

A Tale of Two Cities: Hong Kong and Dubai

Celebration of Disappearance and the Pretension of Becoming

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Abstract. Hong Kong will not disappear but it has installed its existence within a peculiar aesthetics of disappearance. Abbas actually believes that Hong Kong will remain almost unchanged for another fifty years (23). The floating state of Hong Kong's existence makes it a true forerunner of Dubai, which seems to be suspended in a similar state of floating existence, though at the opposite end of the spectrum. Dubai will simply not *appear*. For this city, the act of becoming has been charged with such complicated connotations that "becoming" seems to have been eternalized. While Hong Kong revels in what is (almost) no longer there, Dubai revels in what is *not yet* there. While Hong Kong engenders, in the words of Abbas, the feeling of a *déjà disparu* rooted in an irretrievable, colonial ex-past, Dubai installs itself in a perpetual *not yet there* that speaks to us through the veil of an indiscernible ex-future. Dubai's cultural status develops towards a "colonial space of appearance." According to Mike Davis, Dubai becomes, through its neo-colonial lifestyle, "expert at catering to colonial nostalgia" (Davis 2007: 64). This colonial past does not refer to a reality in the form of colonial buildings and concrete memories, which makes it different from Hong Kong where, in spite of their twofold nature, discussions on colonialism as a concrete experience are possible because of the presence of the dominating father figure: Britain. In Dubai, neo-colonialism has been reissued in the form of "offshore urbanism."