

MARCUS BANKS

4 July 1960–22 October 2020



The untimely death of Marcus Banks, Professor of Visual Anthropology at the University of Oxford, at the age of sixty is a deep loss for anthropological communities in Britain, Europe and across the world. Over the course of a 34-year career, Marcus helped shape visual anthropology as a vibrant disciplinary sub-field, as well as making influential contributions to the use of visual methods in social research, the study of ethnicity and nationalism, and postgraduate training more generally.

Marcus studied social anthropology at Cambridge as an undergraduate and stayed on at Kings to read for a PhD. In 1986 he completed his doctoral thesis on the religious identities of two Jain communities, based on multi-sited fieldwork in two continents, and subsequently published as *Organizing Jainism in India and England* (Banks 1992). In 1987 he took up a temporary ‘demonstrator’ post at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) in Oxford, and also studied film-making at the National Film and Television School. Two years

later he was appointed to a lectureship and remained in Oxford for the rest of his academic career.

Marcus quickly became involved in debates about the importance of theory within visual anthropology, the dangers posed by the 'seductive veracity of ethnographic film' (1990a) and the need for ethnographic film-makers to engage with cinematic conventions of realism (1990b). His research interests in the history and practice of visual methods within anthropology led to edited collections with Howard Morphy (Banks and Morphy 1997) and Jay Ruby (Banks and Ruby 2011), along with a special issue of *History and Anthropology* with Richard Vokes on photography and the archive (Banks and Vokes 2010). He played a leading role in developing Oxford's specialism in visual anthropology, launching a new Master's degree in the subject. He later oversaw its integration with the MSc in Material Anthropology, run by the Pitt Rivers Museum, creating the new MSc in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology, which brought together different parts of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography.

Closely interested in the technologies of visibility, both old and new, Marcus was ever curious, always learning new skills and engaging with new debates. Marcus saw the importance of all students gaining practical fieldwork experience, and during the 1990s he developed a range of pioneering courses in research methods. He became heavily involved in supporting innovations in doctoral training, both at ISCA and across the UK. In Oxford he helped doctoral students convene a series of events debating the future of research training in anthropology, including the 1998 'Marett Conference' and the 2003 'Future Fields' conference.

Many will remember being inspired by Marcus's undergraduate lectures, whether on ethnicity, visual anthropology or fieldwork. They were accessible and calmly authoritative reviews of each field. Marcus would take his audience far beyond the discipline, offering capacious insights on contemporary theoretical debates, while being judicious about imposing his own perspectives. This sustained commitment to pedagogy is reflected in his writing, from his important early textbook on the anthropology of ethnicity (Banks 1996) to several editions of his books on visual methods in qualitative research (Banks 2001, 2007, 2018).

Marcus had a strong sense of the scholarly virtues that should inform academic life and university administration. He embodied and exemplified fairness, balance, and calm reflection. Marcus was endlessly generous with his time and took on a huge range of service commitments for his university and the discipline. Along with his long-standing membership of the RAI Film Committee, he was an Oxford University Proctor, and held leadership roles at Wolfson College, as well as serving as Head of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography

from 2012 to 2016. He regularly served on ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) committees overseeing and assessing UK doctoral training programmes and made many contributions to European anthropology and visual anthropology. Marcus served on EASA's Executive Committee from 2017 to 2019, having been an EASA member since the early 2000s.

Marcus may have been a talented visual anthropologist with a rich diversity of research interests and administrative talents, but he will be most remembered for his generosity as a teacher, and his kindness and compassion. He cared genuinely about the discipline, but much more about the well-being of his students, colleagues and everyone he worked with. There are many deeply moving testaments to his wise counsel as a supervisor, teacher and mentor in the [online book of condolences](#) assembled by his college, Wolfson. Marcus's scholarly modesty is captured in his ten-word Facebook biography: 'I teach and research in social anthropology and visual anthropology'. There is so much more to say. He will be remembered as a scholar, a teacher, and a humanist.

DAVID MILLS¹

References

- Banks, Marcus 1990a. The seductive veracity of ethnographic film, *SVA Review* 6/1, 16-21.
- 1990b. Experience and reality in ethnographic film, *Visual Sociology* 5/2, 30-3.
- 1992. *Organizing Jainism in India and England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1996. *Ethnicity: anthropological constructions*, London and New York: Routledge.
- 2001. *Visual methods in social research*, London: Sage.
- 2007. *Using visual data in qualitative research*, London: Sage.
- 2018. *Using visual data in qualitative research* (2nd edition), London: Sage.
- Banks, Marcus, and Howard Morphy 1997. *Rethinking visual anthropology*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Banks, Marcus, and Jay Ruby 2011. *Made to be seen: perspectives on the history of visual anthropology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Banks, Marcus, and Richard Vokes 2010. 'Introduction: anthropology, photography and the archive', *History and Anthropology* 21/4, 337-49.
- Gingrich, André, and Marcus Banks 2006. *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: perspectives from social anthropology*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Oxford. Email: david.mills@education.ox.ac.uk

Marcus Banks 1960-2020

Editor's note: Other obituaries of Prof. Banks can be found on the Wolfson College website, in *The Guardian* for 24 November 2020 and on the *Oxford Mail* website, via the following links:

www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/news/professor-marcus-banks-1960-2020

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/nov/24/marcus-banks-obituary>

[Obituary: University of Oxford professor Marcus Banks | Oxford Mail](#)

Below we reproduce an interview conducted with Prof. Banks in 2013.