

Becoming a Subject: A Memory Work Study of the Experience of Romantic Jealousy

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Abstract: In this article we aim to contribute to psychosocial debates around selfhood by focusing empirically upon memories of jealousy and the ways in which potential subjectivities are both opened up and closed down. The paper presents a phenomenological narrative analysis of our research on jealousy produced through a memory work group. We identify three types of jealous memories (real, virtual and in-between) and elucidate the narrative structure of jealous experiencing. Memories of jealousy invariably involved some anticipatory context in which the actors engaged with potential subjectivities, which were then disrupted when the physical or psychological presence of another became apparent, triggering powerful embodied feelings. We argue that much of the power of jealousy comes from the way in which it is ambiguous and anxiety provoking as a result of a challenge to perceived subjectivities. Our findings are discussed in relation to extant mainstream literature on jealousy and critical theories of subjectivity, embodiment and relationality.

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1. Introduction

The Cartesian notion of subjectivity as unitary, contained and rational, that is the mainstay of much mainstream psychological work on emotions, faces a critical challenge from theoretical traditions informed by existential phenomenology and process philosophy, amongst others. In this article we draw on these somewhat neglected traditions to examine the nature of romantic jealousy, within the context of a piece of memory work. We explore the ways in which this particular affect highlights the need for a more sophisticated notion of subjectivity (BLACKMAN, CROMBY, HOOK, PAPADOPOLOUS & WALKERDINE, 2008), with its dysphoric power emerging from the way in which it involves the opening up and closing down of particular relational subjectivities. The term subjectivity, similar though clearly theoretically distinct from the terms self or persons, has its roots in French philosophy, particularly the structural MARXISM of ALTHUSSER and the work of FOUCAULT. BUTLER (1997a) theorizes subjectivity as both the subject and agent of power. In BURKITT's (2008, p.237) words

"power forms subjects in the process of the reflexive turn, in which subjects turn to look at themselves through the normative categories in which they are interpellated, yet at the same time subjects assume elements of the power that has informed them, thereafter possessing a power of agency with the potential to go beyond the conditions set by the power that created it." [1]

Subjectivity in these terms is distinct from the notion of selfhood through consideration of the structuring power of the social world in the making of selves and it is for this reason that we use the term when considering the experience of romantic jealousy, an inherently psychosocial emotion (see below) that we argue here involves a challenge to the preservation of imagined subjectivities. It is worth noting that most studies engaging with subjectivity have been within poststructuralist discursive traditions but instead we seek to preserve the intercorporeal and intersubjective through a memory work study drawing on existential phenomenology and process philosophy. [2]

Central to existential phenomenology and process philosophy is a concern with the ways in which *becoming* a subject is associated with the preservation of and, occasionally, challenges to socio-cultural traditions, as established forms of power and authority. There is thus a psychosocial problematic at play concerning the mutual patterning of subjectivity and broader social circumstances. This problematic opens up the possibility of "thinking together" issues of feeling, imagination and desire alongside social figuration, structure and process. Whilst some commentators on HEIDEGGER, and indeed other existential-phenomenological philosophers (such as SARTRE), give the impression that he denied the existence of subjectivity, this is an error. He did not simply dismiss subjectivity, with many references in "Being and Time" (1962 [1927]) to an "actual" subject and a "subject-entity." HEIDEGGER's challenge is to those Cartesian theories in which subjectivity is isolated or contained within its own sphere, with subject and object separate rather than inextricably intertwined. He does not refer to human beings *per se* in his exploration of being but instead uses

the term *Dasein* (in the later writings appears as *Da-sein*). *Dasein* is a commonly used German word often translated as "presence" but HEIDEGGER uses it to refer to "there-being" (or more commonly in English "being-there"), the place of openness where being occurs. HEIDEGGER's *Dasein* is indeed subjectivist in the sense of having the freedom to "choose itself" and being a "project" that is always ahead of itself. Subjectivity is, therefore, not prior or primary, projecting itself into the world but rather it *is simply* a "projection" (in HEIDEGGER's terms, 1962 [1927]). As STENNER (2008) notes, the notion of concern in WHITEHEAD (1935 [1933]), amongst a number other concepts, is comparable and indeed complementary to that of HEIDEGGER¹. STENNER's (2008) account of WHITEHEAD and subjectivity emphasizes the need to abandon either/or doctrines of, for instance, materialism and idealism or subject and object (much as we see with HEIDEGGER), and instead focus on a process ontology grounded in "concern." What is needed is a move to a "deep empiricism" in which the focus is on events or "the *becoming of actual occasions*" (p.99) rather than any notion of a unitary, rational self. This does not mean we need witness the loss of subjectivity itself but rather realize a form of subjectivity that is not only deep into nature but also "deepened and intensified" itself (p.105), through its concrescence into a "personal" society. We adopt these theoretical perspectives in this study and use them to frame our work and, in the spirit of both the existential-phenomenological and process philosophy traditions, seek to ground this in the empirical and avoid the excesses of high-level theoretical abstraction. [3]

For the last 30 years or so, emotions have been treated by critical social psychologists as historically and culturally occasioned, deployed discursively and/or affectively in particular contexts rather than as simple "internal events" amenable to measurement as variables in a natural science modeled on biology (see AVERILL, 1974, 1980; HARRÉ, 1986; SARBIN, 1986). The ability to describe and experience an emotion, for example, can be enabled or constrained by one's cultural background, experience and vocabulary and the classification of emotions varies between cultures with new emotion terms emerging and disappearing over time (GERGEN, 1999; FREDMAN, 2004). Emotions serve social functions and can operate as forms of social control, inflected by particular socio-culturally proscribed lines of power (HARRÉ & PARROTT, 1996). In this context, the emotion of romantic jealousy is of particular interest since the circumstances and forms of subjectivity associated with it are: 1. unavoidably multiple and contradictory (GRECO & STENNER, 2008; STENNER, 1993), 2. self-evidently social (since the mythical self-contained subject would have nothing to be jealous about, 3. historically and culturally variable (STENNER & STANTON ROGERS, 1998), and 4. clearly implicated in the normative arrangements of social institutions such as marriage and monogamy (BARKER & LANGDRIDGE, 2010; ROBINSON, 1997, FINN, 2005, 2010). We acknowledge that jealousy is much more than simply "romantic" but choose to exclusively focus on that specific form here in order to limit the scope of the work and also as a result of our recognition of the way discourses of romantic jealousy are deployed to support particular forms of relationships and conceptual understandings of

¹ Recognizing that there are many distinct differences between the two that might usefully be discussed but are beyond the scope of this article.

relationality. This study is concerned with exploring the nature of romantic jealousy through a phenomenological narrative analysis of jealous memories within the context of a group memory work research project. [4]

We decided to use memory work (HAUG, 1987; CRAWFORD, KIPPAX, ONYX, GAULT & BENTON, 1992) as our methodological technique due to its foregrounding of affect and recognition of the hermeneutic process involved in attending to subjectivities in context, in tune with the existential-phenomenological and process philosophical frame we were working within. Memory work is a relatively new method that has been noted for its focus on collective experience (STEPHENSON & PAPADOPOULOS, 2006) and its usefulness for exploring embodied experience through rich accounts of specific experiences that demand intense descriptive detail (WILLIG, 2001). We have also drawn on REAVEY and colleagues previous work on materiality, embodiment and subjectivity as inspiration for this work (GILLIES et al., 2004; BROWN, REAVEY, CROMBY, HARPER & JOHNSON, 2009; BROWN, CROMBY, HARPER, JOHNSON & REAVEY, 2011). In memory work there is no separation of researcher and participant, no researcher-subject and participant-object. Instead, the focus is a reflexive process in which subjectivities come into being within a pre-determined social space. Below in Section 2 we detail the memory work method adopted for this study and the phenomenological and process philosophy methodology being used to supplement this approach. The findings are presented in Section 3 with the final section discussing these in relation to both the extant literature on jealousy and broader discussions of subjectivity. [5]

2. Method

A group of academics was assembled with a shared interest in theorizing relational, embodied subjectivities, questioning mono-normativity and exploring alternative ways of understanding relationships. Memory group work requires bringing a group of between four and eight people together who all share a key characteristic of relevance to the study. In this study this entailed an interest in romantic jealousy alongside a commitment to researching the topic. All participants had previously researched and written on topics of relevance, such as jealousy (e.g. STENNER, 1993), embodied experience (e.g. BROWN et al., 2009), and open non-monogamies (e.g. BARKER & LANGDRIDGE, 2010). The group consisted of the authors of the current article and colleagues Paul FLOWERS and Dee McDONALD. The latter two were involved in the production and discussion of memories but did not take part in the data analysis or writing up of the research due to other commitments. [6]

The group met four times between October 2007 and October 2009 and followed a methodological approach which stayed close to the three phases of memory work, outlined by WILLIG (2001) and GILLIES et al. (2004). The first phase being the production of memories (1. *Generating memories*), the second phase supporting the analysis (2. *Analysis of memories*) and the third phase facilitating theory generation (3. *Theory-building*) (see WILLIG, 2001, Chapter 8, for an

introduction to the research process in memory work and CRAWFORD et al., 1992, for a detailed account). [7]

2.1 Phase 1: Generating memories

2.1.1 Forming a memory work group

In addition to our similar theoretical approaches, the research group was designed around people with a shared academic interest in alternatives to "mononormativity." The group consisted of gay, straight and bi people, some of whom explicitly identified with alternatives to monogamy including "polyamory" (HARITAWORN, LIN & KLESSE, 2006), "swinging" (VISSER & McDONALD, 2007) or "open relationships" (ADAM, 2004, 2006). The make-up of the group was coherent in terms of commitment to researching the topic but also represented a kind of maximum variation sampling (LANGDRIDGE, 2007), with a diversity of ways of understanding relationships and non/monogamies represented, in line with the need within memory work for heterogeneity of experience. Our memories of romantic jealousy were also diverse in considering experiences where we, ourselves, felt jealousy, those in which we were the object of a partner's real or imagined jealousy, and those where the jealousy in question was that of someone outside our own relationship/s (such as a third party or "other" man/woman). [8]

2.1.2 Writing the memories

Memories were written outside of the group meeting. It is usual for memory work studies to include memories written in the third person to encourage the production of accounts that focus on rich description, avoiding reflective comment. However, this was felt to distance participants from the process of recollecting their experiences and so was adapted to include writing in the first person beyond the first memory elicitation stage. Our aim was to include as much detail about the setting, the feelings and the bodily experience, so as to avoid explanation or generalization and prioritize description, in line with the existential-phenomenological research tradition (see LANGDRIDGE, 2007, 2008). Rich description was thus given priority, with all and any attempt to interpret or theorize our account bracketed, as much as is ever possible. Each group member was also encouraged not to edit the memory for narrative consistency. Inconsistencies and tensions were considered to insightful and useful. [9]

2.2 Phase 2: Analysis of memories

We analyzed the memories both separately (in between Meetings 1 and 2) and together as a group (in Meetings 2, 3 and 4). All group discussions were recorded and transcribed and used as further data to be analyzed. Discussions were conducted broadly within the feminist focus group tradition (RITCHIE & BARKER, 2005; WILKINSON, 1999). That is, they were leaderless and cooperative with an active attempt to minimize power differentials between participants whilst encouraging open and honest dialogue and disclosure of feelings. An important

feature of memory work is its collective nature. Data is produced and analyzed by a collective who seek to work together to understand the social relations within which the meanings are constructed. Whilst each memory is individually produced the hermeneutic process of analysis is highly reflexive and contextualized with all participants working collectively to discern the meaning of the topic being researched. The group discussions themselves are therefore subject to the analytic process alongside the analysis of the memories themselves. [10]

Each memory was discussed separately by every group member. Whilst memory work does not offer a specific analytic strategy, like GILLIES et al. (2004) we examined the series of actions contained in the memory as well as set of relationships described. We noted the use of stereotypes, cliché's, as well as tensions and "ruptures" in the way events or other people were described. The analysis was also influenced by some of the principles of existential and hermeneutic traditions of phenomenological analysis (see LANGDRIDGE, 2007), process philosophy and knowledge of emotion work. This entailed us attending to thematic patterns (through a strategy of thematic decomposition, STENNER, 1993) and also the macro narrative form of the stories being recounted. The analysis was first and foremost grounded in the data with a focus on the analysis emerging out of the memories rather than being imposed upon them. [11]

2.3 Phase 3: Theory-building

Memories were analyzed independently and as a group cross-section of memories. We then discussed the recurring themes, common processes, patterns and narratives through which jealousy came to be experienced. Any recurring themes, common patterns and narrative structures were noted and described in order to develop an account of both core invariant properties and those elements which varied across the accounts. The final session in particular, employed hermeneutics of suspicion (RICOEUR, 1970) as we brought theory (particularly ideas from process philosophy and existential-phenomenology) to bear on the data (see LANGDRIDGE, 2007, 2008, for more on the use of social theory as a hermeneutic of suspicion). However, we acknowledge that such a clear split between hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion is not completely possible as theoretical understandings inevitably colored our earlier descriptions and discussions, whilst personal experience no doubt colors the theories we are drawn to. Similarly, we all made a point of not reading other peoples' memories before writing our own each time (and the months elapsing between meetings meant that memories from the previous time were not well-remembered) but we inevitably influenced each other's telling of memories to some extent. [12]

Our analysis identified a narrative structure or pattern across all the memories of jealousy under consideration. This was not uniformly consistent however, as the three types of memories (described below) represented different expressions of this structure, highlighting varying aspects. We start by providing detail of the three different "types" of memories, which highlight different features of the experience of jealousy, to discuss the ways in which a core structure of romantic

jealousy differently manifests itself depending on the nature of the jealous experience being recounted. We then present the core narrative structure discerned across all memories before moving on to discuss the findings more broadly. [13]

3. Findings

Through the coming analysis we will return particularly to the non-rational, unexpected, intrusive nature of jealousy and its relation to competing virtual subjectivities. Particularly we will consider the "disruptor" moment where a different subjectivity that was being conjured up could not be maintained, a turning point in the narrative being recounted. Sometimes this is a subjectivity we have enjoyed imagining for ourselves in the present, or it is one we feel we'd like to keep open for the future, whilst at other times it is one that we had available in the past that is linked to a sense of a loss of possibility. [14]

In addition to this common structure, aspects of embodiment proved to be key across all the experiences. There was a strong physical performativity in the stories recounted wherein bodies, perhaps unsurprisingly, proved to be central to this particular lived experience (BUTLER, 1997b). Bodies were experienced in space, feeling lost or trapped in another's space, or with others with a vivid physicality and frequently a fleshly touch both within the written accounts and within the analytic process when they were recounted and discussed. Emotions were expressed through a variety of evocative and often particularly difficult inwardly directed feelings (churning, sick, nauseous, curdling stomach, pulsing vein, stunned senses, cold, can't breathe, furious heart, excess energy, buzzy, disgust, can't stand to be touched), alongside outward directed anger and rage. [15]

We identified three distinct groupings of jealous memories in our data, itself a novel finding suggesting the importance of attending carefully to the varieties of experiences of romantic jealousy possible. One set are "actual" jealous memories where all the people involved were actually present and there was some real sexual context. Another set are "virtual" jealous memories where we were the only people present for all, or most, of the experience, and all of the emotional business was happening in our imagination. The final set were "in between," in that two parties were present in the flesh but a third party or parties became more "real" during the process. Thus the sets of memories were on a continuum from "real" to "virtual." We will begin by considering the "in between" memories (Section 3.1), where the core structure described in Section 3.4 below first seemed apparent, and will then discuss the other "virtual" (Section 3.2) and "actual" memories (Section 3.3). In each case below, one example memory is provided (with names and places changed to ensure anonymity) to illustrate the analysis, though it is important to note that the analysis has been derived from careful consideration of all the memories in each category. These exemplar memories were selected on the basis of their representative quality and also that the group member who produced the memory was content with it entering the public domain (an important ethical consideration in memory group work). [16]

3.1 "In between" jealousy memories

"I am in the house of a man I am having a very short fling with. He is with someone else, who is unaware of what's going on. I don't feel good about doing this, especially being in his house. I would much rather be on neutral territory. He has cooked for me, and I feel so young and excited to be on a date, where I am the sole focus and object of desire. I am talking a lot and he finds what I am saying interesting, engaging, amusing, whilst all the time, the undercurrent of sexual desire is wafting round the room. However, this doesn't bother me; I know what this relationship is really about and I don't have grand expectations about anything being deep and meaningful. I find him extremely attractive but I don't see him as a potential serious partner. His views on things are simplistic; dumb even. The house is hot and inviting and I begin to wander around, to discover more about him and how he lives. As he is clearing up the dinner things, I look around at the objects on the shelves and the pictures on the walls in the house, which they share with others. I come across a photograph of him and his partner on holiday somewhere hot. He is behind her, holding her and she is brushing his face tenderly with her fingers. I think they are on a beach. She looks so beautiful and they look so in love. They are the perfect image of happiness: young, devoted and carefree. I begin thinking about their relationship and how jealous they both get when the other talks to another man or woman (or so I am told). If only she knew! I also began thinking that while I didn't agree with jealousy in principle (especially at that ridiculous level!), and hold particular views on monogamy; I envied their devotion, the blind passion in which they committed themselves to preserving their monogamous bond. Why didn't he feel that way about me? Why didn't anyone feel that way about me? I begin to feel alone, deflated and not so clever and desirable after all. The night turns sour, and I try to remove all emotion from what I am about to do—i.e. have sex. It works, and during the time we are having sex, the original feelings of youth, power and desirability return. I feel wrong having felt those things about their relationship and slightly embarrassed, but it did speak to something I can't quite explain. A jealousy of their jealousy: their devotion—even though I think it's bullshit."

This example highlights a core narrative of jealousy (detailed in Section 3.4 below) very clearly. It begins with an anticipatory context. In this case finding oneself in the territory of another with the emotional life that such displacement engenders: anxiety, excitement and desire. This anticipatory context frames the later jealous turn, with desire and uncertainty amplifying the eroticism, which appears key to how jealousy is evoked so powerfully. The ambiguity of the relationship is resisted here (as in the other in between memories). However, the "disruptor," where there is a significant narrative shift and the emergence of jealousy, comes with the objectification of the other, in this case in the form of a photograph (in the others it is the presence of a condom and via a phone call). The shift in subjectivity that occurs as a result of this is powerful and seemingly uncontrollable as she is unable to sustain herself in reaction to the objectification of the other's involvement. She struggles to sustain her identity of herself as powerful, desired, free in the face of this physical objectification of the person. Furthermore, the disruption occurs as a result of a shift in settings "I begin to wander around [...] I look around at the objects on the shelves and the pictures

on the walls in the house." Through wandering into *his and her* general space, the subjectivity of the actor becomes interdependent with the relationship that she is not part of. The object reminds her of this interdependency (see also REAVEY & BROWN, 2009) and shifts the focus from her desirability to the visual presentation of their stability. The precariousness of the set of relations with her lover, which were at first acknowledged and accepted ("I know what this relationship is about and I don't have grand expectations about anything deep and meaningful") becomes for a moment a source of anxiety and ambiguity ("Why didn't he feel that way about me? Why didn't anyone feel that way about me?"). Though this shifts towards the end of the memory ("I feel wrong about having felt those things [...]") the object (the photograph) and the spatial setting provide an opportunity to disrupt her original position as a non-jealous, desirable woman. It is, therefore, possible to say that the "assemble of relations" (LATOURE, 2005) that feed into this variable and contradictory experience of jealousy is achieved *through* the spaces and objects present. [17]

Furthermore, this disruptive moment is arguably a structurally minor event that no-one else would notice (indeed, the partner is completely oblivious) but it is this objectification that challenges the subjectivity of the actor in this memory and thus evokes powerful feelings of jealousy. The very nature of the actor's subjectivity as a person who is not jealous, who is just having fun is challenged through the objectification of another desired person (a person who is being cared for and desired): "Why didn't he feel that way about me?" [18]

In the other "in-between" memories a similar structure is also clearly present with only relatively minor variations. There is a common anticipatory structure in all three memories in this category, grounded in desire and a sense of being territorially unsettled. Part of this anticipatory work also included similar constructions of a subject who is not jealous, who is just having fun and who is desired. The key disruption through the objectification of the other provokes a stark contrast between forms of subjectivity the actors thought they were occupying and then a powerful "upwelling" of another subjectivity—a jealous subject being destroyed/damaged/challenged by the physical presence of the other (even though this is not what they aspire to): "that is not who I think I am (or even want to be)—but now struggling not to be." The actualization of the other in a physical sense seemingly evokes jealousy even in people who rarely feel it. What is also demonstrated is the sense of mismatch between threat and emotional response, which feels out of proportion and comes from nowhere. We would argue that this mismatch is a result of the anticipatory work prior to the moment of disruption and the challenge to subjectivity that such a disruption entails. In all cases equilibrium is quickly restored with the actors puzzled and embarrassed by their responses as they settle back into more familiar subject positions, where jealousy is not so acute or central to their overall understandings of selfhood. [19]

3.2 "Virtual" jealous memories

"She was visiting her ex-husband. She had briefly alluded to the reason, but I had not been terribly interested—something to do with some old documents that needed sorting out. We were staying in a cheap hotel room and she had driven to his house, which was about 40 or 50 miles away. She had left several hours ago and should have returned at least an hour ago. I was worried for her safety. Our car was not particularly road-worthy and she might have had an accident. But I had no way of contacting her, and I didn't know his phone number. Another hour past, and the worry intensified. I was alone, in a strange town, in a strange room, and felt powerless. And then it dawned on me that she may be late because she is 'with' him. It had never occurred to me before that I might not be able to trust her to be faithful, and we had never really discussed fidelity. In fact, we tended to dismiss any mention of such things as patriarchal and bourgeois. But it had never occurred to me that she might still be interested in him, or him in her. They married, she said, as a joke, since they were the least likely people of all ever to get married. Her, a free thinker and a rebel, him a notorious cocksman incapable of taking anything seriously. Little sparks of memory lit up my increasingly suspicious state of consciousness. She told me in a joking fashion how he would refer to me in belittling terms, as her toyboy (he was several years older than I, as was she). He was far more wealthy than I, drove a flash sports car, adopted an alpha male comportment. I had never challenged any of this in our brief meetings. I did not care, and gave him very little thought. I was happy to let him imagine his superiority, perhaps because I felt that, after all, I was now the partner of his ex-wife. She had always been very critical of him: an unreconstructed macho type, she said. It had never occurred to me that there might be more to it than this. An old phrase came to mind: 'she would say that, wouldn't she?' What had been worry and anxiety for her safety gradually transmuted into anger, shame and resentment. How dare she leave me here, stranded—unable to go out, unable to stay in. How could she deceive me? Hypocrite! And self-pity. Poor, poor me. And then I would swing back to imagine her having had a terrible car accident, and torment myself for my mean spirit and my premature judgment. And then back to jealousy. Each oscillation somehow amplifying the bad feelings into a sense of aimless panic. The feeling was very physical. A coldness around the heart, a stunning of the senses, the pulsing of a vein in my forehead. This went on for at least another hour. Then she returned. She had just got a little delayed. At least, that is what she said."

What we have categorized as "virtual" jealous memories demonstrate very similar structures to the "in-between" memories, though here there is no obvious intrusion of the physical presence of the other but rather their production in the imagination of the actor. The setting is also significant in contributing to the imagined sense of betrayal, as the actor feels displaced "We were staying in some cheap hotel [...] I was alone, in a strange town, in a strange room, and felt powerless." Whilst his partner was making a journey from "this strange town" the more familiar territory occupied by her ex-husband, the actor is the one "left" in a non-place "unable to go out, unable to stay in," where it is argued his subjectivity is more de-stabilized and left to unravel slightly. [20]

In the example given above, it is not only the setting but also the passing of time (temporality) that leads to the presence of the other becoming manifest. The other was already real because he was his partner's ex and therefore known as a real person. The feelings are thus more diffuse and less potent because of that. Here the anticipatory work is different though nonetheless important, with disruption occurring through the passing of time—and growing suspicion—rather than any single event. The actor thinks himself into jealousy rather than finds himself feeling this way: this is "becoming jealousy." Once again the response is arguably out of proportion to the events, to the evidence being drawn upon but the anxiety and ambiguity generated from the anticipatory context provides a potent force for such a "becoming jealous," for such a shift in subjectivity. The result of this work is doubt, a sense of not-knowing and it seems, given the amount of emotional work being done, a desire to hold on to such doubt, to return the investment by not letting go of the uncertainty that this experience engendered. He almost wanted it to happen to validate his subjective shift and warrant such an emotional move. [21]

The other virtual memory in this category demonstrated very similar qualities, though it was cast differently as the rules of that relationship were different—it being an open polyamorous relationship rather than a monogamous one. The same work is done in the imagination but as the rules are different this at first appears to be different. There is anticipation and then a turning point where the competition leads to a powerful evocation of jealousy and a critical challenge to subjectivity. This is even more acute given that the actor strives to resist jealousy in their relational life but then finds herself falling into such a position: "I shouldn't be worrying about this, but I am?" [22]

3.3 Actual jealous memories

"It was a fairly usual evening out, a few drinks in a bar out in the city centre and then on to the club. There was only really one club in Birmingham and this was as a result so often our destination of choice: it was cheesy and cruisy, the ideal combination at that time. We had been together for a good few years and would often be on the look out for someone to join us on a night out and this night was no exception. We did not have sex apart but rather would seek someone out for a threesome wherever possible. We spotted a tall young man in club, fairly cute and he certainly seemed to be keen, probably as much a result of the heady cocktail of alcohol and desperation that formed the backdrop of so much gay life in Birmingham. Some drinks later we both encountered him in the toilets, a common place for cruising and pulling and sometimes sex itself, and not that surprising given our frequent visits. We stood together at the long metallic urinal, looking along the row for some time. He was stood at one end and as we all were looking down checking each other out got hard, showing off our cocks to each other. He too was drunk, probably a lot than we were. As usual I allowed Rob to stand next to him, a preferred tactic of mine providing some critical distance between me and the man targeted. It offered a sense of safety, reduces shame and the possibility of easily negotiating an exit if necessary. He was looking down at our cocks eagerly. As far as I could see he was looking interested in us both and the excitement was growing. He then looked over and gave the nod to

join him in the cubicle. Rob headed after with me following behind. As I headed over the door slammed behind them both with me locked outside. At that moment I felt a gut wrenching sinking feeling, confused about what to do. I wanted to scream and shout and break the door down but the presence of the other man with Rob, along others coming and going, meant my sense of shame prevented me from following my preferred course of action. Instead, after a couple of rather pathetic knocks at the door I retreated back to the bar. But what to do? I was both furious at Ian and the other guy for rejecting me, abandoning me to this waiting and nothingness. My self confidence was rock bottom and I wanted to run. But something kept me there. I wanted to jump into a taxi and head home, change the locks and kick Rob out once and for good but this would mean he was left there for the night and might not return, he might abandon me totally, leave me for the other guy. A shag in the toilet was one thing but I could not bear further rejection. This was not fair. But how could I fight, the shame of shouting and screaming in public was too much for me. I spent the next five minutes or so with these contradictory thoughts and feelings running on a continuous loop. The ambivalence was tortuous and paralysing. Rob returned, a little shame faced, and my fury was explosive: 'How could you do this to me?'; 'It's over'; 'I hate you' were all I could pretty much muster but with such venom Rob knew I was serious. He made some pathetic excuses but in reality it was simply a case of alcohol, desire and opportunity that resulted in me moving from my usual first place to second in his consciousness. Would I have done the same thing? A difficult question but I know now that I probably would and have been in similar—though I say somewhat defensively, different—situations where my own sexual desires have meant the place of my partner is displaced, at least temporarily. Later that night and over the next days and weeks I moved from rejection to excitement when thinking of the incident as I forced Rob to recount what he had done in all its detail and with time found the memory less painful. But the feelings of rejection can still be felt—in my stomach—now as I write this. The story is inscribed on my flesh but now thankfully so overwritten with other stories of desire that it is no longer so deeply etched."

In this "real" memory, along with the other two in this category, the disruptor was clearly physical, literally a door in the face and exclusion. At first it is not clear what "the other man" desires, as he was potentially interested in both the actor and his partner ("He was stood at one end and as we all were looking down checking each other out got hard, showing off our cocks to each other"). At this stage, the urinal was a space of ambiguity (as there *appears* to be no single person positioned as the object of desire), shared by all three men. However, the move from the more public urinal to the private cubicle no longer leaves room for ambiguity in terms of who the object of desire is for this "other man." He has chosen the actor's partner and they have visibly excluded him (by slamming the door in his face). The slam of the door thus signals the shift of the actor, in real terms, from first to second place in the mind of his partner. [23]

The anticipatory context in this memory was highly charged and erotic and the outcome of the disruptive moment described above is a sudden upsurge in jealousy and a sense of anger and abandonment. A physical *and* imagined boundary was broken, resulting in the powerful upsurge of emotions being described. The challenge to subjectivity (as a non-jealous individual) was not so

much in this case about finding oneself in a position that was counter to their everyday understanding of selfhood, but rather a direct *confrontation* with their everyday understanding. What kind of fool were they to think that they were primary and such a boundary would be respected by their partner and indeed also by themselves? Here, unlike some of the other memories where there was not such a real challenge to the relationship, the emotional aftermath is longer lasting and more potent. And yet like the other memories, it is the ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding the situation (rather than what did or did not happen) that appears to "torture," "paralyze" and "disempower" the actor the most. It is also what keeps them from leaving the space, as leaving would provoke even greater ambiguity over the status of relationship "I wanted to jump into a taxi and head home, change the locks and kick Rob out once and for good but this would mean he was left there for the night and might not return." It appears to be the ambiguity that causes the greatest anxiety. Indeed, once the status of the relationship is acknowledged, in the following days and weeks, the actor uses his partner's sexual encounter positively, wherein he moves from feelings of "rejection to excitement." All three of these "actual" jealous memories followed the same pattern with only minor differences concerning the detail of the events being recounted. [24]

3.4 The core narrative structure

The common narrative structure of the jealous memories was as follows: Memories began with an anticipatory context where the actor engaged with *potential* subjectivities (of both him- or herself and the other/s involved). Often this involved an opening up to multiple imagined or virtual subjectivities. Following this, a key feature of the memories was a turning point we have described as the "disruptor." In this moment the physical or psychological presence of a "third" or "other" person became apparent, either in the form of a sudden event or realization, or a more gradual acknowledgment. In some way the fact of their existence, which had previously been known but in a rather distant way, became objectified and very "real." This moment triggered the embodied experiencing of jealousy, which was described in a very physical and visceral way. Throughout the memories a key aspect of this experience was a sense of being confronted by the fact that a certain image that the actor held about him or herself is not now viable: they had been drawn into playing with, or imagining, a certain subjectivity which is revealed to be one that is closed down, in some way, to them. Woven into such experiences is some kind of comparison with, or competition to, others who are imagined to offer something that the actor now cannot offer due to the closing down of this potential subjectivity. [25]

4. Discussion

Our findings provide a detailed processual description of experiences/actual occasions, of romantic jealousy that has hitherto been lacking in the literature. The elaboration of three distinct types of jealousy (real, virtual and in-between) highlights the complexity of this emotion and the need for careful and considered understanding of its various forms, something already recognized in extant

"mainstream" literature on this topic (see, for instance, DeSTENO, VALDESOLO & BARTLETT, 2006), as well as more critical social psychological literature (STENNER, 1993; STENNER & STANTON ROGERS, 1998). The phenomenological narrative structure, however, offers up an understanding of the essential features of this experience, across differing manifestations, such that we can see how it arises (within different romantic contexts) and crucially how these emergences result from distinct challenges to a person's subjectivity (self as desirable, self as free, self as primary to the other, self as certain and so on). Different subjectivities, some past, some present and some virtual, compete for primacy as the actors struggle to maintain a sense of authentic selfhood (HEIDEGGER, 1962 [1927]) within particular social and material contexts. These subjectivities are differently emotionally invested and, we argue, much of the power of this (invariably unexpected) emotional upsurge stems from the way in which jealous events (occurring as a result of a "disruptive" moment or event) provide a challenge to a person's sense of selfhood. [26]

Following HEIDEGGER (1962 [1927]) and WHITEHEAD (1935 [1933]) and their arguments that subjectivity is a constant state of becoming, we argue that the self should be treated as continually varied, depending on the *setting* in which it emerges. In this sense, the relationship between the past and the present is created by a subject/self that is perpetually in a state of becoming, as opposed to a version of the self that is constant, and of the same substance (and hence predictable). Forms of subjectivity (thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, perceptions and other first-person experiences) are inseparable from the circumstances and settings that provoke and are provoked by them. Jealousy cannot be adequately defined or described in relation simply to the psychology of an isolated individual. This is because the circumstances are, as it were, "folded into" (or *implicated* within) the definition of the experience. What is decisive to the attribution of jealousy is not the specific quality of the subjective experience alone but, for example, that anger is provoked by the intrusions of an unwelcome rival; apprehension by a fear of infidelity; or despair in the face of abandonment for another. Drawing this distinction also has the advantage of inviting attention to the patterns or *figurations* (ELIAS, 1998) specific to the circumstances and the way in which becoming jealous is an unequivocally psychosocial phenomenon, requiring an understanding in terms of the psychological, social and also material. [27]

What our work shows is that any notion of a predisposition to jealousy as a causal factor in the emergence of jealousy within relationships (PINES, 1998) is deeply problematic. The participants in this study all, to differing extents, engage in relationships in which jealousy is either not a key issue or has been resisted to varying extents. That is, all the participants would class themselves as, and almost certainly be classed as (using any standardized metrics), people who are low in levels of jealousy, as exemplified by some participants' engagement in forms of ethical (open) non-monogamous relationships. What has emerged instead is the essentially psychosocial nature of jealousy, with all the complexity that this necessarily entails. [28]

The necessity of a "disruptor" or trigger, traditionally understood as a perceived threat to the relationship, to induce jealousy has been highlighted here, in line with previous research on the topic (PINES, 1998; FLEISCHMANN, SPITZBERG, ANDERSON & ROESCH, 2005). What we see here, that is different from previous work on this topic, is how 1. the disruptor may or may not be a substantive event and 2. how the disruptor emerges from a background of ambiguity. Disruption involved much more than a simple trigger threat to the relationship but a variety of different challenges to subjectivity: from the presence of the other brought into consciousness through a photograph, through the passing of time resulting in "becoming jealous" to the immediacy of a slammed door signaling rejection. Ambiguity was also key in providing the existential ground for disruption to subjectivity to occur. All the actors were investing in (potential) subjectivities that, to varying degrees, were not relationally normative, and were differently invested emotionally and indeed socio-politically. This, combined with the unknown quality of the situations that were being experienced provided considerable ambiguity and, therefore, also anxiety (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962 [1945]). The emotional quality of the experience was also deeply inflected with ambiguity, a lack of certainty about what should be felt (cf. STENNER, 2005) and what actions should be taken. Such ambiguity further served to ensure that the emotional quality of jealousy was profoundly dysphoric and deeply unsettling for any sense of subjective certainty. [29]

The impact of the material world in disrupting subjectivities and evoking jealousy was also central as we see the relevance of such mundane objects as photographs, condoms, slamming doors and so on, and an emphasis upon the places and spaces within which events unfold. According to LATOUR (2005), objects, settings and artifacts lend something of their seeming stability and potential anchorage in recall. That is to say, recollected events may be inflected not only by the social relations that structure the events, but also by the artefactual or non-human relations present in the setting being recalled. What is recalled is not the behavior of persons set against some neutral backdrop, but rather an action-complex involving an assembly of relations between people and things. [30]

The emotional quality and process of the experience of jealousy is clearly complex and powerful. Anxiety and uncertainty emerge with people vacillating between anger, fury, frustration, isolation, disappointment, etc. This uncertainty results in a replaying of the situation, a reflective attempt to make sense of the irrational. The process invariably involves anticipation and ambiguity at first, then frustration, doubt, fear and anger as one moves, without control, between painful emotions. The power of these emotional responses was in many cases arguably out of proportion and/or often in the face of very little evidence/information and marked with a profound sense of loss, abandonment, and rejection. There was a visceral embodied quality to this emotional complex with what have been traditionally cast as inside (felt bodily sensations) and outside (anger, rage and fury towards the other) interwoven throughout. There was no separation here, no notion of psychic containment (cf. HEIDEGGER, 2001 [1987]) but rather a felt bodily experiencing that was always fundamentally relational. [31]

Our use of memories of real experiences of jealousy is significant. The majority of research on this topic has employed forced-choice hypothetical methods with undergraduate students to invoke jealousy, which often provide inaccurate responses as a result of methodological artifacts (DeSTENO, 2010). It has been argued that jealousy, like other emotions, needs to be studied in vivo such that emergent properties can be captured and biases associated with remote reasoning avoided (BARTLETT & DeSTENO, 2006; WILLIAMS & DeSTENO, 2009). Our work has sought to address this by focusing on our own "real-life" experiences of jealousy, with remote reasoning avoided through the rigorous application of memory work, informed by existential phenomenology and process philosophy. The innovative method we have adopted here enabled us to garner rich detailed accounts of the experience as lived and then examine these memories dynamically, moving hermeneutically from past to present within the analytic process. Such rich descriptions provide an opportunity to elucidate aspects of the process of emotional experiencing that is often missing in mainstream quantitative research on this topic. [32]

There are limitations to this study, however. Whilst this study represents the results of collective production and analysis of romantic jealousy caution must be applied when seeking to generalize beyond this specific group of people. Further research needs to be conducted, either through other memory groups or through other qualitative processual studies, to further validate these findings. Indeed, quantitative studies of jealousy might also seek to address the key issues found here concerning the essential structure of this phenomenon and the way that the surge of jealous feelings arise from a challenge to subjectivities. The status of memories is, of course, also potentially problematic in memory work. The relationship between past and present needs clarifying since memories are recollected and analyzed in the present but refer to a person's past. The ongoing debate concerning the status of acts of remembering will be valuable in this regard. Further, it would be useful if memory work studies were also conducted on more mundane recollections since this study and others using memory work have tended to focus on life events that are not everyday experiences, though we would argue "becoming jealous" is something that whilst not everyday is likely to be familiar to most people. [33]

Finally, it is worth noting that romantic jealousy in many instances resulted from people pushing the boundaries of their subjectivity, with them working hard to open-up new ways of relating that were less possessive and arguably more productive (HECKERT, 2010; RIGGS, 2010). In a sense we can see the actors trying to increase amplitude and power in the world by resisting normative (hegemonic) forms of relating in which jealousy is perceived as simply threatening to the established order. We see jealousy emerging within socio-culturally proscribed existential limit-situations, acting to emotionally police our actions. Such an affective response can, therefore, be productively employed within our own lives and possibly also in counseling and psychotherapy to both remind us of what matters to our sense of self and also when norms might be pushed or played with to free us from hegemonic notions of relationships and relationality. [34]

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