



**In a world
where the old
are the main characters**

[TEAM HUMAN]

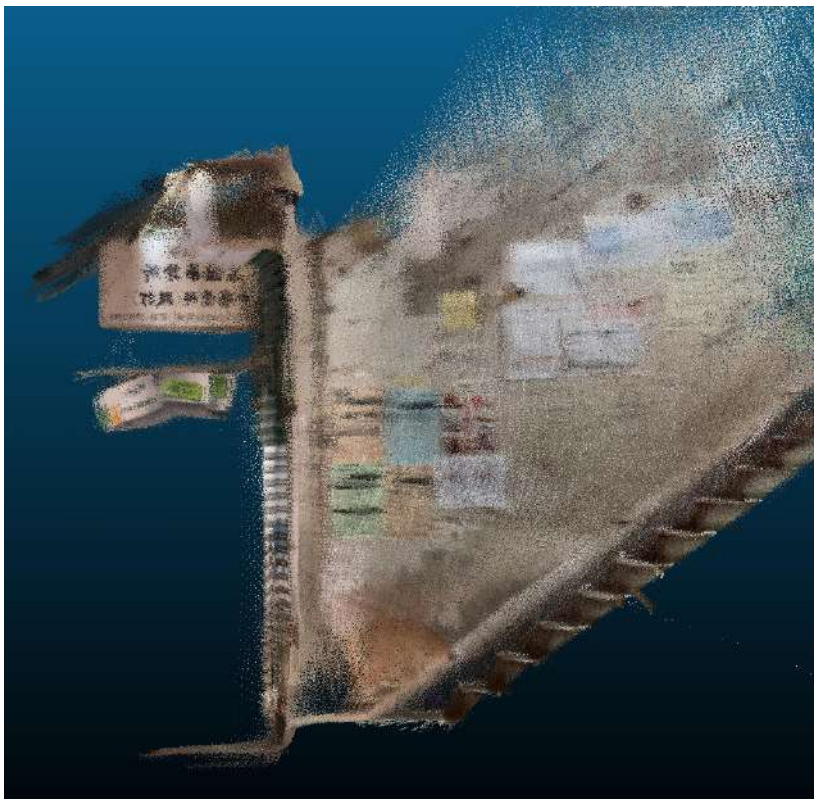
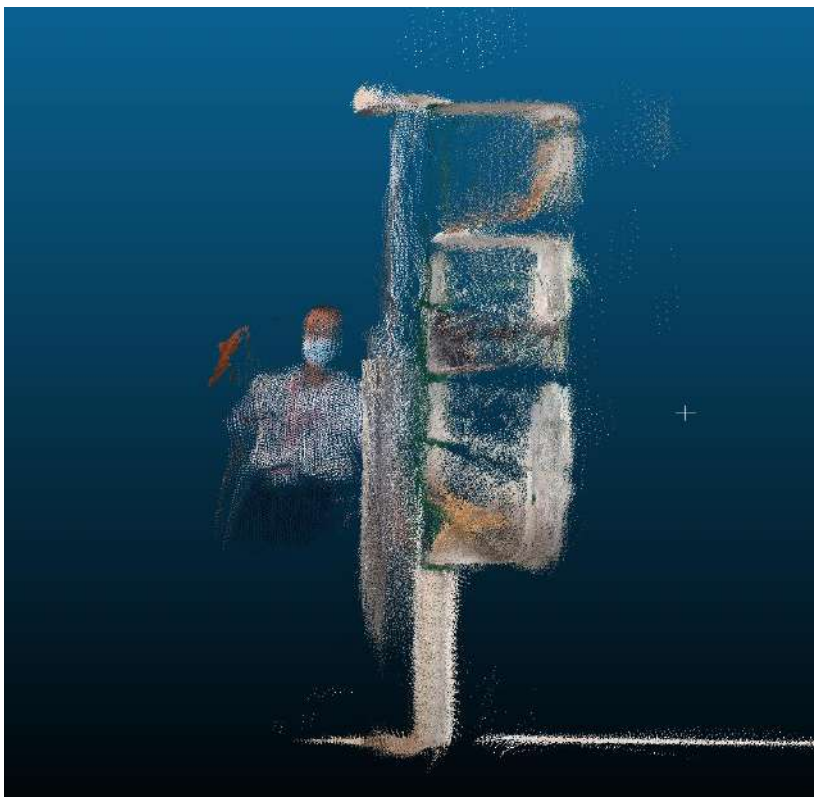
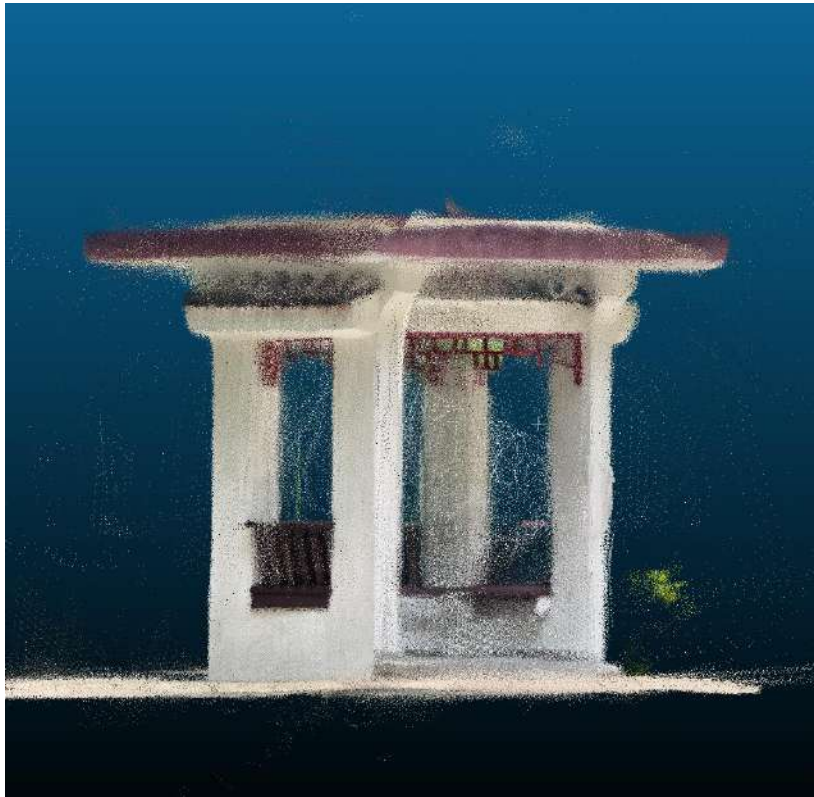
CHEUNG Kin Yi

LI Yuechun

Site Visit



3D Scan



Concept

- i. The traditional Hong Kong elements
- ii. Recapturing memories
- iii. Territories of the physical and the virtual

- iv. Personification – disappearance of humans
- v. Simulator – setting rules

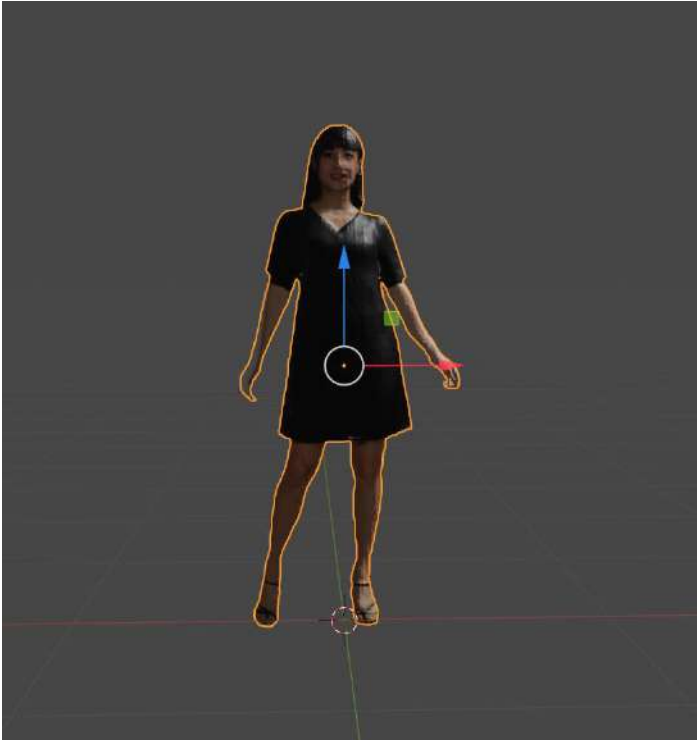
Research

Hong Kong 2030 Planning Vision and Strategy
by HK Government

The old communities do not have the right kind of development vision to match the changes in the environment. The government is committed to supporting and promoting the reclamation and redevelopment of the old communities to ensure they become part of a vibrant new economy. Specifically on the street level, the government should pay more attention on facade improvements in old communities.

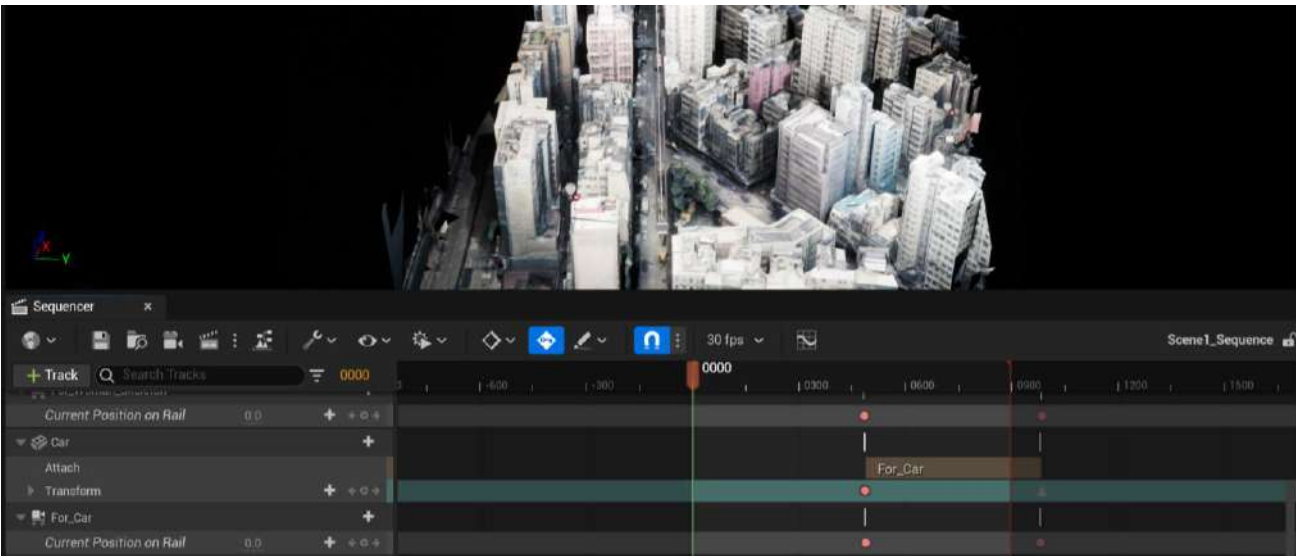
The World Without Us
by Alen Weisman

We need to understand the world we live in so that we can find a better way of living. In a world without humans, the environment would change, particularly given that humans want to control the world and create their own world. More could be achieved even with less energy used; cities will be occupied by animal remains and more efficient power plants; and the past natural environment will be restored.



Who	A retired gentleman	An old stall operator in the street market
Daily activities	Go grocery shopping / Exercising / Socialising with neighbours / Visiting different places in Hong Kong	Go grocery shopping / Exercising / Running the business
Problems	Generation gap with young people	Poor living conditions; having to run a business to earn a living even in such an old age
Thoughts on new things	Interested in technology, but not familiar with it; Life in modern society will be difficult if people do not understand modern technology	Not interested in new technology

Scene 1



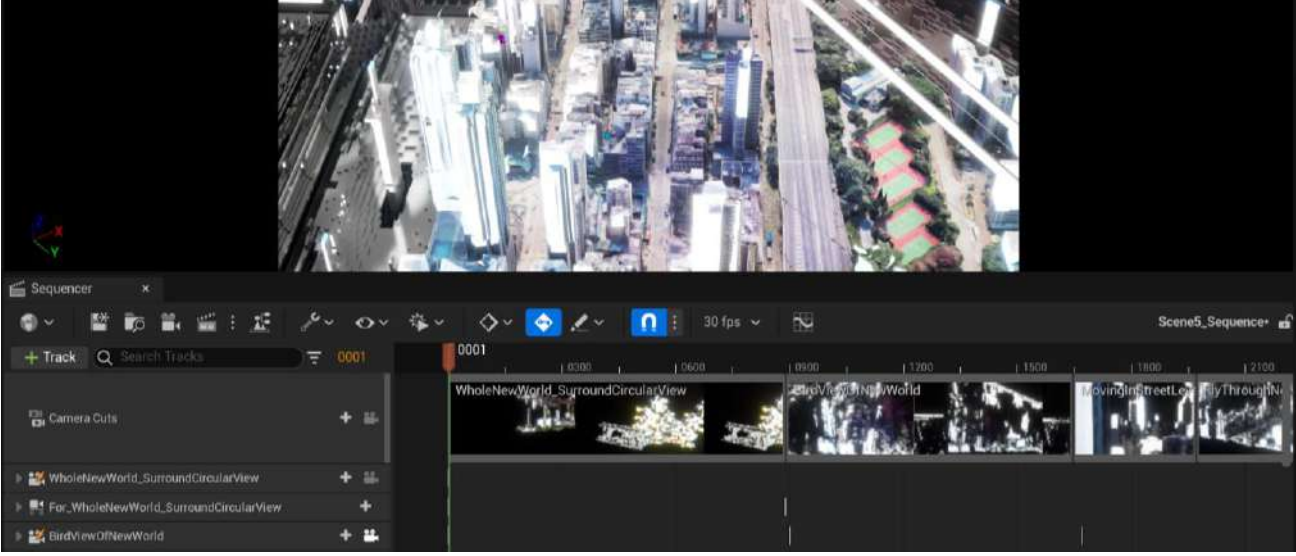
Scene 2



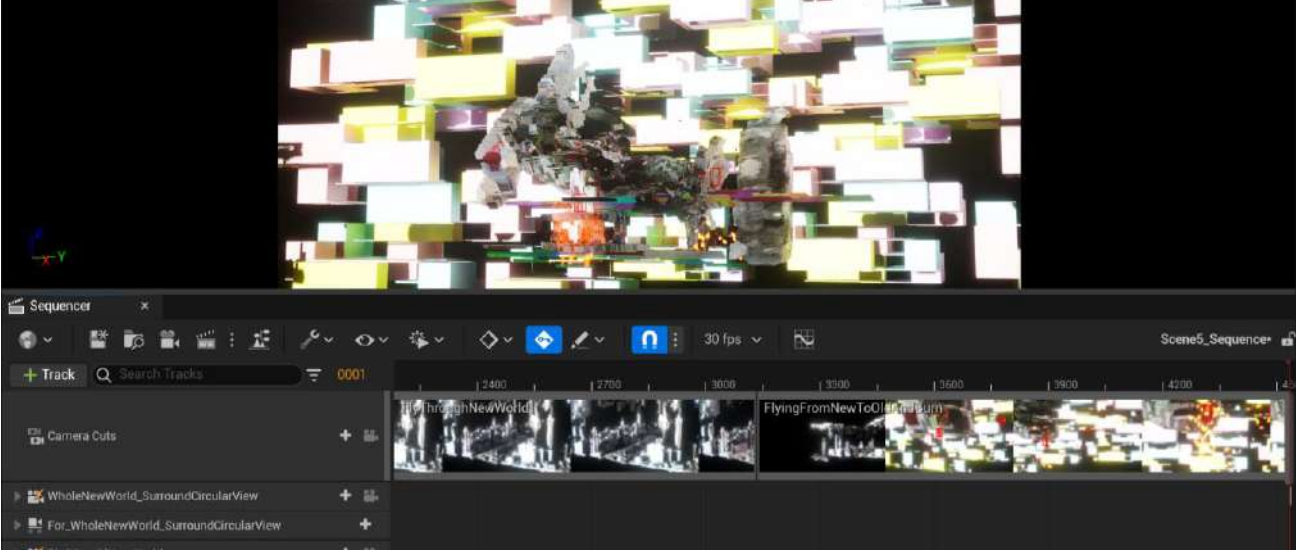
Scene 3



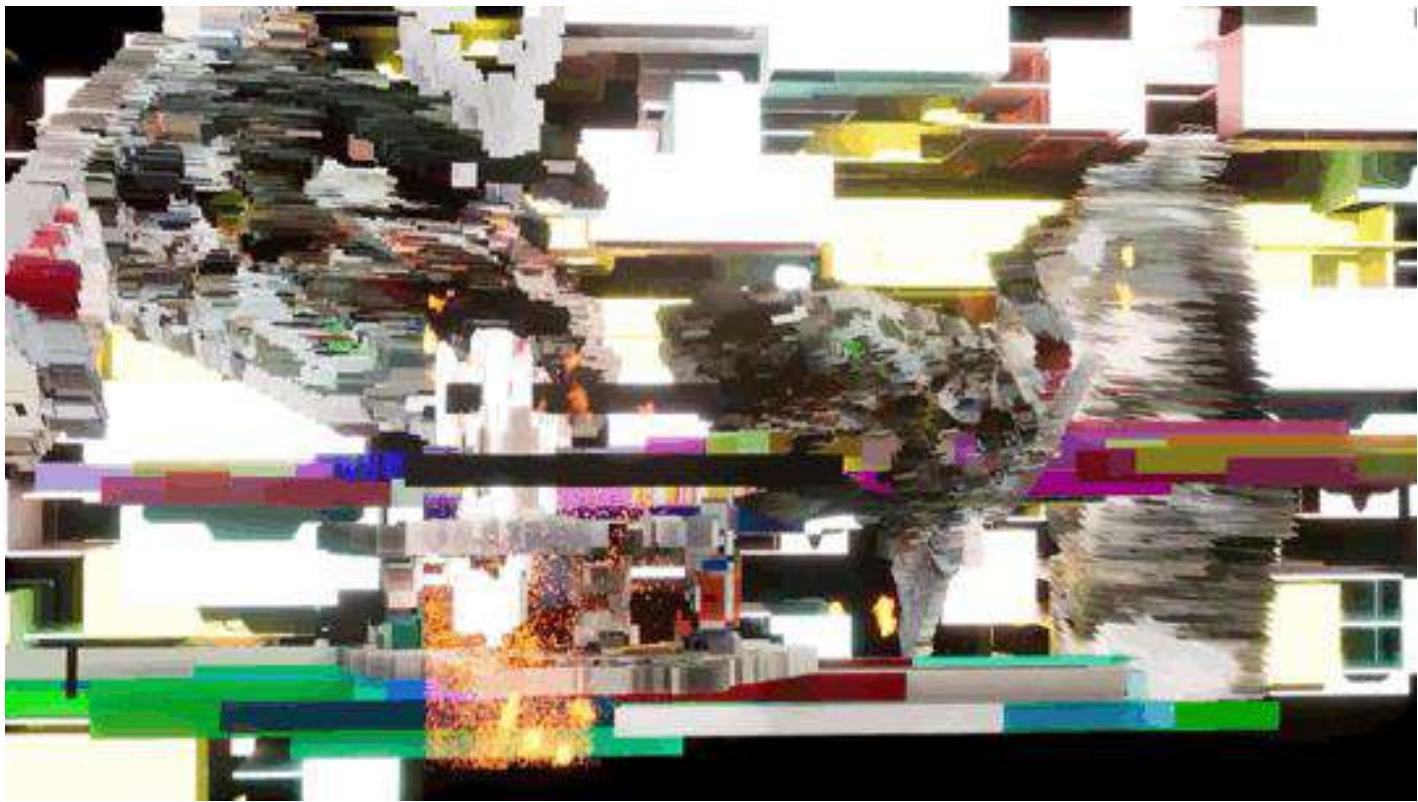
Scene 4



Scene 5



Reconstruction



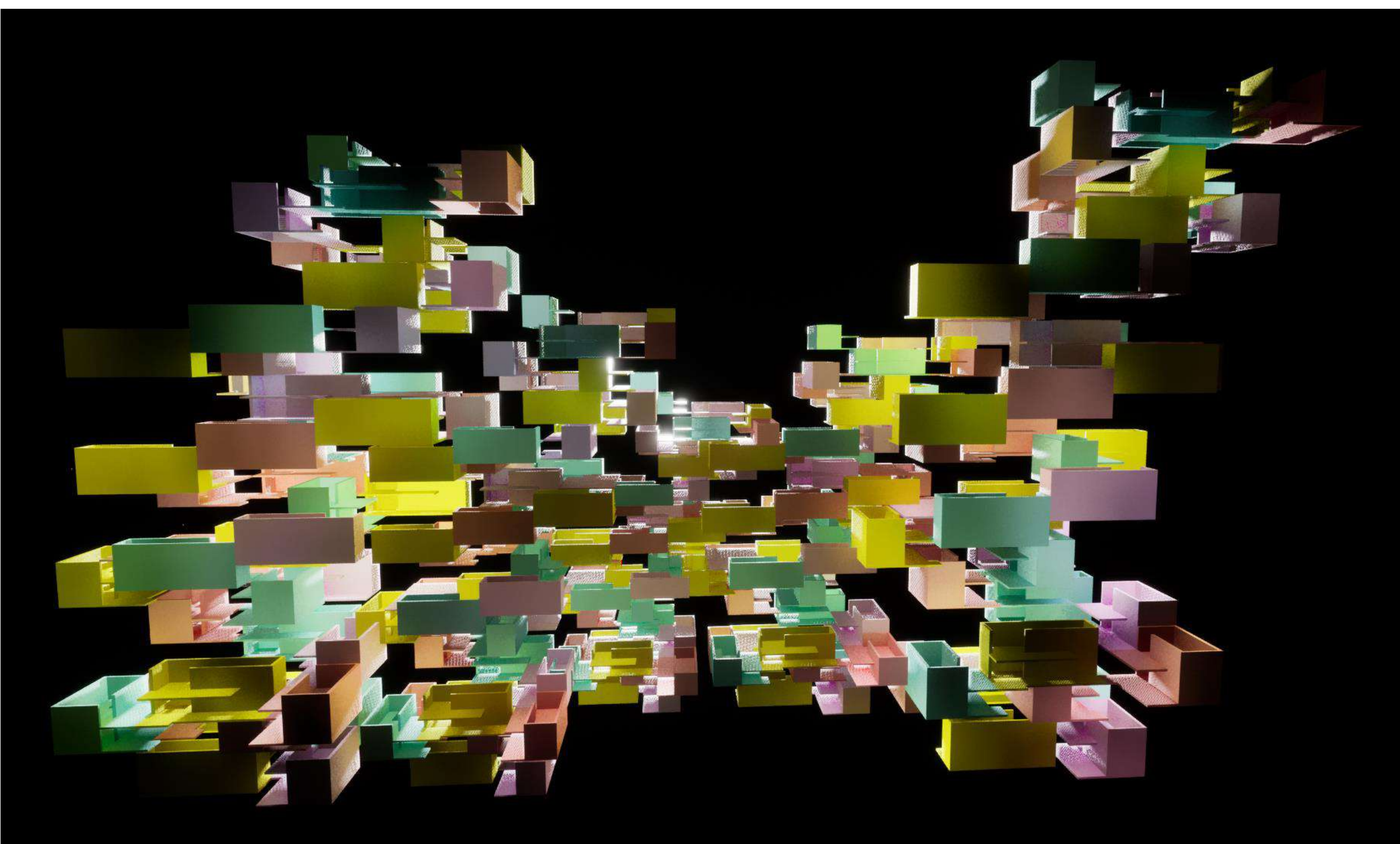
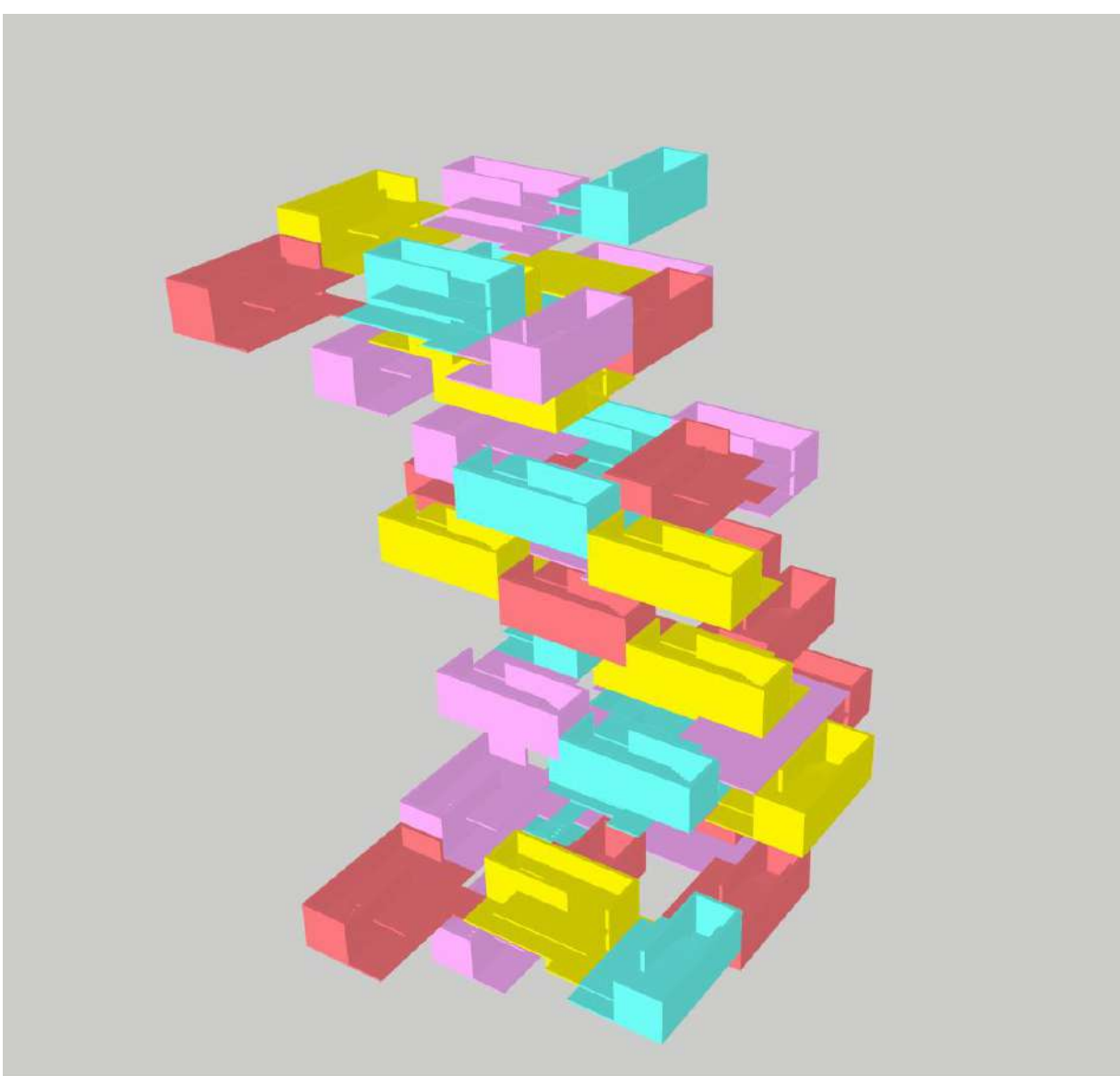
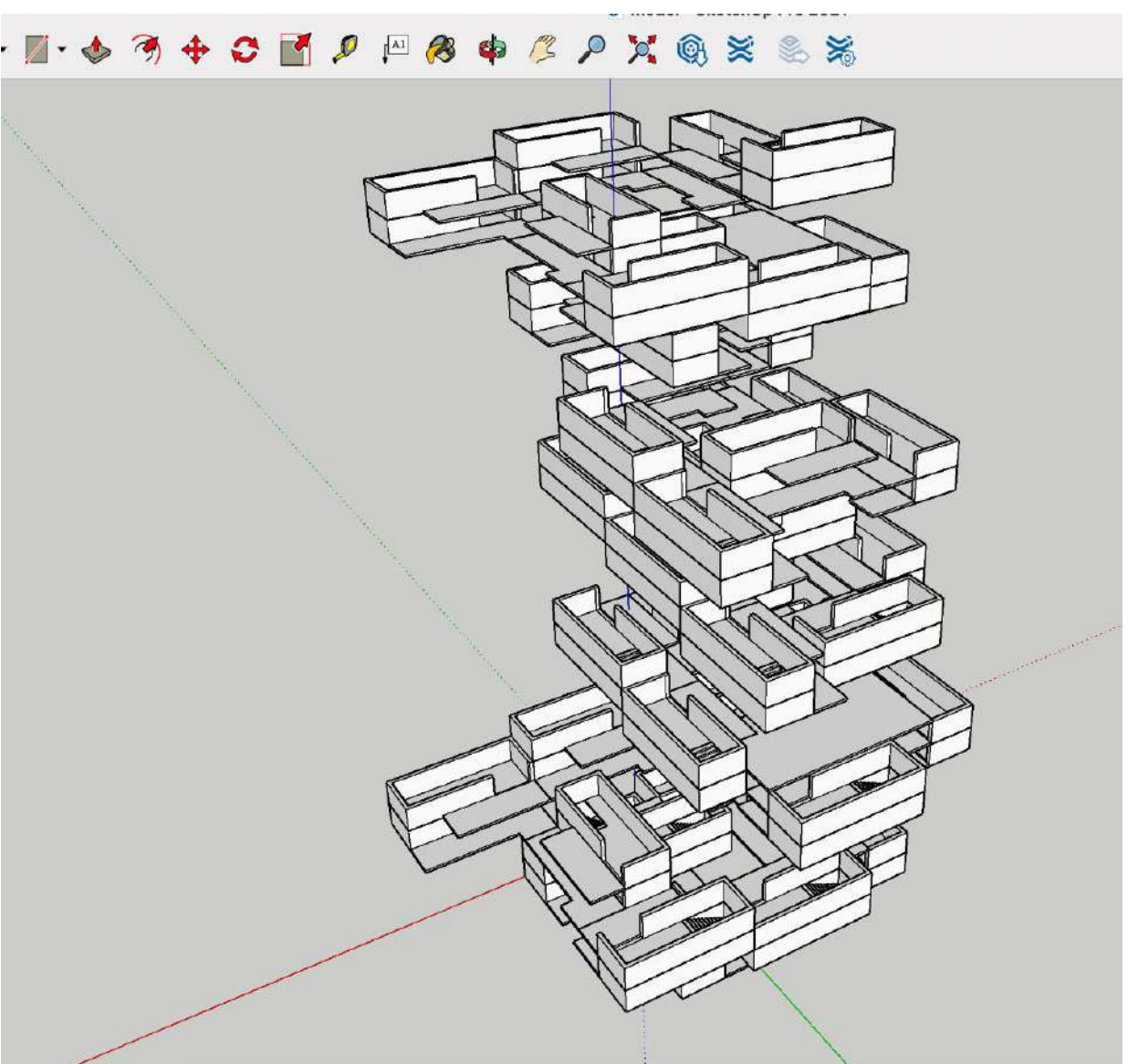
Scene 1 (Top left): Cheung Sha Wan in real world

Scene 2 (Top right): A street composed by 3D scans from Cheung Sha Wan in real world

Scene 3 (Middle left): A theoretical situation where humans disappear and non-living variables interact with the old artefacts in Cheung Sha Wan

Scene 4 (Middle right): An imaginative world in which the old things would be prosperous

Scene 5 (Bottom): An imaginative world where the old things would diminish



Redesign

Volumetric Cinema Workshop

– In a world where the old are the main characters

Presented by [TEAM HUMAN] – CHEUNG Kin Yi, LI Yuechun

Site Analysis

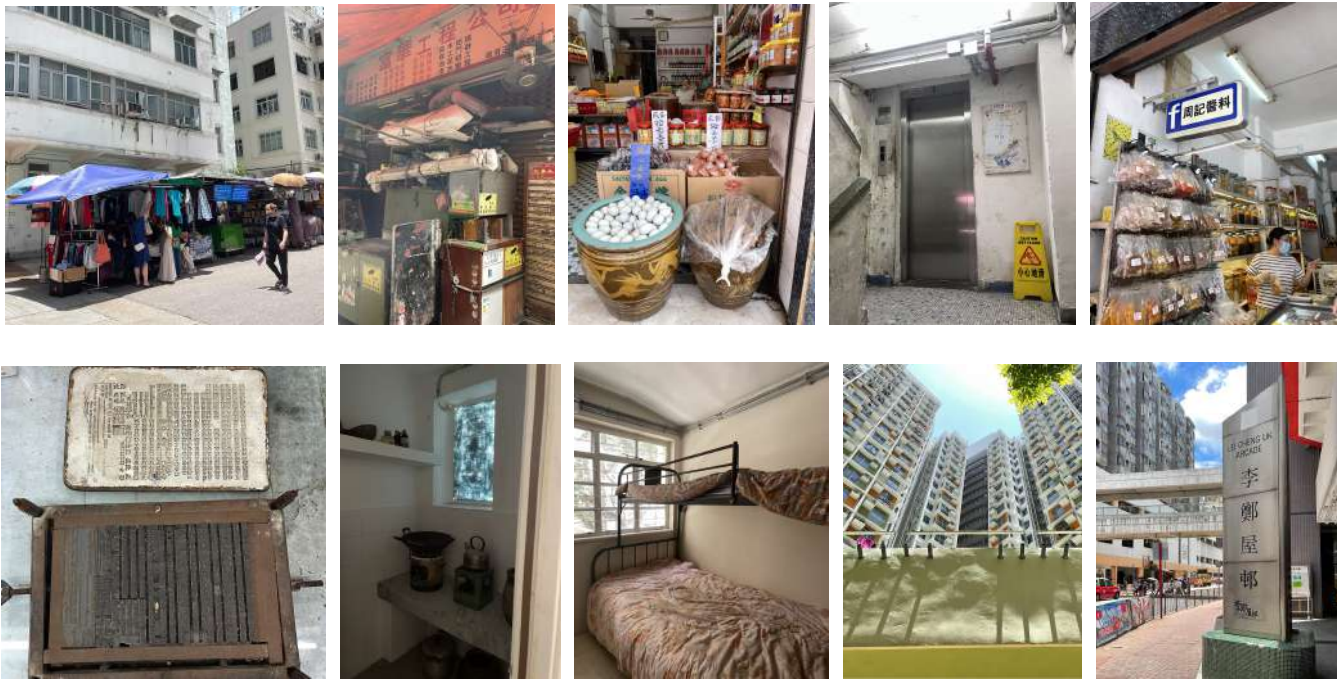
Cheung Sha Wan is one of the earliest developed neighbourhoods. Its development witnesses the history of housing and industrial developments in Hong Kong. It is an inner city area where forthcoming new developments are expected to be embedded into the old, fine-grained urban fabric. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the site are analysed:

– Strengths – Rich history and urban legacy; vibrant street life	– Weaknesses – Urban decay; urban poverty and income inequality; difficulties in accessibility due to constraints imposed by the natural terrain
– Opportunities – Improving living environment of public housing	– Threats – Diminishing histories, traditions, and urban scenes that are full of stories; potential widening of income inequality due to redevelopment

Concept

Our project involves five major concepts:

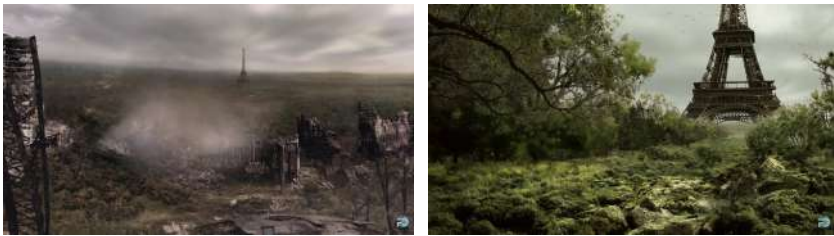
- i. The traditional Hong Kong elements:
During our site visit, we went to visit (i) Kim Shin Lane, an area subject to redevelopment; (ii) a store that sells preserved fruits and sauce, which is a traditional store; (iii) a printing press workshop, which represents a traditional industry; and (iv) public housing estates with long histories, including So Uk Estate and Lei Cheng Uk Estate. What is common to all of them is the “old” element. This is what attracts our attention.



- ii. Recapturing memories:
The old/traditional elements have been endangered by advanced technology in this digital era. Moreover, new development is eagerly pursued. Memories are diminishing and what can we do to recapture them?
- iii. Territories of the physical and the virtual:
The practice of architecture and urban planning has gradually shifted its focus to the virtual space. We want to explore the interface between the physical and the virtual. How could we reconstruct/recreate a metaverse? What is its relationship with the real world? To what degree do they have to be similar with each other? How should we utilise the opportunities offered by the virtual world to understand and help improve the current physical world?
- iv. Personification – disappearance of humans:
When brainstorming ideas for our project, we thought about this question: Is it possible not to engage humans in a metaverse project? To us, humans moving and running in virtual space is somehow a cliché. We therefore decided to set non-living things as the focus of our project, and this is how our project title comes. Our team name also brings out the contrast and confrontation between humans and the non-living. We also think it is compelling to investigate the impacts of the disappearance of humans on the world.
- v. Simulator – setting rules:
Given that people are the main actors that control or determine the future of old artefacts in the real world, the removal of humans from our project implies that we can now focus on the non-living old things to understand how they would develop naturally. For example, if interviewees think technology is a threat to the survival of old things, we will put technological symbols such as computers into the cinematic output as variables. The metaphor is to see our simulator as a culture dish, in which the old artefacts are equivalent to humans in the real world. It is to stimulate and to find out whether the different variables could be seen as the necessary air, sunlight, or water, or could be things that are damaging to our development.

Cinematic Reference

Aftermath: Population Zero, a documentary produced by National Geographic Channel in 2008, has similar concepts as we do. The documentary explores how the world would look without humans. For instance, skyscrapers would collapse, and grass would grow around the Eiffel Tower. Although this documentary is about natural science while ours is not, we could still make some reference from it in terms of conceptual development and presentation style.



(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huzPNb-MFg>)

AI Narratives

AI helps us imagine what we may not be able to think of. To some extent, the use of AI in our project also echoes with our intention to explore the impacts of the new (technology like AI) on the old and the confrontation between them. GPT2 on Google Colaboratory was used to create our AI narratives.

We used two texts in total. The first text we chose to train the AI model is the final report of *Hong Kong 2030 Planning Vision and Strategy* by the Government. The question we asked was “What are the old communities?” The output mainly says that the government needs to pay more attention to the environment design of the old communities. Besides, new communities have more new infrastructure than the old communities. The government should spend much more time and money on the construction of the infrastructure of the old communities. The second question we asked was “What is maintenance?” The output gives us answers from the perspectives of the old communities, and the role of the government is highlighted. Most of the output is similar to the answers of the first question. Asking AI the two questions allows us to generate output that are context specific to Hong Kong and our project.

The second text is *The World Without Us* by Alen Weisman. This award-winning book engages readers in an imaginative journey. The first question we asked was “How things develop in a world without humans?” Two outputs say that the environment would change, particularly given that humans want to control the world and create their own world. These show that the environment is elastic and flexible. Another output directly points out our inability to know the answer, implying that our topic could be an interesting one to explore and to make speculations and imaginations. The output stresses that we need to understand the world we live in so that we can find a better way of living. We also asked the AI to fill in the sentence that starts with “Cities will...” The output generated is mostly about energy resources or climate, for example it is predicted that more could be achieved even with less energy used; cities will be occupied by animal remains and more efficient power plants; and that the past natural environment will be restored. Similar to the cinematic reference, although our project is not climate-related as this text is, the output shows us how to imagine possibilities for our project.

Persona

Interview is part of our methodology to understand and reconstruct personas for the Cheung Sha Wan community. As our project is to create a simulator to see the potential effects of different variables on the old artefacts, the answers from the interviews would inform us what objects to be put in our video as the variables of the simulator. We have three target groups of interviewees: (i) operators of traditional stores; (ii) residents from the old public housing estates, especially those who have been living there for a long time; and (iii) people who have nothing to do with these old artefacts. For traditional store operators, we asked questions like “Were there other old stores that have disappeared? How did they look?”, “What do you think are your competitors?”, and “What do you think can help your business survive in the new era?” For public housing residents, we asked questions including “How long have you been living here?”, “What facilities do you think are fundamental to public housing?”, “How is your daily life here?”, and “Are you interested in new things e.g. new technology?” For other individuals, we would ask questions like “What is your view on new development?” and “Do you like new or old things? Why?”

We managed to conduct interviews with nine individuals. There are two personas that generate a more vivid impression. The first one is a retired gentleman. He said he is interested in new technology and he admitted that in this digital era, problems will be encountered if people are not familiar with new technology. He thinks that the new must be better than the old but to the older generation, social relationship, and community cohesion, old things are better. He pointed out that as time passes, it is unavoidable that the old is replaced by the new. The second persona is an old lady working as a stall operator selling *Zhizha* products. She said that since the living conditions in Hong Kong are not good and *Zhizha* products are not daily necessities, they are for sure not something that people would buy. Moreover, *Zhizha* is very traditional in nature, so the younger generation does not have much interest in it. When asking if she wants to know more about new technology, she said she is not interested in it. She also mentioned that old grocery stores around were closed down as they did not earn much while the rent is high. What is implied in the findings from both interviewees is the gap between the old and the new: the older generation is either completely not interested in new technology or somehow interested in it but thinks it is very difficult to learn; the younger generation is not interested in traditional things; and traditional things are pushed away by the new.

Design

The whole cinematic output comprises five main scenes. The 3D scans we prepared during the site visit are the materials for us to reconstruct the real world in the present and construct possible worlds in the future. Two characters, one man and one woman, one Asian and one non-Asian, are present in our film to show diversity in the neighbourhood. They were produced by using PiFUHD on Google Colaboratory.

– Scene 1 – This scene is to first outline and set up the cinematic context to situate the audience into the site of this project as the camera flies over the site and the character walks on the street level. Audience would be able to gain an impression of how the neighbourhood of Cheung Sha Wan is like. Although the hygiene condition and the crowded residential environment may be notorious to some people, the scene is somehow typical to and representative of Hong Kong’s old inner city areas and the history of Hong Kong. The urban ambience unique to Hong Kong generated by the fine-grained urban fabric is highlighted.

– Scene 2 – The scene now shifts to specifically show the old elements (3D scan replicas), such as the old bus stop, public housing and the street market. Two human characters were placed among these old elements to illustrate the status of the old materials. The two characters show the impacts of humans on the old materials. At the end, there is an overall view about all the old materials.

– Scene 3 – After presenting the current Cheung Sha Wan in the previous two scenes, this scene shows the impacts of modern technology elements on old materials. The transition between Scene 2 and Scene 3 signals a change in time from 2022, the present, to 2122, the future. This is when human beings are no longer in existence and non-living artefacts would be personified. Artefacts are personified by giving them movements in our film.

– Scene 4 – The scene starts with an overview of the two possibilities if humans were not around. It then focuses on presenting a good ending to the old artefacts: a world in which they would be prosperous. We tuned the scene with rainbow hue to depict a wonderful world where the old buildings stay intact and co-exist with hyper futuristic architecture harmoniously. This futuristic and fantasy-like hue is also to present the idea that this is an imaginative world. The bright light from the new buildings also sharpens the existence of the old urban fabric of Cheung Sha Wan.

– Scene 5 – After appreciating the consonance between the hyper new and the old artefacts in Scene 4, the camera now flies from this beautiful world to the terrifying one next to it. Scene 5 presents a bad ending to the old things: a world where they would diminish. The old artefacts could come to an end by direct, violent destruction or by overwhelming domination/occupation by the new artefacts. To signify destruction, we used the burning effect in Unreal Engine. Moreover, the space in this scene is a floating, unstable ground. It was formed by distorting the 3D scans of old artefacts from the real world and randomly placing them. This “rubbish-like” space symbolises a ruined world for the old artefacts. As for domination/occupation, we used SketchUp to model an architecture of the new era and duplicated it dozens of times in Unreal Engine to create a “monster-like” enormous architecture. Cute colours were used when modelling this new era architecture to create a big contrast as this “cute-looking” architecture carries overwhelming power to have dominance over the old artefacts that causes them to be destroyed.

Our intention is to raise questions instead of giving a definite answer. We wish to encourage viewers to join our thinking journey to explore future possibilities of the new and the old and react to see what we can do together in the real world to bring improvements on our living environment and hopefully conserve the old.

Credits

Materials used to produce work for this project belong to their respective owners. External sources from Sketchfab include the following:

- "The City within the Stars" (<https://skfb.ly/6uTrE>) by Augustin.Cagnat is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Changes were made.
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- "Money bag - Anil" (<https://skfb.ly/o6Bxj>) by aniljaco is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Changes were made.
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Volumetric Cinema Workshop

In a world where the old are the main characters

Presented by [TEAM HUMAN] – CHEUNG Kin Yi, LI Yuechun



CHEUNG Kin Yi

Kin Yi has an academic background in Linguistics and Urban Planning. She believes curiosity and imagination enable people to go further. Her interests include learning new things and anything about language, architecture, city, and design. She was here to join this creative journey because the interface between cinema and architecture intrigues her.

It would not have been possible to compose amazing cinematic work without the knowledgeable teaching team. Students learnt an array of design and digital skills that allow them to produce visionary narratives in this intensive workshop. Look forward to similar workshops in the future!



LI Yuechun

Yuechun is a master student in CUHK urban design programme and has urban planning background. She has great interests in the digital game related to urban issues and wants to gain more knowledge about how to build a web-based platform to assist in resolving urban problems.

The workshop gives a perfect opportunity for students who do not have the professional knowledge about the digital to enter into the virtual “world”. The teachers from different backgrounds give students various views about the “cinema” and “space”. And the group work mode also provides a great opportunity to make more friends. This is a wonderful workshop!