

they are imitating (Abbas 2012). Such a fake watch is materially the same as the real one but lacks the cultural prestige of the “real” brand. The fake castle links the history of kings and queens to the architecture of the global shopping mall. It is almost history, but not quite.

At Tianducheng, a gated community near Hangzhou, China, there is a 350-foot-high replica of the Eiffel Tower among 12 square miles of Parisian-style architecture. If British is more your style, Thames Town (Figure 59), close to Shanghai, offers cobbled streets and Tudor houses around market squares. If this is clearly a fake in one sense, you can nonetheless live in these houses in comfort. As the photograph suggests, the wealthy clients who buy these homes are rarely actually in residence. The same has happened to upscale districts of all global cities. In London, for example, wealthy neighborhoods like Belgravia and Knightsbridge are increasingly empty on a daily basis because the owners of the prime real estate are elsewhere, in another global city. Those the economist Joseph Stiglitz called the 1 percent (2011) now live globally in a fake world of nineteenth-century European and mid-twentieth-century American urban living that no longer actually exists. At the same time, many of those aspiring to be among the 1 percent (one poll showed 42 percent of Americans believe that they are or will be in the 1 percent) are carrying fake Louis Vuitton bags and wearing fake Rolex watches. This peculiar and unequal mirroring of fakery epitomizes the way of seeing in the global city.

When trying to see the new “fake” but all-too-real global city, it helps to use methodologies from science



**Figure 59.** Thames Town, China

fiction. In his novel *The City and the City*, China Miéville described two cities that exist in the same footprint (2009). One street might be completely in Ul Qoma, the next in Beszel, another might be partly in both cities. In order for a citizen to negotiate this space, in Miéville's world, it was necessary to learn how to “unsee” spaces from the other city. Nonresidents, especially children, find this hard to impossible, and the unseeing was carefully policed by a mysterious force called Breach. In the novel, to see what should be unseen results in a “breach” that would be punished by disappearance. The global city is there and not there, requiring that we notice and ignore it at once.

In China, a massive new urbanization is transforming the built environment in ways that make the rebuilding



**Figure 60.** Michael Wolf, photograph from *The Architecture of Density*, Hong Kong

of Berlin seem low-key. It has two registers: showpiece districts, built to impress international visitors and local officials, contrast with the endless places of work and residence for the local population only. In China, they call the new residential high-rises “handshake blocks” because they are placed so close together, it’s as if people could reach across from one tower to the next and shake hands. More formally, the German photographer Michael Wolf calls the phenomenon “the architecture of density.”

By taking photographs of these new buildings in Hong Kong without including any way of judging where they begin or end in the frame, Wolf has found a new modernist aesthetic at work in what appear to be simply utilitarian spaces. Such high-rises create an implied visual clash with



**Figure 61.** Sze Tsung Leong, from *History Images*

the reflecting glass towers of global capitalism. Usually the residential spaces are safely out of sight of the commercial areas. The glass towers are built to illustrate the presumed transparency of global capitalism. As we discovered during the financial crisis of 2007, and afterward, they conceal more than they reveal. In fact, the glass only allows those within to see out. These one-way-mirror buildings are the built environment of a world order that “unsees” its supposed citizens. Meanwhile, the residents of the handshake blocks can barely see anything out of the small windows of their apartments, looking out on a forest of other such blocks.

The artist Sze Tsung Leong has set about documenting the rebuilding of China’s popular neighborhoods.

Picturesque low-rise buildings repeatedly give way to massive modern developments, uniform in style and appearance, set against the permanent air pollution of industrial China. His photographs at first were intended as a parallel to European precursors like Marville, who had documented the transformations of nineteenth-century Paris (see Figure 48).

Like Marville, Sze's photographs rarely show people, concentrating instead on the buildings. Before long, Sze felt that his work was very different from European nostalgia. His photographs show instead "the absence of histories in the form of construction sites, built upon an erasure of the past so complete that one would never know a past had existed. And they are of the anticipation of future histories yet to unfold, in the form of newly built cities."<sup>11</sup> There is certainly unseeing of the past, but it is not yet complete. In Tash Aw's 2013 novel *Five Star Billionaire*, set in Shanghai, the characters are all trying to come to terms with the intense pace of change in China. "Every village, every city, everything is changing," a young woman says. "It's as if we are possessed by a spirit—like in a strange horror film."<sup>12</sup> As we shall see later, this is precisely how change in the global city is visualized in horror films, when the past itself becomes the haunting spirit that "breaches" the seamless present.

In Shanghai, there is a visible clash of empires—the old colonial empire and financial globalization. Taken together they visualize the crosshatching of what political scientist Martin Jacques has called the "contradictory modernity" revealed by the rise of China (2011). Until recently, there was a consensus among all those involved that there was only one way for a nation to become

modern—the Western way. To be modern meant having a representative democracy, free markets, and a civil society with freedom of expression, and so on. China’s ascent has shown there are at least two ways to be modern. China has combined a very strong state that tightly limits personal freedoms with managed economic liberalization. According to Jacques, what is central for China is its distinct culture and long history of civilization rather than a set of “self-evident” principles. And so now we are working out this contradictory modernity. Either one side is right and the other wrong, or there are multiple ways to be modern.

On one side of the Yangtze River in Shanghai, there is Pudong, the new commercial and financial district of the city. A forest of spectacularly designed skyscrapers confronts the viewer as a wall. Pudong classifies Shanghai as a global city and separates those who work there, and above all those who own land or buildings there, from other, lesser beings. It is the city in the city.



**Figure 62.** Pudong, Shanghai





**Figure 63.** Former Jardine Matheson mansion, Shanghai

It demands respect for its sheer scale, newness, and spectacle. Who knows what actually goes on in these endlessly photographed buildings? On the other side, the old colonial waterfront, known as the Bund, survives in external form. Shanghai was opened to the West following the Opium War of 1839–42, in which Great Britain fought the Chinese empire for its right to trade opium to the vast Chinese market. Fortunes were made. The Edwardian headquarters of the former opium dealers Jardine Matheson (long since become respectable) still stares out at Pudong, although no sign indicates its past history.

The building has become a fashion boutique, oddly entitled the House of Roosevelt, selling fake luxury goods. Every night, neon displays on the Pudong buildings put on a show for the watching crowds lined up along the colonial Bund. The message, here and elsewhere in China, is very clear: our way is winning.

The built environment of the city feels less real than its electronic network. Ghosts and spirits are perceived in electronic and digital media as a means for people to explore their anxieties about the seemingly endless transformations of their everyday lives. In film, old powers retain their force. New media can be controlled and manipulated from within. The classic of the genre remains *The Matrix* (1999) and its Platonic cautionary tale about computers and a digitally simulated city. The Wachowski brothers, who wrote and directed the film, wanted us all to remember Plato's ancient rubric about the deceiving nature of appearances. In the film, computer code creates a fake world that manipulates us into believing that we are free, while our bodies are in fact serving as batteries for the Matrix.

Learning how to see the simulated machine world of the Matrix is the key to resisting it. In perhaps the best



Figure 64. Still from *The Matrix*



sequence in the film, Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne) offers Neo (Keanu Reeves) a choice. He can take the red pill and see the world for what it is or take the blue one, forget what he has heard, and go back to everyday life. But Morpheus insists, “You have to see it for yourself.”

In the Hong Kong horror movie *Tales from the Dark* (2013), modern media like a mobile phone or a CD all turn out to be haunted. The scariest character in the film is the ruthless city of Hong Kong, haunted in advance as it is by the knowledge that it will return to full control by China in 2046. At present, Hong Kong is in China but not of it. When you enter the region, your passport is not stamped. It’s as if the city is in no man’s land. In *Tales from the Dark*, the voiceover expresses this view clearly: “Humans. Ghosts. Everyone is searching for the way home.”

In the world made by global cities, it is becoming harder to find a home. In the wake of the Spanish economic crisis, the popular slogan “I’ll never have a fuckin’ house” can be seen on walls across the country. Many Californians have complained that due to escalating rent and home prices, San Francisco has expelled everyone who is not wealthy to remote hinterlands and created a theme park of technology. London is not only driving its less wealthy citizens out by dint of astronomical rents and house prices, it is observing them. Great Britain now has over 4 million closed-circuit TV cameras, nearly all owned by private companies. Local councils in London claim to have just 7,000 cameras but note with pride that this is far more than the 326 in Paris. Today 95 percent

of all Metropolitan Police murder cases in London make use of CCTV footage.<sup>13</sup> While some cities are reshaping themselves under close surveillance, others like Detroit are collapsing. Detroit is lacking over forty thousand streetlights. Whole districts of the city are going dark. Within the 140-square-mile city boundaries of Detroit—a city expanded by the automobile, which made it famous—the area of now-vacant land is the size of San Francisco. These patterns are linked. In Detroit, San Francisco is “unseen” (or perhaps unseeable), and vice versa.

In Paris, the two spaces are concentrically wrapped around each other, yet the wealthy, mostly white center “unsees” its poor, mostly black and brown suburbs. The pasts of the global cities have been erased, invisible, and yet are still remembered, at least for now. When French writer Michel de Certeau wanted to imagine how to see everyday life in the 1970s, he went to the top of New York’s World Trade Center and looked down at the city around him (1984). You cannot go there anymore, literally or metaphorically.

## MAP WORLD

Seeing the crosshatched, divided, disappearing, expanding global city is not so simple anymore. But to see where we are, we turn back to our screens. An odd legacy of the Cold War has been a new way to map. After the Sputnik satellite created a sense of panic in Cold War America, part of the response was to create a set of satellites that would allow

for precise positioning on any part of the Earth's surface, known as the global positioning system, or GPS. Launched over a twenty-year period for the correct targeting of nuclear weapons, GPS was fully realized only after the end of the Cold War in 1994. Owned by the United States government, it comprises twenty-four satellites, whose use was gradually extended from military to civilian. A GPS receiver calculates its position by timing the reception of the user's signal from four of the orbiting satellites. Millions of people now carry such devices in phones and other personal data organizers. For the first time in history, those who do have access to GPS can precisely locate themselves without requiring technical skills. Devices designed solely to access GPS are not reliant on phone service and so it's possible never to be lost. Or at least to know where you are, even if you're not sure where that is.

To close that gap, a variety of mapping services have appeared, from navigation systems for vehicles, to free services like Google Earth and Google Maps. Google Earth is a massive database that is rendered as if it were a seamless visual representation. Google Maps (and other such applications) is designed to be of practical use, offering directions, detailed indications of what each building at a given location does, and even the ability to "see" a specific street via the Street View service. And if even this is too complicated, the software will give verbal directions. Google sends vehicles equipped with automatic roof-mounted cameras to photograph every street they can access. Using

this function allows a viewer to see what their destination will look like before arriving, which can be useful in unfamiliar locations. You can also simply browse for pleasure to see what certain places look like. Some worry that thieves use Street View to target desirable properties.

Google Earth and Street View use a process called stitching to link enormous numbers of individual images into what appears to be a continuous depiction. At certain points, the illusion in these software breaks down because of a glitch in the system. The artist Clement Valla has made locating such errors into an art form, which he calls *Postcards from Google Earth*. These failures to render create images that are nonetheless oddly familiar because they look like the CGI-created disasters that litter today's multiplex cinemas.



Figure 65. Valla, *Postcard from Google Earth*

As Valla puts it on his website, Google Earth is

a new model of representation: not through indexical photographs but through automated data collection from a myriad of different sources constantly updated and endlessly combined to create a seamless illusion.<sup>14</sup>

For Valla, we are already in the Matrix. Google Earth does not look like Earth but resembles other digital materials. Because we spend so much of our lives looking at these materials, it becomes real.

The photographer Doug Rickard similarly uses the image stream created by Google Street View as the source for his sometimes controversial work. He bases his search for compelling images on the aesthetic of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs of the 1930s. Many of these photographs, like Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, have become classics of American photography. To find such images, Lange, Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, and others had to first go to impoverished places, then identify and capture expressive moments. Rickard did his work browsing on a computer, often deliberately visiting places that he knew FSA photographers had previously depicted. What is seen is familiar, a variant on documentary or street photography. Only the "photographer" was never on that street and did not even take the picture.

Perhaps unintentionally, Valla and Rickard show that the two issues the society of control cannot control can be found in its online avatars as well: disaster, natural or

otherwise, and inequality. Valla's images of distortions in Google Earth remind us of devastation caused by hurricanes, earthquakes, and the collapse of poorly built or maintained infrastructure, which we now associate with climate-change-related events. Rickard finds the lonely and disadvantaged in the supposedly "level playing field" of the Internet. These alternative means of seeing the world—the changing natural world and social change—will be the subject of the final chapters.