RESEARCH SEMINAR:  

post-industrial craftsmanship  
Variable credit, 2-4 units • Seminar meets Monday evenings 7-10 pm • 279 Lawrence

It is often said that contemporary architecture suffers because “craftsmanship isn’t possible anymore.” The purpose of this seminar is to challenge that statement through the investigation of ongoing initiatives in craftsmanship, at different scales ranging from the object to the building to the city, and with different technologies including traditional hand craft as well as digital techniques.

Contemporary practice includes numerous initiatives that in one way or another are attempting to challenge the contemporary paradigm that separates thinking, designing, and making. This seminar will look at those initiatives and attempt to understand their potential to help us move toward a new, post-industrial way of building that restores a focus on the quality of the individual object and work of architecture, as well as the city as a whole.

There are many approaches to the question of craftsmanship, and the subject is of renewed interest in architecture schools, in practice and in literature. The aspect of craftsmanship that will be emphasized in this seminar is as a way of working with two attributes: first, an immediate connection between the conception and realization of an artifact (between thinking and doing, or between design and construction) and second, the artifact itself providing feedback for decision-making.

This is primarily a research seminar, that will help to launch a new research project by the instructor, that follows on Part III of his previous book, The Culture of Building. This new project is intended to lead to a book with the working title POST-INDUSTRIAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN BUILDINGS AND CITIES. The work of the seminar will contribute to this effort.

After preliminary presentations and discussions, lasting about three weeks, the seminar will turn to individual research projects/case studies, with the expectation that each student will produce new insights by the end of the term. Students will present their own work on a regular basis and participate in vigorous discussions about each other's work. To make the seminar most effective, the number of students will be limited.

Case studies may be chosen within the following areas:
• the revival or continuation of traditional crafts within modern economies
• new relationships among players in architecture, contracting and building trades intended to eliminate barriers between design, construction and fabrication
• digital techniques of visualization and fabrication
• urban processes that put control over city form into the hands of people and communities

Preliminary Bibliography

• David Pye, The Nature of Art and Workmanship
• Richard Sennett, The Craftsman
• George Sturt, The Wheelwright’s Shop
• Branko Kolarevic, Architecture in the Digital Age: Design and Manufacturing
• Malcolm McCullough, Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand
• Peter Dormer, The Culture of Craft: Studies in Design and Material Culture
• Howard Davis, The Culture of Building