

The craftsman

by Richard Sennett

Reviewed by Dr Paul Gibbs

Work based learners and researchers ought to enjoy Richard Sennett's new book *The Craftsman*. In this book Sennett locates and then traces work and the role of the craftsman from ancient Greek philosophy resting to discuss Medieval Guilds but dwelling on the notions of transformation of the Industrial Age almost revelling in an argument of writers such as John Ruskin and William Morris who extolled the crafts before being the notion right up to date.

Sennett defines craftsmanship as "an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake". His interest in the subject arises from his work as an academic sociologist, and wide control of the literature is evident in how his arguments which include Hegel, Heidegger and Marx with a special attention given to his teacher Hannah Arendt. Such a wide trans-disciplinary approach does suffer in the detail of those whose works he can find only little time for. Basically Sennett does not think that craftsmanship has vanished from our world. On the contrary: it has merely migrated to other regions of human enterprise - so that the delicate form of skilled cooperation that once produced a cathedral now produces the Linux software system. Linux, for Sennett, is the work of a community of craftsmen.

The book's three parts first discusses the nature of craftsmen. It is relevant both to setting the context for work within work based studies and as a historical record of the form of activity we mostly engage in. The second part looks in detail at the nature of craft and is enlightening for its unique approach and the depth of its analysis. I was especially interested in the chapter about the hand which links both with Engel's own development and in Heidegger analysis of the notion of hand-craft but I think it fell a little short mainly because of space. This said, the chapter on arousing tools was compelling. The final section deals with craftsmanship in terms of quality and ability. Sennett adds a conclusion which, for the philosophically inclined, is perhaps the best chapter of the whole book. This chapter alone is worth reading the book for as it ranges across a short history of pragmatism, and contextualises it in terms of culture and ethics

Not all of Sennett's views might coalesce with yours but he is able to question what we accept and this book motivates further inquiry. For most there are interesting insights which will encourage both a casual read and also might direct and rewarding other in-depth study.

THE CRAFTSMAN by Richard Sennett
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