Research Note

A (Deleuzian) posthumanist paradigm for tourism research

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ABSTRACT

Posthumanistic inquiry is young and offers new ways to understand critical and ethical relationships, bringing new axiological perspectives to current debates around travel, mobilities and (post)modernist conceptualizations of tourism. This research note introduces a Deleuzian posthumanism paradigm with ontological, epistemological and methodological directions to approach tourism research from a non-dualist perspective. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze offers a postdualist, process-oriented ontology of difference that is vital to create radical new tourism knowledge, and avoid indefensible 'either-or' binaries in research and praxis. The Deleuzian research paradigm we forward eschews anthropocentric premises and modernist traditions for a situated, immanent style of encounter and relational being with human and non-human others that is vital for a healthy planet and justice in the Anthropocene.

Posthumanism poses a serious challenge to tourism, says leading sociologist of tourism, Eric Cohen, for it undermines the often unquestioned ontological and ethical assumptions on which modern tourism is based. As Cohen (2019) says, it can offer a new critical perspective of modern sightseeing tourism as an exploitative anthropocentric enterprise against other humans and non-humans, and encourage the abolition of taken-for-granted binary divisions. Posthumanism is a philosophical and reflective approach that investigates the current post-anthropocentric desire at a time when climate change caused by the impact of human civilisation calls for urgent and responsible human action (Herbrechter, 2013). What could be more important than a posthumanistic paradigmatic turn in tourism research at this crucial time of the Anthropocene, where global mobilities and migrations are directly affected by major disruptions such as the novel COVID-19 pandemic? "Posthumanism has raised practically no interest in the specific field of tourism studies", says Cohen (2019).

The neglect by tourism researchers to posthumanism is not strictly true, for some attempts have been made. Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a milder, analytical and non-critical version of posthumanism in tourism research (Van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2017). For instance, Picken (2010) applies ANT to the urban design planning of a hotel In Tasmania, where the hotel is a relational actor in various nets, but surely making non-humans contenders involves far more than network relations. ANT has been severely criticized for its inability to address power, issues of race, gender, class, and for situating actants as equals in agency, in the end being simply unable to offer a "theory" (Callon, 2007; Sturød, Helgadóttir, & Nordbø, 2019). Also, Barad's agential realism (2007), one of the promising new materialisms that currently populate critical posthumanism has been adopted by O'Regan (2013) in an inspiring analysis of couchsurfing experiences. More recently, Grimwood and Caton (2017, p. 10) have noted a turn towards "anti-essentializing epistemologies, which emphasize the multiplicity, instability, and connectedness of that for which exploration or understanding is desired" and mentioned queer theory, posthumanism, and nomadology as "examples of what knowledge looks like

under such alternative epistemic conditions." But what is the "that" they allude to, and what are the theoretical building blocks of the relationality that they and others forwarding posthumanism advocate?

Posthumanism can bring a new axiological perspective to current debates around travel, mobilities and (post)modernist conceptualizations of tourism. It offers new ontological, epistemological and methodological directions to approach research from a non-dualist, relational perspective. However, as various examples above show, posthumanistic inquiry is young and new ways are arising to approach it (ANT being just one, but critiqued for its failure to be critical and embodied, as noted above). Tourism research currently lacks theoretical guidance and much theory building is needed, especially to capture the relational, non-dualistic modes that scholars like Grimwood and Caton advance with such urgency. We offer below a Deleuzian posthumanist paradigm to commence the task of filling the gap on a posthumanistic approach to tourism research and sustainable futures. Deleuze (1990, 1992, 1994), and Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987, 1994), provide a vitally important ontology, epistemology, ethics and methodology that fully depart from anthropocentric premises.

Deleuze and tourism research

Deleuze's philosophy has remained mostly unnoticed by tourism scholars, despite the prominent role that posthumanistic encounters with the human and non-human other play in his philosophy. In their work, Gren and Huijberns (2011) and Olafsdottir, Huijbens, and Benediktsson (2013) refer implicitly to a Deleuzian plane of immanence to underscore the singular relationality of the social and the material that is inherent in touristic spaces, places and practices. A few other researchers have also used Deleuzian notions like territorialization, rhizomes, milieu, lines of flight, divergent actualizations, affects or multiplicity, to explore transformations of individual hosts and guests (Bone & Bone, 2018; Grit, 2014; Veijola, 2014), small tourism firms (Saxena, 2015) tourism destinations (Pavlovich, 2014) and tourism research (Matteuci & Gnoth, 2017). Nonetheless, with the exception of Vejiola, Grit, and Matteuci and Gnoth's work, important Deleuzian concepts such as shown in Fig. 1 have been underrated theoretically and methodologically, omitting their transformative potential for tourism research to redress current anthropocentric dominance and advance relational ways of being and becoming in the "pluriverse" (as Escobar, 2018, puts it).

The Deleuzian posthumanist paradigm introduced in Fig. 1 resonates with a different immanent style of encounter with the material world that questions simple dualisms. Deleuze changes the way the material world is interpreted by emphasizing that objects are never settled or original to start with, but are perpetually relational. He offers a valuable new paradigm to think differently about human-environmental relationships and complex human-technological ways of being and becoming. A Deleuzian paradigm provides much-needed direction to approach posthumanistic inquiry in tourism research, to create radically new academic tourism knowledge, to foster and enhance the pedagogical role of tourism for socio-environmental justice, and to bring to light possibilities for responsible and just tourist behavior.

Closing the posthumanism gap: future research directions

The Deleuzian posthumanist paradigm together with unexplored Deleuzian concepts like minor politics, affects, becoming-other, dismantling the face, or immanent rights, offer a valuable start to filling the current gap in theory building on justice and tourism. His critical relational approach offers theoretical guidance to re-think and re-approach research about neocolonial, neoliberal and anthropocentric understandings of tourism; about the moralistic understanding of responsibility, hospitality and care; about essentialist understandings of sustainability; and about modernist framings of representative governance in tourism (all of which constitute different dimensions of justice in tourism, as identified by Jamal, 2019).

Further exploration of the ethical position of posthumanism concerning animal rights is also needed, for some argue that though the posthumanist position seems effective for redressing situations of injustice to animals it continues depending upon basic 'anthropocentric' premises (Soper, 2012). Our response is that this critique only seems to apply to compensatory approaches to posthumanism (De Waal, 2009), but not to more radical forms of critical and philosophical posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013; Ferrando, 2019); these are philosophically grounded on Deleuzian thought and do not fall into the inconsistencies of human exceptionalism.

Posthumanism also urges us to question the limits of our research practices and the types of knowledge production enabled and disabled by them. Posthumanist methodology shifts the debate away from "tired epistemological contests" (Lather, 2007, p. 70) towards an examination of "situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe" (Deleuze, 1989, p. xi). The challenge is to think research and data differently "without simply re-inscribing the old methodology with a new language" (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504), without simply using Deleuzian concepts as metaphors that were never intended as metaphors and then illustrate them with examples, but to "think Deleuzian concepts in a way that might produce previously unthought questions, practices and knowledge" (p.540). Moreover Deleuzian methodology assumes an 'image of thought' that rejects thinking as innate and that liberates thought 'from those images which imprison it' (Deleuze, 1994, p. xv); a thought, whose focus is not anymore on avoidance of error, but to give birth to something new through repetition; a thought that "refuses to secure itself with the consolations of foundationalism and nostalgia for presence, the lost object of correct knowledge, the security of understanding" (Lather, 2009, p. 18).

Posthumanist methodologies are thus needed in tourism research if we are to challenge the habitual anthropocentric gaze taken by tourism researchers; to account not only for how researchers works upon data but also for how data work upon the researcher; to rethink our conceptions of tourists' experiences by means of mapping their relationships with the destination as a performativity of the milieus they find themselves in, which slide through, over and alongside those of the hosting communities and tourism operators; to challenge tourists' visual imagery (as well as that of hosts), which tends to reproduce 'everyday banalities', through upsetting the

Reason for research: To explore, study and encourage alternative subjectivities or identities to humanism and modernism; to contribute towards alternative economic systems, to forward-thinking new socio-environmental policies and behavior for a healthier planet; and to introduce a new ethical framework and a posthumanist concept of justice for the Anthropocene.

Ontology (immanence and intensive difference)**:** A realist ontology whereby actual entities are produced by processes of individuation without any need for transcendent generative principles. The actual is the product of nothing but an ongoing internal difference of its own self-realizing manifestations, which create ever newer and more complex associations. Universals do not precede multiple particulars; instead it is a process of intensive differences or multiplicities that constitute individuations. Essences are replaced by generative, rhizomatic and virtual processes in the sense of affective forces and capacities through which something new is actually produced. This 'something new' are events or singularities, which naturally express difference instead of identity or uniformity. It is an immanent and flat ontology, in which dynamic entities on different 'scales' reproduce, act and react in complex relationships and assemblages, where no one 'level' has primacy over any other. On this account, body and mind are not ontologically separate, and humans and non-humans are entangled with each other in creating new ways of being and knowing. It is a vitalist materialism and process ontology where realism is speculative, materiality incorporeal, and where matter is 'alive'. It is also a relational ontology of intra-actions and intensive differences.

Epistemology (transcendental empiricism)**:** Deleuze's epistemology is an empiricism that does not rely on any foundation outside experience. Instead, it is a method of empirical observation of each immanent flow of experience or event. It is not an inductive method designed to (re)discover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new and unstable is produced. Therefore, humans do not mediate knowledge of the world through representation, but instead attempt to grasp its fleeting and elusive non-representational nature through mobile and creative conceptual and representational approximations. Therefore, knowledge is always partial, embodied and embedded. Moreover, because humans are part of the universe and entangled within it, they are an intrinsic part of knowledge production as a form of communication of the world among its parts, but in no case do they have an exclusive right of knowing, thus acknowledging non-human epistemologies and epistemological pluralism.

Ethics (relational virtuosity): Deleuze's ethics is not moralistic. Morality presents a set of biding and stable rules that judge actions and intentions in the light of transcendent values. Instead, ethics is for Deleuze modes of behavior that sustain an immanent mode of existing or way of life. This way, ethical worth can be judged without the need of universal values, by purely immanent criteria like whether modes of behavior increase the capacities to affect and be affected; form assemblages or emergent unities that respect the heterogeneity of their components; and develop and transform self-formation to attain a certain mode of being. Responsibility takes a different meaning. It comes before a response, it is becoming-other before the other. It is an ethics of meeting other bodies in *response-ability* (Haraway, 2008), of touching others without domination. It is therefore an ethics of relational virtuosity. Moreover, it is also an affirmative ethics, namely an ethics of willing that which occurs inasmuch as it occurs, in a manner that involves neither resignation nor resentment, but affirmation.

Methodology (methodological pluralism): In Deleuze's world the emergence of the new rests on sufficient, but not necessary, causes for the actualization of the virtual. Language, whether texts, sounds, or images, insufficiently represents the complex interactions among society, culture, geology, and ecology, as Deleuze's relational perspective demonstrates. Conventional positivistic and hermeneutic methodologies become restrictive and cannot account for the insufficiency. Instead of methodologies sustained by exclusive traditions of thought, or indulged in hegemonic and essentialist narratives, Deleuzian posthumanism embraces methodological pluralism, and engages with pluralistic epistemological accounts. Openness towards affective, intuitive, and affirmative methodologies are encouraged, e.g. emotional reflexivity, heartfelt positivity, Bergson's method of intuition, et c. Similarly, instead of dialectical methodologies, openness towards generative methodologies are promoted, like Deleuze's problematization and concept creation methodologies, from which a wealth of new research possibilities emerge, e.g. the generative approach to grounded theory introduced by Matteuci and Gnoth (2017) in the context of tourism research. Finally, openness to indigenous methodologies are also greatly enabled by this relational perspective.

Fig. 1. A Deleuzian posthumanism paradigm.

way tourists (and hosts) tend to see and make meaning, and shifting towards the co-production of the new; to understanding tourism transformations as emergent and indeterminate phenomena, producing narratives that focus on the event of becoming, thus resisting the need on the part of researchers for easily recognizable narratives and familiar representations; or to identify and avoid in-defensible binaries of 'either-or' commonly used in research projects, from which prescriptions for practitioners are later drawn, and whose results do not often correspond with the outcomes promised.

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