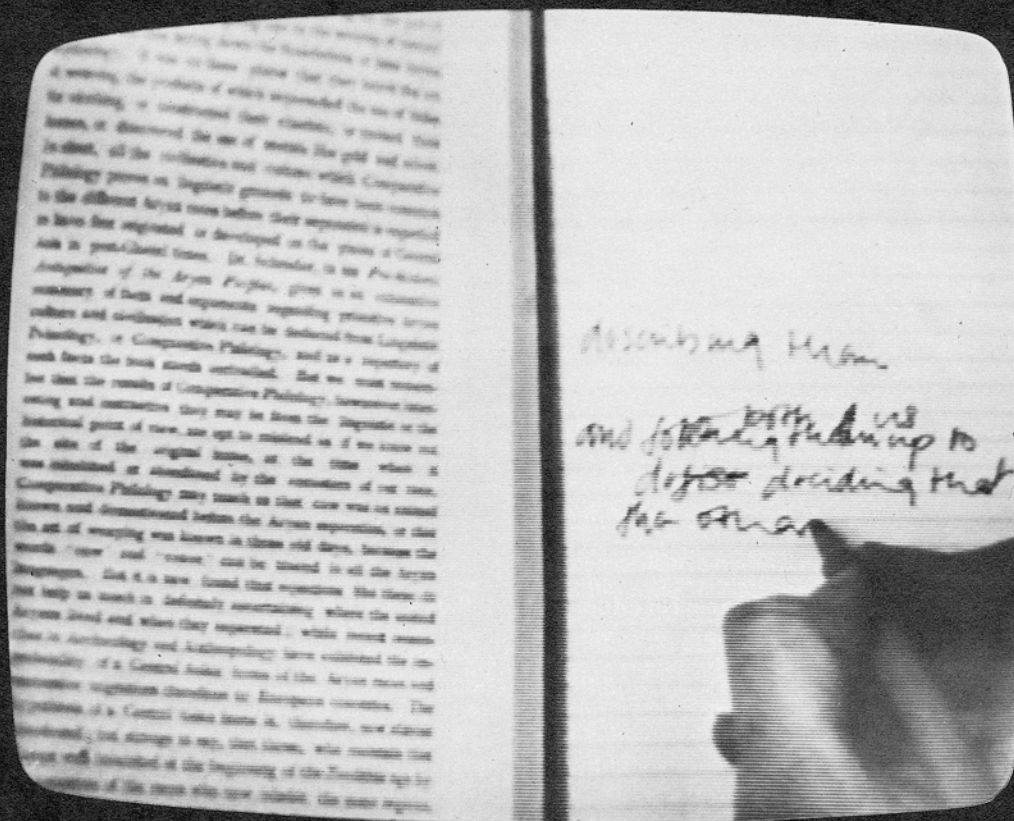


Stuart Marshall



Lapsus 1975

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I simultaneously read a novel 'out loud' and write about my experiences of the previous day. The monitor shows an overhead view of the page that is being written on and the open book. Various parapraxes occur in the form of misreadings and miswritings (slips of the pen). In a second version a written commentary was superimposed, by keying with a special effects generator the day after the recording was made. In this commentary I attempt to link by association misreadings and miswritings, thereby setting up a complex network of cross-references extending from the conscious through the unconscious.

The work is concerned with the interplay of the many levels of mind and in particular:

- a. The unconscious in the traditional Freudian sense.
- b. The level of habituated skills which have sunk below consciousness. 'These motor manifestations to which consciousness attaches little value, or which it overlooks entirely'.

Skills such as reading and writing have sunk to such low levels of consciousness that they are carried out 'automatically', conscious attention (hypercathexis) being directed to the significance of what is being read rather than the act of reading itself. This level of consciousness can be described as 'inaccessible to consciousness' or simply 'non-conscious', and to exist in the idiom of the primary process (to be translated into consciousness with difficulty).

Unconscious b. is not subsumed by unconscious a. Unconscious b. is not 'the repressed' but is unconscious for simple reasons of economy – as are, for example, the processes of perception.

Freud draws attention to 'everyone's experience of the mind wandering when reading aloud'. That is the parallelism of the conscious and unconscious, 'conscious attention' and 'the least important physical functions' (that is to consciousness), hypercathexis and cathexis.

The activities that I am involved in bespeak a many-layered consciousness. Reading and writing demand the use of mechanisms of unconscious b., and there is a

consciousness of content which can be partly suspended in the case of reading but less so in the case of writing.¹ There is a consciousness of the existence of unconscious b. in that I now experience some difficulty in reading and writing, have to 'put my mind to it' (I am reminded of what I unconsciously take for granted). I may also become aware of the 'wandering speech images' (word presentations, signifiers) below the level of consciousness (preconscious).

Unconscious a. may intrude into this layering of consciousness, metaphorically coded by the primary process. Such an intrusion requires a translation (transcription), which is iconically connoted in the tape (writing with a pen, writing with an electron beam).

Certain parapraxes that occur can be seen as leakages in the unconscious b. mechanisms, but this is not to say that they are random or unmotivated. Unacceptable associations while in a volatile state may appear as slips of the pen or as misreadings through a similarity in the unconscious a. thoughts as thing-presentations (catheted memory-traces) or in their corresponding word-presentations (signifiers), (condensation and displacement).

In the commentary I consciously and semi-consciously (free association) associate parapraxes, my memory of my state of consciousness, and my present consciousness. The tape includes the metaphors of the primary process and my attempted interpretation of them. For the viewer a participatory level is introduced through the possibility of misreading. The relationship between the tape in its box and another is a metaphor of the relationship between their conscious and their unconscious. 'In that case we have the same relation to it (the unconscious) as we have to a psychical process in another person except that it is in fact one of our own'.²

All unnumbered quotes are from S. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

¹ W. Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie* Part 1.

² S. Freud, *New Introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis, Dissection of the Personality*.