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Chow, Y.F.; de Kloet, J.

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Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet

## Building Memories - A Study of Pop Venues in Hong Kong

*Changing cities produce many sights that are unfamiliar. But rapidly changing cities, cities without brakes like Hong Kong, produce something else as well: 'the unfamiliar in the familiar'; that is, the unfamiliar that is half-seen or seen subliminally behind the seen/scene of the familiar* (Abbas 1997: 78).

### Fluid Sounds

Indeed, for someone living in a fast-changing city, the landscape may resemble a war zone, where space is structured by a tug of war between disappearance and appearance, between the unfamiliar and the familiar. Ackbar Abbas' interest is essentially visual; his inquiry into ways of seeing a fast-changing city like Hong Kong is located in visual cultures such as architecture and photography. Our concern is to include the audio with the visual. Informed by the global importance of the local sound – Cantopop – in the 1970s and 1980s and its perceived disappearance by the end of the new millennium, and intrigued by the series of the so-called “comeback” Cantopop concerts around the year 2000, we find our unfamiliar in the familiar at the site of a music venue: the Hong Kong Coliseum. In this article, we will begin with a discussion of the “death of Cantopop” and some of its possible readings. Following a different approach to analyze and understand cultural consumption, we will zoom in on pop venues, which are prime sites for this emotive, audio-visual form of popular culture, to argue that one way of seeing, hearing and understanding the fast-changing city in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to seek temporality – the passing of time, the memories, the emotions, the sounds, the fluidity – in stability, or in the buildings that stay.

What happened to the sound of Cantopop, which “in its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s [...] defined the look, feel and – with its lush, ultra-refined production values – even the sound of Chinese cool?” (Burpee in Chu 2007: 2) At a symposium on the development of Cantopop held in Hong Kong in March 2008, discussion was centered on the decline, if not the death of Cantopop. In his doctoral thesis, the veteran Cantopop lyricist and composer, James Wong, pinpointed 1997, the year Hong Kong was handed over to the Beijing authorities, as the end of the Cantopop era (Wong 2003). Figures are quoted to quantify its disappearance: in 1995, Cantopop sales amounted to HK\$1.853 billion, while three years later sales had dropped to HK\$ 0.916 billion (Wong 2003: 169). Cantopop itself and its over-commercialization are referred to as the reasons for its own sad fate. “People are getting tired of mainstream Cantopop because it rehashes the formula of big ballads and cheesy dance tunes year in, year out” (Lee 2002). Economy and technology are also cited as accomplices. According to Stephen Chu, “it is widely believed that the fall of Cantopop was caused by a combination of a bad economy, piracy and file sharing” (2007: 3). This gloomy narrative became even darker after the deaths of the Cantopop superstars, Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui, in April and December 2003.

According to the above accounts, a decade after the publication of Ackbar Abbas' acclaimed book, *Hong Kong – Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Cantopop, which played such a pivotal role in the construction of a Hong Kong identity, is declining, dying, or at least, disappearing. It seems as if Hong Kong is haunted by the spirit of disappearance, as if the return to the “motherland” could only result in its erasure as the unique city so aptly described by Rey Chow: “What is unique to Hong Kong, however, is

precisely an in-betweenness and an awareness of impure origins, or origins as impure” (Chow 1998: 157).

It is, however, precisely the disappearance of this in-betweenness, some would argue, that underwrites the perceived disappearance of Cantopop. Stephen Chu, for instance, asserts that “[t]he rise of a global Chinese music industry and media and the subsequent loss of the hybridity of Cantopop [...] is the major reason behind its recent decline” (2007: 13). In the globalization of Chinese music culture, Cantopop, performed in Cantonese, a regional language, is increasingly being superseded, at least in terms of sales figures and the number of stars, by Mandopop, sung in official, nation-wide Chinese. Such cultural development resonates with the general “re-nationalization” process in Hong Kong after the city joined the nation (Erni 2001) – it is no longer about “impure origins,” but rather “pure origins.”

In addition to placing the perceived disappearance of Cantopop in a wider political, cultural context, it is our wish to challenge such a reading and pose questions regarding the very “fact” of the disappearance itself. Anthony Fung and Michael Curtin, for instance, turn their gaze away from the traditional carriers of Cantopop, such as airplay and music release, to more recent forms of music consumption (Fung and Curtin 2002). Taking karaoke as their field of inquiry, Fung and Curtin argue for a different framing of the discussion. In addition to the disappearance narrative, which is largely framed by declining sales figures and dead stars, they urge to situate pop music consumption in general, and Cantopop in particular, also in the realm of the uncountable, the personal, and the emotive. We want to take this line of inquiry further. In proposing a counter narrative to the story of disappearance, we will show how the uncountable, personal and emotive consumption of music is grounded in solid buildings – the music venues – that help sustain a Hong Kong identity and defy disappearance, also in the post 1997 era.

Furthermore, to substantiate a story of disappearance by looking at sales figures and the number of stars is to fail to take into account, from our point of view, the changing landscape of popular music consumption. Even if the actual number of CDs being sold has declined rapidly, it does not necessarily mean that audiences are listening less to music. Apart from karaoke, there is a great deal of evidence to support the contention that there is continuing heavy emotive investment in popular music: ring tones as well as songs are frequently downloaded to individualize mobile phones; a quite astounding 34.8% of the 530 million mobile subscribers in China use their phones to listen to music, compared with 5.7% in the US.<sup>1</sup> YouTube is used to upload clips of subscribers either singing or mimicking songs, activities which turn the consumer into a producer. MySpace has opened up a space for bands to promote and share their music. Digital production techniques such as GarageBand have become accessible to many people, enabling the easy production of music.

Meanwhile, it seems that pop music consumption is becoming more and more personally oriented through the use of mobile audio devices, such as the mobile phone or the iPod, which enable users to fabricate their own soundtrack while traversing the city (Bull 2000). In short, there are signs that new modes of pop music consumption are not only challenging conventional producer versus consumer distinctions, but also subsuming the collapse of such distinctions into the realm of the personal and the emotive. In the following, we will continue our inquiry into Cantopop on the sites of pop venues, particularly the Hong Kong

<sup>1</sup> From <http://edpeto.com/the-next-generation/> accessed June 10, 2008.

Coliseum. We aim, through such an inquiry, to offer a different way of seeing, hearing and understanding music consumption in the city of Hong Kong. It is our contention that music venues, in particular, operate as emotive landmarks in the consumption of popular music. They allow citizens to feel that they belong to the city, as part of the city, of its citizenry and of a collective landscape of sight and sound. In short, they facilitate the construction of a collective emotive memory.

### Monumental Buildings

Ten years after the handover of Hong Kong, a theme song entitled “Hong Kong always has you” (*Shi zhong you ni*) was commissioned and produced by the official authorities to commemorate the special occasion. Some of the lyrics run as follows:

*Hong Kong always has you (Hong Kong always has you)*

*Let people applaud for a century*

*Hong Kong always has me (Hong Kong always has me)*

*A hundred thousand more surprises in this century*

*Thank you who have made a big world out of a small island*

*you never give up, you are so persevering, despite all the difficulties*

*that's why Hong Kong is so amazing, because Hong Kong always has you*

*the Lion Rock is connected to the Great Wall, we share the same blood*

*Hong Kong always has you (Hong Kong always has you) .....*

*you never give up, you are so persevering, despite all the difficulties*

*that's why Hong Kong is so amazing, because Hong Kong always has you*

*(Mandarin: Because you're here)*

*Let people applaud for a century*

*Hong Kong always has me (Mandarin: Because I'm here)* (Translated by Vincent Zhu)

Lyrically, the song confirms the assumed link between Hong Kong and the mainland, while simultaneously stressing Hong Kong's alleged unique characteristics. The Han-centrism of such lines, as “the Lion Rock Hill is connected to the Great Wall, we share the same blood,” is strengthened by the insertion of the Mandarin line “Because I am here.” While we may wonder who the “I,” “you” and “me” are referring to, or why certain lines have to be sung in Mandarin instead of Cantonese, the lyrics evoke a rosy image of post-handover Hong Kong. After applauding all the efforts and the perseverance of Hong Kong citizens who have made the city into a prosperous place, the lyrics claim that reversion to Beijing rule serves as a guarantee for an equally prosperous future.

Moving beyond the lyrics, we are confronted with the accompanying video clip showing the familiar images of the skyscrapers of Hong Kong. The clip starts with a rather unimaginative, postcard-like parade of skyscrapers, all the modern monuments of economic power, the images of Hong Kong as a city skylined by global capital. One scene includes a window cleaner at work. According to the writer of the lyrics, Chan Siu Kei, the producers deliberately included this window cleaning shot to emphasize the human element in the city's success story. At the end of the clip, we can see a parade of another sort, this time, a series of pop stars. This particular visual celebration of Hong Kong is primarily an act of collaboration between the government and pop music.

Yet, the venues where music is performed in Hong Kong are conspicuously absent in the clip. They never operate as landmarks of the city. Most if not all of the landmarks of Hong

Kong are either super-modern economic buildings pointing not only to the sky, but also to the future, or archaic, colonial architectures accommodating what would normally be called tradition or history. The latter draw our attention less frequently but none the less sharply when they are under threat, for instance, the case of the high profile campaign in 2007 to save the Queen's Pier in Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup> It seems that Hong Kong has to be imagined predominantly in terms of the future and occasionally in terms of the past; in other words, Hong Kong is largely imagined in terms of money and tradition, in terms of construction and destruction. And academics and activists privilege these two types of architectures, the economic ones and the heritage ones, as the prime site of their analytical concern or preservation efforts, of their understanding of contestation and resistance (Abbas 1997).

This article, however, is not about skyscrapers or colonial architectures, but about pop venues. It is about what Sophie Watson calls "mundane and commonplace spaces of the city where people simply muddle through or rub along" (2006: 16). Our concern is the relation between public space, in this case, pop venues, emotion and the possible production of identification and citizenry through the lens of collective memory. To paraphrase Saskia Sassen, this is an attempt to ground the soul of the city or a fragment of that soul in the materiality of the city, that is, pop venues (Sassen 2001). And among the venues, we are particularly interested in the Hong Kong Coliseum, which is generally considered the quintessential pop venue in Hong Kong. When the Hong Kong electronic duo, Pixel Toy, performed in Hong Kong at the Sheung Wan Civic Centre in July 2007, the band claimed on its leaflet "we may not be playing at the Coliseum, but we can still turn this into a big party." The Coliseum is the local temple of a global popular culture. The massive concerts that it has been hosting are a major source of collective emotion and memories for the people of the city.

In contrast to the dominant gloomy narrative surrounding Cantopop in the post-1997 decade, Hong Kong culture, particularly pop culture, was characterized not so much by the politics of disappearance but by the politics of reappearance. This reappearance was not only facilitated by new modes of music consumption as discussed earlier, but also embodied in a series of comeback/reunion concerts. Older pop stars who had retired or simply been fired by the culture industry reappeared in all their former glory. Bands which had broken up or become inactive, such as The Wynners and Tatming Pair, staged high-profiled reunion gigs. All these comeback or reunion concerts took place in the Hong Kong Coliseum.

The most talked about come-back concert series was probably the one by Sam Hui, the godfather of Cantopop. Sam Hui was the first to stage concerts at the Hong Kong Coliseum. That was in 1983. Twenty-one years later, he launched his series of comeback concerts. It became an instant hit, or as some would say, instant hype. In total, 38 concerts were staged, with almost half a million people witnessing Sam Hui's comeback. And the venue was of course the Hong Kong Coliseum. A local music critic attributed the success of his comeback to the local need for collective memory, which could be located in the context of fear. It was fear of disappearance, which hovered over the city before and after its handover to mainland China, a fear that could be relieved by the return of the legendary stars that helped to collectively remember the city called Hong Kong.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.nowpublic.com/hong\\_kong\\_heritage\\_site\\_queens\\_pier\\_about\\_be\\_demolish\\_hk\\_government](http://www.nowpublic.com/hong_kong_heritage_site_queens_pier_about_be_demolish_hk_government), accessed June 10, 2008.

But then, if all these concerts had not been held in the Hong Kong Coliseum, would they still function in the same way? If all these comeback, reunion concerts symbolize certain articulations of a Hong Kong bygone but not quite, we may wonder whether these concerts might have become more a reminder of a Hong Kong bygone, totally and resolutely if they had not been held in the Hong Kong Coliseum. In a way, our questioning is not unlike Susan Fast's reflection on her experience with Live Aid in London, in 1985. For her, the best moments of that concert were during the performance by the band, Queen, but none of the written accounts she came across afterwards carried any reference to Queen at all. She started to ask the most fundamental question: "whose memory is it?" (Fast 2006: 138) And if this is a legitimate and relevant question, then our question would be: whose collective memory? And even: why is collective memory possible if our individual memories are so selective? We believe, as our analysis will show, that the answer, or part of the answer, lies in the venue, literally and figuratively.

The nostalgia, the emotive expression of collective memories and the articulation of cultural identity requires not only the software of pop music, but also the hardware; after all, it requires a space, a public space, a venue where people can gather, to confirm and affirm they share the same memories, to confirm and affirm their emotions, to confirm and affirm their collectivity, to confirm and affirm their sense of belonging, identification and citizenry. According to Abbas (1997: 65), "architecture [...] has the dangerous potential of turning all of us, locals and visitors alike, into *tourists* gazing at a stable and monumental image." But a massive and monumental venue like the Coliseum refuses, in its ordinariness, if not ugliness, to be turned into a tourist fetish. Instead, it turns Hong Kongers, indeed, into Hong Kongers. For the identity to be iterated and reiterated, the venue has to remain the same – far from disappearance, the venue may exude a strong sense of persistence, of defying disappearance. This is perhaps also why Hannah Arendt draws our attention to what she calls the "permanence of public space" (1958: 55). The permanence of certain public spaces, like the Hong Kong Coliseum, serves to comfort city dwellers with the feeling that something is staying, will stay essentially the same; in other words, that something will continue from some recent past into some near future. Pop venues are not only the embodiment of culture; they also help to construct and sustain a city and its culture.

### Building Memories

In the following, we will distinguish among four stages in the development of pop venues in Hong Kong. In doing so, we will also try to connect the venues to the larger cultural formations of the city.

The first phase can be termed the pre-pop venue years, during which the British Hong Kong government, apart from pursuing predominantly economic and political interests, did make some effort to establish a cultural life in Hong Kong. The inauguration of the Hong Kong City Hall in 1962 was heralded as a major breakthrough in providing the city with cultural facilities. While opening the city hall, the governor at that time, Sir Robert Black, proclaimed: "We in Hong Kong are the beneficiaries of two great estates of culture [...]. This City Hall will bring light and pleasure to the people of Hong Kong, to the enrichment of their lives and the lives of their children!"<sup>3</sup> But how inclusive is the "we" really? The venue mainly followed the colonial logic and played host to cultural events and genres for the

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.grs.gov.hk/PRO/srch/english/imgdisplay.jsp?RecordKey=799511&ts=HKPRO\\_Archive\\_web&version=Internet&page=2](http://www.grs.gov.hk/PRO/srch/english/imgdisplay.jsp?RecordKey=799511&ts=HKPRO_Archive_web&version=Internet&page=2).

privileged local elite and expatriate circles. During this phase, there seemed to be a dislocation of experience and identity. Dislocation, because the building itself, through colonial education, was branded for Hong Kongers as a marker or even an icon of the city, something the citizens identified, or should identify, Hong Kong with. Yet, most of the local population would never have stepped inside and experienced the space and its cultural activities. Typical old textbook of the 1960s presented an image of the City Hall being isolated, dominant and proud (see Fig. 1). Now, four decades later, it is dwarfed by its much more powerful neighbors (see Fig. 2), a visual account of the change in Hong Kong as a whole.



Fig. 1: The City Hall

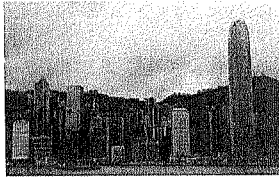


Fig. 2: City Hall dwarfed amidst the Hong Kong skyline

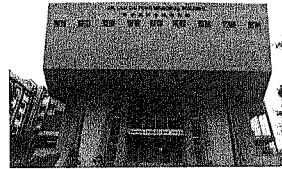


Fig. 3: Academic Community hall

The second phase, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, saw the appearance of, first, the Academic Community Hall (1978, see Figure 3) and, then, the Queen Elizabeth Stadium (1980, see Figure 4). This was also the time when colonial elite culture was being contested, when local pop music, Cantopop, gradually established itself as a major musical genre and market in the colonial city. However, it was also a market characterized more strongly by a “workshop” logic, in the sense that pop stars as we know them later in the pop history of Hong Kong had not yet been produced. As these two pop venues were able to host audiences of 1,300 and 3,600 people respectively, they were perfect locations for smaller concerts. Subsequently, this phase also saw the emergence of the “collective” in terms of memory and emotion, when the local audience started to have a sense of gathering together to share some common experience. However, given the smaller venues and smaller gatherings, such experience remained fragmentary. Instead of privileging one dominant collective memory, there was a fragmented collection of collective memories. The venues and their concerts were not yet massive and monolithic enough to elevate the collective into collective identity, at least not in the sense of a Hong Kong culture and identity. If they were remembered, those venues would be more likely spoken of fondly as reminiscent of the days of folk songs, of the student era, but not of the city.

In the third phase, from the 1980s until now, the definitive venue was constructed, the Hong Kong Coliseum. It was opened on 27 April 1983. With an audience capacity of 12,500, it was much larger than any other performance venue built so far; it ushered in the experience of cultural activity at a different level of intensity and collectivity. According to 2007-2008 figures, more than 1,862,000 people attended activities held at the Hong Kong Coliseum, compared with 334,000 at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium.<sup>4</sup> This was the phase when local

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Entertainment/Stadia/HKC/en/about.php> and <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Entertainment/Stadia/QE/index.html>, accessed June 10, 2008.

pop music was maturing and canonizing into the genre of Cantopop, while the industry saw the full implementation of a more factory-like system when stars were largely seen to be manufactured, packaged and sold on a massive scale.

The Coliseum became the venue not only for performing stars, but also for producing stars. It was, and still is, *the* venue. Even today, new stars must pass through this temple of pop to be fully baptized into stardom. Collective memory is gradually changing from being experiential, even existential, into the expected. Audiences who go to a Coliseum concert these days are not only aware that they will collect memories; they expect to feel stirred emotionally and they also want to own records of their emotions and memories. For instance, DVD recordings of live concerts are one of the bestselling pop genres in Hong Kong. Guy Debord once described a spectacle as “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (Debord 1995: 24). In this case, the image has also become another form of capital that circulates, to be owned by people who have seen the spectacle. The Hong Kong Coliseum’s monopoly over audience expectations and therefore fulfillment of collective memory has turned this unique space into an important producer of Hong Kong culture and Hong Kong identity.



Fig. 4: Queen Elizabeth Stadium

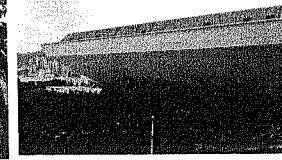


Fig. 5: Hong Kong Coliseum

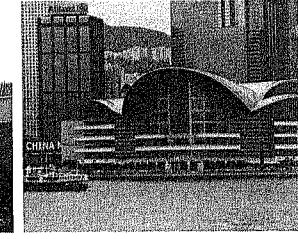


Fig. 6: Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Centre

The fourth phase is more difficult to pin down. New venues have been built since the Coliseum, including the Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Centre which was conceived and completed in conjunction with the Handover Ceremony in 1997; Star Hall, at the Hong Kong International Trade and Exhibition Centre; and Asia World Arena, close to Hong Kong’s international airport. However, up to now, none has offered a serious challenge to the function of the Hong Kong Coliseum in the production of collective memory and identity. By the end of 2008, the Coliseum will be closed for large-scale renovation. At the same time, one new venue may arise as part of the West Kowloon Cultural District project, a government-initiated project that aims to promote Hong Kong as a creative city. The venue, referred to in the plan as a mega performance venue, will host up to 15,000 people, and thus a larger audience than the Coliseum. It remains to be seen whether the project will be actualized in this form, and whether such new venues will be able to replace the emotive power of the Coliseum.

#### The Coliseum

Given the central role the Coliseum has played in Hong Kong pop culture, it comes as a surprise that so little has been written about it. On the contrary, however significant the Hong Kong Coliseum might remain for the local people, Hong Kong is generally described by the Western media and local English media, most notably the South China Morning Post, as lacking venues for international stars. In particular, the lack of large outdoor venues

presumably favored by Western mega stars or pop festivals is a recurring point of concern, although whether Hong Kong, given the heat and humidity, is a suitable location for outdoor events is another question altogether. This discourse sometimes conflates with the general shortfalls of Hong Kong, in terms of competitiveness, suggesting that it is in imminent danger of losing out to other Asian metropolises. Sometimes it conflates with the alleged lack in the ability of Hong Kong or the Chinese to party, to enjoy culture in an exuberant way. This criticism can partly be understood as eurocentric, as an attempt to impose certain Western experiences and values onto another locality, neglecting or ignoring local specificities.

It is clear that for the people of Hong Kong, the Coliseum is not only a public space; it is also a factory, literally, a production site, of collective memory, and a temple of experience and identity. Of all the venues, the Hong Kong Coliseum has not only the mechanics but also the magic to invest those collective memories with collective emotion and identity. To end our discussion on the Coliseum, we would like to pose a few questions for further deliberation in connection with the central inquiry of venues and memory. First of all, the Hong Kong Coliseum, being the canon of pop stardom, the temple of pop music, also hierarchizes, uniforms or even monopolizes the memories of Hong Kongers, while the Academic Community Hall and Queen Elisabeth Stadium, given their much smaller scale, would have more potential for multiplicity or collectivity in the plural. It remains to be seen how the dominant position of the Hong Kong Coliseum will impact on the writing of Hong Kong's cultural history. Another question concerns the Coliseum's "side effect" of facilitating a separation of space, emotion and identity. The Coliseum is an inside space, confined, forever connected to the city's entertainment, leisure, and fun. By and large, Hong Kong only has inside, confined pop venues, and no outside, public venues. Outside venues are always linked with major pop concerts/festivals such as Woodstock, Band Aid, Live8 in the West and the rest of the world, where pop and politics and activism form allies, being visible, being part of the public space in the city. There is, however, a clear line of demarcation in Hong Kong: outside venues, such as Victoria Park, can be used for political rallies but not for pop events. Inside venues, such as the Coliseum, are "only" for entertainment, rendered invisible, not directly part of the larger public space. This makes Saskia Sassen's question as to who has claims to the city more complicated. Sassen observes outdoor festivals, such as gay parades or Caribbean street walks, not only in terms of a moment of showing off, but also in terms of certain groups of people laying claim to the city. However, if a city has developed a habit of celebrating its pop events indoors, how are we to understand its public politics? If live performances staged in the confined space of the Coliseum help generate a collective memory, a Hong Kong identity, how are we to understand such essentially indoor, private moments, which seem to refuse to engage with Hong Kong's larger political landscape? Even more specifically, how are we to understand the identity politics embodied in the Coliseum during the political transition of the city from British to Beijing sovereignty? Would the Coliseum serve to erase a colonial capitalist history from the Hong Kong identity, producing nostalgia without melancholy, pain and a sense of struggle? Can we see the Hong Kong Coliseum, with its closed, massive and tomb-like monumental architecture, as a monument that seems to naturalize power – as monuments usually do?

### **Belonging and Temporality**

These are some of the questions which we believe require further exploration. For the purpose of this article, we have argued that instead of thinking of Hong Kong and its sound, Cantopop, in terms of disappearance, we consider that the changing modes of music

consumption and the related emotive investments signal a continuous negotiation of what it means to live in Hong Kong. In our view, music venues, the material, stable embodiment of sight and sound, operate as emotive landmarks that help to invest memory with emotion and therefore identity. The Coliseum has served, as we have shown, an important function in producing stars, creating collective memories and reinventing the stars from decades ago, precisely in the significant time-span during which Hong Kong became part of China.

This was also the time when Hong Kong was shocked by the untimely deaths of two of its stars. The suicide of Leslie Cheung and the death of cancer-stricken Anita Mui, robbed the city of its most celebrated legends, shocked it into an identity crisis, and ushered in the comeback phenomenon. The Hong Kong Coliseum has offered a space for the performance of a collective Hong Kong identity that refuses to disappear, helping to create a sense of belonging to a city that seems to be in constant flux.

Then what, to conclude, does this inquiry tell us about postmodernism and Hong Kong? At the beginning of the new millennium, the acclaimed volume on *Postmodernism and China*, edited by Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong (2000), was published. The idea of postmodernity is intricately linked to the issue of temporality. The constant state of in-betweenness, of being always in flux, makes it tempting to claim Hong Kong as a postmodern city. However, the "post" in postmodern produces an unjustified temporality, suggesting that the postmodern follows upon the modern. Based on our analysis, we believe it makes more sense to think of the postmodern in conjunction with the modern, in other words, to insist on the coevalness of the modern and the postmodern. If we translate these concepts into "temporality" (the "postmodern" idea of reality and identity being in constant flux) and "stability" (the "modern" idea of a stable, solid grounding of reality and identity), our study of popular music shows how the two can be considered mutually constitutive. Pop can be considered a temporal sound, it produces hits that make us think back to a specific summer; pop is a transient sound, with stars that come and go. "Pop is a performance of the artificial self; it is a spectacularization of the present. Pop's banality and artificiality render the music profoundly ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity that makes pop such a popular yet opaque musical form" (de Kloet 2005: 334). These reflections on the temporality of pop resonate with Chua Beng Huat's observation on the transience of consumer products: "the brevity of life of a consumer object and of a consumer trend makes it unavoidable that all published materials on consumer products and trends are by definition 'historical'" (Chua, 2003: vii).

Pop serves as a marker of time. Today, with the possibilities of new technologies and the arguable collapse of production and consumption, audiences have become producers, sharing and personifying sounds and images. Pop is intricately connected with temporality, memory and nostalgia. Drawing on Rey Chow, Helen Hok-sze Leung argues that "nostalgia is not simply a yearning for the past as though it were a definite, knowable object. Rather, nostalgia involves a 'sensitivity to the movements of temporality.' Understood in these terms, a nostalgic subject is someone who sits on the fence of time" (Leung 2001: 430).

However, pop is not only to be heard; it can also be seen. Sometimes, the sound needs material embodiment, a sight, to manifest itself. This is where the stable, gigantic and "modern" structure of the pop venue comes in. The Hong Kong Coliseum illustrates how a pop venue serves as a massive, monumental fence of time, producing collective emotive memories that are being recorded on DVD's, mobile phones, and cameras that are, in turn, being sold and shared with others on the Internet. Pop venues, as prime sites of this emotive, audio-visual form of popular culture, offer one way of seeing, hearing and understanding the fast-changing

city in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: to seek temporality – the passing of time, the memory, the emotion, the sound, the fluid – in stability, or buildings that stay. Pop venues anchor pop, something which is temporal and in flux. Probably more than the skyscrapers that we see on all the postcards of Hong Kong, more than the monumental colonial buildings that ask for preservation, it is the Hong Kong Coliseum that helps the city to remember itself. It is a place, simply put, where you must have been, if you consider yourself a Hong Kong citizen.

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