Despite the neighbouring interests of the fields of STS and PD with regards to central concerns and presumptions about technology and that prominent researchers such as Lucy Suchman for long has drawn on and contributed to both fields, it seems, however that an increasing interest in associating the two has grown recently.

Especially actor network theory and the work of Bruno Latour seems to address design oriented researchers and for good reasons. Latours concept of Ding-politik and notion of the designer as a cautious Promethea have been welcomed by designers. (Latour 2005) (Ehn, 2008).

Although convergences between fields and traditions are often considered a 'good' thing, I will, however stress that 'inclusive strategies and attempts' also comes with a price. In this case, as in many others, the price is translations that might lead to dissolutions of important differences and thereby a potential 'flattening' and 'homogenization' of concepts and ideas.

So in this presentation my intention could be described as doing a bit of policing in relation to how and to what extend ANT can and should be included into design. By articulating my intention in this manner, the point is of course, to enable and welcome counter-arguments against such 'police actions'.

One translational strategy that seems to have occurred between PD and ANT is what I would describe as how a radical constructivist ontology has been turned into an argument for an all encompassing plea for design.

With the emergence of ANT some 30 years ago and with it's various twists and turns, it has been greatly influenced by poststructuralist thinking and process philosophy drawing on especially Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze and Alfred N. Whitehead. (Law & Hassard, 1999)(Law, 2004)(Gad & Bruun Jensen, 2009) Central to these sources is the ontological assumption that the world is inherently dynamic, complex and multiple (Pickering, 1995)(Mol, 2002). ANT has thus shown and emphasized the unwieldy and wild creation of novel and unanticipated relations and entities that emerge as a consequence of any practice. In the terms of Deleuze any practice and event is pregnant with multiple ‘lines of flight’ that escapes the designated stratified and ordered space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This means that any practice is always subject to the modification of a multiplicity of actors, where none of these are in charge and the outcome uncertain. In relation to science studies, the point has been to show that there is no necessity to what counts as a fact. A fact is similarly constructed by a heterogeneous multiplicity: humans and non-humans in a field of forces commonly designated “political“, “economical“, “social“, “cultural“, “material“, “temporal“ etc. all at play at a given historical moment (itself a conglomerate of many ‘times’ or ‘historical moments’).

From such a radical constructivist perception it is reasonable to state as Latour does, that: “A common world, if there is going to be one, is something we will have to build, tooth and nail, together.” (Latour, 2004, 455). Furthermore, the world is already, in its current condition - common or uncommon - a product of a lot of building, toothing and nailing. The world is thoroughly constructed (not to be mistaken for socially constructed) and in a continuous process of becoming.

However, there is, maybe a slight, but important difference between, acknowledging such an ontology and taking it as an encouragement for initiating processes of toothing and nailing. My interpretation is that this radical constructivist ontology is (too) easily translated into a welcomed affirmation of design.

The important difference consists in that the radical constructivist ontology considers the world to be continually ‘out of whack’ and in the making, where the forces involved are infinite and basically non-representational. Whereas a design philosophy based on this assumption imports the notion of making, building, designing the world and combines it with a ‘modernist’
and progressionist assumption of actually being able to build and design a better and common world.

I have several reservations concerning this translation. First and least of all, it seems to misinterpret some of the crucial aspects and strengths related to ANT. Second, it potentially devalues and muddy, what I consider one of the main strengths of ANT, namely ANT’s ability as an analytical resource to pose problems differently. The strength of ANT is its ability to re-formulate taken-for-granted assumptions about the world and thereby enable novel conceptions and ways of posing problems. In that sense, ANT is already a design practice, that potentially re-design minds and with minds also follows practice (although not in any determinist manner, that is). Third, ANT is non-modernist, it refrains from the assumption that a common world and more importantly a better world is possible, in any transcendent way, anyway. Rather, it holds as Leibniz said, that we actually already exist in the best of all possible worlds. ANT can be seen as a resource for re-appreciating the existing and thereby immanently transgressing it, rather than (as design) work to transgress the existing based on a, by definition, incomplete diagnosis of the current state of things.

REFERENCES