

A RESPONSE TO NATHAN WITTOCK, MICHIEL DE KROM & LESLEY HUSTINX'

MAKING SENSE OF A MESSY OBJECT: HOW TO USE SOCIAL TOPOLOGY AS AN ANALYTIC TOOL FOR ETHNOGRAPHY OF OBJECTS

The essay by Nathan Wittock, Michiel de Krom and Lesley Hustinx is a very comprehensible summary of various works of John Law, Annemarie Mol and Vicky Singleton focusing on their epistemological and methodological lenses of Social Topology. Wittock et al. seek to apply the Social Topology approach to their empirical field of blood in the context of a European blood establishment. Thus, they use the four different spaces of regions, networks, fluids and fire as defined by Law and Mol (2001) in order to position their object *blood* in each of the four spaces. Due to that appliance Wittock et al. succeed in posing research questions to interrogate blood as a messy object being in different spatial relations at the same time. In doing so, the authors make the reader wanting to read more about their bloody object(s).

This desire to learn more about blood in European establishments leads me to the first comment on the discussed essay, namely the craving for empirical content. Although it is Wittock et al.'s explicit aim to write a "theoretical-methodological essay", more empirical contextualization would help to understand the formulated research questions better. The posed questions referring to the four spaces show the immense knowledge of the authors about their object of investigation. Nevertheless, it feels just like a glimpse into the negotiations around blood. The authors seem to know why those research questions are important and interesting to ask but due to the lack of context it is not transparent to the reader. Furthermore, the focus on the theoretical accounts following Law and Mol, makes it unclear what Wittock et al. exactly contribute to the topic of Social Topology. Their analytical work, e.g. gathering the characteristics of fluid space, should be made more explicit as their own work.

Following the first comment on the empirical part of the essay, I would like to make two conceptual comments: Firstly, I am not quite convinced of the understanding of topology. On page four of the essay, Wittock et al. describe the four spaces - regions (i.e. Euclidian space), networks, fluids, and fire – as "topological spaces": whether this is an ascription done by Law and Mol or by Wittock et al. is not clear. Despite of that, the essay leaves out why the Euclidian space should be called a 'topological space'. In Human Geography the Euclidian space as topographical understanding of space was *the* reason to use topology in order to demarcate from the belief in a Euclidian space. My second comment tackles the incoherence in epistemological thoughts. In my opinion, the reference to Martina Löw is not very suitable to the following statements of the essay. Introducing the spatial turn with her social-

constructivist understanding of space, marginalizes the importance of materiality and its agency as acknowledged by Law, Mol, de Laet, etc. It seems important for me to illustrate the epistemological difference between Löw's understanding of space and Law and Mol's view on spaces.

Having laid out my three comments on the essay of Nathan Wittock, Michiel de Krom and Lesley Hustinx, I would like to thank them for appreciating the work of John Law, Annemarie Mol, etc. and for depicting their approaches to topology in a very comprehensible way. I am very excited to learn more about Wittock et al.'s contradictory, messy, disruptive and bloody stories about their research object *blood*.