Exploring ANT in PD: reflections and implications for theory and practice

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ABSTRACT
This workshop aims to explore, map and discuss the contribution of Actor Network Theory to Participatory design ‘s theory and practice. The links between the two are multiple and offers multiple occasions to appreciate the relevance of ANT in PD. The workshop seeks contributions especially in three areas: ANT as a descriptive tool for PD, ANT as conceptual framework for PD theory and practice, and ANT and PD education.

Author Keywords
Actor Network Theory, Participatory design

ACM Classification Keywords
IV. Computers and Society, XIII. Miscellaneous.

WORKSHOP THEMES
In recent years the role of social theory has received considerable attention in design research (e.g. Binder et al. 2011). In this context, Actor Network Theory (ANT) offers new interesting perspectives and concepts to explore the hybrid, relational and emergent nature of things. ANT also raises issues of design, participation and democracy that resonate with some of the traditional concerns in participatory design and conference theme: an ethnometodological eye on everyday practices, the collective dimension of and the different degrees of participation in construction processes, the distribution of power and authority, the political and normative dimension of design and technology, etc. In this sense, the links between ANT and PD are multiple and offers multiple occasions to appreciate ANT in PD (and possibly the other way around too).

At a first level, ANT offers important analytical tools to explore and describe socio-technical settings to design for. A strong focus on ethnomethodology (Latour, 2005) and on following actors (Latour, 1987) with an explicit emphasis on the role of non-humans, already offers useful perspectives to conceptualise settings, practices and stakeholders to inform the early stage of a design process

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(see for instance Stuedahl and Smordal, 2011).

At a second level, ANT has exposed to analysis design processes themselves (Law, 1992; Latour, 1987, 1996; Houdard, 2008; Yaneva 2005; Wilkie and Michael, 2009; Storni, 2012). Here ANT provides a rich and interesting analytical framework and methodological tools capable of producing new accounts of design practices contributing to the ability of the designer to reflect on their own actions and theory (Schon, 1987): design as a translation process where heterogeneous elements are associated and juxtaposed; design as the process of inscribing scripts into the design objects (Akrich, 1992) thus configuring a specific idea of the user (Woolgar, 1991), or as the place where what designs and what is designed mutually shape one another (Yaneva, 2008; Storni, 2012).

At yet another level, ANT’s concerns with democracy and participation in techno-science constitute important allies for the PD agenda and bring novel languages and models to unpack and manage techno-democratic processes (Latour, 2004, Callon et al. 2009) as well as a set of tools and practices to explore participation in public matters. In this ambit, ANT- based studies has recently shown interest in information design and knowledge representation as resources to re-present techno-scientific controversies and their publics (Venturini, 2010).

Design research and PD have already started to take advantage of the analytical power of ANT to re-think PD theories and methods. For instance, Ehn reflects on the concept of things and the idea of designing things (2008, see also Telier et al. 2011), Nickelsen and Binder (2008) found it useful to understand design practices as heterogeneous engineering, Galloway discussed designing in the parliament of things (2005), Storni used the notion of scripts and socio-technical assemblage to describe current innovation practices (Storni, 2009). Despite these early attempts, we believe that the relationship between ANT and PD has yet to offer its best.

1 On this Actor Network Theorists have already underlined the importance of the art of interestment (Akrich et al. 2002a), and of choosing a good spoken person (Akrich et al. 2002b).

2 See exhibitions such as Paris Ville invisible (Latour and Hermant, 1998), or Making Things Public (Latour and Weibel, 2005) or the collection of tools from the Macospol project (http://www.demoscience.org/).
GOAL AND OUTCOMES
By acknowledging an interest in this confluence of ideas, the workshop aims to explore and further discuss how ANT is used and can contribute to PD, and what are its implications for PD theories and practices. The goal is to share participants’ experiences and facilitate the discussion by collaboratively mapping the workshop’s outcomes.

SUBMISSIONS
Participants are required to prepare a 1-2 pages contribution discussing their experience with ANT (with a focus on how ANT was used, in which context, and with what results) and send it to workshop organizers. We are seeking contributions such as, but not limited to:

1) ANT as descriptive tool for PD:
- ANT as descriptive tools supporting social investigation design research and design processes;
- Design as a translation process, and implications for the design and management of design processes;
- ANT to rethink the participation, design, methods and design objects at design- and use-time;

2) ANT as conceptual framework for PD:
- ANT’s to understand meta-design and appropriation involving networks and material-semiotics;
- Design, dasein, phenomenology and ANT;
- ANT and design as social experiment, critical design, design for debate and to make things public;
- ANT, Cautious Prometheus and the issue of representation: the role of design in the Dingpolitik, and designing for the matter of concerns;
- Mapping controversies, mapping participations, mapping design: implications for PD.

3) ANT in PD education:
- How to use ANT as a pedagogical tool in design;
- How to use PD in ANT research.
A limited number of submissions will be accepted (20). Quality of contribution and the originality of the work are the main criteria for selection. The aim of this material is to support a short presentation and to enable group’s discussion. An online blog is also available to publish individual contributions as well as to follow up the workshop activities (http://antinpd.blogspot.com/).

SCHEDULE
After an introductory warming up, the full-day workshop will be divided into two sessions (morning and afternoon) with short, prepared presentations and discussions with 15 minutes for each participant. Each presenter will be required to comment on at least one presentation. The workshop will end with a wrap-up discussion also addressing follow-up activities such as co-writing initiatives or a special issue.

DEADLINES AND IMPORTANT DATES
June 1st: Position papers to workshop organizers;
June, 6th: Feedback on workshop’s submissions;
Aug 12th-16th: PDC2012 in Roskilde

REFERENCES