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Reading *The Logic of Sense* as a Psychological Novel: Gilles Deleuze's Adventure with Lewis Carroll

Abstract

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's intense engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis in *The Logic of Sense* is frequently problematized as an inconsistent phase in his thought. This article argues that the relationship between the series and the events that Deleuze builds in this book highlights it as a coherent part of his philosophical project. By concentrating on Deleuze's reading of the English writer Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the article suggests that similar to Alice's "telescope body," the series of *The Logic of Sense* include movements of opening and shutting up in the events that create their effects through the differences in the signifying chain. These differences stem from an encounter of the homogeneous and heterogeneous series, which finds a reflection in Deleuze's relationship with psychoanalysis. His inevitable "encounter" with Lacan or more generally his "adventure" with psychoanalysis includes the possibility of a "future," or a "coming," which results in a "different" Deleuze.

Key Words

Deleuze, Carroll, Lacan, Psychoanalysis, Event, Series.

Anlamın Mantığı'nı Bir Psikolojik Roman Olarak Okumak: Gilles Deleuze'ün Lewis Carroll'la Maceraları

Özet

Fransız filozof Gilles Deleuze'ün *The Logic of Sense* kitabında psikanalizle kurduğu yoğun ilişki, Deleuze düşüncesi içinde tutarsız bir aşama olarak sıklıkla sorunsallaştırılmıştır. Bu makale, söz konusu kitapta diziler ve olaylar arasında kurulan ilişkinin, kitabı, Deleuze'ün felsefi projesinin anlamlı bir parçası olarak belirginleştirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Makale, Deleuze'ün İngiliz yazar Lewis Carroll'ın *Alice Harikalar Diyarında* adlı masalı üzerine yaptığı yorumlara odaklanarak, *The Logic of Sense*'in, tıpkı Alice'in "teleskop bedeni" gibi, etkisini, gösterenler zincirinde ortaya çıkan farklar yoluyla yaratan olaylar içindeki açılma ve kapanma hareketleri içerdiğini öne sürmektedir. Bu farklar homojen ve heterojen serilerin karşılaşmasından kaynaklanırken, Deleuze'ün Lacan'la

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karşılaşmasında da bir yansımasını bulmaktadır. Deleuze'ün Lacan'la kaçınılmaz “karşılaşması” ya da daha genel olarak psikanalizle “macerası,” “farklı” bir Deleuze'le sonuçlanacak olan bir “geleceği,” bir “geliş” olasılığını içinde barındırır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Deleuze, Carroll, Lacan, Psikanaliz, Olay, Dizi.

1. Introduction

The Logic of Sense, which was first published in 1969, is often singled out in Gilles Deleuze's oeuvre as his most structuralist book that contradicts with his philosophy or creates an impasse in his critical thought. It is not only because the book engages with the psychoanalytic concepts, but also because the structure of the book itself mirrors the structure of the signifying chain as theorized by Jacques Lacan. Tracing the logic of sense, Deleuze divides his book into thirty four series in which he reads Lewis Carroll's fairy tale, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, along with numerous other literary works extending from Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones* to Scott Fitzgerald's *The Crack Up*. While the profound psychoanalytic content of *Alice's Adventures* as well as the prevalence of its psychoanalytic analyses draw the frame of reference for Deleuze, the Lacanian discourse of *The Logic of Sense* seems to confound the commentators. When Jean-Jacques Lecercles welcomes James Williams's critical guide to *The Logic of Sense* as an answer to the “unjust critical *doxa*” that considers it “the work of a structuralist Deleuze, still under the influence of Lacan and psychoanalysis” (2008: vii), he underlines the inseparability of this book from Deleuze's philosophical project. In fact, Williams suggests that Deleuze's philosophy of events does not contradict with the structures and series that he studies and adopts in *The Logic of Sense*. “Events introduce change and differences within those structures,” he maintains, “thus the event of a variation in a social practice draws a society out of line with known and expected patterns; it introduces difference and novelty” (a.e., 1). This article is a modest attempt to discuss the relationship between the series and events, to which Williams draws attention, with a focus on Deleuze's reading of *Alice's Adventures*. Since Deleuze's Lacanian stance is problematized here, the article delves into Deleuze's description of *The Logic of Sense* as “an attempt to develop a logical and psychological novel” (1990: xiv). Thus the basic question to be posed will be: How can a psychoanalytic perspective deal with the logical aspect of this psychological novel?

2. The Telescope Body of *The Logic of Sense*

The logic of Deleuze's book may first be traced in the “surface effects” of the very body of the text. Similar to Alice's body in Carroll's tale it opens and shuts up like a “telescope.” The telescope movement points to the simultaneity of the possibility and the impossibility of “making sense,” creating series, paradoxes, effects, and events. It is this simultaneity that places the movements of opening and shutting up in the events which create the surface effects of the series. On the one hand *The Logic of Sense*

progresses through a chain of series, but on the other hand it shuts itself up by avoiding to attach each series in a manner that explicates or deepens the conceptual framework of the preceding series. The logic here may be formulated with a reference to Alice's expression of her intention to write a fairy tale: "...when I grow up, I'll write one – but I'm grown up now" (Carroll 2001: 61). The series are attached to each other and thus defer "making sense," but the book does not promise a coherent unraveling. In other words, while each series is "grown up now," "making sense" is deferred by the presence of the chain of series.

The series that constitute the chapters of *The Logic of Sense* illustrate that events "haunt" language both by inhering in it and exceeding the mere expression (Deleuze 1990: 181). The event, which is neither the denotation nor the signification, occurs in a chain of series, but this occurrence also proves to be the condition and the foundation of language. In other words, it is the event that renders language possible rather than the denotation and the signification. If "without the event all of this would be only noise" (a.e., 182), it is because language moves beyond the corporeal sound effect by separating itself from the body. The event, then, has an essence of "an impassible incorporeal entity" (a.e.). The impassibility of this essence may be translated as the surface effect of an event that enables it to happen. The telescope bodies of both Alice and *The Logic of Sense* point to these impassible entities by presenting their presence in a movement that transforms their corporeal bodies. As Williams underscores, Deleuzian events are neither new occurrences with a new beginning nor new entities that have not been existed before (2008: 2). Thus a beginning should be understood "as a novel selection in ongoing and continually altering series" (a.e.). Williams's suggestion may well be utilized as a guide for understanding both the textual body of *The Logic of Sense* and the place of this book in Deleuze's thought. Consequently, one may suggest, each series of the book as well as the book itself represents a "novel selection" in the signifying chain.

The signifying chain, in Lacan's terms, implies the movement of a Deleuzian event. Since the shifts in the signifying chain include a transformation that is based on the new encounters in altering series, the simultaneity of the possibility and the impossibility of making sense is intrinsic to the movement of the signifiers in the signifying chain. "The play of sense and non-sense," as Deleuze calls it, manifests itself in this simultaneity, finding an expression in Alice's "telescope body." Her utopic wish to shut up like a telescope alludes to an impossibility which is neutralized by the recent unusual occurrences: "[S]o many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible" (Carroll 2001: 41). Eventually, the impossibility of one's shutting up like a telescope does not erase the possibility of Alice's shutting up like a telescope. Among the recent "out-of-the-way-things" Alice's wish makes sense and finds a place in her logic. Her wish is indeed a result of her logical inference which we read when Alice notices a small passage like a rat-hole, through which she sees a charming garden: "[S]he could not even get her head through the doorway; 'and even if my head would go through,' thought poor Alice, 'it would be of very little use without my shoulders'" (a.e.). Alice's unique way of thinking here shows us another "out-of-the-way-thing": She conceives her head and shoulders as separate bodies even though her head is of *very little* use without her shoulders. According to Deleuze, Lewis Carroll's works offer a series of paradoxes through "a

play of sense and nonsense” (1990: xiii). Instead of making a “daisy chain,” Alice finds herself in a play where there is no determinable direction (Carroll 2001: 37). Therefore, Alice’s shutting up brings about the possibility of her opening at the same time as she wishes to shut up like a telescope. According to Deleuze, the simultaneity of becoming here eludes the present as Alice becomes larger than she was and becomes smaller than she is. In terms of Platonic dualism this is “a pure becoming,” which Deleuze calls, “the paradox of infinite identity” (1990: 2).

Thus if Alice’s head would be of “very little use” without her shoulders, the language creates a paradox, meaning on the one hand it would be “of use,” but on the other hand it would be “of very little use.” Alice’s body (or bodies) appears not as a thing but as an event, non-existing and subsisting. For that reason, Alice would knock the door in “Pig and Pepper,” although she and the Frog-Footman are on the same side of the door: “‘There might be some sense in your knocking,’ the Footman went on without attending to her, ‘if we had the door between us. For instance, if you were *inside*, you might knock, and I could let you out, you know’” (Carroll 2001: 81). Alice knocks the door because her body does not exist but inheres, thereby eluding both the present and the presence. Hence, Deleuze’s description of paradox as “initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but [. . .] also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities” (1990: 3) may be reformulated: Alice *grows* and *Alice* grows simultaneously. Alice cannot be in-side since there is no direction (side) and no depth (in).

Deleuze, referring to the Stoics’ discovery of the surface effects, maintains that “The most concealed becomes the most manifest” (1990: 8) and “Paradox appears as a dismissal of depth, a display of events at the surface, and a deployment of language along this limit” (a.e., 9). Events are now on the edges rather than being behind the curtains or underground. Reversing the sides would only mean changing the directions, as in the case of a left-handed person. When the caterpillar tells Alice that “One side [of the mushroom] will make you grow taller and the other side will make you grow shorter” (Carroll 2001: 75), the directions are even completely dismissed: “Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. However, at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand” (a.e.). After this act Alice has to ask the question, “which is which?” (a.e.). This question relates not only to the sides of the mushroom but also to her own identity because one side makes her smaller and the other side makes her larger: which is which side and which is which Alice?

Before the question of “which is which”, however, Alice asks the question of “what?": “‘On the side of what? The other side of *what?*’ thought Alice to herself” (a.e.). Alice asks the question of what not because she does not understand that one side denotes one side of the mushroom, but because she does not comprehend its expression, i.e., its sense. Therefore she sees the mushroom, yet she looks again and sees its effect. Mushroom as an effect, then, creates a gap between the word “mushroom” and what Alice sees at the second glance. The signifiers and the signifieds begin to float. When *Alice* grows, the outcome is a series of Alice –big Alice, small Alice, short Alice, tall Alice- so we have an Alice-chain similar to a daisy-chain, but

when Alice *grows* we lose Alice's name since Alice grows only at the present time which is eluded by her growing or regressing. The consequence of this movement is a series of floated signifiers and signifieds, each of which corresponds to a particular event or singularity. The signifier then does not signify the signified. Alice's regression has a serial form in which "each denoting name has a sense which must be denoted by another name" (Deleuze 1990: 36). The issue, however, is also of expression in addition to denotation, since the sense serves for denoting the following name in the series. Viewing the problem of the series and events from a Lacanian perspective, Deleuze posits difference in the series, i.e., what changes in the succession. In his own account, "Every unique series, whose homogeneous terms are distinguished only according to type or degree, necessarily subsumes under it two heterogeneous series, each one of which is constituted by terms of the same type or degree, although these terms differ in nature from those of the other series (they can of course differ also in degree)" (a.e., 36, 37). The notion of difference placed in the signifying chain, then, adds a movement to signification, rendering the encounters of the homogenous and heterogenous series "events." This encounter occurs in a crossroads where language is deployed in its limits to make sense on the surfaces.

3. Alice's Esoteric Language of the Surface

Reflecting on the nature of this encounter and its surface effects, Deleuze furthers his engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis. This engagement leads Slavoj Žižek to ask, "How, then, are we to read his later obvious 'hardening' of the stance toward 'structuralism?'" (2004: 82). While the question comes from a Lacanian perspective, one needs to remember that Lacan himself may not be as structuralist as he is often thought of. According to Žižek, it may be inappropriate to regard Deleuze's engagement with structuralism as belonging to an epoch that was going to be buried with his "hardening" of his structuralist stance. It may rather be a "false line of flight," Žižek speculates, or an escape from the complexity of the structuralist thought: That is why his collaboration with Guattari might be a "relief" for Deleuze (a.e., 82, 83). Although it is not easy to comment on the relationship between the two philosophers who develop their thought in changing phases through their own concepts, Žižek's emphasis on their encounter is particularly striking for a discussion on a passionate reader like Deleuze. If "an encounter is not a dialogue" (a.e., xi), it is because compatibility is not a requirement for the former. To put it in Žižek's Lacanian terminology, "An encounter cannot be reduced to symbolic exchange: what resonates in it, over and above the symbolic exchange, is the echo of a traumatic impact" (a.e.). This traumatic impact implicates a contamination intrinsic to the problem of reading. Moving in a frame of reference, a reader may find himself / herself in such a contamination or in Roland Barthes's terms, in a "desperate plagiarism" (1992: 22). That is to suggest that the critical traditions constitute a signifying chain in which what matters is the "difference" that stems from the traumatic repetitions. Thus Deleuze's encounter with Lacan may well be considered an event that brings about a different thought eventually. In this process *The Logic of Sense* "occurs" on the surface and thus creates the surface effects in the signifying chain of Deleuze's thought.

While conceptualizing the surface effects through an engagement with Lacan's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Deleuze unwittingly pinpoints the place of *The Logic of Sense* in his oeuvre. In other words, his exploration of the logic of sense in the series does not exclude his adventure with philosophical and literary traditions. Deleuze, Lacan, Poe, and Carroll meet here, in this adventure, where compatibility and dialogue leave their place to an inescapable contamination. "The bad psychoanalysis," as he coins the term, proves to be the crossroads in which the homogenous and heterogenous series converge to let the events happen in the limits of language.

Reading Lacan's seminar on "The Purloined Letter," Deleuze underscores the difference between the series. The similarity of the two scenes -the first in the royal *boudoir* and the second in the Minister's office- as well as the structural resemblance of the three moments of glances leads Lacan to theorize the displacement of the subject in the signifying chain. Tracing the nature of this displacement, Lacan concludes that the subject is constituted in the symbolic register. Since the itinerary of the purloined letter rather than its content determines the subject's place in the signifying chain, Lacan designates the letter as a pure signifier. By bringing forward the insistence of the pure signifier in the signifying chain, Lacan aims to show that the subject is constructed in and as an effect of language. Drawing on Lacan's seminar, Deleuze suggests that if the characters in "The Purloined Letter" -the Police, the Minister, the royal personage, and Dupin- act according to the place of the letter, the lack of correspondance here may be regarded as an essential component of the series for enabling their continuity. Since the heterogeneity of the series, which is facilitated by the difference that the letter's location makes, relates the subject's relationship with language, Deleuze attaches Lacan's reading of the story to *Alice's Adventures* in his search for the logic of sense.

The logic of sense is guided by the interference of this heterogeneity to the homogenous series, as a result of which the register of truth leaves its place to that of surfaces. The content of the letter as well as the mystery that the detective genre relies on proves inconsequential compared to the simplicity of the case. It is this simplicity rather than the depth of the case that the Police misses. While Dupin finds the letter on the surface, the story demonstrates to Lacan that the register of truth resides in intersubjectivity. This register, Lacan maintains, is a real delusion because everything except the simplicity and the oddity of the story makes us believe the imbecility of the Prefect and draws our attention to the mystery. The simplicity and oddity of the case, on the other hand, shows the singularity of the letter. Lacan poses the singularity of the letter as the "true subject" of the story, which, according to him, illustrates the meaning insisting in the signifying chain. Based on its insisting nature, Deleuze calls the letter "a paradoxical entity" (1990: 40) for being single folded and having two sides. As the circulation of the letter is provided through dis-placements, it is never where it is. Quoting Lacan, Deleuze suggests, "it fails to observe its place (elle manque à sa place)" (a.e., 41). In fact, Lacan describes the letter as a signifier, which is "by nature symbol only of an absence" (1987: 39). Therefore, Lacan goes on, it does not have a proper place, but it is dis-placed in the signifying chain remaining constantly "in sufferance" with the language of the post office (a.e., 43).

According to Deleuze this kind of sufferance and its heterogenous nature is preserved by the esoteric word in Lewis Carroll's work. The structure is constituted by at least two heterogeneous series –signifying and signified- and each of these series is constituted by the terms existing through their relations with each other. In the structure, particular events, i.e., singularities correspond to these relations (Deleuze 1990: 50). Therefore, the paradoxical element is a “differentiator” *toward* which two heterogeneous series converge:

This element belongs to no series; or rather, it belongs to both series at once and never ceases to circulate throughout them. It has therefore the property of always being displaced in relation to itself, “of being absent from its own place,” its own identity, its own resemblance, and its own equilibrium. It appears in one of the series as an excess, but only on the condition that it would appear at the same time in the other as a lack. But if it is in excess in the one, it is only as an empty square; and if it is lacking in the other, it is so only as a supernumerary pawn or an occupant without a compartment. It is both word and object at once: esoteric word and exoteric object. (a.e., 51)

Thus the paradoxical element, the esoteric word in that case, denotes what it expresses while expressing its denotation. It simultaneously says something and the sense of what it is saying. In the serial form, however, the name saying its own sense should be nonsense. Nonsense is present in the sense (a.e., 67). When Alice begins to open out like the largest telescope ever, her feet become almost out of sight. She plans to send them a new pair of shoes: “‘They must go by the carrier,’ she thought; ‘and how funny it’ll seem, sending presents to one’s own feet! And how odd the directions will look! Alice’s Right Foot, Esq., Hearthrug, near the Fender (with Alice’s love)’”. Then Alice exclaims, “Oh dear, what nonsense I’m talking!” (Carroll 2001: 45) Although Alice realizes the nonsense when she discerns that her feet are the parts of her body, she initially imagines her feet as separate entities. By denoting the nonsense, nonetheless, Alice renders the nonsense sense, or she herself makes sense. Through denotation, nonsense begins to make sense. In the esoteric word, on the other hand, nonsense inhabits in sense without denoting it. However, Deleuze adds, nonsense may encompass different abysses whose surface is fragile enough to approach the language of a little girl, an artist, or a schizophrenic in the same manner (1990: 92). Moving from the surface effects of a purloined letter to Alice's language and its resemblance with the language of a schizophrenic, Deleuze returns us back to his adventure with psychoanalysis.

4. The Event and the Advent(ure) of Psychoanalysis:

The “bad psychoanalysis,” as Deleuze describes in *The Logic of Sense*, observes materials that can be found everywhere and invents analogies creating false differences. If “the clinical psychiatric aspect and the literary critical aspect are botched simultaneously,” according to Deleuze, it is because psychoanalysis is satisfied with the account of the historical anecdotes and the designation of cases (1990: 92). Freud's realization of the constitutive nature of language rather than the content of the narrative account in a psychoanalytic treatment as early as the “Dora” case garners importance here since this realization locates the actualization of an event at the present time. The

transference of Dora's past traumatic experiences to the analysis undermines the identification of a psychoanalytic event with the past. The event proves to be the sense created by the analyst and the analysand together. It is now not simply what happened to the analysand, but it is what touches and transforms both the analysand and the analyst. Therefore, Freud's discovery that during a psychoanalytic treatment "the productive powers of the neurosis" reproduce themselves in the form of "transferences" implies the dis-placement and re-placament of the subjects as the revitalization of the patient's phantasies and impulses results in the replacement of an earlier person by the analyst (Freud 1990: 43). An analysis, then, is exposed to the shifts in the series, each of which enables a change in the roles of the subjects although the scenes resemble each other, as in the two dialogues in "The Purloined Letter". This aspect of transference leads the signifiers and the signifieds to float so that there is no denotation, no direction, no designation, even no diagnosis. Therefore the present enters the scene taking place between the past events and the future recovery. This 'taking place' ironically occurs in the form of dis-placements as a result of the compulsive repetition, which is an important component of repression. The tendency toward the pleasure principle, as Freud observes, is met by the resistance of the reality principle. The resistance implies both the insistence of unpleasurable experiences and attachment to life whose final outcome is expected to be pleasure. In other words, the reality principle does not totally abandon the intention of obtaining pleasure, but postpones satisfaction and carries into effect "the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (a.e., 6-7). Similar to "the letter in suffering" in "The Purloined Letter," the pleasure of repression marks the analysis. Consequently, one can suggest that in a transference situation, which is a form of repression for Freud, both the present time and the presence of the analyst are replaced by the past and someone who belongs to past. So long as the patient wants to preserve his / her pleasure any analysis will result in displacement.

Freud's discovery and the ensuing change in the perception of psychoanalytic criticism, bring about a notion of psychoanalysis which is regarded as a narrative discipline in which incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent, and repetitive account becomes much more important than the contents of the past events. Whereas this new understanding possibly establishes an analogy between the author and the patient, Deleuze suggests, "authors, if they are great, are more like doctors than patients" (1990: 237). That is why, Deleuze maintains, the psychoanalytic diagnosis about Lewis Carroll's Oedipal stage and its projection onto the little girl as a symbol of phallus is problematic. In short, for him, "artists are clinicians of civilization" (a.e.). This fact, nevertheless, does not suggest to Deleuze that all novels are created by the doctors. The novel as "a work of art" has an object, which is "to extract the non-actualizable part of the pure event from symptoms [. . .], to raise everyday actions and passions (like eating, shitting, loving, speaking, or dying) to their noematic attribute and their corresponding pure Event, to go from the physical surface on which symptoms are played out and actualizations decided to the metaphysical surface on which the pure event stands and is played out . . ." (a.e., 238) *The Logic of Sense*, as a "psychological novel," then, may be considered a pure event moving beyond its actualizable physical surface.

5. Conclusion

The telescope body of *The Logic of Sense* opens itself to an adventure both with Lewis Carroll and psychoanalysis. The “problematic” psychoanalytic readings of *Alice's Adventures* do not constitute a hindrance to the be-coming of an event here. Despite his critical stance of psychoanalysis, whose intensity increases in his later works, Deleuze does not leave aside his engagement with psychoanalysis. As Derrida suggests, it is indeed an advent(ure) that enables an event to happen. “Advent there must be,” he says, “because the *event of an invention*, its act of inaugural production, once recognized, legitimized, countersigned by a social consensus according to a system of conventions, must be valid *for the future (a-venir)*” (1988: 28). Implying a possibility of a future, a “coming” or an “invention,” the “advent” and the “event” mark the heterogeneity of the series. As a result, dramatizing a thinking process from which psychoanalysis cannot be excluded, Deleuze's thought comes in multiple voices.

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