

Sigmund Freud



Psychopathology of Everyday Life

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INTRODUCTION

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Professor Freud developed his system of psychoanalysis while studying the so-called border-line cases of mental diseases, such as hysteria and compulsion neurosis. By discarding the old methods of treatment and strictly applying himself to a study of the patient's life he discovered that the hitherto puzzling symptoms had a definite meaning, and that there was nothing arbitrary in any morbid manifestation. Psychoanalysis always showed that they referred to some definite problem or conflict of the person concerned. It was while tracing back the abnormal to the normal state that Professor Freud found how faint the line of demarcation was between the normal and neurotic person, and that the psychopathologic mechanisms so glaringly observed in the psychoneuroses and psychoses could usually be demonstrated in a lesser degree in normal persons. This led to a study of the faulty actions of everyday life and later to the publication of the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, a book which passed through four editions in Germany and is considered the author's most popular work. With great ingenuity and penetration the author throws much light on the complex problems of human behaviour, and clearly demonstrates that the hitherto considered impassable gap between normal and abnormal mental states is more apparent than real.

This translation is made of the fourth German edition, and while the original text was strictly followed, linguistic difficulties often made it necessary to modify or substitute

some of the author's cases by examples comprehensible to the English-speaking reader.

A. A. BRILL.

NEW YORK.

I

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FORGETTING OF PROPER NAMES

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During the year 1898 I published a short essay *On the Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness*.[\[1\]](#) I shall now repeat its contents and take it as a starting-point for further discussion. I have there undertaken a psychologic analysis of a common case of temporary forgetfulness of proper names, and from a pregnant example of my own observation I have reached the conclusion that this frequent and practically unimportant occurrence of a failure of a psychic function—of memory—admits an explanation which goes beyond the customary utilization of this phenomenon.

If an average psychologist should be asked to explain how it happens that we often fail to recall a name which we are sure we know, he would probably content himself with the answer that proper names are more apt to be forgotten than any other content of memory. He might give plausible reasons for this “forgetting preference” for proper names, but he would not assume any deep determinant for the process.

I was led to examine exhaustively the phenomenon of temporary forgetfulness through the observation of certain peculiarities, which, although not general, can, nevertheless, be seen clearly in some cases. In these there

is not only *forgetfulness*, but also false *recollection*: he who strives for the escaped name brings to consciousness others—substitutive names—which, although immediately recognized as false, nevertheless obtrude themselves with great tenacity. The process which should lead to the reproduction of the lost name is, as it were, displaced, and thus brings one to an incorrect substitute.

Now it is my assumption that the displacement is not left to psychic arbitrariness, but that it follows lawful and rational paths. In other words, I assume that the substitutive name (or names) stands in direct relation to the lost name, and I hope, if I succeed in demonstrating this connection, to throw light on the origin of the forgetting of names.

In the example which I selected for analysis in 1898 I vainly strove to recall the name of the master who made the imposing frescoes of the “Last Judgment” in the dome of *Orvieto*. Instead of the lost name—*Signorelli*—two other names of artists—*Botticelli* and *Boltraffio*—obtruded themselves, names which my judgment immediately and definitely rejected as being incorrect. When the correct name was imparted to me by an outsider I recognized it at once without any hesitation. The examination of the influence and association paths which caused the displacement from *Signorelli* to *Botticelli* and *Boltraffio* led to the following results:—

(a) The reason for the escape of the name *Signorelli* is neither to be sought in the strangeness in itself of this name nor in the psychologic character of the connection in which it was inserted. The forgotten name was just as familiar to me as one of the substitutive names—*Botticelli*—and

somewhat more familiar than the other substitute—Boltraffio—of the possessor of which I could hardly say more than that he belonged to the Milanese School. The connection, too, in which the forgetting of the name took place appeared to me harmless, and led to no further explanation. I journeyed by carriage with a stranger from Ragusa, Dalmatia, to a station in Herzegovina. Our conversation drifted to travelling in Italy, and I asked my companion whether he had been in Orvieto and had seen there the famous frescoes of—

(b) The forgetting of the name could not be explained until after I had recalled the theme discussed immediately before this conversation. This forgetting then made itself known *as a disturbance of the newly emerging theme caused by the theme preceding it*. In brief, before I asked my travelling companion if he had been in Orvieto we had been discussing the customs of the Turks living in *Bosnia* and *Herzegovina*. I had related what I heard from a colleague who was practising medicine among them, namely, that they show full confidence in the physician and complete submission to fate. When one is compelled to inform them that there is no help for the patient, they answer: “*Sir* (Herr), what can I say? I know that if he could be saved you would save him.” In these sentences alone we can find the words and names: *Bosnia*, *Herzegovina*, and *Herr* (sir), which may be inserted in an association series between *Signorelli*, *Botticelli*, and *Boltraffio*.

(c) I assume that the stream of thoughts concerning the customs of the Turks in Bosnia, etc., was able to disturb the next thought, because I withdrew my attention from it

before it came to an end. For I recalled that I wished to relate a second anecdote which was next to the first in my memory. These Turks value the sexual pleasure above all else, and at sexual disturbances merge into an utter despair which strangely contrasts with their resignation at the peril of losing their lives. One of my colleague's patients once told him: "For you know, sir (Herr), if that ceases, life no longer has any charm."

I refrained from imparting this characteristic feature because I did not wish to touch upon such a delicate theme in conversation with a stranger. But I went still further; I also deflected my attention from the continuation of the thought which might have associated itself in me with the theme "Death and Sexuality." I was at that time under the after-effects of a message which I had received a few weeks before, during a brief sojourn in *Trafoi*. A patient on whom I had spent much effort had ended his life on account of an incurable sexual disturbance. I know positively that this sad event, and everything connected with it, did not come to my conscious recollection on that trip in Herzegovina. However, the agreement between *Trafoi* and *Boltraffio* forces me to assume that this reminiscence was at that time brought to activity despite all the intentional deviation of my attention.

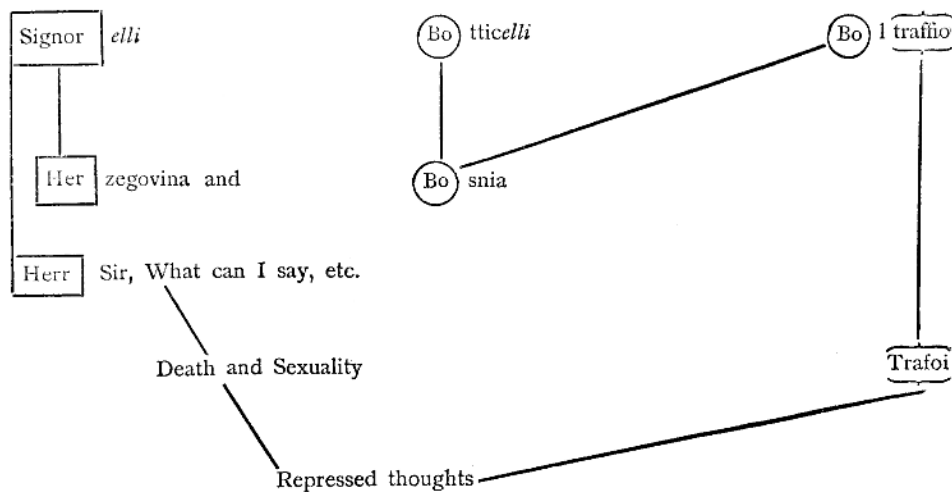
(d) I can no longer conceive the forgetting of the name Signorelli as an accidental occurrence. I must recognize in this process the influence of a *motive*. There were motives which actuated the interruption in the communication of my thoughts (concerning the customs of the Turks, etc.), and which later influenced me to exclude from my consciousness the thought connected with them, and which

might have led to the message concerning the incident in Trafoi—that is, I wanted to forget something, I *repressed* something. To be sure, I wished to forget something other than the name of the master of Orvieto; but this other thought brought about an associative connection between itself and this name, so that my act of volition missed the aim, and I *forgot the one against my will*, while I *intentionally* wished to forget the other. The disinclination to recall directed itself against the one content; the inability to remember appeared in another. The case would have been obviously simpler if this disinclination and the inability to remember had concerned the same content. The substitutive names no longer seem so thoroughly justified as they were before this explanation. They remind me (after the form of a compromise) as much of what I wished to forget as of what I wished to remember, and show me that my object to forget something was neither a perfect success nor a failure.

(e) The nature of the association formed between the lost name and the repressed theme (death and sexuality, etc.), containing the names of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Trafoi, is also very strange. In the scheme inserted here, which originally appeared in 1898, an attempt is made to graphically represent these associations.

The name Signorelli was thus divided into two parts. One pair of syllables (*elli*) returned unchanged in one of the substitutions, while the other had gained, through the translation of *signor* (sir, Herr), many and diverse relations to the name contained in the repressed theme, but was lost through it in the reproduction. Its substitution was formed in

a way to suggest that a displacement took place along the same associations—“Herzegovina and Bosnia”—regardless of the sense and acoustic demarcation. The names were therefore treated in this process like the written pictures of a sentence which is to be transformed into a picture-puzzle (rebus). No information was given to consciousness concerning the whole process, which, instead of the name Signorelli, was thus changed to the substitutive names. At first sight no relation is apparent between the theme that contained the name Signorelli and the repressed one which immediately preceded it.



Perhaps it is not superfluous to remark that the given explanation does not contradict the conditions of memory reproduction and forgetting assumed by other psychologists, which they seek in certain relations and dispositions. Only in certain cases have we added another *motive* to the factors long recognized as causative in forgetting names, and have thus laid bare the mechanism of faulty memory. The assumed dispositions are indispensable also in our case, in order to make it possible for the

repressed element to associatively gain control over the desired name and take it along into the repression. Perhaps this would not have occurred in another name having more favourable conditions of reproduction. For it is quite probable that a suppressed element continually strives to assert itself in some other way, but attains this success only where it meets with suitable conditions. At other times the suppression succeeds without disturbance of function, or, as we may justly say, without symptoms.

When we recapitulate the conditions for forgetting a name with faulty recollection we find: (1) a certain disposition to forget the same; (2) a process of suppression which has taken place shortly before; and (3) the possibility of establishing an *outer* association between the concerned name and the element previously suppressed. The last condition will probably not have to be much overrated, for the slightest claim on the association is apt in most cases to bring it about. But it is a different and farther-reaching question whether such outer association can really furnish the proper condition to enable the suppressed element to disturb the reproduction of the desired name, or whether after all a more intimate connection between the two themes is not necessarily required. On superficial consideration one may be willing to reject the latter requirement and consider the temporal meeting in perfectly dissimilar contents as sufficient. But on more thorough examination one finds more and more frequently that the two elements (the repressed and the new one) connected by an outer association, possess besides a connection in

content, and this can also be demonstrated in the example *Signorelli*.

The value of the understanding gained through the analysis of the example *Signorelli* naturally depends on whether we must explain this case as a typical or as an isolated process. I must now maintain that the forgetting of a name associated with faulty recollection uncommonly often follows the same process as was demonstrated in the case of *Signorelli*. Almost every time that I observed this phenomenon in myself I was able to explain it in the manner indicated above as being motivated by repression.

I must mention still another view-point in favour of the typical nature of our analysis. I believe that one is not justified in separating the cases of name-forgetting with faulty recollection from those in which incorrect substitutive names have not obtruded themselves. These substitutive names occur spontaneously in a number of cases; in other cases, where they do not come spontaneously, they can be brought to the surface by concentration of attention, and they then show the same relation to the repressed element and the lost name as those that come spontaneously. Two factors seem to play a part in bringing to consciousness the substitutive names: first, the effort of attention, and second, an inner determinant which adheres to the psychic material. I could find the latter in the greater or lesser facility which forms the required outer associations between the two elements. A great many of the cases of name-forgetting without faulty recollection therefore belong to the cases with substitutive name formation, the mechanism of which corresponds to the one in the example *Signorelli*. But I

surely shall not venture to assert that all cases of name-forgetting belong to the same group. There is no doubt that there are cases of name-forgetting that proceed in a much simpler way. We shall represent this state of affairs carefully enough if we assert that *besides the simple forgetting of proper names there is another forgetting which is motivated by repression.*



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FORGETTING OF FOREIGN WORDS

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The ordinary vocabulary of our own language seems to be protected against forgetting within the limits of normal function, but it is quite different with words from a foreign language. The tendency to forget such words extends to all parts of speech. In fact, depending on our own general state and the degree of fatigue, the first manifestation of functional disturbance evinces itself in the irregularity of our control over foreign vocabulary. In a series of cases this forgetting follows the same mechanism as the one revealed in the example *Signorelli*. As a demonstration of this I shall report a single analysis, characterized, however, by valuable features, concerning the forgetting of a word, not a noun, from a Latin quotation. Before proceeding, allow me to give a full and clear account of this little episode.

Last summer, while journeying on my vacation, I renewed the acquaintance of a young man of academic education, who, as I soon noticed, was conversant with some of my works. In our conversation we drifted—I no longer remember how—to the social position of the race to which we both belonged. He, being ambitious, bemoaned the fact that his generation, as he expressed it, was destined to grow crippled, that it was prevented from developing its talents and from gratifying its desires. He concluded his passionately felt speech with the familiar verse from Virgil:

Exoriare ... in which the unhappy *Dido* leaves her vengeance upon *Æneas* to posterity. Instead of “concluded,” I should have said “wished to conclude,” for he could not bring the quotation to an end, and attempted to conceal the open gap in his memory by transposing the words:—

“Exoriar(e) ex nostris ossibus ultor!”

He finally became piqued and said: “Please don’t make such a mocking face, as if you were gloating over my embarrassment, but help me. There is something missing in this verse. How does it read in its complete form?”

“With pleasure,” I answered, and cited it correctly:—

“Exoriar(e) aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor!”

“It is too stupid to forget such a word,” he said. “By the way, I understand you claim that forgetting is not without its reasons; I should be very curious to find out how I came to forget this indefinite pronoun ‘*aliquis*.’”

I gladly accepted the challenge, as I hoped to get an addition to my collection, and said, “We can easily do this, but I must ask you to tell me frankly and without any criticism everything that occurs to your mind after you focus your attention, without any particular intention, on the forgotten word.”[\[2\]](#)

“Very well, the ridiculous idea comes to me to divide the word in the following way: *a* and *liquis*.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“What else does that recall to you?”

“The thought goes on to *reliques—liquidation—liquidity—fluid.*”

“Does that mean anything to you now?”

“No, not by a long shot.”

“Just go ahead.”

“I now think,” he said, laughing sarcastically, “of Simon of Trent, whose relics I saw two years ago in a church in Trent. I think of the old accusation which has been brought against the Jews again, and of the work of *Kleinpaul*, who sees in these supposed sacrifices reincarnations or revivals, so to speak, of the Saviour.”

“This stream of thoughts has some connection with the theme which we discussed before the Latin word escaped you.”

“You are right. I now think of an article in an Italian journal which I have recently read. I believe it was entitled: ‘What St. Augustine said Concerning Women.’ What can you do with this?”

I waited.

“Now I think of something which surely has no connection with the theme.”

“Oh, please abstain from all criticism, and——”

“Oh, I know! I recall a handsome old gentleman whom I met on my journey last week. He was really an *original* type. He looked like a big bird of prey. His name, if you care to know, is Benedict.”

“Well, at least you give a grouping of saints and Church fathers: *St. Simon*, *St. Augustine*, and *St. Benedict*. I believe that there was a Church father named *Origines*. Three of

these, moreover, are Christian names, like *Paul* in the name *Kleinpaul*.”

“Now I think of *St. Januarius* and his blood miracle—I find that the thoughts are running mechanically.”

“Just stop a moment; both *St. Januarius* and *St. Augustine* have something to do with the calendar. Will you recall to me the blood miracle?”

“Don’t you know about it? The blood of *St. Januarius* is preserved in a phial in a church in Naples, and on a certain holiday a miracle takes place causing it to liquefy. The people think a great deal of this miracle, and become very excited if the liquefying process is retarded, as happened once during the French occupation. The General in command—or *Garibaldi*, if I am not mistaken—then took the priest aside, and with a very significant gesture pointed out to him the soldiers arrayed without, and expressed his hope that the miracle would soon take place. And it actually took place....”

“Well, what else comes to your mind? Why do you hesitate?”

“Something really occurred to me ... but it is too intimate a matter to impart ... besides, I see no connection and no necessity for telling it.”

“I will take care of the connection. Of course I cannot compel you to reveal what is disagreeable to you, but then you should not have demanded that I tell you why you forgot the word ‘*aliquis*.’”

“Really? Do you think so? Well, I suddenly thought of a woman from whom I could easily get a message that would be very annoying to us both.”

“That she missed her courses?”

“How could you guess such a thing?”

“That was not very difficult. You prepared me for it long enough. Just think of the *saints of the calendar, the liquefying of the blood on a certain day, the excitement if the event does not take place, and the distinct threat that the miracle must take place...* Indeed, you have elaborated the miracle of St. Januarius into a clever allusion to the courses of the woman.”

“It was surely without my knowledge. And do you really believe that my inability to reproduce the word ‘*aliquis*’ was due to this anxious expectation?”

“That appears to me absolutely certain. Don’t you recall dividing it into *a-liquis* and the associations: *reliques, liquidation, fluid?* Shall I also add to this connection the fact that St. Simon, to whom you got by way of the *reliques*, was sacrificed as a child?”

“Please stop. I hope you do not take these thoughts—if I really entertained them—seriously. I will, however, confess to you that the lady is Italian, and that I visited Naples in her company. But may not all this be coincidental?”

“I must leave to your own judgment whether you can explain all these connections through the assumption of coincidence. I will tell you, however, that every similar case that you analyse will lead you to just such remarkable ‘coincidences!’”

I have more than one reason for valuing this little analysis, for which I am indebted to my travelling companion. First, because in this case I was able to make use of a source which is otherwise inaccessible to me. Most

of the examples of psychic disturbances of daily life that I have here compiled I was obliged to take from observation of myself. I endeavoured to evade the far richer material furnished me by my neurotic patients, because I had to preclude the objection that the phenomena in question were only the result and manifestation of the neurosis. It was therefore of special value for my purpose to have a stranger free from a neurosis offer himself as a subject for such examination. This analysis is also important in other respects, inasmuch as it elucidates a case of word-forgetting *without* substitutive recollection, and thus confirms the principle formulated above, namely, that the appearance or nonappearance of incorrect substitutive recollections does not constitute an essential distinction[3].

But the principal value of the example *aliquis* lies in another of its distinctions from the case *Signorelli*. In the latter example the reproduction of the name becomes disturbed through the after-effects of a stream of thought which began shortly before and was interrupted, but whose content had no distinct relation to the new theme which contained the name Signorelli. Between the repression and the theme of the forgotten name there existed only the relation of temporal contiguity, which reached the other in order that the two should be able to form a connection through an outer association.[4] On the other hand, in the example *aliquis* one can note no trace of such an independent repressed theme which could occupy conscious thought immediately before and then re-echo as a disturbance. The disturbance of the reproduction proceeded here from the inner part of the theme touched upon, and

was brought about by the fact that unconsciously a contradiction arose against the wish-idea represented in the quotation.

The origin must be construed in the following manner: The speaker deplored the fact that the present generation of his people was being deprived of its rights, and like Dido he presaged that a new generation would take upon itself vengeance against the oppressors. He therefore expressed the wish for posterity. In this moment he was interrupted by the contradictory thought: "Do you really wish so much for posterity? That is not true. Just think in what a predicament you would be if you should now receive the information that you must expect posterity from the quarter you have in mind! No, you want no posterity—as much as you need it for your vengeance." This contradiction asserts itself, just as in the example *Signorelli*, by forming an outer association between one of his ideation elements and an element of the repressed wish, but here it is brought about in a most strained manner through what seems an artificial detour of associations. Another important agreement with the example *Signorelli* results from the fact that the contradiction originates from repressed sources and emanates from thoughts which would cause a deviation of attention.

So much for the diversity and the inner relationship of both paradigms of the forgetting of names. We have learned to know a second mechanism of forgetting, namely, the disturbance of thought through an inner contradiction emanating from the repression. In the course of this

discussion we shall repeatedly meet with this process, which seems to me to be the more easily understood.

III

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FORGETTING OF NAMES AND ORDER OF WORDS

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Experiences like those mentioned concerning the process of forgetting a part of the order of words from a foreign language may cause one to wonder whether the forgetting of the order of words in one's own language requires an essentially different explanation. To be sure, one is not wont to be surprised if after awhile a formula or poem learned by heart can only be reproduced imperfectly, with variations and gaps. Still, as this forgetting does not affect equally all the things learned together, but seems to pick out therefrom definite parts, it may be worth our effort to investigate analytically some examples of such faulty reproductions.

Brill reports the following example:—

“While conversing one day with a very brilliant young woman she had occasion to quote from Keats. The poem was entitled ‘Ode to Apollo,’ and she recited the following lines:—

“In thy western house of gold
Where thou livest in thy state,
Bards, that once sublimely told
Prosaic truths that came too late.’

She hesitated many times during the recitation, being sure that there was something wrong with the last line. To her great surprise, on referring to the book she found that not only was the last line misquoted but that there were many other mistakes. The correct lines read as follows:—

ODE TO APOLLO

“In thy western *halls* of gold
When thou *sittest* in thy state,
Bards, that *erst* sublimely told
Heroic deeds and sang of fate.’

The words italicized are those that have been forgotten and replaced by others during the recitation.

“She was astonished at her many mistakes, and attributed them to a failure of memory. I could readily convince her, however, that there was no qualitative or quantitative disturbance of memory in her case, and recalled to her our conversation immediately before quoting these lines.

“We were discussing the over-estimation of personality among lovers, and she thought it was Victor Hugo who said that love is the greatest thing in the world because it makes an angel or a god out of a grocery clerk. She continued: ‘Only when we are in love have we blind faith in humanity; everything is perfect, everything is beautiful, and ... everything is so poetically unreal. Still, it is a wonderful experience; worth going through, notwithstanding the terrible disappointments that usually follow. It puts us on a level with the gods and incites us to all sorts of artistic

activities. We become real poets; we not only memorize and quote poetry, but we often become Apollos ourselves.’ She then quoted the lines given above.

“When I asked on what occasion she memorized the lines she could not recall. As a teacher of elocution she was wont to memorize so much and so often that it was difficult to tell just when she had memorized these lines. ‘Judging by the conversation,’ I suggested, ‘it would seem that this poem is intimately associated with the idea of over-estimation of personality of one in love. Have you perhaps memorized this poem when you were in such a state?’ She became thoughtful for a while and soon recalled the following facts: Twelve years before, when she was eighteen years old, she fell in love. She met the young man while participating in an amateur theatrical performance. He was at the time studying for the stage, and it was predicted that some day he would be a matinée idol. He was endowed with all the attributes needed for such a calling. He was well built, fascinating, impulsive, very clever, and ... very fickle-minded. She was warned against him, but she paid no heed, attributing it all to the envy of her counsellors. Everything went well for a few months, when she suddenly received word that her Apollo, for whom she had memorized these lines, had eloped with and married a very wealthy young woman. A few years later she heard that he was living in a Western city, where he was taking care of his father-in-law’s interests.

“The misquoted lines are now quite plain. The discussion about the over-estimation of personality among lovers unconsciously recalled to her a disagreeable experience,

when she herself over-estimated the personality of the man she loved. She thought he was a god, but he turned out to be even worse than the average mortal. The episode could not come to the surface because it was determined by very disagreeable and painful thoughts, but the unconscious variations in the poem plainly showed her present mental state. The poetic expressions were not only changed to prosaic ones, but they clearly alluded to the whole episode.”

Another example of forgetting the order of words of a poem well known to the person I shall cite from Dr. C. G. Jung,^[5] quoting the words of the author:—

“A man wished to recite the familiar poem, ‘A Pine-tree Stands Alone,’ etc. In the line ‘He felt drowsy’ he became hopelessly stuck at the words ‘with the white sheet.’ This forgetting of such a well-known verse seemed to me rather peculiar, and I therefore asked him to reproduce what came to his mind when he thought of the words ‘with the white sheet.’ He gave the following series of associations ‘The white sheet makes one think of a white sheet on a corpse—a linen sheet with which one covers a dead body—[pause]—now I think of a near friend—his brother died quite recently—he is supposed to have died of heart disease—he was also very corpulent—my friend is corpulent, too, and I thought that he might meet the same fate—probably he doesn’t exercise enough—when I heard of this death I suddenly became frightened: the same thing might happen to me, as my own family is predisposed to obesity—my grandfather died of heart disease—I, also, am somewhat too corpulent, and for that reason I began an obesity cure a few days ago.’”