

“Worlding the Brain”

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A Worlding of Compulsivity: Rendering knowledge of Tourette syndrome spatial

[Abstract] This paper proposes an ontological centring of compulsivity as emanating with the Tourette syndrome diagnosis to analyse human being-with-the-world on unchosen terms. In addition to motor and vocal tics, many people with Tourette’s experience urges to interact with the extracorporeal environment. In abolishing these urges, they need to compulsively touch, (re)order and/or (re)align objects in unintentional, involuntary, seemingly purposeless and meaningless ways. Nonetheless, as the Tourette’s condition has mainly been conceptualised in medical and clinical sciences, compulsivity has almost exclusively been understood in terms of brain functionality. Consequently, its profoundly spatial and experiential nature has not been conceptualised beyond mere illustration, because medical scientific ontologies and epistemologies do not cater for such expansion. However, this paper argues that such expansion is possible by rendering the medicalised compulsivity experiential and spatial. It does so in an engagement with the interview, participant observation and mobile eye-tracking data of 15 people diagnosed with Tourette syndrome, through poststructural and postphenomenological theory in human geography. Bringing the Tourette syndrome diagnosis back to the compulsive urge and act in the moment and in situ, in turn, allows conceptualising compulsivity on its own terms. Ontologically centring the concept of compulsivity then allows tracing its relations through the various corporeal tissues and extracorporeal environment where the different knowledges are situated. This opens up the possibility to conceptualise compulsivity as an assemblage of medical and clinical scientific, with spatial and experiential knowledges. Herewith, the paper presents a hopeful proposal for interdisciplinary engagement with compulsive life through Tourette syndrome.
