

Unseen

What we can't or won't see

Façades are found in many places, most traditionally on buildings, where they are erected to project an image that is more stylized or refined than the structures behind them. Trickery, in a way. The concept of the façade is prevalent in the objects and even the services we use every day. Turn on the water and a hidden, often ugly, system provides (one hopes) a clean, consistent flow. Over time, we have become used to reaping the benefits of such infrastructure without giving the infrastructure itself a second thought. These systems are often huge and complex entities, sometimes many times larger than the façades that hide them. While it's easy to focus on the tangible face of a product or service, it's interesting to seek out, or at least to imagine, what is going on behind the curtain. We have an opportunity to do just that when an object or service is demolished, corroded, or otherwise highlighted—sometimes by something as simple as a flow of air—and its internal workings are thus brought to light. Perhaps more difficult to see are those elements of machines that are in plain view but intentionally hidden or camouflaged by use of lights, paint, or scale. Sometimes you just have to take a closer look.

Gaining an appreciation for the underside of technology generates bigger questions. As resources become ever more scarce, can we afford the luxury of hiding things from view? On the other hand, is it inherently good to know how things work? Should we move toward exposing inner workings in an attempt to raise awareness and promote judicious usage? Or is it unsettling to see what it takes to provide us with the necessities we are used to?



