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How Academic Dress Is Mobilized in Degree Ceremonies and to What Effect

By Sandra Wearden

Abstract

Academic dress is perceived by many to be fixed and unchanging, yet this study illuminated how rich, diverse, dynamic and changeable it can be. Using a socio-material approach called actor-network theory meant that the focus of attention in this study was on how academic dress was mobilized in relation to degree ceremonies and to what effect. By focusing on academic dress in this particular way, the aim was to highlight how academic dress contributed to making and shaping degree ceremonies.

This study found that academic dress generated similar and different effects across degree ceremonies held at different institutions, and concluded that using actor-network theory provided an opportunity to look closely at how similar and different cultural values, assumptions and expectations, were constructed in relation to academic dress.

Introduction

For centuries in the United Kingdom, academic dress was everyday wear for staff and students in universities. Those who wore academic attire daily during this period in the UK represented the few who worked and studied at the small number of universities in existence, or who taught at grammar or public schools. During the second half of the twentieth century, this daily custom vanished at many institutions. Today in the UK, academic dress is more commonly associated with and worn at degree ceremonies. While these changes in use of academic dress in the UK have been lamented by some, including the first Chairman of the Burgon Society, they have perhaps contributed to the continued use and survival of academic dress.¹

The emphasis in this paper is on academic dress worn at degree ceremonies during the second half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first century. The questions that underpinned and guided this study were as follows:

- How have customs associated with wearing academic dress at degree ceremonies developed and changed, or stayed the same, at six higher education institutions?
- How does academic dress relate to other actors at degree ceremonies and to what effect?

Socio-material approaches to educational research deliberately draw attention to material actors in social situations. Actor-network theory in particular pays attention to

I would like to thank Bruce Christiansen, Alex Kerr and Stephen Wolgast for their valuable comments and to Bruce Christiansen for contributing two photographs that have been included in this paper.

¹ Philip Goff, 'Chairman's Speech to Congregation', *The Burgon Society Annual 2001*, pp. 6–7.



Jessie Tarbox

FIG. 1 Academic dress assembled in different ways to different effects: Students at Lancaster University Graduation Ceremony, right, 9 December 2015, and a suffrage march in New York in 1910.



how social and material actors relate in different ways, in different places, spaces, at different times, and to what effect. (See Appendix A.)

Previous studies² have shown how socio-material associations generate amongst other things the perception of material objects being at a 'proper place', which can also be demonstrated by a socio-material association that generates the opposite effect as seen in Figure 1, on the preceding page.

The focus here is on how academic dress is mobilized in relation to other actors and networks at different times, and how these various constructions are themselves subject to change. For example, during World War II proctors at the University of Cambridge were compelled to relax the rules for wearing a square cap due to a shortage of the material used to make them, which resulted in the caps' being difficult to obtain.³ Therefore a shortage of material led to a change in the rules about wearing hats at Cambridge. If there had not been a shortage of material then the effects generated would likely have been different. This example demonstrates how relations and interdependencies between social and material actors can change, and in this particular case what resulted.

Dress historians are no strangers to such socio-material connections and have long been aware that clothing and changing fashions can contribute to the construction of different effects and meanings in relation to other actors. Around the world and throughout history there are examples of how items of clothing have contributed to the generation of such effects.⁴ Consequently, I believe that academic dress is of interest to educational research, because it can tell us something about how higher education has evolved and changed, and how it has been situated and perceived at various periods.

Changing use and representation of academic dress

Hargreaves-Mawdsley considered the golden age of academic dress as that preceding the nineteenth century. He argued that during this period academic dress represented and articulated the intellectual harmony of the Western world. At the end of the eighteenth century, he said there was a break when the gradual incremental changes associated with 'the formative period of academical dress was over'.⁵ He related this break to a period of growth and change in the academic world, at a time when nationalism emerged and many new universities were founded as national institutions.

Hargreaves-Mawdsley was unhappy with the manner in which academical attire was determined for new institutions established at this time. He claimed that robemakers responsible for creating academicals for these new institutions often borrowed freely from older institutions, with little or no understanding about how the latter had acquired their

2 Bruno Latour and Emilie Hermant, *Paris ville invisible* (Paris: La Découverte-Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1998). *Paris: Invisible City*, trans. by Liz Carey-Libbrecht, corrected February 2006 by Valérie Pihet, online at <<http://bruno-latour.fr/virtual/PARIS-INVISIBLE-GB.pdf>>, accessed 1 June 2016.

3 Oliver James Keenan, 'How Can Academical Dress Survive in the Third Millennium?', *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 99–125 (p. 102). The change in regulation was acknowledged in a 'notice concerning academical dress', in the Official Report of 1943.

4 Mina Rocas and Louise Edwards, 'Transnational Flows and the Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas', Ch. 1, *The Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), pp. 1–16.

5 W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. vii, emphasis added.

costume incrementally over time. Surprisingly he paid little heed to this when he designed the scheme of academic dress adopted by the University of Sussex on its foundation in 1961.⁶

A context of growth and change in higher education

Hargreaves-Mawdsley focused on academical dress until the end of the eighteenth century, whereas this study focuses on two periods of growth in higher education sector in the UK and internationally that relate to the sample of institutions included in this study. (See Appendix B.)

The first concerns the significant period of growth that occurred in the higher education sector in the UK during the 1960s and in 1992. In 1960 for example, there were 123,500 students registered at universities in the UK; by 2011/12 the figure had grown to 2.5 million, of which 435,230 were international students.⁷ The second period of growth concerns the rapid expansion of higher education globally during the past 15 years ago which is continuing to grow at a tremendous pace. The number of students enrolled in higher education around the world has doubled in the last twenty-two years⁸ and predictions suggest that the world's population of higher education students will more than double to 262 million by the year 2025.⁹ The sample of institutions chosen for this study reflects how this growth is developing in higher education through a range of different types of institutional relationships.

The sample for this study

The data collected for this study are part of a wider ongoing PhD research project using actor-network theory to look at degree ceremonies. This study includes data relating to degree ceremonies at six higher education institutions,¹⁰ four of which are located in the UK, one in South Asia and another in South East Asia.

See Appendix B for more information regarding the sample of institutions that took part in this study. Lancaster University was the primary site and more data was collected there than at the other institutions in the sample. See Appendix C for further details about the types of data collected for this study.

Methodology

There is a range of theoretical approaches to choose from in social-material research.¹¹ This study drew on previous studies that used actor-network theory and post actor-network

6 Alex Kerr, 'Hargreaves-Mawdsley's *History of Academical Dress* and the Pictorial Evidence for Great Britain and Ireland: Notes and Corrections', *TBS*, 8 (2008), pages 106-50 (p.108).

7 Malcolm Tight, *The Development of Higher Education in the United Kingdom since 1945* (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, 2009), Table 3.4(a), p. 55.

8 Simon Marginson, 'High Participation Systems of Higher Education', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87.2 (March/April 2016), pp. 243-71.

9 Bob Goddard, *Making a Difference: Australian International Education*, Dorothy Davis and Bruce Mackintosh, eds (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2012).

10 Lancaster University, The Open University, Blackburn College, Blackpool and The Fylde College, Sunway University (Malaysia), G. D. Goenka World Institute (India).

11 See T. Fenwick, R. Edwards and P. Sawchuk, *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 4-7

Network of ceremonies directly associated with Lancaster University



Ceremony in this sample not directly associated with Lancaster University

The Open University
 Distance Learning Provider, Founded 1969
 Presentation ceremony robemakers: Ede & Ravenscroft

FIG. 2 A Visual Representation of the Sample for this Study and Background Information (2013/14)

theory¹² to describe and demonstrate complex networked relations in different fields of inquiry. This analytical stance allows social and material actors to be involved in the mobilization of degree ceremonies. When using this approach a researcher is required to make no a priori assumptions with regard to effects such as power, identity, order and formality. Instead the emphasis is on understanding how these effects are achieved. Actor-network theory pays attention to the various networks involved in the construction, maintenance and care of assemblages, such as degree ceremonies in this case, and the work that often goes on behind the scenes that is invisible to most. Researchers using this approach are also interested in the fragility and vulnerability of these constructions, and anything that threatens the stability of them.

This study used ethnographic methods to collect data. See Appendix C for further information about the methodology used to conduct this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

Space here prevents me from including all the data collected and analysed. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper the aims during analysis were to:

- focus on data that related most clearly with changing customs or conventions with regard to academic dress, and
- demonstrate how actor-network theory may provide an alternative route to the study of academic dress.

Changing customs and conventions

The gradual decline of wearing academics on a daily basis

Based on data collected for this study only one institution provided evidence of academic dress worn on a daily basis in the past and that was at the University of Lancaster.

In 1964 when the University first opened its doors to students, undergraduates were required to wear a basic grey gown [u3], which was the regulation garment at the time.¹³

Wearing gowns daily during the first few years at Lancaster University was less consistent amongst staff. Some members of staff didn't wear gowns, while others did all the time, and the practice gradually died out rather than suddenly ceased. A long-standing member of staff at Lancaster University mentioned that upon their arrival at the University in 1968 some staff were still wearing gowns to give lectures (Fig. 4). Unlike the example given earlier where there were clear indications about why and how rules had changed regarding the wearing of caps at Cambridge University, in this case reasons for the gradual decline of wearing academic dress on a daily basis were less clear. Two points might shed some light on this. The first raised by the same member of staff at Lancaster University was that after the Second World War people had perhaps wanted to go back to the way things were before the war. This respondent said that as immediate memories of the war receded and rationing ended in the 1950s, there was a greater sense of freedom and opportunity for expression captured in the zeitgeist of the 1960s. The second point coincides with this period when seven new universities opened which created opportunities for more people

¹² John Law and John Hassard, eds, *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

¹³ Nicholas Groves, ed., *Shaw's Academic Dress of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3rd edn (London: The Burgon Society, 2011–14), 2 vols, Vol. 1: *Universities and Other Degree-Awarding Bodies* (2011), p. 25.



Photograph courtesy of the University of Lancaster Archives

FIG. 3 When undergraduates were required to wear gowns to lectures at Lancaster University and the majority did so (exact date unknown, but this photograph would have been taken around 1964–66).

from a broader range of backgrounds to be able to access higher education. These new universities not only wanted to join the ranks of the older, more established institutions, they also wanted to exert their own identities and present a more contemporary image.

According to a long-serving member of staff at Lancaster University, it is likely that academics involved in establishing the University had come from older universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, and may have influenced the rules about the daily wear of academic dress introduced at Lancaster when it opened its doors in 1964. In which case, this would suggest that as academics moved between institutions they influenced the movement of practices between institutions too. Still, the transference of practices relating to daily wear of academic dress at Lancaster University failed to endure and had ceased by the end of the 1960s.

Despite daily wear of academic dress lapsing at many newer institutions, the rules at older universities such as Oxford still require academic dress be worn more frequently, although these rules are challenged from time to time. For example, in May 2015 the customary practice of wearing sub fusc and academics to examinations at Oxford University made it to the newspapers. Students at Oxford voted by a decisive majority to keep this particular tradition alive and well. The argument that wearing academics was elitist and put off students from state schools and disadvantaged backgrounds was countered by others who argued that wearing sub fusc and gowns into examinations wasn't elitist but instead egalitarian. One student quoted in an article in the *Guardian* said, 'No matter your background, race, class or gender, when you go into exams wearing the gown, you are equal.'¹⁴ There is a long tradition of (graduate) academic dress formally and visibly representing a revocation of social distinctions in the UK and America. That is not to say that attempts to personalize graduation attire do not exist.¹⁵

¹⁴ Damien Gayle, 'Oxford University Students Vote to Keep "Archaic" Sub Fusc Academic Dress', *Guardian*, 23 May 2015.

¹⁵ Albert A. Harrison, Robert Sommer, Margaret H. Rucker and Michael Moore, 'Standing Out from the Crowd: Personalization of Graduation Attire', *Adolescence*, Volume xxi, No. 84 (Winter 1986), pp. 863–74.

FIG. 4 A member of staff at Lancaster University, Prof. Tom Lawrenson, lecturing in a gown in the Centenary Church during the 1965/66 term.



Photograph by the Daily Express/Courtesy of the University of Lancaster Archives

This particular example from Oxford University though showed how academic dress related to issues of equality and widening participation debates in higher education. Data collected from the institutions included in this study did not show a similar correlation between academics and issues of widening participation. However, there were two short references related to the costs associated with hiring gowns at Lancaster University. Therefore, debates about widening participation in relation to academic dress were different at different higher education institutions.

The Open University expressed its egalitarian approach in a different way when it opened its doors in 1969. Unlike Oxford University in the example above it chose not to have caps¹⁶ worn to degree ceremonies, thereby making no distinction between male or female headwear. A member of staff from the Open University said:

... you know, when the university was founded they wanted to be a little bit different so they wear blue robes rather than black ones. You know, they chose not to have hats.¹⁷

This example illustrates how the Open University used academic hats as a means of distinguishing itself from other institutions, perhaps in particular the older institutions where women but not men traditionally wore hats during degree ceremonies, such as at the University of Oxford. By choosing not to have hats for both sexes at degree ceremonies, the Open University took an egalitarian approach in relation to gender. The earlier example above demonstrated how the wearing of academic gowns to examinations at Oxford were associated with equality and widening participation. Both institutions assembled academic dress in relation to egalitarian principles but did so in different ways.

Despite a gradual decline in the daily wear of academic dress during the 1960s, the tradition for wearing academic dress continues to thrive at degree ceremonies, where it was worn at all six institutions in this sample.

Based on the data collected for this study, what appeared most distinctive in relation to how customs and conventions regarding academic dress have changed, developed or stayed the same, concerned the wearing of headgear during degree ceremonies. Different practices, customs and controversies were found to result from a variety of associations between academic headgear and other actors involved in degree ceremonies.

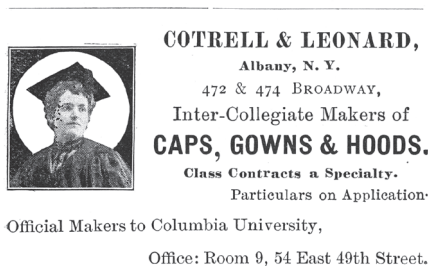
¹⁶ Caps are commonly referred to as 'hats' at the Open University.

¹⁷ Interview with the author, The Open University, 24 Oct. 2013.

Customs associated with wearing hats at degree ceremonies

Female students at Lancaster University used to have to wear a soft Oxford cap during degree ceremonies. Some of the female students were reluctant to wear them, and in 1985 a group of students from Pendle College wrote to the Vice-Chancellor,

Dear Sir, We are a group of final year female students. We have noticed that on the application forms for degree ceremony dress hire that women graduands will be supplied with soft caps rather than the traditional mortarboards. We would rather wear mortarboards, which are universally recognised.¹⁸



COTRELL & LEONARD,
Albany, N. Y.
472 & 474 BROADWAY,
Inter-Collegiate Makers of
CAPS, GOWNS & HOODS.
Class Contracts a Specialty.
Particulars on Application.

Official Makers to Columbia University,
Office: Room 9, 54 East 49th Street.

FIG. 5 Robemaker's advertisement, Columbia University Spectator, New York, dated 1900.

It is interesting to note that the female students appear to identify the mortarboard as 'universally recognised', although sadly the letter does not expand on how they had arrived at this conclusion. However, it is clear that they wanted to have the same opportunity as the male students to wear the mortarboard. Despite the rules regarding the wearing of caps at Lancaster distinguishing between male and female at the time, the mortarboard had not been particularly associated with gender at earlier universities such as the University of London in the nineteenth century or the University of St Andrews where regulations allowed women to wear them. At the beginning of

the twentieth century, women in the USA were wearing square caps as the advertisement in Figure 5 shows.

The Vice-Chancellor at Lancaster University replied to the female students from Pendle College in a letter dated 9 May 1985, which appeared to relate hats with gender:

Dear Ms. D. I have long been somewhat mystified that some women should seek to sink their identity in the common mass and so imply shame rather than pride in their sex. My mother was a very early feminist and took exactly the opposite view. However.

Dress for degree congregations was laid down by Council in 1965. The soft hat for women was decided because it was thought it would be more comfortable for women's hairstyles. I do not have power to vary a Council decision. A proposal for variation can of course be put to Council, but I am sure the response would be 'Do a majority of women students want it?' So I think we must find out, and we have not time to do this before the arrangements for the coming Congregation have to be settled.¹⁹

The Vice Chancellor's letter stipulated that the reason for choosing soft caps for women to wear to degree congregations was to accommodate women's hairstyles and comfort. It is likely that the tradition for wearing soft caps at Lancaster University was similar to the practice associated with women wearing hats at Oxford. The regulations at Oxford still say

¹⁸ Extract of handwritten letter signed by five female students, undated but presumed sent in 1985 (Archives of Lancaster University, UA.1/3/4/5, correspondence dated April/May 1985).

¹⁹ The Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University in 1985 was Mr P. A. Reynolds. Letter dated 9 May 1985, Archives at Lancaster University, *ibid*.

that ‘women members of the university attending ceremonies shall either carry a square or wear a soft cap’, the reason being that the square cap has to be removed in the presence of the Proctors while the soft cap does not, meaning that hairpins can be run through it.

The Open University’s decision not to have hats worn to degree ceremonies was met with some resistance, which resulted in the Open University’s relenting slightly by specifying in 1973 that Open University graduates could wear caps for photography should they choose to do so. The data collected in this study suggests that the situation has not changed much in the ensuing years. A member of staff from the Open University said,

I do have letters from some students saying I feel cheated. I don’t feel I got a proper degree because I didn’t get to wear a mortarboard. So in recent years we’ve allowed our photographers to have a few in their bags so they can have their photograph taken with it, but we don’t allow them to wear it in the ceremony.²⁰

At the time of writing, the rule about wearing caps to degree ceremonies at the Open University had not changed. However, evidence in this study highlighted how some students were still challenging the rule to the extent that the Open University continues to provide caps in the photography areas at their degree ceremonies.

At Blackburn College there did not appear to be any rules or regulations in operation with regard to the wearing of caps in the ceremonies, as the following observation notes show.

While we were in the room where Ede staff were helping students into their robes etc., one of the Ede staff asked a member of staff from Blackburn College whether the students wore their hats into the ceremony or held onto them. She said, ‘it doesn’t really matter they can do what they want. They usually wear them.’²¹

All students from Blackpool and The Fylde College wore caps during ceremonies observed at the Winter Gardens in Blackpool in 2014. Male and female students wore squares throughout the degree ceremonies observed at Sunway University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where Ede & Ravenscroft have an office that supplies academics locally.

The caps worn during degree ceremonies held at G. D. Goenka World Institute in India were slightly different from those worn at the other ceremonies in this sample. They resembled a square but unlike those seen at other institutions in this study they had elastic chin straps to keep them in place and what appeared to be a longer than usual black tassel. In 2013 and 2014, there were no established robemakers in the area, and therefore a local tailor made these caps based on photographs of caps used by Lancaster University. The overall effect of seeing elastic chinstraps keeping caps in position seemed incongruous to a Western eye accustomed to seeing them worn without. However, students and staff in India seem perfectly comfortable and happy wearing them this way, although it was apparent when watching the DVD of this ceremony that without the elastic chinstraps the caps had a tendency to slip and fall off.

Seeing chinstraps used in this way at G. D. Goenka illustrated a local adaptation for wearing squares at degree ceremonies, and demonstrated how cultural assumptions and expectations differed in relation to the wearing of chinstraps. This example also shows how using a socio-material approach such as actor-network theory can expose similar and dif-

20 Interview with the author, the Open University, 24 Oct. 2013.

21 Observation notes: Robing room, King George’s Hall, Blackburn, 24 Oct. 2013.

ferent cultural values, assumptions and expectations, and how transcultural assemblages can occur between two institutions.

One of the rules relating to academic attire that appeared to have endured at Lancaster University degree ceremonies was that women wore their academic caps throughout whilst men were required to remove theirs. All the students who attended the undergraduate degree congregations held in July 2013 appeared to comply with this rule.

Staff co-ordinators told students about the rule as they lined them up before each ceremony. The marshals were responsible for enforcing the rule during ceremonies although the data showed that one was happy to disregard it:

International students, we do have a lot of them now, they don't see it that way. They've learned a lot of their English from watching American movies and people graduate and they keep their hats on. It's symbolic, very symbolic, look, I've got the hat, and I've done it.

I wonder if maybe we need to change that, let them keep their hats on because it's the ... it's like the symbol of the right I've done it ... I'm allowed to wear this hat now, let me wear it across the stage. In these days of equality ... I'll come back to the old equality thing. Like, men and women, yeah, we want equality, give them equality. Let them wear the hats.

RESEARCHER: Do you think a lot of them would?

Yeah, because they forget it and it's the whole thing that when anybody who's helped out at the ceremonies for the past few years will go oh, they [men] didn't take their hats off. A part of me goes, I'll never tell them because they've earned it so leave them to it.²²

At the postgraduate congregations held in December 2013, observation notes describe how some male students wore their caps during ceremonies. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the number of men wearing caps, to the point that all male students now wear caps during ceremonies held at Lancaster. However, the rule pertaining to this did not change until after it had become customary for them to do this.

The issue of equality in relation to wearing caps at Lancaster University degree congregations appears to have shifted over time. From women wanting equality with men in relation to the wearing of caps, to men wanting equality with women. However, how those changes occurred was notably different.

Conclusions

Only Lancaster University in this study provided evidence of staff and students previously wearing academic attire on a daily basis. Students ceased wearing robes on a daily basis there in 1966 and there was a gradual decline in staff wearing robes following that. At all six institutions represented in this study, staff and students wore academic dress to degree ceremonies. There was also evidence of an overseas institution choosing to adopt western academic attire, although locally made caps were slightly different from those used by their partner institution based in the UK.

The most distinctive evidence across the six institutions in this study related to customs and practices associated with academic headgear worn (or not) at degree ceremonies. The mortarboard which is a widely recognized symbol associated with academic attire was

²² Interview with the author, Lancaster University, 3 June 2014.

worn during degree ceremonies at five out of the six institutions in this study, and provided for photography purposes only at the sixth.

This study found examples of how academic dress was mobilized in relation to issues of equality and gender in different ways at different universities, and then went on to show how these mobilizations changed or were maintained over time to produce similar and different effects.

At Lancaster University, the process used for changing rules in relation to academic dress appeared to have altered and become more relaxed over time. In 1985, the Vice-Chancellor at Lancaster University indicated that he required Council approval to change rules regarding the wearing of caps during degree ceremonies, whereas in 2014 the rule changed *after* it had become customary for men to wear caps during ceremonies.

At first sight, academic dress can appear fixed, unchanging, and universally accepted symbolic attire associated with degree ceremonies. Yet, this study has shown how academics were associated with a variety of different cultural practices, customs, legacies and changes that related to both historical and contemporary higher education settings. What looked similar and universal at one level hid a rich cornucopia at another.

Using actor-network theory, this study demonstrated how academics were mobilized in degree ceremonies at six higher education institutions. It showed how academics are not fixed, isolated material objects in societies, but instead relate dynamically with other actors, and in doing so contribute to how degree ceremonies are constructed, shaped and develop meaning. Choosing this method to intervene in a research setting can also show how change occurs, how cultural assumptions and practices develop, and how these complex networked relations are maintained, or lost over time.

Appendix A: Socio-material approaches in educational research

Socio-material studies in the field of educational research²³ are still relatively new, although other disciplines such as material culture studies,^{24, 25} spatial geography,²⁶ science and technology studies,²⁷ sociology,^{28, 29, 30} management and organization studies³¹ have been quicker to explore this emerging area of interest.

For those in pursuit of a specific theoretical construct, there is no clear articulated 'socio-material theory' on offer, for the following reasons. First, the term 'socio-material' as it is used here intends to capture a collection of work currently emerging in educational research as part of a wider shift in the social sciences. Second, the term 'socio-material' is being used in this paper as a way of drawing more attention to the importance of materiality in education, rather than in an attempt to construct a specific new theory. Sørensen describes such a post-humanist position as one that seeks not to place the human above materials (as the creator or user) but among materials.³² As Sørensen clearly points out, not only can humans use materials but also materials can exert influence over humans and thus change educational practice. Our use of the term therefore highlights not how humans use materials but rather how particular configurations and relations amongst humans and materials produce and generate a variety of different and similar effects.³³

There are other theoretical approaches under the umbrella of socio-materiality and although they share similar concerns and interests about the inclusion of material actors in studies, there are often ontological and methodological differences that make them different from each other.

For the purpose of this FBS study and my PhD study I am drawing on aspects of actor-network theory and post actor-network theory (also referred to as 'actor-network theory and after' or 'material semiotics') to study the degree ceremonies in this sample.

23 Tara Fenwick, Richard Edwards and Peter Sawchuk, *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the Socio-material* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. vi–vii.

24 Helga Dittmar, 'Material Possessions as Stereotypes: Material Images of Different Socio-economic Groups', *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 15.4 (Dec. 1994), pp. 561–85.

25 Angus A. A. Mol, *The Connected Caribbean: A Socio-material Network Approach to Patterns of Homogeneity and Diversity in the Pre-Colonial Period* (Leiden: Sidestone, 2014).

26 Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Books, 1989).

27 Jack Ingram, Elizabeth Shove and Matthew Watson, 'Products and Practices: Selected Concepts from Science and Technology Studies and from Social Theories of Consumption and Practice', *Design Issues*, 23.2 (Spring 2007), pp. 3–16.

28 *Actor Network Theory and After*, John Law and John Hassard, eds (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

29 John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2003).

30 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 1st edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

31 Theodore R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina and Eike von Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001). E-book, transferred to digital book in 2006.

32 Estrid Sørensen, *The Materiality in Learning* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 2.

33 Ibid.

Appendix B: The sample of data used in this FBS study

Choosing a sample for this study was a purposive and pragmatic process. Purposive because I deliberately sought out degree ceremonies at newer universities that would provide more contemporary sites for this study, and pragmatic, because I wanted to be as close as possible to the back-room workings of degree ceremonies, as well as the public manifestations of them. Studying at the University of Lancaster and living nearby meant that it was the most practical option. The Open University was included because it is a distance-learning provider and could show how degree ceremonies assembled at a university that does not have regular face-to-face contact with its students. Most time was spent collecting data at Lancaster University, observing ceremonies and back-room preparations and processes before and after ceremonies. As a result, the sample is skewed in favour of Lancaster University, which the reader must take into account.

The context for the sample in this study in relation to two periods of change in higher education

Growth in higher education in the UK since the 1960s

Lancaster University and the Open University were founded during the 1960s, which represented a significant period of growth in higher education in the UK and saw the opening of a number of new universities.

From September 1967, St Martin's College and Poulton-le-Fylde College had their teacher training qualifications validated and awarded by Lancaster University and these degrees were awarded at Lancaster degree ceremonies. From October 1973, Edge Hill College of Education had their degrees awarded by Lancaster University after transferring from the University of Liverpool.

In 1992, the higher education sector in the UK experienced another period of growth when the polytechnics were awarded university status. This period coincides with the sample used in this study as follows: St Martin's College became an accredited institution in 1993, Charlotte Mason College became a College of Lancaster University from 1992 to 1996, Blackpool and The Fylde College received associate College status from Lancaster University in October 1993 and Blackburn College received associate College status in April 1995.

St Martin's College, Poulton-le-Fylde College, and Charlotte Mason College went on to join the University of Cumbria founded in August 2007. Edge Hill College went on to achieve university status in May 2006.

Global growth in higher education

As the higher education sector has grown globally in the past ten to fifteen years so has Lancaster University. In 2006, Sunway University College in Kuala Lumpur and Lancaster University established an academic partnership. This institutional agreement means that students at the Sunway campus can study for undergraduate degrees validated by Lancaster University. Students are awarded two certificates upon successful completion of the honours degree programme, one from Sunway University and one from Lancaster University. Senior officers from Lancaster University attend the commencement ceremonies in Kuala Lumpur to present the Lancaster University certificates. The ceremonies in

Malaysia are organized and co-ordinated by Sunway, and Ede & Ravenscroft supply the robes in country.

In 2009, The G. D. Goenka World Institute became a franchise partner of Lancaster University. Upon successful completion of their degree courses, students receive a Lancaster University degree. Senior officers from Lancaster University attend the degree ceremonies in India, but unlike the ceremonies in Malaysia, degree ceremonies in India are currently co-ordinated and arranged by Lancaster University with the support of Goenka staff. At the outset there were no known local robemakers operating near G. D. Goenka World Institute in India.

There are further signs of global expansion at Lancaster. In 2008, a memorandum of understanding was signed with COMSATS Institute of Information Technology in Pakistan, and in June 2013 Lancaster University opened a branch campus in Ghana called Lancaster University Ghana. At the time of writing degree ceremonies in these countries were being arranged and discussed in collaboration with Lancaster University's ceremonies office. There are smaller partnership arrangements in Brazil and Kazakhstan with more planned.

In this paper (and my PhD study), I focus particularly on Lancaster University's institutional relationships with Sunway University and G. D. Goenka World Institute because they were delivering graduation (presentation) ceremonies during the period of time that data was being collected. The first ceremony at COMSATS occurred after the data collection period and at the time of writing there have been no graduation ceremonies held in Ghana yet.

Appendix C: Methodology

Previous studies using actor-network theory have used ethnography as a means of collecting data. One of the challenges associated with ethnography is how to identify the boundaries around the field of study in question. This is particularly challenging when using a theoretical approach that seeks to demonstrate complex relations across a degree ceremony network. It would be difficult and take more than one lifetime to include all degree ceremonies. Therefore, although multi-sited approaches to ethnography offer an option permitting some methodological freedom, there is still the problem of the boundedness of the field. However, Candea suggests a way of dealing with this by foregrounding the arbitrary nature of the locations used in a multi-sited ethnography, and stating clearly that an arbitrary ethnographic account accepts that the study is still a glimpse of a larger, more complex situation.³⁴

Different types of data were collected at the six sites in this study (see Appendix B for more details). ATLAS-ti was used to collect, manage and analyse the data collected. This software program enables a large and complex data set to be managed and investigated, which increases the possibilities for socio-material researchers wishing to describe and demonstrate complex relations and networks. The analysis of data for this study focused specifically on data related to the two questions posed in the introduction above.

This particular ethnography included six sites (see Appendix B). Field notes, photographs and Programme Guides were collected at degree ceremonies held at Lancaster University, Blackburn College, Blackpool & The Fylde College, and at an Open University ceremony held in Manchester. DVDs were collected for ceremonies held at Lancaster University, G. D. Goenka World Institute and Sunway University. Thirty interviews were conducted. I am grateful to Lancaster University and J. Wippell & Son Ltd for giving me access to files of correspondence to help with this study.

³⁴ Matei Candea, 'Arbitrary Locations: in Defence of the Bounded Field-site', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s. 13 (2007), pp. 167–84.