



What a mess!

Description

Anyone with a sense of order canâ??t help but notice that problems frequently occur at the seams, where things join, or donâ??t join, or donâ??t quite align as they should â?? where the joins donâ??t survive successive adaptations.



Sociologist Richard Sennett illustrated the demoralized state of crafters in the former Soviet Union. Once when shown around a construction site Sennett observed empty cartons of caulking compound for sealing around the windows. Their contents had been sold on the black market. Workers filled the gaps around the windows with newspaper and painted over them (403-12).

Cover up

Sennett sees this messiness at the joints as a symptom of material indifference festering within a demoralized workforce devoid of a sense of participation and reward. This failure in workmanship becomes evident at the seams, from which materials are easily pilfered, and where there are already tactics of covering over.



When visiting a country with inadequate building controls any tourist is conscious of the mess at the seams, where joints are unresolved, trades are inadequately coordinated, and where there might be little attention to maintenance. These are often symptoms of the early adoption of partly industrialized processes. Indigenous structures, where they are retained, exhibit no such degradation at the joints.

Architects and others in the practical arts make only oblique reference to the challenge of adjustment, calibration, tolerance, drift, slippage, the gap, and the remainder. Adjustment and adaptation are understandably under-theorised in the classical literature. They represent deviations from standard and fixed universal methods of making. Any adjustment method cannot easily be generalised and subjected to rule. See my early post about [Vitruvius and adjustment](#).

Politics of the gap

To assert the importance of adjustment has several ramifications. Not least, it boosts the political significance of attending to the marginal, as opposed to the officially sanctioned, which is to say the ideal, the hierarchical, hegemonic, the powerful, and the standardised.



Adaptive design

Attending to the gaps also amplifies the nature of design, a more positive cast on Sennett's observation about the opportunistic pilfering of caulk.



The various adjustments that have to be made in applying geometry to some schema of expectations results often in the production of a dimension, portion or element that is left over, that does not fit.

[I've said this before](#). Drawing attention to the interstitial and the remaindered is a recent architectural tactic: those left over spaces, the non-places, the spaces between unaligned grids, those other spaces that don't conform, the geometrical surpluses. This is often where the action is. The remaindered can't necessarily be planned for.

See posts tagged [Le Corbusier's error](#), [Architectural remainder](#), [Architecture and music](#), and [Tuning as a!](#).



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Note

- Pictures show various examples of building details in former Soviet countries, concluding with fly tipping at a panoramic view point. The building with a flag on top is an innovative adaptation attached to a modern cultural and convention centre in Tallin, Estonia.

Category

1. Architecture

Tags

1. adjustment
2. gap
3. tuning

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