

Introduction to the publication *Concerning Jealousy*

In 1895, Edvard Munch produced the first painting in a sequence of works all titled “Jealousy.” The image depicts a romantic triad consisting of Dagny Juel, her husband, writer Stanisław Przybyszewski, and Munch himself. Munch can be seen in the background, in amorous embrace with Juel, while Przybyszewski occupies the foreground, rendered in green, his mask-like face looking towards the viewer in distorted angst. Over the proceeding forty years, Munch would produce twelve variations of that same painting. Although the series could be read as a continuation of Munch’s ongoing interest in allegory, the image reveals a psychic investment in the scene of infidelity which exceeds mere disinterested depiction. “Jealousy” would repeatedly stage the discord between Munch and his contemporary by carefully fixing the characters in their respective roles of seducer, betrayed, and object of desire. The conflict between Munch and Przybyszewski was thus mediated through the painterly presentation of Juel’s affection. When preparing “Jealousy” for an exhibition in Paris, Munch was forced to withdraw the work out of personal concern:

“I had traveled to Paris to hold an exhibition there. Then they showed up, and I had to leave with my paintings because it was indeed the two of them that I had painted—him green and her naked. The exhibition in Paris came to nothing [...] This woman-related affair ruined a lot for me.”(1)

In his novella *Über Bord*, Przybyszewski would reverse the roles. In the book, the painter’s wife, Isa, starts an affair with the writer, Falk, and eventually the painter kills himself, while Isa and Falk seem to live happily ever after. (2) Both Munch and Przybyszewski’s tendency to expose their romantic entanglements—regardless of how much played out in real life—indelibly changed their work, the unpleasantness of jealousy becoming a source of creative motivation. Juell’s characterization as a femme fatale carries bitter foreboding when one considers her murder at the hands of a spurned lover three days before her thirty-fourth birthday. (3)

Concerning Jealousy at Scherben, takes Munch’s painting both as a point of departure and a site of critical inquiry as a means to explore the ways in which artists have broached the subject of jealousy as a generative tool and a creative problem within their practices. A core comprehension of jealousy entails the perceived risk of losing something or someone due to the involvement of a third party. This third party remains elusive to the jealous individual; it withholds something, the nature of which may not be discernible. The only certainty is that, inherently, the jealous individual can never attain it. The anticipated loss is the result of this unnamed thing gaining enormous weight in the jealous mind. Due to its speculative nature, which can verge upon paranoia, the jealous person is often compelled to do the dirty work of assessing their familiar environment on the lookout for disturbances. Apart from glances and gestures, they might notice a previously unlocked drawer now locked, or the arrangement of chairs suggesting unwelcome proximity. This recognition may be followed by a strong desire for their surroundings to revert to a state wherein each object’s placement is clear, including their own comfortable place within it. The attribution of jealousy is highly undesirable, as exemplified by Munch and Przybyszewski’s mutual attempts to attribute the jealous role to the other. But unlike envy, jealousy carries little theoretical baggage, and has less biblically inflected moralism associated with it. While envy often emblemizes a failure of character, jealousy is commonplace—perhaps constitutive of

human relations. Jealousy marks the limits, both real and speculative, of an existing social order: whether the implicit contract of monogamy, the illusory promise of career advancement, or the lack of acknowledgement within a friendship, jealousy is the threshold wherein expectations meet the demystified world of shared social reality. The exhibition aims to expand understandings of jealousy beyond mere romantic-melodrama and into a broader argument for the generative and essential qualities of limitations across various personal relations.

This book serves as a companion to the artistic works which comprise the exhibition. Its various contributions have evolved around the ways in which jealousy can be a creatively generative affect as well as a critical tool for examining both the limits and possibilities of a given relationship. In Agnes Callard's text, "The Other Woman", she reads Tolstoy to argue that jealousy is not only a negative affect, but can be understood as a speculative and generative experience of relationships. Henrike Kohpeiß discusses the letters of Ingeborg Bachmann and Max Frisch, examining their partnership as a site of "ungovernable feelings," while Graham Hamilton explores the relationships between artists and their critics, mapping out complex and often duplicitous desires for mutual recognition demanded by these roles. The epigraph of the book is a poem from Pati Hill, writer and artist, widely recognised for her xerox-copies, which programmatically aim to translate invisible housework into a visual language. Over the past ten years, interventions within the field of critical theory have increasingly made space for deeper explorations and outright avowals of "negative feelings." (4) The experience of jealousy marks us as always limited by our fantasies for one another; although such experiences of rejection and disillusionment are often painful, what is revealed within them is the glimmering fact that limitations reveal the entangled nature of all relations. What defines a horizon of possibility always forecloses a different future. Jealousy signals the illusory possibility that relations could always ever be otherwise— that such other forms could only be accessed through the (im)possibility of relation.

— Charlotte Berg & Jackson Beyda

(1) Arnold, Matthias, *Edvard Munch*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1986), 56–57.

(2) Przybyszewski, Stanisław, *Homo Sapiens: Romantrilogie*. (Hamburg: IGEL Verlag, 1993)

(3) These men-related affairs ruined a lot for her.

(4) The publication of Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* in 2007 and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* in 2011 are two examples of the so-called "affective turn" in critical theory. The publication of the *2nd Affect Theory Reader* by Duke University Press last year demonstrates the continued relevance of these topics.