The Legacy of Deleuze and Guattari in Sociocultural Anthropology¹

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Abstract

In this paper I focus on the reception of Deleuzoguattarian conceptual legacy and the peculiar situation of Russian sociocultural anthropology, distinguishing it from other national traditions of anthropological research. The peculiarity of this situation lies in the stark contrast between the proliferation of Russian translations of Deleuze and Guattari voluminous oeuvre, on the one hand, and the curious absence of any direct influence of their works on various domains and specializations within national tradition of anthropological research, on the other. In documenting this glaring lack of impact, I trace its main reasons to the prevalence of descriptive and experiential nature of the discipline, as well as to the continuing influence of some (post-) Marxist dogma, particularly in the still prevailing modernist interpretation of the subject-object and nature-culture dualisms.

Introduction

It's not a matter of bringing all sorts of things together under a single concept but rather of relating each concept to variables that explain its mutations.

Gilles Deleuze. Negotiations

The semi-centennial anniversary of the publication of the French edition of *Anti-Oedipus* presents a fortuitous opportunity for an overview and assessment of the influence of the entire D&G's oeuvre and its rich conceptual toolkit on theories and practices of anthropologists. It is sure too ambitious a task for the allotted space, so I focus on the influence and reception of their ideas on sociocultural anthropology in the country, where this influence remains negligent, or almost entirely absent, the circumstance that

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simplifies my task. This is the case of Russian anthropology, and its interest lies mainly in the fact that the conspicuous absence takes place in the context of burgeoning numbers of translations of D&G's works into Russian².

The dialogue between Deleuze and Guattari, on the one side, and sociocultural anthropology, on the other, has been for a long time one-sided, that is, both scholars regularly turned to the works of anthropologists (notably to Gregory Bateson and Claude Levi-Strauss, but also Roger Bastide, Laura and Paul Bohannan, Pierre Clastres, Georges Dumézil, Meyer Fortes, Marcel Griaule, Edward Leach, André Leroi-Gourhan, Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Victor Turner), borrowing some concepts, terminology or ideas as material for the elaboration of their own conceptual tools³. In an effort to escape many of the assumptions, built into ordinary language or used in previous scholarship, the philosophers have thoroughly rethought many of the notions of their predecessors and elaborated new terminology to reference highly original concepts of their own making, e.g. rhizome, assemblage, schizoanalysis, (de-, or re-) territorialization, transversality, lines of flight, (trans-, or de-)coding, smooth/striated space, nomadism and nomad thought, cartography/archaeology, desiring and war machines, body without organs, exteriority/interiority, molar/molecular, minoritarian/majoritarian, the ontology of becoming, flows, folds, perspective, multiplicity, intensity, plateau, disjunctive synthesis, faciality, univocity, to name only the most popular. This new terminology is partly responsible for what makes the work of these two thinkers famously difficult to read.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, some anthropologists, although few in number (for

Admittedly, Russian translations, not mentioning the French originals, in some cases lagged for decades behind the English ones, and this fact alone might explain the delayed acquaintance of Russian audience with the works of the French scholars, e.g. Logique du sens [1969] appeared in Russian translation in 1995 (in English in 1990); next in 1997 came Nietzsche et la philosophie [1962] (Engl. 1983) and Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque [1988] (Engl. 1992); then in 1998 Difference et Repetition [1968] (Engl. 1994), Foucault [1986] (Engl. 1988), and Qu'est-ce que la philosophie? [1991] (Engl. 1994) went out of print; in 1999 there appeared the Russian translation of *Proust et Signes* [1964] (in Engl. in 1972); in 2001 La Philosophic Critique de Kant [1963] (Engl. 1984) and a volume, comprising Empirisme et subjectivité: Essai sur la Nature humain selon Hume [1958] (Engl. 1991), Le Bergsonism [1966] (Engl. 1988), and Spinoza: Philosophie pratique [1970] (Engl. 1988); in 2001 Critique et Clinique [1993] (Engl. 1998); in 2004 both volumes of Cinema [1983, 1985] (Engl. 1986, 1989); in 2004 Pourparlers 1972-1990 [1990] (Engl. 1995). The Anti-Oedipus [1972] was published in 2008 (Engl. 1977), and Mille Plateau [1980] (Engl. 1987) in 2010. The same year the translation of Kafka: pour une littérature mineure [1975] (Engl. 1986) was published. Next came in 2011 Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation [1981] (Engl. 2003); in 2015 Leibnitz lectures [1980, 1986/87] and finally in 2016 Deleuze's Lectures on Spinoza. Without second editions and corrected translations this constitutes the bulk of the D&G translations into Russian.

³ The D&G's manner of citing and interpretation of the anthropological accounts have been harshly criticized by a comparative literature scholar Christopher Miller (1993, 1998, 2003) and vigorously defended by D&G's translator and scholar Eugene Holland (2003a, b), a debate that illustrates well the uneasy relationships between philosophical and anthropological knowledge-making. Compare, also, Marc Auge, who perceives D&G's position (together with the views of Clastres) as 'neo-evolutionist', adding that "Ethnographic description and phantasy have never been mingled in so cavalier a manner as in the last three or four years, and never have philosophers treated such materials so casually. All and sundry, with great confidence and with a subtly arrogant condescension, scan other peoples' ethnographies (done by others, speaking of others) and decide upon meanings." (Auge [1979] 1982: 91)

the sake of brevity I shall skip the names of those who used the terminology for purely ornamental purposes, due to current fashion, or just yielding to the temptation of an easy claim to cleverness), have engaged either critically or propitiously certain D&G's conceptions to reform their own research domains in a number of fields, notably in anthropology of media, of technology, digital and medical anthropology, material culture studies, political anthropology and post-colonial studies, the research at the intersection of anthropology with studies of biotechnology and body studies, and some other more specialized research areas.

Beyond anthropology proper, assemblage theory, affect theory and new materialism have been decisively influenced by D&G's work. Besides, the creation of an analytical framework that is capable of including humans and non-humans has been a central concern in STS and the 'multi-species' or animal turn, whereas in contemporary anthropology one of its major 'turns', the ontological⁴, has been inspired almost in its entirety by the French thinkers' ideas on multiplicity and perspectivism: e.g. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in delineating his own version of 'perspectivism' adopted their vocabulary almost wholesale. In his book on Amerindian cosmologies, he states:

The future of the master concept of anthropology – *relation* – depends on how much attention the discipline will end up lending to the concepts of *difference* and *multiplicity*, *becoming* and *disjunctive synthesis*. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 170, *italics added*)

Perspectivism, viewed by some anthropologists as the only version of the ontological turn that has affected their discipline (the view, basing on the situation with this turn in the case of anthropology in Russia, I consider mistaken), exemplifies the most evident case of D&G's influence on the current state of anthropological theory. It does not only borrow much from the conceptual toolkit of the French thinkers, but has a direct reference to the fundamental issues of anthropological research, such as the status of indigenous cosmologies/ontologies in their relation to the Western (scientific) ontology (Cf. Henare; Holbraad; Wastell 2007).

The influence of D&G's ideas on other branches and specializations of anthropological knowledge I assess as modest and profound at the same time. It remains modest in the outreach (that is sociologically, in terms of numbers of scholars involved) due to what Paul Rabinow defined as *idiosyncrasy* of the D&G's tropes (Rabinow 2011: 62) that had contributed to the general difficulty of their texts. Few anthropologists ventured into what most of them perceived as philosophical jungles, but those who did, turned out to be at

⁴ To be exact, only one version within the ontological turn variants (precisely Viveiros de Castro perspectivism that influenced quite a number of anthropologists beyond the field of Amerindian studies) is based on of D&G's concepts. Two other influential strands of the turn, each with their own perspectivist version of multiple nature/cultures of indigenous ontologies, and lead by Philippe Descola and Eduardo Kohn, respectively, practically do not mention any of D&G's works.

the same time influential figures in contemporary anthropology, who acted as interpreters and disseminators of deleuzoguattarian thought in their own fields of research.

D&G's Legacy in Western Anthropology

In order to substantiate the statement on the profound influence on certain anthropological subdisciplines and research fields, I have to document this influence that quite unlike the case of perspectivism remains unconsolidated, that is dispersed among many domains, research topics, issues of concern, and research centres. One of such research directions not mentioned above is the anthropology of time, elaborated in a dialogue with Deleuzian notions of *l'intempestif*, *contemporaneity* and *historicity* by Paul Rabinow (Rabinow 2011: 62-63, 77), who had also creatively explored the concept of assemblage (Ibid.: 121-126). Another prominent case of such an influence is the elaboration by the British anthropologist Tim Ingold of the concept of *rhizome* in his relational approach to what he has termed as *being-in-an-environment*. Besides the concept of rhizome, Ingold has creatively used the D&G's ideas on the lines of flight, *haecceity*, and *smooth space* to tie together his different explorations of indigenous ways of life and the continuities between animal and human ways of being (Ingold 2000, 2007, 2011). Arjun Appadurai, an American scholar, specializing in economic anthropology, applied the D&G's terms deterritorialization and flow in his analysis of globalization (Appadurai 1996, 2002). Princeton-based anthropologists João Biehl and Peter Locke, publishing mostly in the field of medical anthropology, edited an article collection "Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming" (Biehl, Locke 2017). Its authors found their inspiration in the rich conceptual apparatus, elaborated by D&G. They explain:

In working toward an anthropology of becoming, we have drawn on the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (in dialogue with his longtime collaborator Félix Guattari) [...] In Deleuze's writing we find approaches that seem refreshingly ethnographic and unabashedly open-ended – cartography as opposed to archaeology, rhizomes as opposed to deep structures, leaking social fields as opposed to enclosed systems, and lines of flight and deterritorialization forever breaking through the impasses imposed by totalizing forms of power and knowledge. (Biehl, Locke 2017: 7)

All these anthropologists turned out to be what is elsewhere known as 'multiplicators' or mediators, due to the fact that other members of the anthropological communities throughout the world came to know many ideas of the D&G legacy, whose influence is discussed here, not directly, but mediated by the interpretations of their eminent colleagues. It is their engagement with D&G's rich conceptual legacy that has informed the fields and domains of anthropological research mentioned above, and that continues

to resonate with many statements of the French philosophers of becoming.

Perhaps less resonant but still effectual were 'pin-point' references to certain R&G's concepts of other leading anthropologists. Among them are Marylin Strathern, who engaged Deleuzian concepts of *flux* and *cut* in her influential paper "Cutting the Network" (Strathern 1996), Michael Fisher, who elaborated the term *plateau* into his own *ethical plateaus* (Fischer 2004)⁵. Paul Staller, a US Africanist, in discussing the problem of representing complexity and the search "for a set of metaphors that ethnographers, among others, might use to represent" draws our attention to the D&G's concept of rhizome as alliance and recommends it for ethnographers to use as "a model for thinking about the dizzying array of complex assemblages that constitute contemporary social worlds (Staller 183–184). There were many more mentions and engagements with D&G legacy by the British, US and Brazilian anthropologists, whereas in France, with exceptions of Barbara Glowczewski (2020), who in her recent book used a whole array of the D&G's concepts, anthropologists as a rule referred to the D&G's work either casually, or critically. (see *footnote 2*, above).

To sum up, the influences Deleuze and Guattari (in line with other post-structural philosophers – Jacque Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault) have exerted a perceptible influence on various fields in contemporary Western anthropology. They have been a decisive force behind the turn to non-Cartesian ontologies and epistemologies that problematize the authorial omnipotence and its representational strategies, as well as to politically more engaged anthropological research. The brief inventory of the intersections and dialogues of Western anthropologists with D&G legacy, presented above, is far from exhaustive (for the sake of brevity I have not covered their influence on media and digital anthropology), its main purpose being the comparison with the place of their legacy in the special case of Russian anthropology.

The Case of Russian Anthropology

If we judge by direct references to their works in Russian ethnology and sociocultural anthropology, the D&G's legacy seems to be almost totally ignored. This looks strange as all the major texts of the French scholars are available in Russian, although some translations are quite recent (see *footnote 1*, above), which might be a factor in delayed reception.

Perspectivism in its various versions (books by Viveiros de Castro, Descola, Kohn and

⁵ Fischer mentions that Paul Rabinow's most successful and path-breaking ethnographic work on molecular biology in the 1990s *The Making of PCR* (1996), a landmark book in science studies, "was originally a text drawing heavily on the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, but all such vocabulary and philosophical attempts were excised from the final text, Rabinow explained at the time to me and other friends, so that it could be read by his molecular biology interlocutors, so that the people he wrote about could also read it." (Fischer 2018: 81)

Löwenhaupt Tsing are available in Russian translations) produced a negligent impact on fieldwork agenda and subsequent analysis: this approach has been implemented only by a couple of Siberianists, who have attempted to see similarities to Amerindian ontologies among indigenous peoples of Southern Siberia (*cf.*: Broz 2007; Tykhteneva 2011, 2012)⁶.

Indirect influences, that is, the impact of D&G's ideas, interpreted and creatively applied by such scholars as Bruno Latour, John Law, Donna Haraway, Annemarie Mol among others, seem to be more important in the Russian case. Latour, who frequently referred to various parts of the D&G' legacy, has been instrumental in institutionalizing a whole new field in Russian social sciences, affecting those domains within anthropology that are related to STS, among them medical anthropology, body studies, media anthropology, and material culture studies⁷. Urban anthropology, due to the impact of Latourian actor-network theory, based on D&G's ontological insights, has been substantially revised to include in its subject all kinds of infrastructures and invisible agents, such as microbes, radioactive and poisonous waste, etc. (Trubina 2010: 154) 'Flat ontologies', underscoring agency of non-human objects, rhizomatic relations within networks, and 'territorializing' forces of the state apparatus received attention in the anthropology of technology (Kuznetsov 2016; Vozyanov, Kuznetsov, Laktyukhina 2017; Vozyanov 2018), urban anthropology (Bychkova, Popova 2012; Karasyova 2020), and political anthropology (Ssorin-Chaikov 2022). The actor-network methodology has transformed some research domains in medical (Mikhel 2021; Kurlenkova 2018; Torlopova 2017, 2018), and in ecological anthropology (Sokolovskiy 2022). However, such endeavors remain marginal among mainstream research ideologies and have not been so far successful to alter the overall positivistic agenda of the national tradition of anthropological research, a situation that could be documented by the programs of many recent professional forums of Russian anthropologists.

This modernist and positivist agenda (an heir of Marxist materialism that dominated all science in Russia till the early 1990s), with its stark dualisms of nature vs. culture, subject vs. object, past vs. present, human vs. animal, matter vs. spirit, mind vs. body, laid all alternative ontologies suspect, and is responsible for their outright rejection on ideological grounds as being 'unscientific', 'speculative, or 'conjectural'. Professional 'myopia', boarding on obscurantism, of many Russian anthropologists has further contributed to labeling all knowledge that contradicted the established dogma as 'quaint', and to denounce scholars, who experimented with new approaches, as 'victims of fashionable fads'.

Another potential factor that might have contributed to the lack of attention to what happens beyond the discipline's boundaries is the deep entrenchment of interdisciplinary barriers, instituted by a number of agencies, such as academic councils, editorial boards, university departments, etc. that engender boundary policing practices and discourage

⁶ For a comprehensive account of the perspectivist turn in anthropology, see: Vaté, Eidson 2021.

⁷ For a review of the 'material turn' publications in Russian anthropology, see: Sokolovskiy 2021.

cross-disciplinary 'borrowings'. Due to such barriers and veto practices, books as *Cannibal Metaphysics* have been perceived as 'purely philosophical', that is, not pertaining to the domain of sociocultural anthropology.

Additionally, the legacy of Marxist materialism, still felt in Russian anthropology, remains a factor that prevents accepting such ideas as democracy of things, the agency of non-human material objects, flat ontologies, or symmetric anthropology that are based on D&G's notion of the entanglement of humans and non-humans in shared networks and intersecting flows of becoming. All these factors explain the relative lack of attention on the side of Russian anthropologists to the D&G's rich conceptual legacy that is successfully used in other national traditions of anthropological research.

Conclusion

The D&G's legacy has made a substantial impact on anthropology of media, technology, on digital and medical anthropology, on political anthropology, as well as on material culture and post-colonial studies. However, this impact on anthropological theories and practices remains geographically limited, as it has been demonstrated by the case of Russian anthropology, where despite the availability of translations of all the major D&G's works, very few anthropologists are experimenting with the concepts, elaborated by these French scholars.

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