

Edvard Munch's Toponymic Codes

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Abstract The Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) created upwards of 1789 paintings of which only 14 are inscribed with toponyms. The extreme rarity of place names in his work invites consideration. In some cases, these place names signify the direct witnessing of a location or a person. More interestingly, the toponyms operate as literary devices that focus attention on the artist's sickness and health, on physical collapse and rebirth. Interpreting toponyms as forms of 'time travel' and 'space travel', the article considers Munch's signatures and toponyms as elements in the formation of his public biography.

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1 Introduction

In 1900, the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) painted a crucifixion scene and signed it "Edvard Munch Kornhaug Sanatorium 1900" (fig. 1). In 1907, he painted a large scene of naked men on a beach, signing it "E. Munch Warnemünde 1907-1908" (fig. 2). A self-portrait is signed "Edvard Munch - Kjøbenhavn" – 1909 (Copenhagen) (fig. 3) as an artifact of his convalescence at a private clinic. All three were painted in well-known therapeutic sites, and these announce Munch's presence there through their inclusion of toponyms, or place names. As such, the signatures and place names, in concert with the motifs, structure performances, securing the artist's body and identity in illness and resurrection by association with place. Munch is increasingly recognized as an artist who mined events and sensations from his own experience as well as participating in inventive self-staging.¹ Particularly as the artist

approached middle age, he struggled to maintain his relevance in a changing European art context. His 'placements' were outward looking, texts directed toward his audience as much as they were artifacts of place and space. Munch produced upwards of 1789 paintings (the number included in Gerd Woll's systematic catalogue of the artist's work, herein cited as "Woll"), 748 print matrices (there are c. 20,000 prints alone in the Munch Museum), and thousands of drawings.² Of Munch's 1789 paintings, only 14, or less than 1% overall, display toponyms on their surfaces.³ A productive writer as well as a visual artist, Munch composed extensive literary notes, a play, and a vast corpus of letters to friends, family, business associates, and institutions; some 15,000 pages are preserved. The relationship among his media, particularly between his literary texts and his visual art, is tangled and complex. (Guleng 2011). The toponyms deployed by Munch, in their extreme rarity and in light of the artist's experimentation with

1 I am grateful to Gerd Woll and Sam Engelstad for their generosity, and to the Theodora L. and Stanley H. Feldberg Chair at Wellesley College for research funds. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. On Munch's inventive use of his own image and experience, cf. Berman 1993b, 627-46; Heller, 2006; Clarke 2009; Britt, Steihaug 2013.

2 Woll 2009; 2012. Magne Bruteig, Munch Museum, is currently completing the systematic catalogue of the drawings. A comprehensive introduction to the drawings and sketches may be found in Bruteig, Kuhlemann 2013.

3 In addition to the three cited above, four are identified with sites in France from 1890-1 (Woll 2009, 199, 202, 225, and 227); two, dated between 1904 and 1906, display "Weimer" (690 and 696), one from 1907 is identified as "Berlin" (768), an additional painting is labeled "Warnemünde" (818), and three additional paintings from 1908-9 bear the place name "København" (820, 822 and 824). This article considers only 4 of the paintings in depth. The signatures and inscriptions on Munch's graphic work are outside the parameters of this article. His dating on the graphic works was particularly eccentric as, in signing an earlier work, his recollections may have been inaccurate. Woll 2012, 32.



Figure 1. Edvard Munch, *Golgotha*. 1900. Oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm. Oslo, Munch Museum. © Munch Museum

text, invite speculation regarding their function in his work. This paper proposes that Munch's rarely deployed toponyms operate as metanarratives, engaging artistic biography, performance, legacy, and mythologizing.

1.1 Munch's Signatures

The artist was in no way systematic in regard to his signatures. Many fewer than half of Munch's paintings bear his signature, and these he signed in various ways: E. Munch, E Munch, Edv. Munch, Edv. Munch (accompanied by a date), E. Munch (accompanied by a date), E.M., and EM. He occasionally signed a canvas twice. Rolf Stenersen, Munch's patron and friend in the

artist's later years, reported that he generally signed his pictures only at the time of sale [1944] (1994, 96).⁴ Yet Munch's signature appears both on those works that he sold and those that he retained.⁵ As reported by Stenersen, Munch willingly added signatures to works he had earlier sold to people who had shown him generosity: "If they ran into difficulties he was always willing to help. However, if anyone who had bought a picture inexpensively in the past came to have it signed he usually refused...yet if he liked the picture he would sign it anyway" (85). Stenersen quotes Munch as offering: "I'm going to get a brush and sign the picture. That'll make it go up in value, won't it?" (173). His lifelong friend, champion, and biographer Jens Thiis cited the historical value of Munch's signature when in

⁴ Stenersen also reported that Munch was "curiously unreliable" in the dating of how works: "In his later period, he might add a few brush strokes to paintings that had been standing around for many years and then supply such works with very recent dates. On the other hand, paintings completed in the 1930s's might be given dates going ten to fifteen years back" (94).

⁵ Munch's signature appears on 21% of the 997 paintings in his own collection, not held in Oslo's Munch Museum. Perhaps, speculates Mille Stein 2017, the artist was satisfied enough with those particular paintings to have exhibited them. Gerd Woll reports that approximately 760 of Munch's total output of paintings bear his full signature. Personal communication, October 9, 2012.

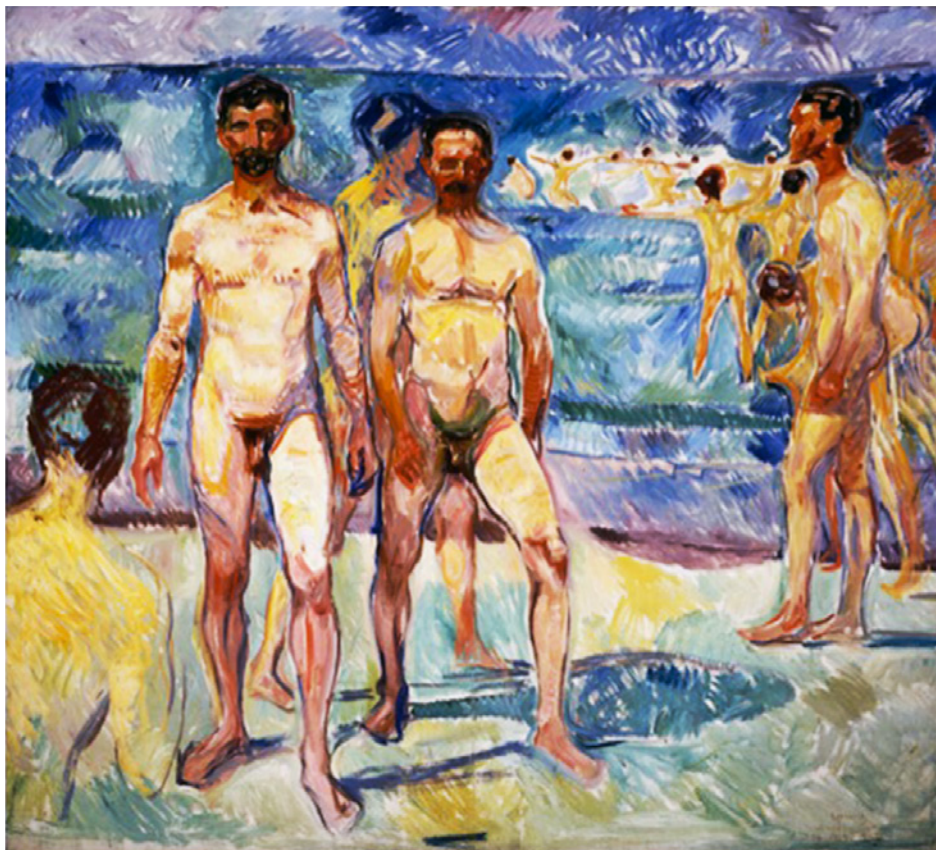


Figure 2. Edvard Munch, *Bathing Men*. 1907-8. Oil on canvas, 206 x 227 cm. Helsinki, Finnish National Gallery/Ateneum Art Museum, coll. Antell

1941, he asked Munch to inscribe works formerly given as gifts:

several of these things, first and foremost the paintings, remain unsigned, and I think that is a shame. Their authenticity will certainly be clear throughout the ages, but I would wish [...] that you place your signature and if possible the dates on these things which are of art-historical significance.⁶

In the 1930s, Munch was embattled with the tax authorities that had attached a high duty to the artist's properties and art collection. A letter draft on behalf of Munch, addressed to the tax authorities, stated:

Munch does not consider [much of his holdings] to be finished and suitable for sale and

would under no circumstances sign them in their current condition. An unsigned image has altogether no market value and could raise doubts about who had painted it.⁷

In these instances, Munch's signature performed as a marker of authenticity, a form of currency, and a medium of connoisseurship and legacy.

Generally, his signature and date appear in a painting's corner and are not incorporated into the motif. In some cases, his signature was a constitutive element in a painting. One example is *Self Portrait in Hell* (fig. 4, 1903), on which the artist signed his name across the image of his naked belly, and excruciatingly, tantalizingly, just above the bottom of the canvas at his groin. Such a definite gesture may be interpreted from a psycho biographical perspective. However, as a material presence, the signature brands the

⁶ Letter from Jens Thiis to Munch, dated 7 June 1941, MM K 1179 Munch Museum archives. http://emunch.no/HYBRIDNo-MM_K1179.xhtml#ENo-MM_K1179-01 (2017-05-18).

⁷ Letter draft to Akers Ligningsvæsen, Akers Ligningsråd, Akers ligningskontor, dated 4 September 1935, MM N 3635, Munch Museum archives. http://emunch.no/HYBRIDNo-MM_N3635.xhtml#ENo-MM_N3635-00-03r (2017-05-18).

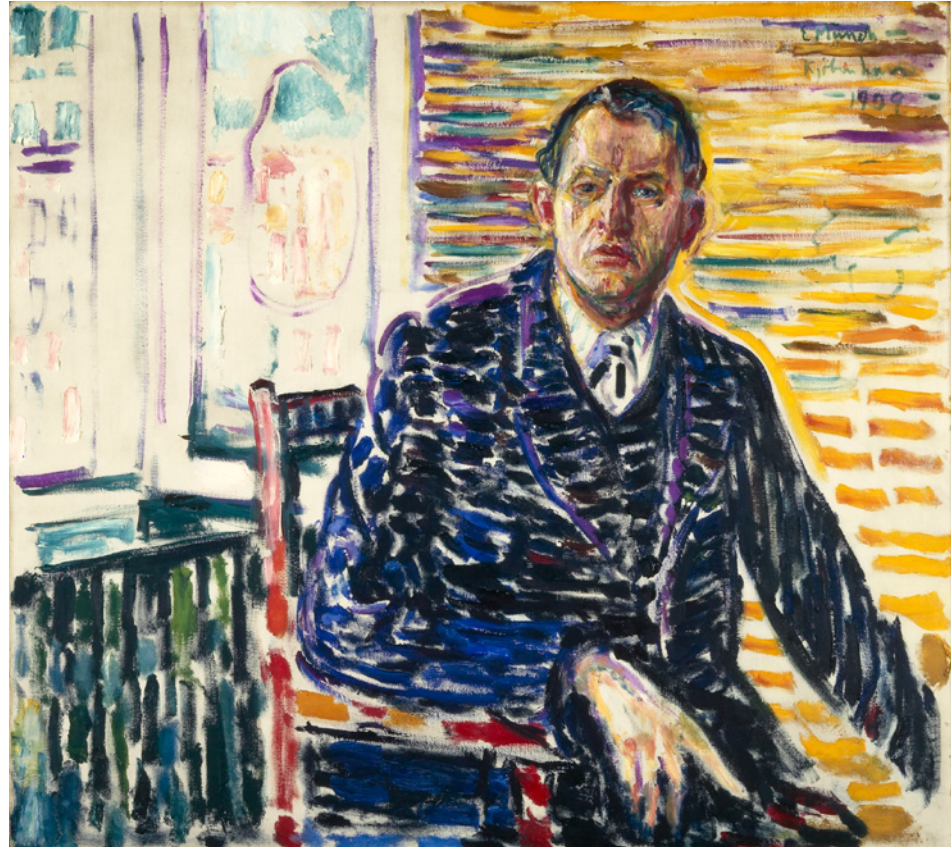


Figure 3. Edvard Munch, *Self Portrait in the Clinic*. 1909. Oil on canvas, 100 x 110 cm. Kunstmuseene i Bergen (Rasmus Meyers Samlinger)

artist's body, marking that representation of flesh as being by the artist and of the artist. As such, it is a literary code, a guide to the 'reading' of the body in concert with the fiery background.

2 Toponym as Travel Archive

Munch's rare toponyms are likewise constitutive elements. As a rule, Munch did not manifestly identify the sources for his motifs, preferring instead that his images remain open-ended: "Whether or not the painting looks like that landscape is beside the point. Explaining a picture is impossible. The very reason it has been painted is because it cannot be explained in any other way. One can simply give a slight inking of the

direction one has been working towards".⁸ Given Munch's general reluctance to anchor his motifs in tangible place and space, and considering the exceptional rarity of place names that accompany his signature on his paintings, it seems clear that his few toponyms are significant.

The earliest of them follow the conventions of tourist views: Two of them, inscribed on paintings created in and around Paris in 1890, appear to be the self-conscious efforts by the Norwegian artist to assert his presence in Europe's artistic epicenter.⁹ These works follow the tradition of itinerant artists in the 18th and 19th centuries who routinely identified their landscape motifs with toponyms and the dates of the works' production. Such place names were mnemonic devices, prompts for the memory of places once

⁸ Edvard Munch, N29, Munch Museum archives, Translated in Tøjner 2001, 134.

⁹ *At the Wine Merchant's* (1890; Woll 2009 202), represents a slice of generic urban life, only located both temporally and spatially by the signature "Edv. Munch Paris 1890". The other, *The Seine at St. Cloud* (1890; Woll 2009 199), but for the vivacity of technique, has the appeal of a popular tourist's view. Two paintings from 1891, each entitled *Fisherboy from Nice*, resemble standard ethnographic depictions of exotic 'types'. They are signed in two languages: "E. Munch. Nice 1891" and "Edv Munch Nizza 1891".

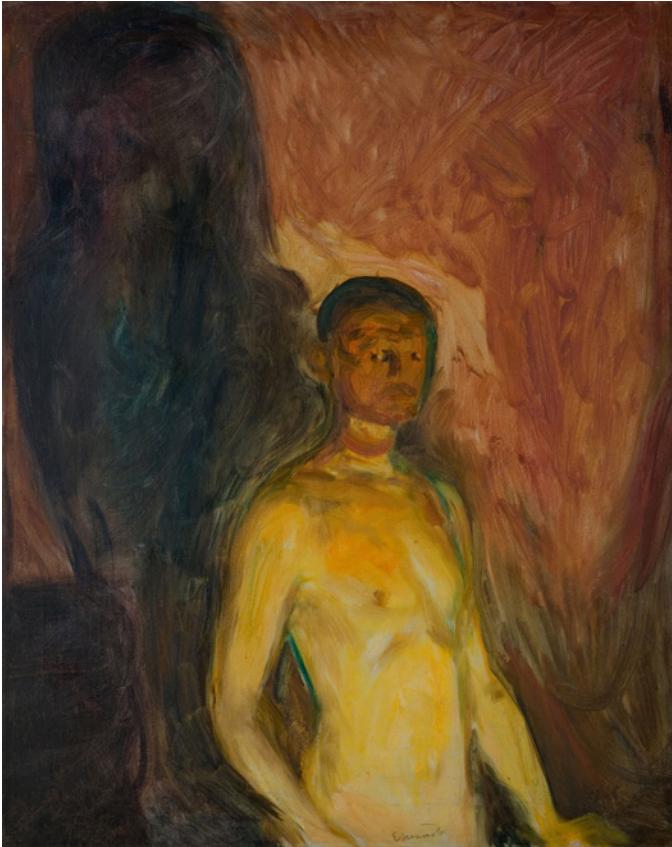


Figure 4. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait in Hell*. 1903. Oil on canvas, 82 x 66 cm. Oslo, Munch Museum. © Munch Museum

visited as well as empirical ‘evidence’ that gave credence to the sites and the artists as witnesses. Within the Nordic context, the Danish artist C. W. Eckersberg helped to initiate the practice of plein-air painting and emphasized to his students the importance of empiricism as the basis for individual inventiveness.¹⁰ In these cases, pace names provided time and space travel, the elements of an archive of sensorial memory.

Symbolist artists of Munch’s generation typically eschewed identifying their landscape motifs by place name, instead endeavoring to create ‘mood paintings’. The material presence of a landform in a painting was only tethered to the geophysical site by a string of associations triggered by the suggestive painted motif. Munch’s countryman Harald Sohlberg identified his best-known motif, *Winter Night in the Mountains*, for example, not by the geographical site his many variations represent (the Rondane

mountain range), but by the more generalizing title ‘mountains’.¹¹ Likewise, Munch’s Swiss contemporary Ferdinand Hodler rarely identified his high-mountain motifs, allowing them, like Sohlberg’s ‘mountains’, to inspire more metaphysical speculation. A notable exception was a series of paintings of the Jungfrau from 1908 on which Hodler inscribed “Schynige Platte”. Sharon Hirsh notes that these particular named views mirrored and participated in the increasingly popular Alpine literature and touristic photography of the period. Hodler specified his exact location in relation to notable views (Hirsh 2001, 172). To identify the topography on the surface of his painting was to confirm that Hodler had followed that trail, experienced that view, evidence of an authentic witnessing at the core of the artist’s formal experimentation. When the addition of a toponym is so rare in an artist’s production, it stands outside of routine practice

¹⁰ On C. W. Eckersberg’s pedagogy, cf. Hornung; Monrad (eds.) 2005.

¹¹ Øivind Storm Bjerke (1995, 64) notes that Sohlberg “wished to dissociate the experience of the sublime from its geographical anchor. It was his concept, *vis* vision that was supposed to count”.



Figure 5. Edvard Munch, *Golgotha*, detail. 1900



Figure 6. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait in Hell*, detail. 1903

and therefore signals a kind of event, an invitation to activate a narrative within, under, or over the motif itself.

2.1 “Edvard Munch Kornhaug Sanatorium 1900”

A leitmotiv in Munch’s early critical reception was the artist’s illnesses and alleged derangement and negative genetic endowment. As noted by Reinhold Heller, Munch endeavored to dispel this painful notion, particularly as the artist suffered from respiratory illnesses and harbored anxieties about his family inheritance. Yet he also helped to support such a reading by creating signposts that suggest the absolute confluence of “his person, his psychological state, and the image he produced” (Heller 2006, 17). Mieke Bal has identified this strategy as one of ‘narrator-character’, a “focaliser [...] the explicit or implicit holder of the point of view through or with whom the viewers gain access to the specific visions of the world we see in the images” (2017, 11). Several of Munch’s paintings display

toponyms that intersect expressly with, and are souvenirs and public proclamations of, his physical and psychological health. They help to focus and focalize. In 1900, Munch was a guest at Kornhaug Sanatorium where he painted (or where he identified himself as having painted) the crucifixion scene *Golgotha* (fig. 1), signing it with the place name “Kornhaug Sanatorium”.

The painting represents the crucified body of a male, vitiated and nearly genderless, at the base of whose cross a mass of figures congregates and swells toward the center. Such modern reinterpretations of Christian sacred imagery were widespread among members of Europe’s avant-garde in the 1890s, including James Ensor’s *Calvary* (1886), Paul Gauguin’s *Agony in the Garden* (1889) and the artists associated with Joséphin Péladan and the Ordre de la Rose+Croix (cf. Eisenwerth 1997, 403-4, 411-2). However, Munch’s invocation of the particular space of the modern sanatorium within this context is an extravagant form of self-staging. The motif may be understood as a kind of therapeutic outpouring and guided knowledge-

able viewers to identify the caricatural figures with Munch and his circle.¹² The place name does more straightforward work. The inscription occupies nearly 1/3 of the lateral composition, its red paint conspicuous against the explosive dark blue sky. It is also linked visually to the red cloud-like form to its left (fig. 5). These elements, in turn, echo the sky represented in *The Scream* (1893), and it is notable that *Golgotha* is listed as having been installed in 1902 at the Berlin Secession side-by-side with that canvas (Kneher 1994, 151). *Golgotha*'s signature, place, and date together both disrupt and direct interpretation. Claude Gandelman interprets such an inscription as a device that causes us to "leave the vantage point from which we can focus on the whole image and to come closer to the canvas in order to decipher them...They make us 'focus out' of the global picture in order to 'focus in' on them" (1985, 7). The prompt to envision a fashionable sanatorium, combined with the reputation of the artist founded in part in illness, directs the viewer's gaze, and belief, to the abstracted figure on the cross as, potentially, representing the artist himself. The painting's title, *Golgotha*, does not represent the hill upon which Jesus was crucified, but an existential Calvary. The toponym is a signal that the martyrial body is simultaneously historical and contemporary.

Kornhaug was one of Scandinavia's leading sanatoria,¹³ an internationally acknowledged site within a growing 'geography' of health tourism (Williams 1998, 23-4). Munch's topographic specificity, with its resonances with *The Scream* and with a noted place of convalescence, was a map with which to locate his body and mind, a code that helped to narrate the artist's identity as agonist and martyr already manifest in the motif itself (cf. Jensen 1992, 138-45; Wilson 2006, 15). Munch repeated the gesture of site

naming several more times as a means of staging his intimate biography as artistic metaphor.

2.2 "Edv. Munch Kjøbenhavn 1909"

In October 1908, Munch suffered a physical and psychological crisis and sought treatment in Dr. Daniel Jacobsen's private clinic in Copenhagen. The *Self Portrait in the Clinic* (fig. 3) was painted during the artist's seven-month convalescence. In it, the artist rendered himself as facing the audience, his torso tilting forward, as though rising from the chair upon which he sits¹⁴ He applied the thick paint in a rhythmic series of parallel lines and long, thickly laden dashes of pure color, leaving primed white canvas in reserve as background. At the upper right, in green paint that contrasts markedly with the hot colors of the variegated background, Munch wrote "E. Munch Kjøbenhavn -1909-", specifically locating his presence in that city (and for the knowledgeable public, at that clinic, at the time (fig. 6).

In the fall of 1908, Munch had been planning an exhibition at Copenhagen's Kunstforeningen (Artists' Organization) when he entered the clinic for treatment. The Danish newspapers were quick to capitalize on the artist's predicament by publishing articles entitled "Norwegian painter mentally ill", and "The Norwegian Painter Edv. Munch Residing in a Nerve Clinic".¹⁵ When Munch's exhibition opened on 22 November, one month after he had entered Dr. Jacobsen's clinic, his treatment continued to be held up for public consumption: "Edvard Munch is currently a resident, as one remembers, in Daniel Jacobsen's Clinic".¹⁶ It seemed particularly important for Munch to mitigate negative publicity.¹⁷ Shortly after the artist had entered the clinic, his close

12 Munch had been involved in a complicated love affair, and at that time, two couples who were intimates of the artist were experiencing painful separations, and the characters alluded to in the painting may play out a drama of erotic misery. Cf. Høifødt 2010, 111-25.

13 Cf. Jacob, Pannwitz 1902, 307. On Kornhaug and the painting *Golgotha*, Cf. Berman 1997, 21-6, 211-15.

14 The posture is similar to a self-portrait photograph that Munch took while at Dr. Jacobsen's clinic. There also exists a photograph of the painting in its early stage of formation. Cf. Eggum 1989, 136-7.

15 Clippings from October 1908 in Munch Museum archives. Cf. Berman 2016, 85.

16 Anonymous, "Edv. Munch i Kunstforeningen", *Vort Land*, 22 November 1908, clipping in Munch Museum archives.

17 Four years prior to his clinical stay in Copenhagen, Munch had been the subject of bad publicity. Toward the end of August in 1904, Munch and the Norwegian writer Andreas Haukland had a public altercation, resulting in a court case against the writer. Between the end of August and mid-September 1904, the Danish newspapers were filled with reports of Haukland and Munch's fight, relishing the story of "The last Norwegian Battle", "The Norwegian Brothers in Violence", "Norwegian Life in Copenhagen", "The Norwegian Berserkers", and "The Bloody Drama outside the [Hotel] Bristol". Clip-



Figure 7. Edvard Munch, *Daniel Jacobson*. 1908-9.
Oil on canvas, 204 x 111.5 cm. Oslo, Munch Museum
© Munch Museum

friend Christian Gierløff placed an article in *Dagbladet*, a newspaper published in Kristiania (the older name for present-day Oslo), that attempted to re-script Munch's illness:

I thought you were sick. All of the newspapers reported that you are so grotesquely sick?' 'Munch laughs.' '[...]...It is my leg that is bad. The right one. Whether or not you want to believe me, I get massaged three times a day, and on Sundays and holidays, up to five times.¹⁸

While at Jacobsen's clinic, Munch planned a number of exhibitions of his work, including two large-scale exhibitions in his hometown, Kristiania. This would be the first time he exhibited there in several years. Perhaps remembering that in 1900, a critic for the newspaper *Morgenposten* that claimed "Munch is preoccupied with the same issues, year after year. Now he is old fashioned. Time gets away from him",¹⁹ Munch wrote to his close associate Jappe Nilssen in Kristiania, expressing the desire for a fresh identity:

I must exhibit in Norway but it will be different from the past - my paintings were created abroad... I therefore no longer have that old combativeness - or more properly said, fighting spirit.²⁰

Munch soon amended this statement to focus on his relationship to his market:

Sales are now very important for me - as I now must live in a different manner than in the past.²¹

pings in the Munch Museum archives. See also Buchhart et al. 2009, 21. This event continued to preoccupy Munch throughout his stay at Jacobsen's clinic, as reported in his letters to his friends.

¹⁸ 'G.' (Gierløff, Christian), "Edv. Munch: Brev til Dagbladet", *Dagbladet*, 8 October 1908, clipping in Munch Museum archives.

¹⁹ Arne Næss observes that for an artist who saw himself as a radical, approaching middle age, such a statement would be particularly devastating. *Morgenposten*, 4th December 1900, quoted in 2004, 225.

²⁰ Munch to Jappe Nilssen, letter dated 28 December 1908, in Bang 1946 23-4.

²¹ Munch to Jappe Nilssen, letter dated 3 February 1909, Copenhagen, in Bang 1946, 30. When in May 1909 Munch moved back to Norway, his cousin Ludvig O. Ravensberg recorded him as saying "I hope a new star for my art will arise". Ravensberg, diary notation LR 537, dated 7 May 1909, Munch Museum archives.

The very next day, he wrote again to Nilssen, elaborating on his notion of staging his work for the Kristiania audience to signal new beginnings:

I think one ought to include some of my recent richly colored paintings – otherwise one would have a false sense of me as a painter. I believe I am on a roll despite my illness; I am selling well and working productively.²²

Munch also explained to his Swedish patron Ernst Thiel that he hoped his stay in Jacobsen's clinic might itself initiate a new era for his art,²³ a sentiment that he repeated in 1909 as he left the clinic and moved back to Norway. His cousin Ludvig O. Ravensberg recorded him as saying "I hope a new star will arise for my art".²⁴

Munch's inscription "Kjøbenhavn" signaled such a renaissance when the exhibition opened in March 1909 at Blomqvist, Kristiania's premier gallery. A review in the newspaper *Morgenbladet* notes that, "Among the exhibition's most consequential paintings, the standout is Munch's self portrait painted this year, located below, near the entrance. That painting has a deep human resonance, a gripping self-understanding. This is a man on whom life has left its mark, a man who has suffered...how distant this is from the youthful self-portrait in the museum [*Self Portrait with Cigarette*, 1895] or the current exhibition's other self-portrait with the proud, direct gaze. In addition, standing before this painting, I am reminded of the greatest artist of them all: Rembrandt".²⁵

"Kjøbenhavn" was a code: as Oskar Bätschmann has noted, self-portraits are often of the highest interest to a viewing public and are seen to be direct expressions of an artist's psyche, assumed to be painted without commission, and therefore the "product of artistic freedom...[...] an intimate monologue, revealing personality" (Bätschmann 1997, 13). Calling forth his physical location at the clinic, and painted with what Munch's friend and

biographer Jens Thiis later termed, "violent brush strokes", the painting is a direct instruction to the audience to consider the illness and witness the exuberance. (1933, 289-90)

The artist may be for the moment in a clinic, and will always be known to have been at that clinic, but while there, the artist's energies seemingly exploded off of the canvas. Three other paintings, signed, dated, and bearing the name "Kjøbenhavn", attest to Munch's drive and ambition while at the clinic. Two of them are full-standing portraits of Dr. Jacobsen himself (1909, fig. 7; Woll 2009, 820 and 822), one created for the doctor and the other for Munch's own collection, as was his practice. The other represented Munch's friend, the writer Helge Rode (1908; Woll 2009, 824). Munch had exhibited the portrait of Rode in his 1908 exhibition in Copenhagen, both Rode and the larger of the Jacobsen portraits (in Munch's own collection) at Kristiania's Blomqvist and in the city of Bergen and at Copenhagen's Charlottenberg in 1909, among numerous other venues.²⁶ Attesting to an unusual sociality within the clinic, the paintings argue for a view of the clinical treatment as a period of vitalization and rebirth. They are to be read as well as seen.

2.3 "Warnemünde"

At the same exhibition at Blomqvist in spring 1909, Munch exhibited *Bathing Men* (fig. 2), a painting about which he had particular concerns and expectations. A large canvas, painted in bright, prismatic colors, *Bathing Men* displayed male frontal nudity without recourse to classical referencing or other art historical or literary trappings (cf. Berman 1993a, 71-83; Körber 2006, esp. 83ff.). The painting had been excluded from an exhibition in Hamburg in 1907, due, according to Gustav Schiefeler, to local 'prudery'.²⁷ Perhaps with a concern for the same potential

22 Munch to Jappe Nilssen, letter dated 4 February 1909, in Bang 1946, 32.

23 To Ernst Thiel, undated, quoted in Bardon et al. 1999, 197-8; and in Gry Hedin, "Edvard Munch and Contemporary Psychology", in Buchhart 2009, 144.

24 Ludvig O. Ravensberg, diary notation LR 537, dated 7 May 1909, Munch Museum archives.

25 Hans Dediken, "Edvard Munch", *Morgenbladet*, 27 March 1909. Clipping in Munch Museum archives.

26 The other Jacobsen portrait, in the collection of the doctor, was exhibited in Stockholm in 1913 among other venues. Woll 2009, 802, 804-5, 807.

27 Schiefeler wondered why male nudes should be more provocative than female nudes. Gustav Schiefeler's diaries, 30 October 1907, in Eggum 1987, 259, letter number 352.

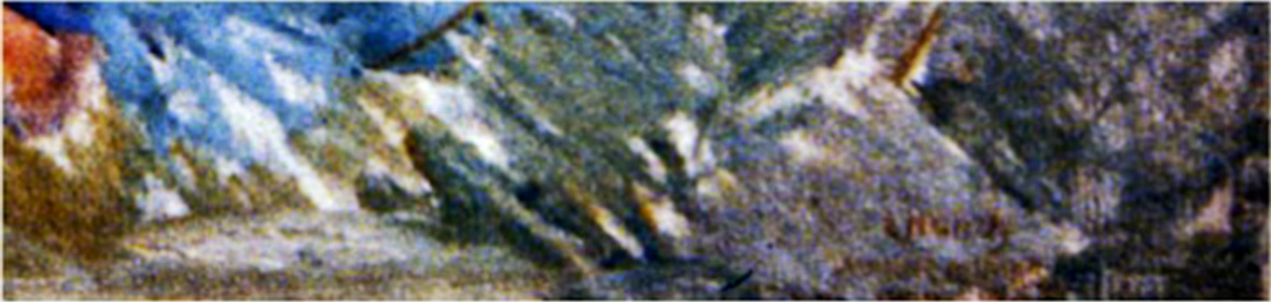


Figure 8. Edvard Munch, *Bathing Men*, detail.1907-8

for disquiet in Kristiania, Munch accorded the painting special attention when issuing installation instructions to his friends at home while he resided in the clinic.²⁸ In addition, in the summer of 1908, Munch envisioned the central painting as part of a polyptych, “on one side childhood and youth, on the other old age – In the middle Man in full power”.²⁹ Perhaps this plan was intended to defuse the specter of frontal male nudity by embedding it in a conventional *Stadien auf des Lebens Wegen* (stages of life).

The gesture of naming “Warnemünde” in the lower right corner of the canvas likewise rationalized the naked bodies by placing them in the physical space of a healthful bathing culture. Painted in a russet hue, matching the bodies of the men pictured in the painting, the words vibrate against the cool colors of the hatch-marked ground (fig. 8). The men pictured are therefore not merely performing bodily pleasures in a space of homosociality, but participating in the culture of bodily cleansing on that particular beach and in that specific environment of vigorous good health. A painting that is so clearly sexualized is consequently ‘explained’ by the place itself. His act of witnessing such a scene locates him within that environment as both spectator and participant.³⁰

In the decades of Europe’s most rapid industrial and technological growth, and the increasing sense that the urban environment was dangerous to body and body politic, seashore resorts and health spas became popular retreats. Germany was particularly noted for its *Freiluft Kultur* (open air health culture): “It is increasingly normal to travel to a bathing place by the sea. A while ago, it was only the wealthy that had the possibility of settling by the sea each summer, but now many thousands of city dwellers hurry to the beach as soon as the heat sets in” wrote a contemporary commentator.³¹ The village of Warnemünde, on Germany’s Baltic coast, was especially well known throughout Germany and Denmark as a bathing town, part of the circuit of ‘sanitary tourism’.

Munch painted numerous motifs in Warnemünde, in both the summers of 1907 and 1908. However, he only inscribed the town’s name on two canvases, *Bathing Men* and a portrait that he made of Gustav Schiefler (1908; Woll 2009, 818), the Hamburg art collector who was one of Munch’s chief patrons and the author of the first systematic catalogue of Munch’s prints. Schiefler visited Munch in Warnemünde in the summer of 1908 where he posed for the artist.³² In the case of the portraits, the place names provide evidence of the proximity of model

²⁸ In contrast to the other works in the exhibition, Munch was very specific about the wall that the painting should occupy. Munch to Jappe Nilssen, letters dated 1 March 1909 and 3 March 1909, in Bang 1946, 39, 42.

²⁹ The format is discussed in relation to both sacred and art-historical tradition in Trine Otto Bak Nielsen (2006). Edvard Munch: The Three Life Ages: 1907-1908 [Unpublished MA thesis]. Oslo: University of Oslo.

³⁰ Photographs taken, and staged, by Munch picture himself painting directly on the beach using bathing attendants as his models. Eggum 1989, 132-3.

³¹ Balticus, “Die Seebäder Mecklenburgs”, *Die Heimat. Volksblatt für Mecklenburg*, 9, 1 December 1907, 68, quoted in Annie Bardon 1999, 9.

³² In a letter to his wife Luise, Schiefler described the posture that Munch had selected for the portrait, and the underdrawing that limned it. Schiefler, from Warnemünde, 23 July 1908, in Eggum 1987, 1: 286, letter number 401. Munch painted a second version that he retained for his own collection, as he had done in the case of Daniel Jacobsen’s portrait, which was typical of Munch’s work as a portraitist. One of the versions was exhibited in Copenhagen in 1908, along with a painting entitled *Warnemünde* as well as Munch’s portrait of Helge Rode from “Kjøbenhavn”.

to artist, and they testify to the Norwegian's cosmopolitanism and networks of prominent, creative people. This is also a context for three paintings, all portraits, inscribed with the name "Weimar".³³

The painted word "Warnemünde" signifies a souvenir, as do the inscriptions of "Kornhaug Sanatorium" and "Kjøbenhavn". In each of those locations, Munch sought treatment for illness. As records of these experiences, one might view them as corollaries to *ex voto* paintings, as reminders of the body in pain and the body recovered. In each of these cases, the place names appended to Munch's signature operate as texts through which to read the motifs.³⁴

3 Signatures as Texts

Signatures themselves have historically performed various tasks as texts, among them offering signs of authenticity and carrying the aura of individual genius.³⁵ In the 1890s, Munch had used texts strategically as functional elements in his paintings and prints. *The Scream*, the artist's most famous motif, repeated in several variations, is a particularly rich example of a work that mobilizes text with, and as, a signature element. *The Scream* was inspired by Munch's memory of a sunset over Ekebergåsen, a hillside overlooking Oslo's harbor. In a literary text dated "Nice, 22 January 1892", Munch wrote:

There I was walking along the road with two friends. The sun set. I felt a tinge of melan-

choly. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired [my friends looked at me and walked on] and I looked at the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword over fjord and city. My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature.³⁶

In the following year, Munch translated the text's attestations of fear, isolation, and sensorial dysphoria into wildly dissonant colors, perspectival exaggeration, and rhythmical brushwork of *The Scream*. Toward the top of this first painted version is an inscription penciled onto the most prominent red form in the sky: "Kan kun være malt av en gale mand" ("Could only have been painted by a madman"). Some scholars have conjectured that Munch rendered this sentence and others consider that a flustered gallery visitor may have inscribed it in the 1890s or early 1900s.³⁷ If the latter, it is significant that Munch did not erase or overpaint the statement, as Reinhold Heller argues, but Munch left the sentence to prompt the association between motif and state of mind: "Mad Artist at Work" (Heller 2006, 17). Heller further notes it is important to consider Munch's verbal texts and visual images as 'highly mediated', the result of conscious decision-making on the part of the goal-oriented artistic to "maximize their communicative capacity for an audience" (Heller 2006, 30). He argues that Munch's visual texts were specifically intended for audience consumption.

³³ Munch spent considerable time in Weimar between 1904 and 1906, circulating within the circle of Harry Graf Kessler. The portraits are of Kessler (Woll 2009, 696), Hermann Schlittgen (1904; Woll 2009, 579), and a posthumous rendering of Friedrich Nietzsche (1906; Woll 2009, 690). The importance of Weimar as a cultural capital cannot be overstated, and the significance of Kessler as a vanguard cultural and artistic champion is immense. Munch's deployment of the city's name on his canvases was a mark of distinction for himself and for his subjects, the memento of a progressive cultural environment. On Weimar, cf. Easton 1996, 495-532.

³⁴ Around the same time that Munch painted *Bathing Men*, Munch painted *The Death of Marat II* (1907; figure x), a motif is the culmination of five years of variations, some entitled *The Murder* (Woll 2009 741) and *The Murderess* (742). The painting seems to fictionalize an altercation between the artist and his then lover, Tulla Larsen. The event, which occurred in 1902, resulted in the mutilation of the artist's left hand. The title allegorizes the event, recalling Jacques-Louis David's canonical painting and recasting the violence as a sacred martyrdom. Gustav Schiefler reports that Munch painted the motif while staying in Berlin (Eggum 1987, 1: 232, Schiefler diary entry 9-12 March 1907). The place name that appears on the painting's upper left. The sole example of the word "Berlin" on a painting by Munch, despite the numerous other works he produced there, the toponym creates a fascinating dissonance, especially given the painting's inclusion at the Salon des Indépendants in 1908. "Berlin" manifestly locates the artist in the eponymous city but severs the motif spatially and culturally from the act of Munch's mutilation (which occurred in Norway) and the French national story. Like the existential "Golgotha/Kornhaug", the dissonance between "Berlin" and "Marat" re- and de-locates the martyrial image.

³⁵ Matthew 1998, 630 as quoted in Guichard 2008, 1, 25, 54

³⁶ Manuscript T2760, Munch Museum archives, translated in Heller 2006, 18.

³⁷ Heller 2006, 17. *The Scream* is one of the most widely reproduced images worldwide, and one of the most examined in the scholarship on Munch. The two most comprehensive studies are Heller 1973 and Ydstie 2008.

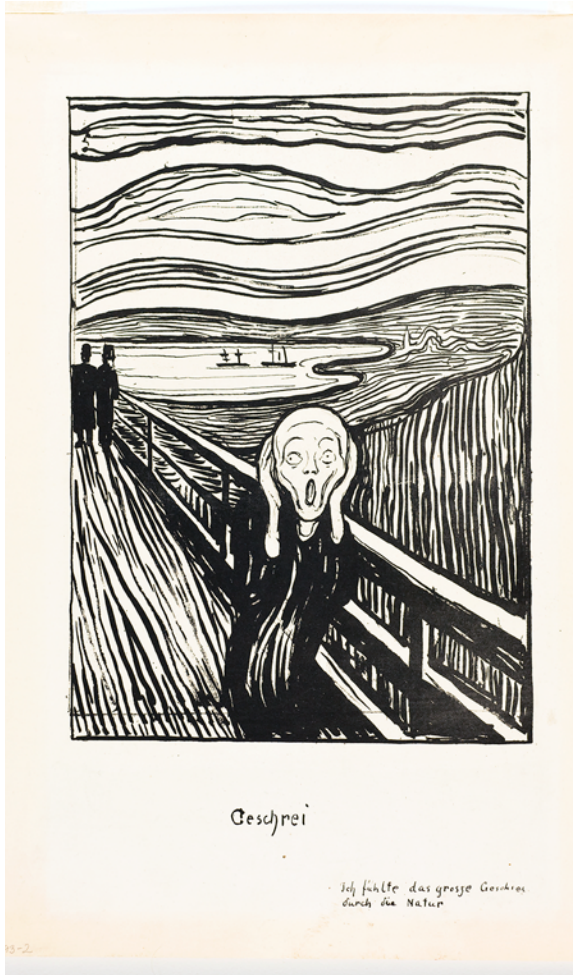


Figure 9. Edvard Munch, *The Scream*. 1895. Lithographic crayon and tusche, 355 x 254 mm. Printed by Liebmann, printed in black ink. Oslo, Munch Museum MMG 193-2. © Munch Museum

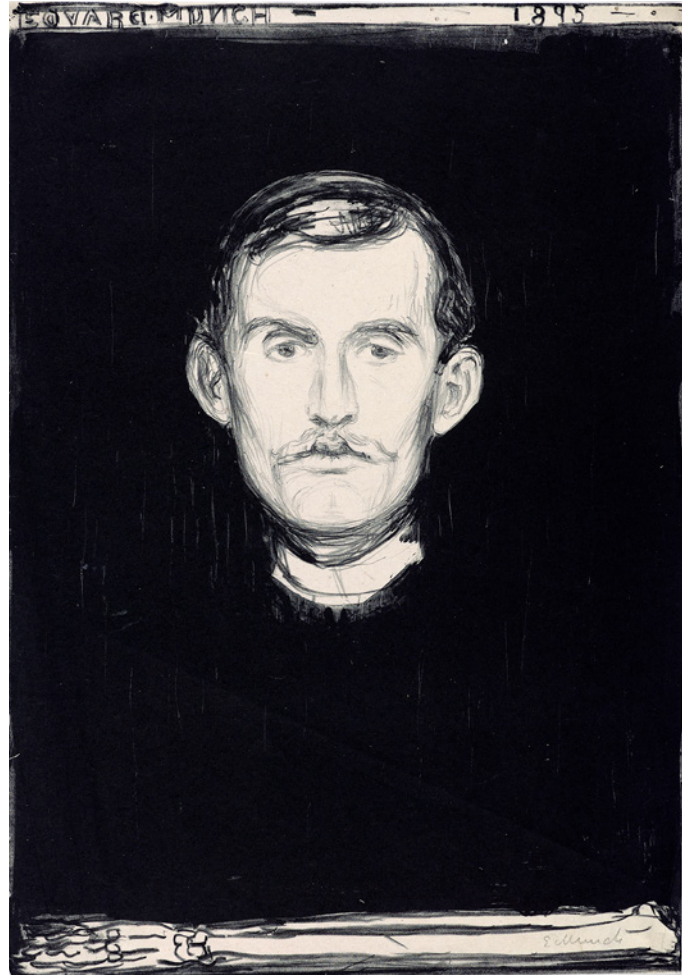


Figure 10. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait*. 1895. Lithographic crayon on cream paper, 45.8 x 36.8 cm. Oslo, Munch Museum, MM G 192-57. © Munch Museum

In 1895, Munch translated *The Scream* into a lithograph, inventing distinctive linear configurations as parallels to the painting's dissonant colors and forms (fig. 9). He wrote the title, in German, "*Geschrei*" onto the lithographic stone below the motif, and, to the right, he inscribed: "Ich fühlte das grosse Geschrei durch die Natur" ("I felt the great scream pierce nature"). He then varied the format of the lithograph by cropping it in three different formats: In one, the entire image and text ensemble is present. In another, only the motif and title remain. In the third, the pictorial motif is the

sole element and no text appears (cf. Woll 2012, 64-5). Each of the three formats does different textual work: the motif, title, and ekphrastic fragment together proclaim a first person witnessing, a personal confession. The configuration of motif and title is more suggestive and universalizing (not my scream, but a scream); and the motif alone operates itself as entirely open-ended.³⁸ The "Ich" may be seen as a speech effect that John L. Austin categorizes as 'perlocutionary', a statement that intentionally persuades the audience to act or understand an action in a particular way. (1962,

³⁸ Such variations seem to provide an experimental arena for narration, just at the time when Munch was exploring the sequencing of his paintings into what he later termed his *Frieze of Life*. Within the changing 'frieze', Munch arranged a number of his canvases on the walls of galleries such that his audiences could seek meaningful interrelationships among the motifs. In this way, he hoped to clarify his ideas, and to be persuasive, to his audience in the spaces of exhibition. The sequencing was linguistic as well as visual. cf. Heller 1993 and Guleng 2011b, 128-39.

107). The phrase “Ich fühlte” immediately identified Munch as both the locus of perception and production, conveying this inspired ‘madness’ to his audience in the years that his art had become a sensation in Germany. In a review from 1895, the French critic Thadée Natanson identified the text as a signpost of Munch’s aspiration as a writer, published a drawing based on *The Scream* along with the prose poem, and commenting:

The text that comments on the picture is one of the small poems that Monsieur Munch has the habit of supplementing his compositions with. The document thus confirms the Norwegian painter’s literary interests.³⁹

Another example of a graphic work with literary ambition is Munch’s 1895 lithographic *Self Portrait* (fig. 10), in which the artist’s pale head floats in a black field and is bracketed by a horizontal form at the top of the motif and a skeletal hand and arm at the bottom. Munch fashioned the words “E. Munch 1895”, as though they were engraved in stone. As such, this print is one of the few instances in which Munch mobilized what Claude Gandelman identifies as a “functionally integrated signature”, an element that is fundamental to the design of the motif itself (Gandelman 1985, 2-3). The artist is present, or self-designating, through the lapidary-like inscription of his name, through his self-image, and through the suggestion of his (dead) hand. Like the signature branded on the figure’s groin in *Self-Portrait in Hell*, the name and date constitute both a formal element and a text to be read. In addition, Munch signed many impressions of this lithograph in graphite on the bones at the bottom of the image. This act, according to Gandelman, creates a ‘redoubling’ or ‘dedoubling’ of the artist’s signature. In what he calls ‘a philosophical irony’, the two signatures, produced at different moments, in different media, both identify the artist and emphasize his absence from the process of production and the place of witnessing.

Munch’s *Self-Portrait* is consequently an act of inventive self-commemoration, invested with Symbolist eeriness and perhaps tinged with the ironic gesture of leaving two letters reversed in the name “Munch” (Berman 2017). According to Jacques Derrida, a written signature “implies

the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer”. It nonetheless will be understood to retain “his having-been present in a past *now*” to be carried forward “in the transcendental form of presentness”. (Derrida 1988, 20) A signature therefore has the capacity to record the moment of creation – the touch of the artist in time, the moment of viewing by the spectator, and the carrying forward of both identity and past temporality. Munch’s two lithographs, one glossed with *Ich fühlte* and the other resembling a tombstone, place the artist’s invention and execution in the past and the present. They are textual experiments, words that do the work of ‘focalizing’.

4 Toponyms as Signposts

A signature is at face value a mark of authenticity and a ‘signpost’ of intention and invention, as much a “symptom of, but not necessarily the sign of, the individual” (Rubin 2006, 563-99). They are artifacts of will and desire as much as of place. In these works, intended for exhibition, Munch’s toponyms telegraphed bodily disintegration and resurrection to his audiences. The signatures contextualized the motifs, locating the medicalization of the artist. They help to tether his works to his autobiography, and they shape his public autobiography for critical understanding.

“E. Munch, Kornhaug Sanatorium 1900”, “Kjøbenhavn”, and “Warnemünde” advertised his incapacities and his endurance. They are perhaps the smallest and last details to be added to the paintings’ surfaces, but as signatures, they are the texts that move outward to provide indices for artist and viewer to interact in both time and space.

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39 Natanson, Thadée. “Salon des Indépendants”, *La Revue Blanche*, 14 November 1895. Translated in Jacobsen, Lasse, “Edvard Munch’s Own Publications”, in Guleng 2011a, 114.

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