

On Man's Right to Be Jealous, and Woman's Duty to Induce Her Own Demise

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On the Right to Be Jealous

Jealousy is commonly discussed as a problem. However, with Kant, jealousy becomes a solution. In his commentary on Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Michel Foucault writes that

as [a] violent form of interaction which objectifies a woman to the point where she can simply be destroyed, [jealousy] is also a recognition of her value; indeed, only the absence of jealousy could reduce a woman to a piece of merchandise, where she would be interchangeable with any another. The right to be jealous—to the point of murder—is an acknowledgement of a woman's moral freedom. (Foucault 2008, p. 43)

The quote captures the passage from feudal model of ownership prevalent within the juridical thought in the 16th century to the forms of ownership between individuals that started to preoccupy juridical, as well as philosophical, discussions in the second half of the 18th century. The juridical thought of the 16th century focused on defining the relationship between an individual and the state or between an individual and “the thing in the abstract form of property,” whereas 18th-century discussions place the focus on forms of ownership amongst individuals “in the concrete and particular forms of the couple, the family group,

the home, and the household” (*ibid.*, p. 40). The inquiry into the forms of ownership amongst individuals led Kant to formulate his own doctrine on matrimonial law that was soon to become, and continues to be, one of the most discussed and problematic theories of marriage, giving way to fierce criticism.

One of these criticisms was directed against Kant’s conception of sexual union (*commercium sexuelle*) as a reciprocal use of sexual organs and capacities (*usus membrorum et facultatum sexualium alterius*) that Kant based on the distinction between conceptions of natural and unnatural union. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant writes:

I give the other person ... a right over my whole person, and this happens only in marriage. Matrimonium signifies a contract between two persons, in which they mutually accord equal rights to one another, and submit to the condition that each transfers his whole person entirely to the other, so that each has a complete right to the other’s whole person. (Kant 1997, p. 388)

For Kant, sexual union is considered natural only insofar as it is a union between persons of two different sexes (capable of procreation). The sexual union is further understood as a special type of contract (marriage) based on a mutual promise. With marriage, one promises the other an exclusive right not just over the use of one’s sexual organs but over one’s entire body. It is from this premise that man’s right of possessing the woman’s entire body extends to the point of its full destruction.

Kant provides the most condensed presentation of his doctrine in the section “On Rights to Persons Akin to Rights to Things” of his *Metaphysics of Morals*, where he defines this right as “that of possession of an external object *as a thing* and use of it *as a person*” (Kant 1996, p. 95). Already in Kant’s lifetime, the idea spurred accusations of inapt legalism (see, for instance, Vorländer 1893, 1904). Similarly, in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argued that Kant’s contractual view of marriage cannot be

seen as premised on “a right over a person, but only over something external to the person or something which the person can dispose of, i.e. always a thing.” (Hegel 2003, p. 72)¹ Similarly, in another critical approach, Christian Gottfried Schütz's reading of *Metaphysics of Morals* resulted in an exchange of letters with Kant at a time when he was finishing his *Anthropology* (Kant 1999, pp. 520-522). For Schütz, the doctrine had quite a few problematical points, which Kant then addressed in a letter dated 10 July 1797. The main objection involved the problem of subordination and objectification of woman by man that reduces her to a mere thing or an exchangeable good (*res fungibilis*).² Out of this follows a special type of satisfaction (which finds its model in cannibalism) that man gains from his—to use Kant's term—acquisition. Kant rejects Schütz's objection by asserting that marriage cannot be seen as a mere “mutual subordinatum” (*mutuum adiutorium*), but rather on the contrary, mutual subordination is “the necessary legal consequence of marriage, whose possibility and condition must first be investigated.” (*Ibid.*, p. 521)

Here, Kant's views (as already underscored by Hegel) still belong to and hinge upon the feudal model of ownership. However, what is key here is Foucault's insight that it is only and precisely by the absence of jealousy that the woman is reduced to an exchangeable piece of merchandise. If man's right to be jealous extends to

¹ “For Kant, personal rights are those rights which arise out of a contract whereby I give something or perform a service—in Roman law, the *ius ad rem* which arises out of *obligatio*. Admittedly, only a person is obliged to implement the provisions of a contract, just as it is only a person who acquires the right to have them implemented. But such a right cannot therefore be called a personal right; rights of every kind can belong only to a person, and seen objectively, a right based on contract is not a right over a person, but only over something external to the person or something which the person can dispose of, i.e. always a thing.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 71-72)

² Schütz to Kant: “You cannot really believe that a man makes an object out of a woman just by engaging in marital cohabitation with her, and vice versa.” (Kant 1999, p. 521)

the point of murder, then, following Foucault, it is precisely her expendability that makes the woman unexpendable. Here, Kant's idea of marriage, complemented by Foucault's insightful suggestion, shows a striking similarity with the conceptions of marital jealousy as proposed by structural anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis.

The Art of Producing Nothing, or Two Types of Nothing

In psychoanalysis, the relation between subject and object is never symmetrical. Despite the fact of their internal intertwining, the object and the subject cannot form a harmonious union, nor can they be in a conjunctive relationship, but rather are placed in a relation of radical disjunction. However, what is radical about this relation is the reversal of its (traditional philosophical) understanding. The psychoanalytic object is an internalized exteriority; however, the object's internalized nature does not make it reducible to the subject. An unbridgeable gap is created between them, which is precisely the result of their (non)relation. In this regard, Jacques Lacan puts forth two contexts in which the object appears in relation to this irreducible gap.

For the purpose of this article, suffice it to focus only on one of these two contexts, namely on the possibility of closing this gap in which the object appears as the object-cause of desire. Here, the subject is completely absorbed such that no room is left for subjectivization. In its place the fantasy emerges, representing a specific mode by which this gap between the subject and the object is closed or, more precisely, neutralized. The fantasy is there so that the constitutive gap could be (at least) ostensibly covered; the fantasy bridges the fissure that arises from the constitutively asymmetrical relationship between the subject and the object of desire. But could we not also say that the fantasy is not only there to cover the gap between subject and object, but that it also serves

to fill the void of the object itself? The true nature of the object-cause of desire is that it is an originally lost object that coincides with its own loss and hence is nothing but this loss itself. In other words, for Lacan, the object first appears only through the search for the lost object. Thus, the object is always a re-found, or re-discovered, object, i.e., an object that is itself caught up in the search for it (see Lacan 2020, pp. 18-32, p. 52).

If the void of this object, which arises from it being always-already lost, can only be filled by fantasy-construction, are we then led to positing two forms of fantasy? One that serves to fill the void of the object *and* another that neutralizes the gap between the subject and the object, thus placing them in an unproblematic relation? To avoid a possible misunderstanding (or, worse, conceptual nonsense), we must add the following: the subject fills the void of the object by itself becoming this void since the void of the object depends not so much on the object itself, but rather is a matter of the subject, its own subject-matter. This mechanism does not posit an unconditioned action on the part of a supposedly autonomous subject. It presupposes a subject which does not create its object, neither does it simply rediscover the lost object. Rather, the loss of the object is the consequence of the subject's refinding of it:

It is precisely in this field that we should situate something that Freud presents, on the other hand, as necessarily corresponding to the find itself, as necessarily being the *wiedergefundene* or re-found object. Such is for Freud the fundamental definition of the object in its guiding function, the paradox of which I have already demonstrated, for it is not affirmed that this object was really lost. The object is by nature a re-found object. That it was lost is a consequence of that—but after the fact. It is thus re-found without our knowing, except through the refinding, that it was ever lost. (Lacan 1992, p. 118)

Thus, what is re-found as object is nothing but the void of the subject. The refinding of the lost object is only possible through

the “medium” of fantasy, which serves a protective function, guarding the subject against its own negativity. The logic is exemplified by pottery. Pottery is a complex process entailing, and dependent upon, a generative power. The process begins with the absence of the object-pottery and ends with the establishment of an enigmatic symbolic bond which, by way of identification, transforms the (female) potter into the object. When analyzing the relation between potter and pottery, Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains that the potter is not merely “the cause of the pottery,” adding that if “[b]efore it was physically external to it, it is now ... integrated into the pottery.” (Lévi-Strauss 1988, p. 181)

The quote from *The Jealous Potter* perfectly indicates the point where Lévi-Strauss’ potter meets Lacan’s subject. The two are tied together by their relation to the object. Lacan’s subject comes to terms with the primordial loss by way of searching for the lost object. It does so by becoming this void, just like the potter “presentifies” the absence of pottery by herself *becoming* this absence. The skill of pottery requires not only deliberate and correct movements, attention to the smallest mistakes in the process itself, but, first and foremost, for the pottery to come as close as possible to its model—i.e., to *the model, which is there precisely as absent/lost*. A clay vase, for example, must be modeled after the original, otherwise it is not a vase. But the original is problematic because it is absent/lost. The problem with the original, which the potter must carefully imitate, is hence precisely the problem of emptiness that confronts Lacan’s subject. Both the subject and the potter must make do and content themselves with copies—the subject with a phantasmatic object, the potter with a copy of the original vase. They must make do with copies of structurally lost originals, which can only be thought against the backdrop of this primordial loss.

By forming pottery around its constituting absence, the potter simultaneously produces something else and something more than a mere empirical circumference, which fails to satisfy her creativity. The potter is precisely the producer of nothing that was not

there prior to the potting process and that emerges simultaneously with the circumferential, empirical object. Nothing emerges at the exact moment when the potter begins to model the clay rim and is a by-product of the pottery-making process. Thus, the potter does not simply outline the object, which would be nothing but the effect of a change in the physical state of the clay mass. By producing the physical object, the potter simultaneously produces nothing that wasn't there before. Pottery is productive of *a surplus scarcity* (see Santner 2022, p. 143, *passim*) indicative of a surplus-knowledge inherent in the art of pottery.

Such would be the classic schema, which, however, considers only one side of the story. The quote from Lacan unequivocally states that the loss of the object is a consequence of the finding of it. The object is — not found, but rather — lost through the subject's finding of it. To better understand this point, *nothing* (inherent in the logic of finding, as well as creating of the object) must be considered more closely.

First, we must presuppose nothing, which is surrounded by nothing and which, prior to the intervention of the potter *qua* subject, has no positivity. This nothing is precisely the emptiness or absence of the object highlighted by Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. Then there is the undifferentiated clay-mass, the Platonic Khôra, i.e., the formless stuff that, prior to the mediation by the demiurge/subject/potter, contains no positive qualities. And then there is nothing that serves as a model or idea of the original pottery, the ideal model of the primordial object. If clay is bare undifferentiated matter, then the original is a bare undifferentiated form. This nothingness does not exist prior to a concrete product that couples and thus actualizes the undifferentiated couple. Just like there is no object prior to fantasy, there is nothing prior to the act of creation. The nothing at issue here is a product of creation and hence a pre-ontological nothing preceding any ontological positivity.

And second, there is the ontological nothing, which — unlike the pre-ontological nothing of the *creatio ex nihilo* — pertains to

creatio nihil, or the creation of nothing itself. It is this nothing that the potter must bring closer to the original. The process is extremely tricky: for the art of pottery to bear fruit, the producer must rely on the elusive *comparison of nothing with nothing*. The differentiated nothing is precisely the *form* of absence of pottery itself, i.e., the nothing created together with its enclosing boundary, attaching itself to the previously non-existent form. Thus, nothing is redoubled and split into two: there is nothing inherent in the positive absence of pottery, and then there is nothing inherent to its enclosing boundary, or: nothing as the primordial void of the object, and nothing as pertaining to the subject's fantasy-object. This duality of nothing(s) forms a necessary (historically antecedent) presupposition, but the two modes do not emerge in sequence. The negative precursor to nothing, which would be subsequently followed by its positivization, is the effect of this positivization itself, such that talking about the first (primordial) and second (derived) nothing amounts to a rationalization of this duality. Rather, the emphasis should be on the fact that prior to finding the object the subject could not have known anything of the object-void which emerges only with the emergence of the enclosing boundary/fantasy. Put differently: we would know nothing of the preceding absence had the potter not given it its material form. Without the positive nothing of the *creatio nihil* there is no negative *ex nihilo*.

Let us stop for a moment to consider the object characterized by Lacan in *Seminar VII* as occupying a tricky intermediate position between barely being and not yet being an object. Lacan's introduction of this mysterious object (*das Ding*) appears somewhat abruptly in his theory, however, what seems truly abrupt is his swift abandonment of it. The concept provides us with a peculiar solution to the conundrum of the subject's relation to the object. The *irreal* nature of the Thing seems to highlight the aforementioned central paradox of the lost object as something not actually lost. Herein lies the necessary and decisive shift, as

well as the true conceptual value, of Lacan's *Ethics*. *Das Ding* is conceived of as an undifferentiated object, which simultaneously *is* and *is not yet* an object. As such, it remains irreducible to the status of the object discussed above. *Das Ding* is neither a phantasmatic object, nor can it be equated with the void of the object but is rather something pulsating in-between the subject and the object-void. *Das Ding*, we could say, is a false harbinger of a past, or primordial, loss. As such, it relates to the Real in a way that escapes us, which prompts Lacan to conclude that the "question of *das Ding* is still attached to whatever is open, lacking, or gaping at the center of our desire." (Lacan 1992, p. 84)

So far, only one aspect of the subject's relationship with the object has been addressed. Let us now see how this bond manifests itself in relation to affect. The love-object and pottery share a paradigmatic relation to jealousy. In what follows, I will highlight this minimal relation to jealousy in two distinct ways. In the first step, I will focus on the exchange economy of the love-object and pottery: love is essentially exclusive ("When I love, I am exclusive!" Freud says in a slightly more private tone) and hence, at least in principle, is not a matter of exchange. Rather, love pertains to gift-economy, the paradoxes of which were convincingly defined by Marcel Mauss. The love-object is exempt from exchange and is therefore essentially an object without exchange-value (or without an equivalent). In the second step I will focus on jealousy by providing its formula while defending the thesis that—within the framework of affect-theory—the logic of the subject's relation to the primordially lost object is precisely that of jealousy.

In *The Jealous Potter*, Lévi-Strauss's emphasis on the jealous nature of pottery as evidenced in South American myths strikes the reader as only tangentially touching on the key premise indicated in the book's title. Lévi-Strauss does provide a series of descriptive examples, referring to various myths and their convergences, but stops short of providing a more general definition. Thus, the conclusion of Lévi-Strauss' book seems to refer the

reader back to its initial question: “Is there a connection between pottery and jealousy?” Though often neglected, it is precisely the loving relationship tying the potter to her final product that seems best suited to guide us in answering this key question. The pottery-making process creates a bond between potter and pottery-in-the-making—a bond determined by the circumferential fantasy, i.e., with the potter’s imaginary representation of the object, which will ultimately give the product its final form while also bringing it into a thwarted and problematic relationship with the original. During the process, the potter’s fantasy relating to the finished image of pottery literally “sticks to” matter in giving it its shape. The decisive problem, however, that introduces the topic of affectivity only enters the process after the fact, i.e., when the product is finished and the potter has to part with it.

As long as pottery is being made, the potter is not separated from it; but the moment the product is finished—taking on, for instance, the shape of a vase—the potter-producer must separate herself from it so that her product may enter exchange. The product thus becomes a useful object for others satisfying the others’ needs. The key problem at issue here is not so much that the potter loses her product, but that her product, once it has taken on its final shape, is *socially reshaped* as a mere utilitarian object, thus losing its surplus-value, or aura, granted to it by its phantasmatic character. And it is precisely at the point of this social recasting of the object that jealousy enters the picture. The potter is jealous because she feels robbed not of her pottery but rather of its phantasmatic surplus scarcity. There is a flipside to this process: since the aura of the object results from its place within the subject’s fantasy, the melting away of the aura brought about by the social reshaping of the object is correlative with the dissipation, *aphanisis*, of the subject.

The Right to Be Jealous and the Duty to Induce Jealousy

In his analysis of the Dora case, Freud shows how Dora becomes an object of exchange. At the core of all of Dora's jealous impulses lied a tacit agreement between Mr. K. and Dora's father who had, Dora was convinced, handed her off to Mr. K. as a kind of reward for patiently putting up with his own relationship with Mrs. K. Dora's father could not simply have handed Dora over to someone else without her ceasing to figure as his love-object. Here, we once again come across a split introduced into the love relationship by the logic of symbolic economy. For the father to be able to put her surplus-object into circulation, he first had to annihilate it; by allowing that her agalma be used by another, the father effectively reduced Dora to a mere object of exchange. Mediated by her father's gesture, Dora (like the potter) passes from the order of "being" (the agalma) to the order of "having" (the agalma), insofar as we understand this change as the direct result of these two oppositions. This transition draws love into symbolic relationships and thus into the economy of exchange. Put differently: we are dealing with two positions that mark the relation of the subject to the object. But the opposition is not only one between two heterogeneous orders, but is inherent to both and can be further defined by two questions: "Am I or am I not the object-cause of the Other's desire?" and "Do I possess or not the object for the Other?" In the first case, the object arises as agalma, in the second, it arises as a phallic object that introduces the logic of exception or, in economic terms, of competition.

Both positions entail their specific internal ambivalences, or intrinsic fluctuations, which, in affective terms, point toward two types of jealousy differentiated in accordance with the masculine/feminine divide. This is clearly evidenced by the example of the potter which entails the subject's imaginary, and hence narcissistic, relation to the object preceding their symbolic separation ("If before it was physically external to her, now [...] she is integrated into the pottery," writes Lévi-Strauss in the already

quoted passage). The ambivalence of the second type is not the result of the transition to the always-already operative symbolic economy, but rather is the result of the uncertain relationship between “have” and “have not”, which defines the logic of *envy* as it relates to the problem of possession.

By entering the order of exchange, Dora is reduced to a useful object, or mere property. The Lévi-Straussian example showed that this is a double reduction of pottery *and* the potter to the status of a use-object. The potter is reduced to a mere *producer* of useful objects and therefore deprived of her status as the object’s *creator*. In the order of “being”, the image of the potter relates to the idea that the object is solely hers, while in the order of “having” this image dissolves in the idea that the object-subject can and is possessed by others. The transition from the order of “being” to the order of “having” entails a further moment. Affectively speaking, this transition entails a move from the field of love to that of hatred. It entails the move from feminine to masculine jealousy, or, more specifically, a transition from jealousy to envy.

The effects of jealousy thus arise from a discrepancy between two fundamental positions — “to have or not to have” and “to be or not to be.” The oppositional elements entailed in each of the two positions are inherently variable, or unstable, and can easily turn into their opposite. A subject previously registering under one position can easily pass into the opposing register, such that nothing guarantees the subject’s existence in its desired place. Jealousy is the affective indicator of the uncertainty of this process. It is situated within at border region separating the opposing terms, occupying their very edge. A similar thesis can be found in Lévi-Strauss, when he writes that “jealousy tends to create or support a state of conjunction when there is a state of threat of disjunction” (Lévi-Strauss 1988, p. 173). Jealousy, in this respect, arises from the desire to be attached to someone or something that has been taken away from you, but it can also be understood as a desire for someone or something that the subject structurally does not

and cannot possess. Accordingly, could we not say that jealousy is not merely a sign of suspicion regarding the love-object, but first and foremost an eminent sign of the subject's asymmetrical relationship with the originally/primordially lost object? Jealousy tends toward unity with the object—unity provoked by the threat of separation.

From here, let us return to the basic dichotomy of love and hatred so fundamental to jealousy. Jealousy is always a stranger within the field of love, but a stranger that is not simply external to the sphere of love, but rather inherent to it. Oriented by an image of an external imposter disturbing the love-relation, jealousy is itself the native imposter in the sphere of love. Hatred—which, in jealousy, represents an internal threat to love—is fueled by love itself, such that we can describe it in Hegelian terms as love in its oppositional determination. In jealousy, hatred emerges as the Real core of love, distinguishing the latter from its supposedly isolated polar opposite. This ambivalence, therefore, does not point to an external dissonance, where hate would impose upon and hinder love from the outside. Rather, it accentuates their internal intertwining, or the inherent/primordial nature of the ambivalent conflict:

And in fact such a protracted survival of two opposites is only possible under quite peculiar psychological conditions and with the co-operation of the state of affairs in the unconscious. The love has not succeeded in extinguishing the hatred but only in driving it down into the unconscious; and in the unconscious the hatred, safe from the danger of being destroyed by the operations of consciousness, is able to persist and even to grow. (Freud 1955, p. 239)

Jealous hatred stands for the *becoming unconscious* of hatred as inherent to love.³ The ambivalence between love and hate that

³ I borrow this turn of phrase from Santner: “*we never cease becoming unconscious of what has no part in the field of knowledge.*” (Santner 2020, p. 65)

manifests itself at the level of jealousy is its structural feature and must be related back to the discussed disjunctive threat that pertains to the subject's relationship with its primordially lost object. In every love-object, the subject finds the originally lost object, with the latter effectively defining the very essence of the object of love. The specificity of the originally lost object is precisely that the subject does not possess it, that it is, so to speak, originally separated from it. But since the loss is primordial, love itself is essentially characterized by an ambivalent conflict, or jealousy. Love is either jealous or else it is not love at all. The subject of jealousy tends toward bridging this original disjunction to establish a conjunctive relationship with its object. The affect that accompanies this representation signals the elimination of the original disjunction. That which has been originally lost thus arises as a result of the find. Thus, strictly speaking, the loss is not Real; what is Real is the threat of it.

This brings us back to Kant's doctrine of matrimonial law. In his *Anthropology*, Kant associates the end of pain of love with the end of love itself. He thus connects the presence of jealous impulses to the very essence of love, suggesting that love inherently involves feelings of jealousy. Though abstractly referring to the fear or apprehension of losing the affection or attention of a loved one to someone or something else, for Kant, jealousy is inherently *gendered*, but in a very specific way. On first approach, it may seem that, for Kant (and Foucault), there is no other jealousy except for masculine jealousy. However, I want to conclude with a slightly more nuanced and critical point.

It is not jealousy as such that is reserved for the husband, but rather the *right* to be jealous. We've already pointed out the paradoxical status of this right: jealousy signals simultaneously the woman's reduction *and* the impossibility of her reduction to a mere object of utility. I take Foucault's point regarding this "right to be jealous—to the point of murder—[as] an acknowledgement of a woman's moral freedom." However, such an understanding

of moral freedom entails a suicidal consequence. Is man's *right* to be jealous not matched, or complimented, by woman's *duty* to induce jealousy in man? And does this duty not entail the double meaning of "demise" in the sense of, firstly, transferring of the woman *qua* property to another man (thus prompting her husband to exercise his right to be jealous) by which, secondly and consequently, the woman brings on her own demise (is, ultimately, murdered)? Is this duty to induce jealousy not the problematic consequence of Schütz's and Foucault's assertion of the woman's freedom, or moral subjectivity? Can the false heroism of the freedom to dutifully orchestrate one's own murder truly be praised as a liberating effect of matrimony?

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