Scratching the Surface: On and In Self Portrait (1895)

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the surface of Edvard Munch’s Self Portrait (1895), one of the artist’s most emblematic images, proposing ways of thinking about the lines scratched into the blackness surrounding the artist’s head. Assuming that the surface is a place of negotiation among the artist, the material, and the viewer, it examines ways in which the almost invisible lines trouble the reading of the motif.

Keywords
Edvard Munch, Self-Portrait, Lithograph, Sudarium

Edvard Munch’s 1895 lithographic Self Portrait is one of Munch’s most riveting images (ill. 1). In it, his head floats starkly against the velvety black background, detached and surmounting a white band reminiscent of a priest’s collar, framed above by a white band containing the artist’s name and date, and below by the forearm and hand of a skeleton, offering up the image, as noted by Elizabeth Prelinger, as a tombstone, or the face of Jesus on the Sudarium. This image has been much reproduced, exhibited, and interpreted. In reproduction, a pattern of very fine lines scratched into the black background are often indiscernible. The morbidity of the bones contrasted against the beauty of the man, the symmetrical head set against the subtly off-axis collar, and the scratched lines that militate against depth, create a circuit of uncanniness within the print.

My focus here is on the delicate array of lines inscribed onto the motif, lines that play no recognizable role other than residing on or in that surface. Like Lucio Fontana’s works (ill. 2), they operate as cuts that reveal the surface to be layered, articulating the ink to be one surface, the paper to be another, and the drawn and painted motif to oscillate between the two.

Gustav Schiefler identified these scratches to be “in the background” in his 1907 catalogue of Munch’s works, Dieter Buchhart recognized them as “sharply etched white lines” in the motif, and Elizabeth Prelinger described them as “scratching into the surface to create a kind of liquid drawing.” I have been fascinated by this work for many years. However, it was Andy Warhol who explored the lines as significant elements in a series of screen prints that he produced in 1984 (ill. 3).
Warhol’s procedure was to re-photograph reproductions of such works as this, blow them way up in scale until they began to break down into dots, trace selected lines from the original motifs, and then overlay the so-called originals with his graffiti-like traces. As Warhol photographed and re-photographed, enlarged, and then traced Munch’s self-image, he exaggerated the fine lines that Munch had drawn into his image. He then further enlarged them into significant design elements that embellish the surface of his own prints. This layer of extravagant artificiality overlaying the degraded photomechanical dot matrix, emphasized the reproductive nature of Warhol’s “Munchs.” Such extravagant gestures prompted me to revisit the surface of Munch’s self-portrait as a springboard for the consideration of the surface as object, as body, and membrane. This article does not focus therefore so much on what the print “means,” but how it means through its scored surface.

In thinking about these lines, I am grateful to Giuliana Bruno’s book Surface; Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media, and I would like to adapt her term “surface tension” to think about what the lines contribute to Munch’s image, and to think about surfaces – “the very skin of media” – in general. The surface is both haptic – touchable and palpable – and optical, the material manifestation of things. Bruno interprets the surfaces of things to be spaces of negotiation, in which materiality, production, memory, projection, and interpretation co-mingle through “aesthetic encounters” and she helps to frame surface as a critical category as well as a material realm: “Thinking about the visual
in a material way activates the surface.” To help think about Munch’s self portrait, I enlist Jasper Johns’ Painting Bitten by a Man (1962, ill. 4) in which body and gesture are inextricably tied to surface, and in which the surface, here layered with encaustic, has enough opacity and translucency, both, to operate as a kind of body or skin.


In its impossible re-enactment of gesture as articulated through form, the work operates within a realm of what Mary Anne Doane has termed a kind of “hyperindexicality,” the striving for a complete record of presence which “could not disassociate itself from the realm of the contingent or the material.” I know that these two gestures, the delicate linear mark and the bite, could not be more different. Yet Jasper Johns’ work,
like Warhol's serigraph, is an intermediary through which to look very closely at, and think about, Munch's surfaces, what they disclose, what they contain, and how we inhabit them.

However, conservators have long studied, evaluated, theorized, and worked with Munch's surfaces, and several art historians stepped outside of the overriding iconographic, biographical, and social-historical space of scholarship to theorize Munch's surfaces. Reinhold Heller's 1985 article, "Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface" recuperated Symbolist art from the realm of visual literature and offered a materialist historiography in which "the very material of the painting was perceived as functioning in the signification generated." In this formulation, materiality itself in Munch's work and that of his contemporaries was emblematic of the immaterial, a dialectic in Heller's words of "material manifestation and spiritual signification." Dieter Buchhart's work, particularly in his 2007 exhibition "Edvard Munch: Signs of the Modern", focused attention on the artist's manifold experimental techniques, a stream of analysis that also underlay the exhibition "Edvard Munch the Modern Eye" in 2012.

The notion of the surface is, of course, a central critical issue in modernist criticism, practice, and aesthetics. Within Western modernism, the notion of "surface" is a polyvalent and contested site, from Michael Fried's argument of the "objecthood" of an overemphasized surface to Clement Greenberg's notion of avant-garde painting's "progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to 'hole through' it for realistic perspectival space..." The surface is an endlessly complicated and shifting idea that engages both teleological and ideological concerns within the understanding of the history of art and the consideration of individual objects. A material turn has brought our focus back to the surface with new considerations of materiality and the phenomenal, and particularly with theorizations of screen culture, and with haptic viewing. Surface, as considered within the fine arts, and most particularly in painting, tends to be what we see through to seek subject matter and examine motif. In Munch's work in particular, which has been so powerfully allied both with his motifs and with his personhood, surface gives way to narration and is not often constituted as itself a site of meaning. As noted by Hans Belting, "Visual media compete, so it seems, with the images they transmit. They tend either to disseminate themselves or to claim the first voice. The more we pay attention to a medium, the less it can hide its strategies. The less we take note of a visual medium, the more we concentrate on the image, as if images would come by themselves." It is very hard to acknowledge surface when one's imago of Munch is all depth, all identity.

SURFACE AS OBJECT
Munch's self portrait, which is among the artist's first forays into lithography, exists in four states. The first is a trial proof (ill. 5), in which the artist represents his head and shoulders, cropped at chest level by a horizontal band of liquid applied to the lithographic stone that seems to reference a shelf or frame at the edge of which rests the summarily sketched skeletal arm.
The trial proof is notable for its relatively conventional representation of tenebrism; the artist’s face and body emerge from darkness signifying a spatialized surround and can perhaps be associated with such conventions of romantic portraiture, the dark background serving as a corollary for mystery or isolation. Whatever we might speculate about the darkness, it is episodic and textured, it is delineated as separate from Munch’s shoulders in some areas, and it bleeds into his body in others. In the frontality of its figure, its diaphanous surrounding space, its suggestion of a shadow to the left, the print is closely allied with his *Self Portrait with Cigarette* of 1895 (in The National Museum, Oslo). The blurring and mottling of the painted and drawn surface on the lithographic stone translate the numerous experimental painted passages in the oil self portrait into the graphic medium. What is clear is that Munch first explored this image as mirroring a body in space, as conventionalized, formulaic figure-and-ground composition, with those starkly haunting symbolic elements of name and bones added to the delicately limned face.

After drawing and painting the face, shoulders, and background, Munch scratched the surface of his media, creating short vertical lines that run, grid-like, throughout the entire dark area of the print. They are certainly not the first thing that one notices upon viewing the print, but once registered, the depth of the image is interrupted as the lines fix the body both to surface and to background. The lines, drawn into the layer of tusche, have the appearance of a fine netting and bring to mind Munch’s 1886 *Self Portrait* in oil (in The National Museum, Oslo) with its scored and pitted surface. Residing in the Munch Museum, this lithographic print is the only known trial proof.
The second state is the one with which we are most familiar (ill. 1): The artist covered the dark area between the upper band and skeletal arm with tusche, resulting in an almost monochrome black surface out of which the head and collar now appear as though disembodied.\(^{18}\) A third state, which Gerd Woll surmises was created after 1906, displays the head on an entirely black ground, the bands containing the artist’s name and the skeletal arm having been painted over with tusche (ill. 6), leaving only the faintest remains of those elements at the top and bottom edges of the print.

Woll reports that Ludvig Ravensberg noted in 1915 that Munch “has reworked the plate for the self portrait.”\(^{19}\) Much later, Munch reflected on his process, “My prints are not printed in a certain edition where they are numbered and the stones and plates then ground down. I have constantly worked further on my prints and experimented with different impressions…. This is similarly the case with Self Portrait with the Hand – The hand has been removed.”\(^{20}\) The third state exists in two forms, one apparently printed in Berlin by Lassally, who kept the stone from the 1890s, and one transferred onto a new stone.\(^{21}\) The impressions resulting from transfer lithographic matrix lost much of the linear variation and delicacy of the earlier print runs, although many of them display fresh scratches into the tusche (ill. 7).\(^{22}\)

A fourth state, in which a small damage to upper left corner of the original stone, was, according to Gerd Woll, corrected through the transfer of the motif onto a new stone (ill. 8).

Munch rethought his motif from one state to the next, first taking the radical step of removing his body, then deleting the overtly symbolic and symbolist skeletonized arm and name, and then correcting a damaged upper left corner of the earlier stone impression. The tiny vertical lines appear in each of the states, migrating in various numbers and configurations from stone to stone and state to state. What I find intriguing is the fact that despite the many changes in the image, and through the process of transfer, Munch (and his master printers) made the decision to re-scratch, or carefully steward, the tiny lines. Within states II-IV, the number and location of the lines change, depending on the print run. For example, an impression of State II, signed by Lassally in Berlin and dated to 1913, contains many more of the scratched lines than, for example, the impression reproduced in figure 1 (ill. 9).
This is a minor question within Munch’s large and highly experimental body of work, yet what might we surmise about the tiny mark that is so deliberative and reiterative?

It is notable that small vertical lines are deployed across the surface of all four variations of the motif, incised into the crayon and tusche with a scraper – a sharp object such as an etching needle or some kind of knife – to scratch into and open up that dark passage after it filled in a bit on the first roll up/test run. According to artist Phyllis McGibbon, keeping very thin scratched lines open on a lithographic stone in a dark heavily inked passage is one of the most challenging things for a master lithographic printer to pull off. It is one thing to scrape the lines and another to keep them crisp and present, especially over the life of the chemical surface of the stone in which some degradation can take place. As was demonstrated to me, the printer had to reenact the act of scraping, or to trace the scratches, so that they would not fill with ink, a double gesture for each line. These little forms are not as extravagant as the black tusche, not certainly as so many of Munch’s extraordinarily experimental painted surfaces, in which drips and splatters become integral form. However, the little scratched lines are so deliberative, carefully repeated from state to state, as to be discursive elements.

This is a much-discussed image within Munch’s corpus as it is his first graphic self-portrait and because it is so symbolically rich. The radical gesture of isolating the face and collar translates the face into a floating disembodied icon, akin to the numerous symbolist images of Orpheus, such those by Odilon Redon rendered between the 1880s and the early 20th century. Formally, in the contrast between the white face and the surrounding blackness, it was likened early on by Ingrid Langaard to the work of Félix Vallotton, especially his 1895 Portrait of Dostoïevski that was published from within Munch’s Berlin circle in the journal Pan. In part, the black tusche layer gives the lithograph the unusual appearance of a woodcut. The stark contrast between the black background and the white face of the subject was repeated in other of his works at this time, such as his more detailed portrait of August Strindberg (1896; Woll 66), and the value contrasts, which suggest a woodcut rather than a lithograph, also characterize his graphic versions of, among others, The Scream (1895; Woll 38). However, the self portrait is notable for the range of values, and value drawing, for the facial features that are so finely executed that they seem slightly bleached out in relation to the darkened lines that describe the hair – the effect possibly of using a harder crayon for the face than the hair, leaving a lighter trace. Munch later wrote about the freedom of touch that lithography offered him, “Working directly on the stone offers the richest opportunities – Here one can use a brush – crayon … – and scrape,” in contrast to the challenges of transfer printing. What remains is a remarkably full range of value exploiting the graphic effects of lithography – the blackness of the background, the variability of value and line quality.
of the hair and face. It may be linked to Vallotton’s woodcut for its graphic contract between black and white, but it is distinctive in its wide range of touches and values. It is inherently lithographic and not woodcut-like.

In addition to Munch’s exploitation of lithographic media and effects, the configuration of text at the top of his motif communicates the use of a print matrix. Munch wrote four letters in his name backwards – or rather frontward on the lithographic stone which, when printed, appear backwards – and he chose to maintain these accidents in his second state. They may have been accidental reversals when he drew them onto the stone in a mirror-image fashion, but when he examined the trial proof and then made the move to lay down a layer of tusche in the middle section, he could well have made corrections. I am inclined to view the reversed letters as another announcement of the lithographic process itself. The disparity in style between the name, seemingly recalling carved lettering through its outlining, and the date, written using single lines, seems to deliberately contrast the lapidary name of Munch from the more ephemeral looking letter forms. In a composition so austere, such a distinction is telling.

SURFACE AS BODY

Albert Gell’s notion of agency is a helpful analytical tool here, for Munch’s print represents a surface in and on which particularly complex negotiations are staged regarding identity and reception, and these are the negotiations that we might consider as we look at and interpret both Munch’s surfaces and the idea of surface in general. In this regard, Elizabeth Prelinger’s reference to the Sudarium is a helpful analytical tool. Rather than thinking about it iconographically, however, I would like to see it indexically.

The Sudarium, or the Veil of Veronica, is one of a number of “miraculous” images that are understood to be acheiropoietâ, the category of objects that some believe were not made by human hand but direct imprint of the face of Jesus, in the words of Ernst Kitzinger, “images believed to have been made by hands other than those of ordinary mortals or else they are claimed to be mechanical, though miraculous, impressions of the original.” Such images are venerated as especially “authoritative” as they were explicitly made by the subject through miraculous inscription and may be understood to be the true appearance of the subject. The Shroud of Turin is the most relevant to this discussion. In 1898, it was displayed along with the Sudarium in a public exhibition during which the photographer Secondo Pia was allowed to photograph it.

As Georges Didi-Huberman recounts, the historic impetus to render the shroud of Turin, or rather its stains, visible began with photography. Secondo Pia, in attempting to produce a clear photographic image of the shroud in 1898, saw at the bottom of his chemical bath a face peering up at him the moment that the negative image took form, and he published it (ill. 10).
When the photographic “evidence” took shape, it both recorded and performed proof of a miracle. In exposing the unseen, the shroud’s “luminous index” became the analogy of the photographic imprint of the body. Didi-Huberman refers to this object as existing between materiality and pure space and enacting a dialectical mimesis, as “absolute seeing that would transcend the scansion of seeing and knowing; an absolutely reflexive representation.” Didi-Huberman here refers to the stains that cohere into a figurative and descriptive image as enacting “the fantasy of referentiality.” The stains became rearranged into evidence of a previsualized bodily presence through the agency of the photograph: “If all physical contact calls to mind the act that establishes it (in an indexical relationship), every act calls forth as well and imperatively, the proper name of the actor.” With the shroud, seeing is embedded in dogma; it is this notion that I bring back to the self-portrait.

Munch’s self portrait of course predates Secondo Pia’s photograph of the Shroud of Turin by several years, but it does call forth a kind of miraculous image, especially concerning the dead hand in the foreground. There are many possible ways of interpreting this skeletonized arm. In one way, we read it as the artist’s own hand, something we

![Image of the Shroud of Turin](image-url)

**III. 10. Secondo Pia: First photograph of the Shroud of Turin, 1898.**
anticipate through conventionalized ways of both seeing and anticipating artists’ self images, going back to Albrecht Dürer’s *Self Portrait* from 1500 (in Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich). The hand making art, the hand gesturing, the hand in proximity to the head, signals invention, artistic labor, and the very origins of art, even when holding a cigarette or, as in the case of Dürer, caressing fur.34 “The hand that is dead may or may not be Munch’s own hand. Reading it through self-portrait conventions, it could be seen as his own, mutilated and ossified, incapable of production.35

The scratches on the surface may themselves be understood as a displacement of the dead hand, replacing the fingerprints that might otherwise characterize identity in a living hand now dispersed throughout the print surface. In this attenuated sense, the scratches, the indexical marks of the hand at work, reanimate the hand that is dead. In which case, like the Veil of Veronica, the delicate face was not made by human hands, or at least not by the “Munch” pictured on and in the print. Or we read the arm as not being the hand of the artist; it is a more conventional memento mori, akin to Arnold Bocklin’s *Death Playing the Violin* (1872; in Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin), or Munch’s *Portrait of Przybyszewski* (1895; in the Munch Museum), an expressive spectacle of morbidity and illness.

What is striking is how persistent the gravitational pull of Munch’s seemingly morbid personality, or at least how unimpeachable his identity as sacred sufferer remains as invested into his works. At the outset of his career, Munch’s work was often analyzed in terms of its surfaces – the success or lack thereof of his draftsmanship, the degree of finish – much criticism, positive and negative, was addressed to the ways in which he treated the surfaces of his painting, *Sick Child* being among the most contested examples, with its scraped and abraded surface and its blurring of detail.36 The 1894 monograph published in Berlin by Munch’s colleagues, Stanislaw Przybyszewski, Willy Pastor, Richard Dehmel, and Julius Meier-Graefe, helped to initiate a shift in Munch’s criticism from the surface to anecdote. The essays in that slim volume linked Munch’s motifs to his personality and to his intimate experience, characterizing him as isolated and visionary in, at times, extraordinary hyperbole, as in Stanislaw Przybyszewski’s assertion of genius arising from madness: “Munch paints the delirium and the dread of existence, paints the feverish chaos of sickness, the fearful premonitions in the depths of the mind: he paints a theory which is incapable of logical elucidation, one which can only be experienced obscurely and inarticulately in the cold sweat of direct horror, the way in which we may sense death although we properly cannot imagine it ourselves.”37 Increasingly, critical writing about Munch focused on motifs qua motifs as the artist’s identity became intimately associated with illness and death. Munch himself played a role in cementing this relationship through his published writings, his works sent to exhibition, and his alliances with critics and biographers who associated a morbid biography with his images.38

Munch’s self portraits were such agents of identity. T. J. Clark has written eloquently about the transactions that occur when an audience looks at an artist’s self-portrait and notes the multi-vectorized looks that coalesce into a kind of dogma. The artist begins by looking into a mirror, or at a photograph or other likeness if the self-portrait is to carry some sense of the mimetic. What we then see is an artist regarding her or himself on one surface and transferring the image to another. One cannot plausibly look at a mirror and
directly at a canvas, sheet of paper, or lithographic stone in the same optical field. Therefore, there is in the first instance a fiction of looking as inherent in these self-portraits. As an audience, we are prepared to share in this fiction as we experience and anticipate such a performance, a process that Clark calls “an infinite dialectic regress.” Therefore, the first stage of self-presentation is a fiction in which we share. The next vectored view is ours as we see the artist looking at him or herself, while seeming to be looking directly at us. We then conspire with the artist to make the leap from the artist performatively seeing the self to seeing us. It cannot be the case that we are seen by the artist, but our shared gazes – we regard the artists seeing the self as seen by us – offer a fictive intimacy. Once we note the artist’s presence looking at himself as we see him looking at us, the artist becomes corporealized even in an image as flat and summary as this, and we look through the surface to greet the subject and at the surface to seek the imprint of the artist, the marks of the maker. The moment that we understand the artist’s touch and presence to be indexical, that we see tracings and leavings as indices, and we imagine the body as the agent of production, we see the surface as the artist’s body. Munch as a body in representation supersedes the body in fact; it is both relic and idol, living and dead, and its tiny lines, scratched into what should be the background, ensnare the face in the undefined space in-between.

SURFACE AS MEMBRANE

The technique of scraping into lithographic media to create texture or volume, and as a way of interrupting or enhancing the motif, is common and was consistently practiced by Munch and his contemporaries. Munch’s lithographic image Vampire II from 1895, for example (Woll 40), likewise displays fine lines inscribed into the layer of tusche, but these seem to serve the function of radiating outward from the woman’s head as though tracing a force field, and they seem to mark in small vertical gestures where the black shadow terminates. The little white scratches in the Self Portrait, in contrast, do not cohere into anything other than themselves, unlike the stains in the Shroud of Turin. They are not dense enough to lighten the effect of the background, as they do in many others of Munch’s works, and they do not operate as formative elements of figuration as they do, for example, in the lithographic work of Eugene Carrière. Perhaps it could be argued that they emulate the graining of a woodcut, a technique Munch would assume in the following year. However, they are not significant enough or variable enough to do that work. Interrupting the complete blackness of the field surrounding Munch’s face and subtly bringing the eye back to the surface, they render the reading of depth impossible to fully achieve. At the same time, they reveal substrate, the paper that lies underneath the artist’s production. The self-portrait is all surface and at the same time all depth, a troubling of the surface that Richard Wollheim has characterized as the tension between “seeing in” and “seeing as.” As such, they may be understood as membranes through which one state passes into another.

We might in this regard see Munch’s painting Vision of 1892, and the prose poems that he wrote in connection with this motif, in terms of such a liminal surface:
She was a swan – who with its long slender neck glided gently over the water – looked into the water, which was bright blue with white clouds, just like the sky above – or so it believed. – I lived down there in the depths. I rowed among the blue-black worms, green-brown slime and all kinds of hideous creatures and was reminded of a time – when I still lived on the surface, in all that blue light – when I did not have all this slime in my lungs. I forced myself up from the bottom – I raised my head above the surface of the water – it was so glaringly bright – it hurt my eyes. There was the swan – it was so fine – it had such gentle eyes – it was so dazzlingly white. – I stretched out my hands – it came nearer – it did not move– just glided nearer and nearer – …– Come to me, I said – then I saw that its breast was dirty and noticed – that the water around me was cloudy and filthy – and I saw my reflection in the muddy water – . 

Marja Lahelma recently considered the painting and its allied texts as appeals to the absolute through the separation of surface and depth, mind and body, matter and purity. In this regard, the surface of the water, in the painting, is a plastic necessity that marks the dualism, both a mirror of the sky and the mask of corruption. Is the surface a dirty thing, corrupted by materiality, a necessary but potentially malign tool in the evocation of an idea? Or is it the idea itself? In the same manner, I speculate that the white lines that mark the surface of Munch’s lithograph in its variations serve as both partition and kind of “breaking through.” The little lines allow for a surface and a subsurface, potentially the material conditions for both a separation of the face from the manifest surface of the print and an indication of strata. Moreover, if the face is not on the surface, how do we locate it?

Giuliana Bruno characterized the surface as “a partition that ‘mediates’ by acting as a material configuration of how the visible meets the thinkable.” Here she refers in particular to screens and projected imagery, places where we play out our own stories as performed by another, mirroring Wilhelm Worringer’s notion at the turn of the last century that “aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self enjoyment….The value of a line, or of a form consists for us in the value of the life that it holds for us. It holds its beauty only through our own vital feeling, which in some mysterious manner, we project onto it.” This self-portrait is a magnet for projection. I am struck by how often resonances of Munch’s self-portrait take new form, particularly in Jasper Johns’ live arm recreating Munch’s skeletal image as a monotype (ill. 11), or Warhol’s Self-Portrait with Skeletal Arm (After Munch) (ill. 3), in which the two artists inhabit the same image, the face of Munch but the marks, and lemon blond hair, of Warhol.
It took one printmaker to note the almost insubstantial lines yet indexical lines of another, to monumentalize them, and to call out the way in which they make the motif vacillate between surface and depth, the spontaneous and the strategic, and like so much of Munch’s work, the artist and his image.
NOTES

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3 Trygve Nergaard's interpretation remains one of the most poetic, articulating the “unbridgeable gap between body and spirit, or between technique and idea, which is the artist’s curse.” Further, he wrote, “The face, the ‘mirror of the soul,’ emerges from the darkness with visionary force. It obscures the ephemeral body and triumphs over the dead and powerless artistic means symbolized by the skeletal arm.” Trygve Nergaard, “The Theme of Death,” in *Edvard Munch Symbols and Images* (exh. cat.), (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1978), 135. Among others, Iris Müller-Westermann reads the image as a *memento mori*, in which the floating head symbolizes the artist's legacy after death as foreshadowed by the skeletal arm, in Iris Müller-Westermann, *Munch by Himself* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005); Marja Lahelma interprets the image as communicating the notion that art is produced by the mind (the head) and not the hand. Lahelma, “Ideal and Disintegration: Dynamics of the Self and art at the Fin-de-Siecle,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2014, 124.


10 Heller, “Concerning Symbolism”, 152.


17 On Munch's act of scoring and scraping his self portraits, Dieter Buchhart writes, "The layers of paint in the face were applied with a palette knife and then partially scraped away again, leaving bare patches of canvas. In some places, Munch scratched and cut with a sharp object so vigorously that these wounds expose the canvas sizing, thus incorporating the color of the sizing into the overall color scheme of the painting. He inflicted severe injuries to the color skin in his Self-Portrait, as an illusionistic representative of himself, as if he were tearing away lumps of flesh with his blows. The explanation for why Munch mistreated the painting in such an aggressive manner is less likely to be found in a biographical-psychological interpretation than in Munch's unorthodox approach to technique and material." Dieter Buchhart, “Disappearance: Experiments with Material and Stuff,” in Edvard Munch: Theme and Variation (exh. cat.), Klaus Albrecht Schröder, ed. (Vienna: Albertina and Hatje Cantz, 2003), 23.

18 The following observations are dependent on Woll, The Complete Graphic Works, and to an examination of all of the impressions of this motif conducted through the generosity of Ute Kuhlemann Falck, Munch Museum, who shared her expertise with me. Her observations are reflected here. Woll chronicles the papers that Munch used for his impressions of Self Portrait: Many impressions were printed in editions of China paper, cut almost to the size of the stone, which she surmises was an economic strategy to save paper. There are also prints mounted on gray cardboard, impressions on gray paper that have faded to green, and impressions on heavy cream paper. Gerd Woll, “Paper in Prints,” in Schröder, ed., Edvard Munch, 44. Many of these are signed on the picture surface, several on the skeletal arm (see for example MM G 192-50). Ute Kuhlemann and I also observed one impression of State III (MM G 192-14) printed on bright yellow paper.


21 As Woll explains, it is very difficult to determine the dating of the various states or print runs as Munch reserved his plates and stones for later printing, as many as 20 years separating one print run from another. M. W. Lassally (in Berlin) sent some of Munch's stones to him during the Great War, later to be printed by Anton Peder Nielsen. The motifs were also easy to transport via transfer paper. Gerd Woll, “Paper in Prints”, 41. The master printers with whom Munch worked are noted in Woll, The Complete Graphic Works, 33.
22 After what appears to be a transfer, fresh lines appear to have been opened up. In MM G 192-41 and 192-46, the word “Pröve,” not in Munch’s hand, is written below the motif. It is notable that State III displays great variance in the number of scratches that appear in the surface of the motif. For example, MM G 192-61 displays few lines while MM G 192-41 and 46 display fresh lines. MM G 192-11 displays the most number of lines of this group.


24 See, for example, Lahelma, “Ideal and Disintegration,” 124–127.


26 I am grateful to the American printmaker Phyllis McGibbon, Wellesley College, for this observation in an email message dated November 4, 2015.


29 Prelinger and Parke-Taylor, The Symbolist Prints, 93.


33 Didi-Huberman, “The Index,” 68.


40 On this, see Alexander Nagel, Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), especially, Chapter 17, “Relics and Reproducibles.”


