

## THE LATENCY PERIOD AS LOGICAL TIME

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Association Recherches en psychanalyse | « [Recherches en psychanalyse](#) »

2012/1 n° 13 | pages 44 à 50

ISSN 1767-5448

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

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<https://www.cairn.info/revue-recherches-en-psychanalyse-2012-1-page-44.htm>  
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## The Latency Period as Logical Time

*La période de latence comme temps logique*

Julie Ahmad

### **Abstract:**

The author proposes to consider the period known as the child's latency phase, in the metaphor of a structural conception of the subject and his genesis, as "logical time" within which, on the one hand, the repression of the Oedipus Complex and the renunciation of the parents of infancy are ratified, and on the other, the advent of the adolescent processes is anticipated. This latency period is then considered in its three logical moments: firstly, the child's disappointment in his parents, as the "instant of the glance" opening onto the entry into latency; secondly, the interrogation of the place of the Other, as the "time for comprehending" specific to the structuring operation of latency; thirdly, discrediting of the parents who are unable to embody the Other, as the logical conclusion objectified in the retroaction of the latency by the advent of adolescence.

### **Résumé :**

L'auteur propose d'envisager la période dite de latence chez l'enfant, dans la métaphore d'une conception structurale du sujet et de sa genèse, comme « temps logique » au sein duquel s'entérine le refoulement de l'Œdipe et le renoncement aux parents de l'infantile, d'une part, et s'anticipe l'avènement des processus adolescents, d'autre part. Ce temps de latence est alors envisagé en ses trois moments logiques que sont : premièrement, la déception de l'enfant face aux parents comme « instant du regard » ouvrant sur l'entrée dans la latence ; deuxièmement, l'interrogation de la place de l'Autre comme « temps pour comprendre » propre à l'opération structurante de la latence ; troisièmement, la disqualification des parents à incarner l'Autre comme conclusion logique objectivée dans l'après-coup de la latence par l'avènement de l'adolescence.

**Keywords:** adolescence, infancy, latency period, logical time, other, subject

**Mots-clefs :** adolescence, autre, infantile, période de latence, sujet, temps logique

### **Plan:**

**From Disappointment to Hope**

**The Place of the Other**

**The Assertion of Anticipated Certainty**

Lacan's text on "logical time" teaches us that "subjective assertion" is founded on anticipated certainty. As a conclusion to the logical movement of the genesis of the "I", the *assertion about oneself* is thus given in the experience as an assertion objectified by "three *evidential moments*", whose logical values are different and of increasing order: the *instant of the glance*, the *time for comprehending* and the *moment of concluding* (Jacques Lacan, 1945); each of these moments is absorbed back into the passage to the next, "the last moment which absorbs them alone remaining" (*Ibid.*, p. 167).

The subject's possibility, as a subject of enunciation, of "concluding about himself" originates necessarily and logically in a first phase of logical exclusion (which grounds the *instant of the glance*), introducing in a second phase (the *time for understanding*) an "authentic hypothesis" that results from a subjective experience of reciprocity. Thus, in the apologue of the three prisoners that Lacan uses as an introduction to his demonstration, the assertion about oneself can intervene within "the urgency of the *moment of concluding*" (p. 168) because a "certain time" occurs, "a *time of meditation* that each [...] must ascertain in the other" (p. 168).<sup>1</sup> In other words, after the instant of the glance, the time for understanding is required, the second phase of the subject's logical genesis. This time for understanding is the time in which men acknowledge one another; therefore it unfolds on the basis of identification: it is because each of the prisoners recognises the other as his semblable that he can count himself as One; with the added dimension that thereafter he must count with the Other to know "what a man is" (this is the result of the subjective assertion that is founded, therefore, for the subject, on the anticipation of a certitude about his truth).

Subjective assertion is thus founded both on fresh identifications and on the taking into account of a radical otherness.

In the clinic, this phenomenon can be grasped in particular with regard to the question of the subject's relation to the Other. In other words, it

is through the metaphor of a genesis of the Other that one can account for the mutations that lead the subject to produce an assertion about himself. Clinically speaking, it is a matter of examining what, in the subject's identifications, evolves in accordance with the mechanism of symbolic identification that designates the subject of the unconscious as identified with an invariable trait known as the unary trait.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, the Ego Ideal becomes the representative of the subject's series of identifications with this trait. As an instance referred to the symbolic (in opposition to the instance of the Ideal Ego founded on the Imaginary), the Ego Ideal is therefore articulated to the dimension of the Other defined as the locus of language, the locus of signifiers, whose point of articulation is constituted by the Name-of-the-Father in order to make it the locus of symbolic law.

In the child's mental life, the time of symbolic identification corresponds, as Freud indicates (1923), to the period that follows the "passing of the Oedipus Complex", known as the "latency period". Indeed, this period sets down the bases of the constitution of the Ego Ideal. This is done starting off from the elaboration of an identificatory project supported by the mechanism of symbolic identification itself, articulated with the "Oedipal promise" that consists in the idea of one day being able to retrieve the Phallus that the child devolved to the father for the duration of the latency period (Lesourd, 1994, pp. 29-31).

Even though Freud initially made this latency period a period in which the drives are "gelled", he was already underlining in his definition the exceptional character of a complete libidinal dormancy in the child and suggested that psychoanalysts might rather examine these "exceptions" that constitute "interruptions in the latency phase" so as to deduce the very origin of the life of the drives. On this point, the clinic furnishes us with multiple examples of the persistence of the activity of the drive during latency without this activity seeping out through recourse to different fates of the drive such as

repression or sublimation which moreover find their origin in the latency period (Freud). Later on, he would also underline the importance of identificatory movements and fresh identifications that sustain the latency period (Freud, 1923) which he situates at the exit from the Oedipus complex. These elaborations are maintained in the conceptions of recent authors who are interested in adolescence (including J.-J. Rassial and S. Lesourd). Both Rassial and Lesourd thus consider the fresh identifications that support the latency period in their articulations with the “Oedipal promise”. This promise, itself articulated to the operation of symbolic castration that situates the Phallus as inexistent and indicative of the emptiness of the locus of the Other, thereafter heralds the adolescent operation that consists in the subject’s acknowledgement of the discrediting of his parents as incarnations of the Other (J.-J. Rassial, 1996). Indeed, it is with the deployment of the adolescent processes that the subject confronts the question of the emptiness of the locus of the Other as a purely symbolic locus, the treasure of signifiers, which the parents, now acknowledged to be lacking, bearing the seal of castration, can no longer embody (*ibid.*). Adolescence thus represents a period of *assertion about oneself* inasmuch as it grounds a new relation of the subject to the Other which, having been imaginarily embodied by the parental figures, passes over to a purely symbolic status (Rassial, 1996). Indeed, it is during adolescence that the structuring operation that consists in “moving out” of the family (Rassial) is put in place; and with it the subjective assertion that consists in the subject now recognizing himself as one among others. Within the metaphor of a structural approach to the subject articulated to the question of the genesis of the Other, the period known as the “latency period” thus corresponds to the “time for comprehending” that logically follows what is absorbed into it from the infantile period<sup>3</sup> and anticipates, just as logically, the future of adolescence, in what this phase of latency inaugurates in terms of the fundaments of a

new relationship between the subject and the Other.

Here I shall propose that we consider latency as the logical time of a psychogenesis of the Other<sup>4</sup>, organised in accordance with three phases:

1°/ The child’s disappointment with his parents, as the time of “logical exclusion” (the parents are not all-powerful) and the entry into the latency period; the inaugural disappointment of the child’s renunciation of the Oedipal parents.

2°/ The child’s questions with regard to the place of the Other, based on the evolution of parental representations and the construction of the child’s identificatory project as the time of the preconscious elaboration of a new relationship between subject and Other, specific to the structuring operation of latency; and as the time of an identification whereby “men recognize themselves among themselves as men.” (Lacan, 1945, p. 174).

3°/ The discrediting of the parents (when it comes to their embodiment of the Other) as the objectified conclusive assertion in the retroaction of latency due to the advent of adolescent processes.

### From Disappointment to Hope

Freud (1923) tells us that, on leaving the Oedipus complex, the entry into latency arises from the multiple disappointments the child finds himself contending with due to the “internal impossibility” of the complex (p. 173). The inevitable absence of the hoped for satisfaction leads the child to give up the Oedipal object in order to turn to identifications. During the latency phase, the child finds himself confronted with his parents’ limits, parents who are now unsatisfying because they have not lived up to his expectations. Then begins the decline of parental all-mightiness. A decline that moreover both confirms and denounces the emergence of the Family Romance fantasy which is contemporary with latency (Freud, 1909); since, at the same time as the child expresses his disappointment faced with the

parents and his desire for “revenge” and “retaliation” against them (p. 240), he paradoxically strives to find again the magnificence of his erstwhile parents (p. 241). This is the ambivalence that stirs the child in his relations with the parental figures. Furthermore, this ambivalence founds the identificatory movements that are put in place during this period, because in not being able to invest in them as something he possesses, he invests in them as identificatory models (in other words, after the fashion of “being like”).

The child’s disappointment in the parental figures therefore inaugurates the entry into the latency period. Under the sway of the castration threat, the Oedipal object makes room for the identificatory project. This project is founded on the imaginary of the “Oedipal promise” that introduces the child to the hope that “one day”, when he will be “grown up”, he will be able to retrieve the Phallus that is now devolved to the father in his imaginary version.

In the image of the Family Romance, the phallic attribution to the paternal figure, to the extent that this is effectuated in the form of a “savings loan” (Lesourd, 1994, p. 31), thus reinforces the imaginary part of this father, which is necessary to the child in the latency period so that he can invest for example in learning (based on his desire to know) while waiting to “grow up”, in the hope of thereby being able to retrieve the use of the phallus.

The imaginary of the Oedipal promise thus allows the child to stall the disappointment stemming from the renunciation of the Oedipus and to build up the foundations of his identity based on an identificatory project that brings about a suturing of the narcissistic wound caused by the renunciation of the phallus. But this imaginary also restores a paternal figure whose all-mightiness is nevertheless weakened by the process of castration. Because, if the child has to submit to symbolic castration, it is because his parents do too, notably his father.

Thus we see the child, in the latency period, disappointed by his parents, tempted in spite of everything to maintain an idealised representation

even though the Oedipal promise that underlies these highly valorised representations reinforces (at the same time as it denounces) paternal castration (Lesourd, 1994, p. 32).

Here we have to distinguish between two levels of elaboration: a symbolic level and an imaginary level. The first, related to the operation of castration, implies that this is because the father has himself “received” castration, and that he can efficiently impart it to his child. The second has to do with the child’s identificatory project, the essence of which is imaginary, which necessitates that highly valorised (essentially parental) identificatory models endure for the child in latency.

In other words, two planes are juxtaposed with regard to the evolution of the parental representations during the latency period:

Firstly, the intervention of castration confronts the child with his parents’ limits, notably with the limits of the paternal figure which introduce the child to a possible symbolic identification with the Real Father;

Secondly, this recognition of paternal castration remains and must remain a preconscious, latent, even suppressed<sup>5</sup> phenomenon throughout the latency period, thus allowing for the maintenance of the structuring lure represented during latency by the hope of a possible conjugation between Ideal Ego and Ego Ideal (Rassial, 1999, p. 91).

The suppression (*Unterdrückung*) of the un-idealised versions of the parental representations, which is consubstantial with the ambivalence that stirs the child in the latency period, turns out to be necessary, and even structuring, during this period. This suppressive movement is articulated to what Jean-Jacques Rassial (1996, p. 133) suggests we consider as the psychical labour specific to latency, namely “using the Imaginary to support the Other, which falters in the real, as the locus of the order of the Symbolic”.

### The Place of the Other

The parental figures, who thus far have been idealised as imaginary embodiments of the

Other, evolve therefore with the latency period and the installation of secondary identifications (contemporary with this period and articulated with symbolic castration) in the direction of their dis-idealisation.

This dis-idealisation of the parental representations turns out to be necessary inasmuch as it authorizes the child's identification with the sexuated body, on the basis of the encounter with the Real Father as the "father of the real of castration" (Hoffmann, 2001, p. 87). Indeed, it is the identification with the Real Father that allows for the exit from the Oedipus Complex (*ibid.*). But this movement of the dis-idealisation of the parental figures must however remain latent, lest it should bring down the child's identificatory image in the framework of his "project". This does not signify however that the symbolic elaboration of the parents' fall from their imaginary pedestal does not take place in a preconscious fashion during the latency period (which thus carries its name well<sup>6</sup>).

On the other hand, this latent destitution of the parental figures thus logically anticipates the advent, in adolescence, of the definitive discrediting of the parents ability to embody the Other. If indeed the big Other is embodied during the first years of childhood based on parental figures; in adolescence, the parents definitively lose this status of imaginary embodiments of the Other (Rassial, 1996). Between these two moments, the latency period as logical time allows for the preconscious elaboration of the subject's passage from a relation to the Other in its parental version to a new relation to the Other that is henceforth purely symbolic.

Therefore, the latency phase is constituted in the metaphor of a logical temporality as the time in the course of which the child recognizes the parental other as his semblable<sup>7</sup> (based on an initial disappointment with him); an identificatory movement that will then enable the subject to formulate the anticipatory subjective assertion that is expressed in adolescence by the definitive judgement that discredits the parents as incarnations of the Other.

On the basis of the renunciation of the parents of the infantile period, the latency period questions the place of the Other, opening the path to the adolescent processes.

A clinical illustration may now be given. Starting off from the idea that the pathological sheds light on the normal, I shall ground my demonstration on the meaning that a symptom carried for a child of nine years, with a view to bringing out the latent operation of the anticipation of a new relation between subject and Other during the course of the latency period, based on the confrontation with symbolic castration. This clinical illustration will be founded on the very definition of the concept of the symptom in psychoanalysis as that through which the subject (as a subject of the unconscious) expresses himself.

For a few months Charles had been suffering from a trichotillomania.<sup>8</sup> He is the eldest of three children: he has a younger sister and brother. The first interview in the presence of the child's mother highlights a considerable rivalry between Charles and his sister, then aged seven. Even though this rivalry also exists in his relations with his five-year-old brother, Mme C. makes no mention of this. Indeed, what worries Charles's mother turns out to be related to the aggressiveness that reigns between her eldest son and her daughter, with no disclosure of Charles's regressive identification with his younger brother (which she does however recognise) as a form of jealousy. During this first interview, there also appears the phallic rivalry between Mme C. and her husband, and which repeats in her eyes in Charles's relation with his sister. One may thus wonder what the child is thereby taking on his shoulders as regards the parental problematic, with the question that now poses itself for him as to the castration anxiety that constitutes the nodal point of the problematic of the latency period.

His symptom appeared a few weeks after the death of his paternal grandfather. This death is mentioned in the first interview, by Charles himself, who is however unable to come back to it: he says that speaking about it makes him too sad.



In this context, one can see a first outline of what was activated for Charles as a latent conflict and which is now being expressed through the production of a symptom.

The aggressiveness that is manifested in Charles's jealousy of his sister signals the castration anxiety he is grappling with.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, we know that boys' apparent disinterest in girls (and vice versa) which sometimes even goes as far as aggressiveness, is seen as the reflection of their insecurity about their own sexualization and as a consequence of the prohibition of genitality due to the fact of the child's functional immaturity (which is in fact merely the formalisation in reality of the operation of symbolic castration).

Now, castration anxiety seems to have been reinforced in Charles by the death of his paternal grandfather. Indeed, this death summons up once more the child's filiation which is now inscribed as the last link in a chain of generations at the head of which the father does not stand alone. Here I shall be taking up Rassial's assertion (1996), for whom reference to the grandparents indicates an impossible Other of the Other since "the father having a father forbids him being thought of as standing at the head of the symbolic order" (p.123). The natural death of Charles's grandfather introduces the child to the dimension of paternal castration and to the idea of a possible death of the father, without having to kill him *imaginarily, symbolically, or even really*. This encounter with the Real Father thus heralds the death of the child's imaginarily phallic father. This phallic paternal representation nevertheless constitutes a narcissistic support that is necessary for the child during the latency period because it lies at the heart of the identificatory project – itself linked up with the Oedipal promise – which is put in place during latency.

In this context, Charles's symptom is likewise evocative and significant in terms of a symbolic identification with a father who in reality is balding and whose phallic representation is evolving in the direction of his destitution. Moreover, a drawing by the child highlights the hair/bodily hair analogy which oversaw the constitution of this symptom at a moment when

the child, confronted with castration and the real of his functional immaturity, was losing all hope of one day being able to retrieve the use of the Phallus due to the fact of the intensity of the castration anxiety he is grappling with.

Interpreted in light of its singular value of self-castration – through identification with a real father – this symptom highlights what is at play more generally for the child during the latency period based on the now open-access to the register of symbolic castration: namely, his questions about the locus of the Other that, formerly parental, is on the road to becoming a purely symbolic status.

### The Assertion of Anticipated Certainty

It is thus because the child now acknowledges his father as one man among others, in the experience of reciprocity specific to the "time for comprehending", that he may logically anticipate a new relationship between subject and Other.

This "time for comprehending" turns out to be necessary from a twofold perspective: Firstly, inasmuch as it allows for the symbolic elaboration of the repression of the Oedipus Complex and the renunciation of the Oedipal parents, so that the child can gain access to secondary identifications. Secondly, inasmuch as it founds the bases upon which the adolescent process can be deployed, which constitute the definitive shift in the consistency of the Other and the constitution of identity through identification with the Real Father.

In this context, the advent of adolescence is well situated within the logical continuity of the operation initiated by latency: without this time of preconscious elaboration, adolescence, as a structuring psychical operation cannot come about. Indeed, the child's identificatory project and the preconscious elaboration of a new relation between subject and Other ground respectively the constitution of the identity of the adolescent subject and the change in consistency of the Other that now seeks to be embodied on the basis of the Other sex.<sup>10</sup>

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup>In the apologue of the three prisoners: "Let us call 'A' the real subject who concludes for himself, and 'B' and 'C' those reflected subjects upon whose conduct A founds his deduction." (p. 163). Thus, "'A' designates each of the subjects insofar as he himself is in the hot seat and resolves or fails to conclude about his own case. 'B' and

'C' are the two others insofar as they are objects of A's reasoning." (p. 164). Each of the subjects thus "is A insofar as [he is] real" (p. 164).

<sup>2</sup>Here we refer the reader to J.D. Nasio's study (1988), and more particularly to the chapter concerning the concept of identification (pp. 143-87), in which the author takes up the different Freudian and Lacanian categories of identification to propose a definition of symbolic identification as "[consisting] precisely in the birth of the subject of the unconscious understood as the production of a singular trait that distinguishes itself when we take each signifier of a history on a one-by-one basis" (p. 167). He continues, specifying that we give the name Ego Ideal to the instance of the unary trait that founds symbolic identification when "we think of it as the constant reference that regulates the ego's successive identifications with images", i.e., when "the entirety [regulated by this instance] is that of images" (p. 169).

<sup>3</sup>Here we are taking up a conception developed by R. Lévy (2003) who uses the term "infantile" to designate the period that precedes the entry into latency ("from the acquisition of language up to the constitution of the Oedipus complex"), characterised notably by the still insufficient elaboration of repression.

<sup>4</sup>In employing the term "psychogenesis of the Other" we are referring to an earlier article written in collaboration with other authors (J.-J. Rassial, M. Benhaïm, J. Ahmad & B. Jacobi, 2007) who propose to substitute the big Other for the ego as object of psychogenesis.

<sup>5</sup>In the sense of the Freudian notion of suppression (*Unterdrückung*), which designates a psychological operation "that tends to make an unpleasant or untimely content disappear from consciousness", and which repression is a particular mode of. What henceforth distinguishes suppression from repression is due to the conscious character of the operation of suppression and the fact that the suppressed content only becomes preconscious, and not unconscious. Cf. Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967, p. 419.

<sup>6</sup>Indeed, throughout his oeuvre, Freud uses the same German term in its different declensions to designate the latency period (*Latenzperiode*) and the latent content, for example of the dream (*Latenter Inhalt*).

<sup>7</sup>[Translator's note: We are following Bruce Fink in resurrecting this archaic English-language term to translate the still current French equivalent. See his Translator's endnotes to *Écrits, op. cit.*]

<sup>8</sup>A compulsive symptom that consists essentially in pulling out his hair.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Lacan (1948): In his text on "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis", Lacan approaches "images of castration" as "elective vectors of aggressive intentions" (p. 85).



<sup>10</sup>This conclusion accords therefore with Chaboudez (2007) who insisted on the result of adolescence as the advent of a non-relation following the repetition of symbolic castration, on which Bernard (2008) likewise insists. Haie & Rassail (2008) insist on the alternative – a

function of the outcome of castration – between a re-founding of the fantasy and a construction of the sinthome summoned by the logical time of adolescence; the question of the specific nature of the adolescent re-founding of the fantasy is treated by Haie & Douville (2007).

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### **Electronic reference:**

**Julie Ahmad**, “The Latency Period as Logical Time”, *Research of Psychoanalysis* [Online], 13 | 2012 published June 26, 2012.

This article is a translation of *La période de latence comme temps logique*

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