

<b>Institution: SOAS</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 24A Social Anthropology and Development Studies: Social Anthropology</b>
<b>Title of case study: Understanding Craft Skills, their Acquisition and their Importance (Trevor Marchand)</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Trevor Marchand's anthropological research into how craft skills are learnt, developed by his own acquisition of building and woodworking skills in different societies, has translated theory into practice and the practical. He has contributed to the resistance against the UK's downgrading of craft skills and he has directly impacted upon the way in which crafts have represented themselves and their importance. His impact has been felt in the crafts movement, among architects, and in the FE sector. His work on acquired practical knowledge and its theoretical insights continue to inform debates in the UK and the US in particular.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>After completing studies in architecture at McGill in Canada in 1992, Professor Marchand turned to anthropology to better understand the social and cultural dimensions of building-craft knowledge as it is learned and performed on site. He undertook a PhD at SOAS, conducting fieldwork with minaret builders in Yemen (1996-7). Then, as a SOAS Lecturer, he worked with mud masons in Mali (2001-present), developing an apprenticing method of inquiry that involved labouring alongside builders over long periods to gain first-hand knowledge of their technical procedures, educational processes, formation of professional identities, and struggles for rank, status and work. Immersion as a building-team member enabled him to 'learn about learning' in working environments characterised by hierarchy, competition and, importantly, limited verbal explanation. Results of those studies include the monographs <i>Minaret Building &amp; Apprenticeship in Yemen</i> (2001) and <i>The Masons of Djenné</i> (2009); a co-edited special issue of the AIA journal <i>Africa</i> on 'Knowledge in Practice' (2009); the documentary films <i>The Future of Mud</i> (2007) and <i>Masons of Djenné</i> (2013); and public exhibitions on Mali's mud masons at the Royal Institute of British Architects (2010) and the Smithsonian Institution's Museum for Natural History (2013-14).</p> <p>Importantly, first-hand engagement in craftwork has enabled Marchand to remain actively involved with his communities of study and share findings, to cooperate with craftspeople in the making of films, exhibitions and publications, and to delve evermore deeply into his subject of research. In 2005, funded by an ESRC Fellowship, Marchand's next project focussed on a European case in order to broaden the scope of his comparative studies of craft training, and to advance understanding of situated learning, embodied communication, and skilled practice. Fieldwork included two years of fulltime training in the fine woodwork programme at London's Building Crafts College. It produced a fine-grained study of woodworking practices, craft identities, and the social politics surrounding vocational training and manual work in contemporary Britain. Equally, Marchand's study contributes significantly to a theory of human knowledge that begins from the premise that 'knowing' is an emergent state of mind-body engaged <i>with</i> and <i>in</i> the environment, shedding light on the role of motor cognition in learning, planning, rehearsing and executing skilled practices. The project yielded outputs including a ten-week public lecture series on the <i>Transmission of Knowledge</i>, a special issue of the <i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</i>, 'Making Knowledge' (2010), and the establishment of a cross-disciplinary network with academic researchers and with educators and practitioners in the fields of craft, architecture and conservation.</p> <p>Marchand's current research with UK woodworkers is focussed on the complex and evolving relation between brain, hand, and tool as trainees learn their craft and develop 'personal style'. By employing a combination of participant observation, interviews, digital video, and biomechanical analysis software, Marchand's latest research is producing a unique database for carefully examining grasps, postures and movement with handtools, and for analysing practical problem-solving strategies using resources-to-hand. Ultimately, the study aims to expand popular concepts</p>

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of 'knowledge' to include the intelligent hand at work.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. with Mary Jo Arnoldi and Peter Durgerian. *Masons of Djenné (22-minute Documentary Film)*, 2013.
- b. ed. *Making Knowledge: Explorations of the Indissoluble Relation between Mind, Body and Environment. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 supp. 1 (2010).
- c. *The Masons of Djenné*. Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- d. and Kai Kresse, eds. *Knowledge in Practice: Expertise and the Transmission of Knowledge. Africa* 79/1 (2009).
- e. with Susan Vogel and Samuel Sidibe. *Future of Mud: a Tale of Houses and Lives in Djenné (58-minute Documentary Film)*. Brooklyn, NY: Prince Street Pictures, distributed by First Run Icarus Films, 2007.
- f. *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen*. Richmond: Curzon, 2001.

#### Awards:

The monograph *The Masons of Djenné* received the Melville J. Herskovits Award (African Studies Association), Amaury Talbot Prize (Royal Anthropological Institute), and the Elliot P. Skinner Award (Association for Africanist Anthropology).

#### External grants supporting the work above:

Economic and Social Research Council, 3-year fellowship: Building-Craft Knowledge & Apprenticeship in Britain (September 2005-August 2008), £182,000

**Output f was submitted to RAE 2008.**

**Outputs b and c are submitted in REF 2.**

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Through his cross-cultural analysis of the fundamentals of skills transfer in craftsmanship, Marchand has come to engage directly with the crafts community, greatly informing its understanding, and that of the wider public, of the nature of apprenticeship and the importance of learning and preserving manual skills. Marchand's efforts to promote skills transfer are rendered more significant by the UK government's recent decision to remove 'crafts' from its list of creative industries, thereby devaluing their contribution not only to the UK economy, but to its social and cultural life. Multiple closures of notable craft courses at higher education institutions have occurred in the UK in the past twenty years, while the number of children studying art and other creative subjects at GCSE has decreased sharply since 2010. In this context, voices such as Marchand's are of increasing importance.

Based on his research into mud masons in Mali, Marchand curated an important exhibition in May 2010 entitled *Djenné: African City of Mud*, held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London. The exhibition was created in collaboration with RIBA and was sponsored by SOAS, the ESRC, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), and the Dutch embassy. It explored the relationship between design and construction practices, architectural heritage and cultural identity and, as part of the wider 'The Art of Mud Building: Heritage and Sustainability' project, was accompanied by a series of public lectures and events at RIBA, SOAS and the Ismaili Centre (1, below). Approximately 4,000 people attended the exhibition, while around 300 attended

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Marchand's public lecture (2). The exhibition was favourably received in *The Architectural Review*, which noted its emphasis on the craftsmanship involved in its maintenance: 'The real discovery of the exhibition lies not with the architecture, but in the story of the community which maintains the site.' (3)

Marchand has been particularly proactive in his engagement with the FE sector, demonstrating the importance of skills transfer to young people undertaking craft-related courses. In 2013, Marchand returned to the Building Crafts College, London (where he conducted fieldwork as part of his ESRC fellowship), to deliver a lecture on his research into the development of hand skills and how they relate to the brain.

He has contributed to the Making Futures project, hosted by Plymouth College of Art (an FE institution), which aims at improving understanding of how the contemporary crafts are practiced in relation to global environmental and sustainability issues (4, 5). At its biennial conference in 2011 attended by practitioners, curators, historians, theorists, campaigners, activists, and representatives of public and private agencies, he presented a lecture discussing what he had learnt from working with minaret builders in Yemen, mud masons in Mali and furniture maker trainees in East London.

The organiser of Making Futures, Malcolm Ferris, has characterised the contributions to the crafts community of Marchand's research and participation in the project as follows (6):

*"Trevor is developing an important set of perspectives on, and understandings of, craft that are helping the community to critically appraise and situate the value of practice within a broader set of epistemological and cultural-developmental concerns. He has made an important contribution to emergent debates around 'craft' that are concerned with shifting the critical focus away from the object and onto the lived experiences of the practitioner and the contexts of practice. This has enabled the community to meet on shared ground with other disciplines and given them a means (other than practice) by which to communicate the value of craft to constituencies beyond the practitioner community. These developments are pivotal in terms of the current re-evaluation and understanding of craft thinking and making going on in society. In this respect his work not only addresses practitioners, but also audiences and agencies beyond the immediate crafts community, including those that view creative making as a vital component in the effort to connect communities."*

His impact on one prominent attendee of Making Futures, Rosy Greenlees, Executive Director of the UK Crafts Council, was described as follows (7):

*"I have never heard an academic talk so persuasively about the value of making things. His talk validated how the craft community works, and the arguments we put to the government regarding the value of apprenticeships and the transfer of skills"*

Further, Greenlees confirms that Marchand's work has helped her to provide a robust evidence base supporting representations to government, without which she believes ministers would not take her and her organisation's arguments seriously.

In 2013, Marchand convened a two-day workshop in collaboration with the Plymouth College of Art on 'craftwork as problem solving', related to his research on the brain, hands, and tool use. This brought together designer-makers, architects, and researchers of crafts to present short papers and engage in an exchange of ideas and perspectives.

In 2012, Marchand was one of three keynote speakers at the Museum of Skills Conference hosted by the British Council London, and the result of a collaboration between Norske Kunsthåndverkere (The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts), Artquest and ArtProjects and Solutions (8). Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Norwegian Embassy and the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts, the conference brought together thinkers and practitioners to discuss what skills the arts sector will need in the future and how they can be used.

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Marchand's talk was well received and has since been posted on the internet by numerous organisations and individuals, thereby increasing its impact. Specifically, it was posted on the blog of Robin Wood, a tableware craftsman who has produced work for the Tower of London and the film director Ridley Scott (9). In his comments on the lecture, Wood stated:

*"Lots of folk understand handwork and there are a few academics who study it and write about it but I think Trevor is perhaps unique in his depth of understanding of both worlds. This is great as it stretches my thoughts about what I do in the workshop and it also gives those of us who work with our hands more credibility. The level of intelligence that is required to be really good is not often understood from the outside."*

In January 2011, Curator for Africa at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum for Natural History in Washington D.C. invited Marchand to co-curate an exhibition grounded in his ongoing research in Djenné. Marchand produced and directed four new short documentary films to be exhibited alongside his photographs, which together document the livelihoods, expertise, and the masons' struggles to sustain their traditional craft in a rapidly-changing world. The year-long exhibition, *Mud Masons of Mali*, opened in the Smithsonian African Voices focus gallery on 30 August 2013 and will run for one year (10). Output c serves as the exhibition catalogue.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. 'The Art of Mud Building: Heritage and Sustainability' project featured in RIBA's Spring 2010 Bulletin: <http://www.architecture.com/files/ribatrust/programmes/bulletins/spring10.pdf> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
2. Attendance figures for the RIBA exhibition were provided by email by the curator of the exhibition.
3. *The Architectural Review* review of *Djenné: African City of Mud* exhibition: <http://www.architectural-review.com/reviews/djenn-african-city-of-mud-london-uk/5217949.article>
4. Making Futures, Programme and Article, Plymouth College of Art <http://makingfutures.plymouthart.ac.uk/index.php?pageID=1> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
5. Review of the Making Futures II conference, by Dr Karen Yair, Research Associate, Crafts Council <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/about-us/press-room/view/2011/making-futures-ii-reviewed> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
6. Malcolm Ferris, organiser of Making Futures.
7. Rosy Greenlees, Executive Director of the UK Crafts Council
8. Museum for Skills Conference [http://www.artquest.org.uk/articles/view/museum\\_for\\_skills](http://www.artquest.org.uk/articles/view/museum_for_skills) [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
9. Blog of Robin Wood, Woodware craftsman <http://www.robin-wood.co.uk/wood-craft-blog/2013/05/14/wisdom-of-hands-great-film-about-woodwork/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].
10. *Mud Masons of Mali* at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum for Natural History in Washington D.C. <http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/mud-masons/> [Most recently accessed 20.11.13].