensive Line 1 subway (upon learning that her house is located on a more central node on the same railway line, I can appreciate the unworldly Occam's razor-like reasoning).

That both films centre on fourteen-year-olds is no coincidence; by Kwon's admission, this is considered a delicate age in Korea. No longer children, not quite adults, yet shouldered with societal expectations to perform, especially in academics. The hopefulness of youth is evident in bespectacled Songhee's conceptual metaphor of "a wall" for the end of the world – not as a prohibitive barrier, but a marker for what lies beyond, yet to be explored. And explore they did, fuelled by the certainty of friendship for camaraderie and to lend each other emotional courage.



image: Mary Ann Ng

Throughout the film, perceptible restraint to maintain a respectful distance in the mises-en-scene is evident, ostensibly to preserve the purity of the teenage ensemble's interactions. Inevitably, it beckons viewers to eavesdrop on the girls' unscripted conversations. The quartet's (mis)adventures in peri-urban Sinchon, sparsely inhabited by elderly residents, is rendered cinematographically as a constructed universe comprising panoramic live-action long shots interspersed with, oftentimes, slightly out-of-focus still lifes or close-ups of flowers and domesticated animals developed from the

disposable cameras. These mediated images, deliberately included for the audience and film production team to reflect on, enforce the separation between the girls and those outside their clique. They are visual documentations of what four teenagers, cast to play themselves, see through their viewfinders. We will never truly be able to see through their eyes. Nor become a part of their world. Nonetheless, a compellingly haptic quality pervades both the moving and still images. Tinged in warm hues, they invite our eyes to visually 'graze' the textures on screen. The artefactual nature of analogue photographs affirms their performative function – as snapshots of memorable moments from this chapter of life. Here, old tech is the right tech.

*The loss of a phone,
Invites way-finders,
For a spell of way-losing in green fields;
A play of summer rain,
Footprint in the mud.*

The symbolic confirmation of enduring friendship bonds through the gifting of Himalayan wishing bracelets is augmented through shared experiences. As sunrise concludes the extended excursion, the quietude of dawn is perforated by an audible gnashing of plastic teeth mechanically winding a spool of film into place, followed by the firm snap of a camera button pressed down, repeated over and over again.

¹ "Short Vacation | Berlinale Meets... Kwon Min-pyo and Seo Hansol," February 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6ZPtXFfzWA>



Cat Fields

image: Dr Simone Shu-Yeng Chung



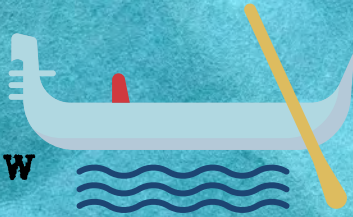
Death in Venice

image: Zhu Sheng Buwei and Melissa Ong Kai Yi

Find out more about this work at www.millennialnomadspace.com/death-in-venice

W h a t

I s a w



i n V e n i c e

by Professor François Penz - October 2021

Venice is a city that even the Italians visit as if it were a foreign city. As for foreigners... there's every kind of foreigner. Everyone brings their own homage. Their own admiration. Their curiosity. Their anxiety. Their complacency. Their avidity. Wishing to be in Venice. Wishing for having been in Venice.

Voice-over in *Giro turistico senza guida*
[Unguided Tour aka Letter from Venice]
(Susan Sontag, USA/Italy, 1983)



VENICE PARTICIPANTS AT THE START OF THE WORKSHOP
(from L to R: Reuben, Angel, François, Shireen, Karolina, Sumaiyah)

While in Venice in September 2021 on the occasion of the Venice - Singapore cinematic workshop, part of the Architecture Biennale, I often had the opportunity to reflect on Sontag's remarks for myself but for others around me. Being a city even foreign to Italians, I wondered if Venice could be construed as a form of heterotopia, transcending time and place, and yet a city that belongs to the collective imagination of the world. Clearly what had motivated the students, myself and my colleagues to join the workshop at that particular moment time, was driven by personal motives and a strong desire to be in Venice. This wish transcended any potential risks and other tedious travel restrictions associated with the ongoing pandemic. And yet if we had been re-watching *Death in Venice* (Visconti, Italy, 1971), as I did, we would have been warned by a poignant scene between Aschenbach - aka Dirk Bogarde - and the bank clerk who did not mince his words 'Asiatic cholera has shown a marked tendency to spread beyond its source...but when you consider the vulnerability of Venice, with its lagoons and its scirocco...Do you know that in the hospitals, there's not a single free bed to be had'. In the event the Biennale organisation was impeccably safe, and we were all able to enjoy a time outside time that we will all cherish for a long time.

And so, I embarked in this workshop, initially teasing out of cinema a reflection on what Venice perhaps was and is. To get to know a city though cinema is always an enjoyable and informative task, which varies depending on whether one has a prior knowledge of the city or not. For example, when I first visited Japan in 2018, I had studied

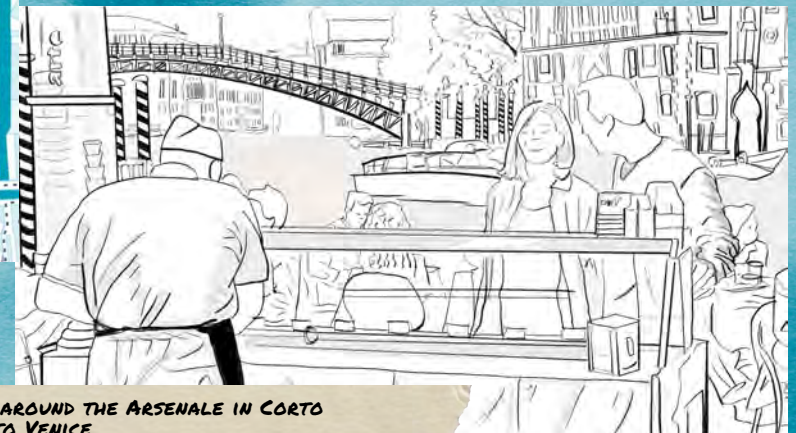
quite a few Japanese films, particularly by Ozu. It gave me an instant sense of familiarity with some urban sights of Tokyo as well as domestic interiors. I experienced the same feeling while visiting New York for the first time. This is what could be described as a sense of déjà-vu. But a prior knowledge of a city through film can only provide a 'theoretical' insight that only gets 'realised' while actually being physically present in time and place.

Venice is a city I have visited several times, also my wife being Venetian gives me an added personal bond to the place. So, no sense of déjà-vu in this case but as I watched quite a few films while in Venice, and since I have returned to Cambridge, I feel a much closer relationships with the city through the cinematic locations that I could recognize. For example, in *Pane e Tulipani* [Bread and Tulips] (Soldini, Italy, 2000), the characters of Rosalba and Constantino were meeting in Campo do Pozzi, a square I became familiar with, being so close to my flat, and a key site in Corto Maltese's Guide to Venice (see images above and right) – ditto



for the scenes around the Campiello dei Miracoli. Having gained such a direct bodily experience with a place allows for a set of personal memories to get re-activated when watching a film. It is no longer a theoretical experience but a heightened involvement with a familiar place.

I still have a long list of Venice films to get through, indeed according to IMDB, it is the second most filmed city in Italy (after Rome), so no shortage of material. Unsurprisingly perhaps the overall picture is quite different from other cities. While for example London emerges as the archetype of the modern civic dystopia, most Venice films can't resist its picture postcard prettiness. This is why so many foreign films are made in Venice or have scenes set in Venice. It has often been suggested that places are glorified by the presence of film stars but in my view, it doesn't apply to Venice, on the contrary – if you can bear it



(LEFT) THE WALK AROUND THE ARSENALE IN CORTO MALTESE'S GUIDE TO VENICE

(RIGHT) ILLUSTRATED STILL FROM ROSALBA AND CONSTANTINO MEETING IN CAMPO DO POZZI IN PANE E TULIPANI [BREAD AND TULIPS] (SOLDINI, ITALY, 2000)

watch how Bruce Willis and Michelle Pfeiffer in *The Story of Us* (Reiner, USA, 1999) are dwarfed by Venice's magnificence. And if you can't compete with Venice, you can call on James Bond (Daniel Craig) to engineer its destruction, with the spectacular collapse of Palazzo Lion Morosini in the Canal Grande in *Casino Royale* (Campbell, UK, 2006). Of course, there are notable exceptions, for example *Don't Look Now* (Roeg, UK/Italy, 1973) that eerily exposes the darker side of Venice.

Another curious phenomenon that distinguishes Venice, is that its urban fabric has barely changed since the 17th century. As a result, the 'cinematic urban archaeology' methodology, which I employed for London, tracking the accumulated layers of moving-image material for key city locations over decades in order to chart the urban transformations, would yield little, if no benefit for Venice. However, the other important component of a cinematic urban archaeology approach, recognising the social and cultural mutations of a city, would prove much more fruitful. For example, in *Anonimo Veneziano* [Anonymous Venetian] (Salerno, Italy, 1970), essentially a long *dérive* of a couple in the streets of Venice, there are no traces of tourists – *vaporetti*, piazzas and calli are almost empty. But if we fast forward to the year 2000, the characters in *Pane e Tulipani* struggle to find a room for the night. In the intervening thirty years tourism had increased exponentially, hotels had become saturated and Airbnb had yet to be founded in 2008.

Cinema has clearly documented this process over time, amongst other social and cultural trends, and so have we during our workshop. Over a week, participants working across Venice and Singapore made short films, indexing a chunk of the world duration in the process. The first observational exercise helped us to understand the world around us and how the moving image constitutes a unique form of spatial ethnography. The second exercise 'City Sinfonietta'



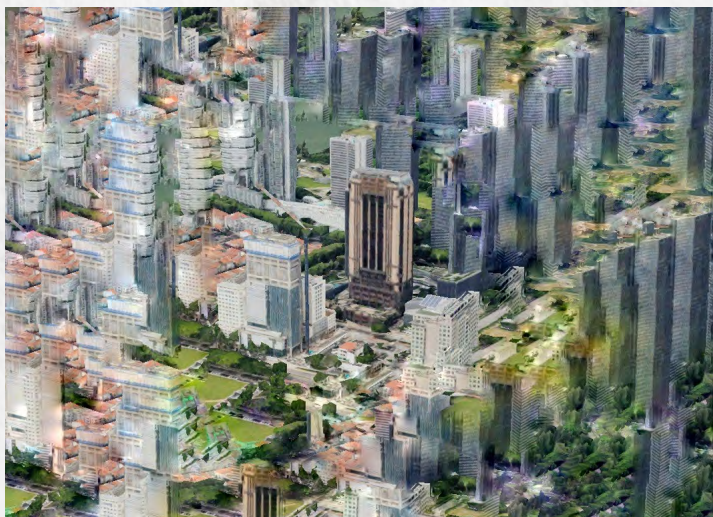
ILLUSTRATION OF BRUCE WILLIS AND MICHELLE PFEIFFER ON THE CANAL GRANDE IN *THE STORY OF US* (REINER, USA, 1999)



FINAL REVIEW AT THE SINGAPORE PAVILION BETWEEN VENICE AND SINGAPORE PARTICIPANTS ON ZOOM.

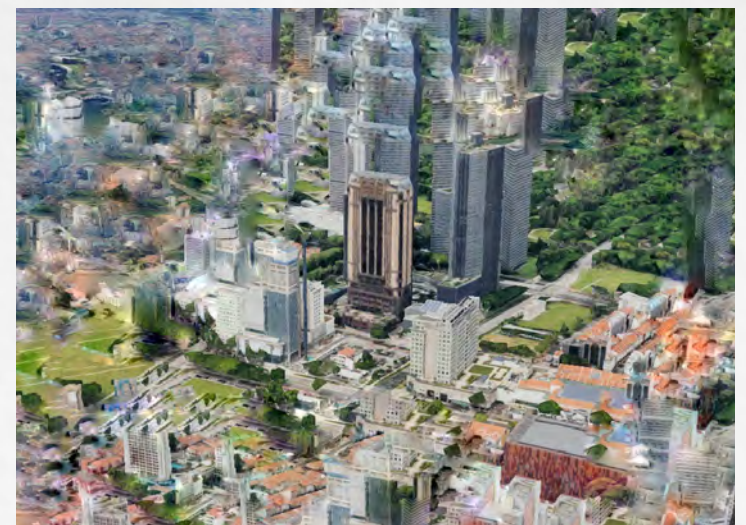
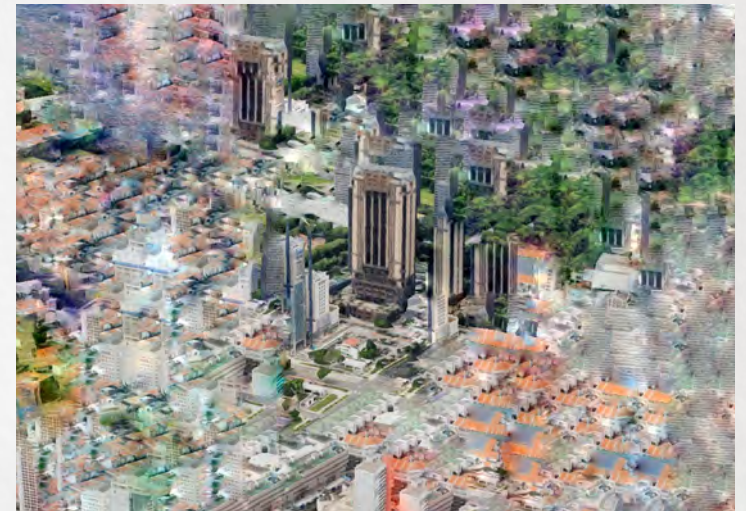
asked for the manipulation of screen time and space, using the montage editing tradition. In the process we experimented with creative geographies, recording new topographies and creating new maps of both cities. The last exercise asked participants to work in teams across Venice and Singapore. This was the opportunity to reflect on the art of future living in the age of globalization, pushing to the limit the notion of 'creative geographies', to imagine new spaces in which 'we might live together' (the theme of the Biennale), however remotely. This was a fascinating exercise that forced us to confront our cultural similarities and differences – with on one hand, Venice, the ultimate representative of material culture, and on the

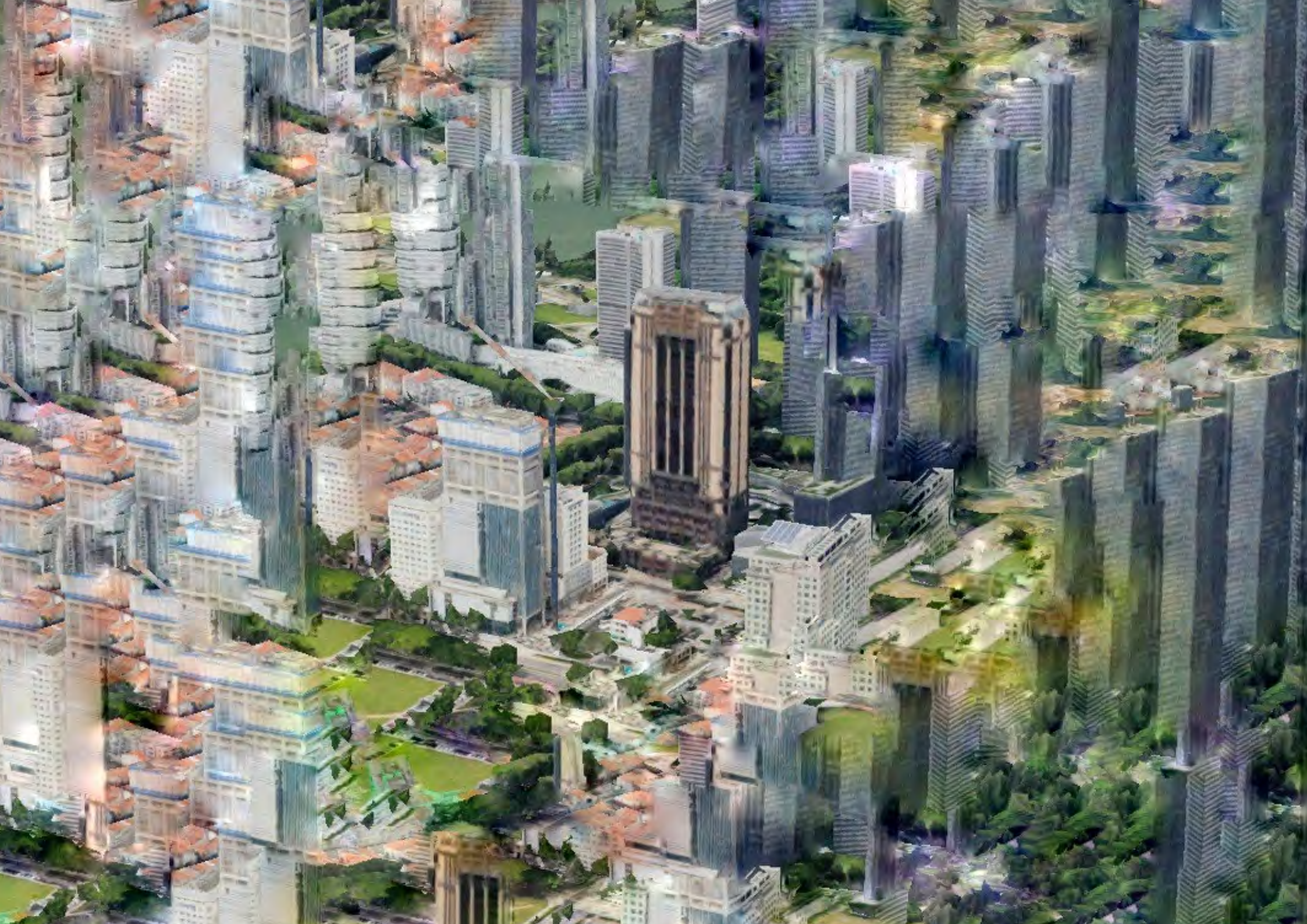
other, Singapore, as a generic city characterized by its unique hawker culture, recognized as a key intangible cultural heritage of humanity. In the final review of the work, the films we made (available at: <https://to-gather.sg/event/cavsworkshop/>) acted as a thinking tool for an innovative reflection and insights into complex situations at the global level. It was a novel experiment that brought the two cities temporarily closer. I feel that I have experienced living in Venice though Singapore, a city I do not know – and if one day I have the opportunity to visit it, no doubt it will be associated with my memories of Venice...and a sense of déjà-vu.



Untitled (Map of a city)


image: Lu Yixin





About the Contributors

Brian KHOO Zonghan is interested in the phenomenological influences of architecture, atmosphere & objects on the everyday, among other design related explorations. He is also one half of Office Of_, a design studio engaged in the exploration of design across space, objects and time.

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Dr. Simone Shu-Yeng CHUNG is curator of the Singapore Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2021. She is Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore. She holds a Ph.D. in Architecture from University of Cambridge and practiced as an architect in London. A former Rome Scholar in Architecture and Japan Foundation Asian Center Fellow, she is also a 2020 CCA Research Fellow. She co-edited, with Mike Douglass, *The Hard State, Soft City of Singapore* (2020, Amsterdam University Press).

Mary Ann NG is Curatorial Assistant for the Singapore Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2021. She holds a Master of Architecture degree from the National University of Singapore. Both researcher and designer, her interests stem from observations of the contemporary individual, their subsequent emergent lifestyles, online and offline social practices and new cognitive behaviours within the spatial context. She is also most recently research assistant for *Deciphering the Spatial Rhetorics of the Millennial Nomad* (2019-ongoing).

Melissa ONG Kai Yi and ZHU Sheng Buwei are two Architecture Master students at the National University of Singapore. They are both interested in how meaning and fruitful discourse can be created within the loosely defined confines of architectural thinking, design and representation.

François PENZ is Professor of Architecture & the Moving Image and Emeritus Fellow at Darwin College, University of Cambridge. He has published widely on issues of cinema, architecture and the city, most recently *Cinematic Urban Geographies* (Palgrave Macmillan 2017) and *Cinematic Aided Design: an everyday approach to architecture* (Routledge in 2018). In 2020 he completed an AHRC research project, 'A cinematic musée imaginaire of spatial cultural differences' (2017-2020) that expanded many of the ideas developed in his Routledge book applied to other cultures (China and Japan in particular), construing films of everyday life as a revelator of deep spatial cultural differences and similarities.

LU Yixin is interested in finding ways to talk about very specific feelings of existential anxiety, ambivalence, nothingness and the lack of resolution. In the past, he used to dabble in theatre, installation and photography. He is currently a first-year architecture student at the national university of Singapore.

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About the Singapore Pavilion, Venice Biennale 2021

to gather: *The Architecture of Relationships* examines the different ways in which we, residents of Singapore, share space — in our city, with one another, and with the rest of nature. The 2021 Singapore Pavilion features sixteen projects that represent the cross-section of local cultures and society. Singapore is highly urbanised and amenable. Against this cosmopolitan backdrop, spatial typologies such as hawker centres, community centres and housing development void decks are constant fixtures in facilitating and nurturing practices of sociability in the city.

Co-commissioned by the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore and DesignSingapore Council, the exhibition is curated by the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore.



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About ArtScience on Screen

ArtScience on Screen explores the intersection between art and science using moving image, video and film. ArtScience on Screen forms the backbone of the museum's dedicated film programming, and is part of Marina Bay Sands' ongoing commitment to the local and international film culture and community. In addition to screenings, Level 4 of ArtScience Museum will also host regular press conferences, dialogue sessions and masterclasses with acclaimed filmmakers and artists, with the aim to inspire audiences to discover art and science through film and moving image.

About ArtScience Museum

ArtScience Museum is an iconic cultural landmark in Singapore. Our mission is to explore where art, science, culture and technology come together. It is here at the intersection of art and science that innovation and new ideas are formed. We have held large-scale exhibitions by some of the world's best known artists including Leonardo da Vinci, Salvador Dali, Andy Warhol, Vincent Van Gogh and M.C. Escher since opening in February 2011. In addition, we have presented significant exhibitions that explore aspects of science including big data, particle physics, paleontology, marine biology, cosmology and space exploration.



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