

# INSPIRATION, MEDIUMSHIP, SURREALISM: THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVE DISSOCIATION

Michael Grosso

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*And so things went along, since man did not work on himself, not being yet  
awake, or not yet in the fullness of his dream. Arthur Rimbaud (1957, p. 28)*

DISSOCIATION IS A NORMAL part of mental life. For example, sometimes after a telephone conversation I find I have been doodling and have unconsciously produced an intricate drawing. Sometimes, my mainstream awareness gets disconnected from routine behaviors, such as driving a car; I may arrive at my destination unable to recall how I got there. On the other hand, extreme dissociative states such as a fugue, depersonalization, or dissociative identity disorder (DID) are maladaptive and hence get labeled “pathological.”

Dissociative process is a matter of degree. Thus, doodling may be thought of as a semiautomatic activity in which the amnesic rift from the normal self is relatively slight in comparison to dreaming, in which it is deep. But doodling, a superficial type of dissociation, may by degrees evolve into full-fledged automatic writing or drawing.

As Krippner (1994a) has pointed out, interpretations of dissociative phenomena are culture-bound. What we in our rationalistic culture may characterize as pathologically “dissociative” may appear under a different guise in another culture. Speaking of spirit incorporation in Puerto Rico, Krippner writes, “These mediums would reject the suggestion that they are disconnected in any way; on the contrary, they have made a vital connection with a vital part of the universe” (p. 344).

I want to reinforce Krippner’s point in discussing the concept of creative dissociation; what looks like fragmentation or disconnectedness may in fact be a prelude to greater wholeness or higher integration. It may be, and we will see this in the examples below, that before we can “reassociate” on a higher level we first have to “dissociate” from some aspects of lower selfhood or ordinary reality. Creative dissociation is paradoxical because it is destructive and reconstructive at the same time. In what follows I look at three interrelated types of creative dissociation: inspiration, mediumship, and surrealism. For the moment I will rely on the reader’s intuitive understanding of the idea of creativity (but see Krippner, 1994a, pp. 341-342).

## Inspiration

The link between inspiration and dissociation may be seen in the mythic idea of the Muses. According to Greek mythology, there are nine muses, all daughters of Zeus and Memory. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod (Evelyn-White, 1959) describes how he was taught “glorious songs while he was shepherding his lambs....” Writes the poet, “they gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel ... and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things of old” (p. 78). Homer (Il. 1:70) uses almost the exact words to describe the mantic gift of Calchas the seer who “tells of things present, past, and future.” Again, in the *Iliad* (Lattimore, 1967) the poet invokes the Muses: “for ye are goddesses, and are present and know all things.” Through the Muses, the poet becomes present to all things and thus can transcend the limitations of his ordinary self.

Hesiod’s expression “breathed into me a divine voice” clearly suggests that he is dissociated from his normal voice and mind. Now a divine voice speaks through him, proof of which is that now he can sing of past and future. Hesiod, let us note, is literally *inspired* — a spirit is breathed into him. This description suggests that inspiration helps to bring about dissociation through hyperventilation or hypercarbia, conditions known to produce profound altered states of consciousness, states disconnected from patterns of mainstream awareness.

Another reference to the Muses as a source of dissociated consciousness comes from a great philosopher who knew the limitations of rationalism. In Plato’s *Phaedrus* (Fowler, 1966), Socrates says that the “greatest blessings of

humankind arise through madness.” Among several types of creative madness, Socrates speaks of “possession by the Muses,” without whose aid, says he, no poet can reach the heights of greatness (p. 465). In the *Odyssey* (Fitzgerald, 1990, p. 127), a Muse loves Demodocus, takes away his eyesight, and gives him in exchange the poet’s inspired voice. Commenting on the meaning of the Muse, Dodds (1968) speaks of “the feeling that creative work is not the work of the ego” (p. 81). In other words, creativity is linked to dissociation.

Many creative artists have described their experience of inspiration. Here are a few examples from the Western canon. William Blake, in a letter from April 25, 1803, wrote of his “friends in Eternity” being the source of poems that he took “from immediate dictation” (Wilson, 1971, p. 330). Blake stressed the involuntary nature of his experience in which works were produced “without premeditation and even against my will.” Blake’s allusion to his “friends in Eternity” need not be taken literally, although many poets, prophets, and mediums interpret the source of their “dictations” to lie not only outside the mainstream of their conscious minds, but in an altogether different mind, world, or dimension of reality.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a child prodigy, displaying memory and inventive musical skills at a very early age. Some of his abilities, in fact, resembled those we identify nowadays with the “savant syndrome” (Treffert, 1989). For example, like some musical “savants,” Mozart could, upon hearing a piece of music once, immediately reproduce it, note for note. Mozart, however, unlike most savants, grew up to be an original musician, not merely a mnemonic prodigy. One of his letters provides interesting details about how he wrote music. “When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer — say, travelling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. *Whence and how they come, I know not; nor can I force them*” (Ghiselin, 1952, p. 45).

Mozart describes how he applies the rules of counterpoint, adapting his inspired ideas to different instruments, until his composition stands “almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or beautiful statue, at a glance (p. 45). Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once.” This process, he says, “takes place in a pleasing lively dream” (p. 45).

What Mozart transcribed to paper rarely differed from what he heard in his “lively dream.” The writing was automatic — “for whatever may be going on around me, I write, and even talk, but only of fowls or geese or of Gretel or Baerbel, or some such matters.” In other words, he employs what Janet called the “method of distraction” for invoking the “second self” (Crabtree, 1985, p. 24). He occupies his conscious mind with trivia, even so far as to chat about geese or girls, while his hand transcribes what he has already mentally seen as complete. All this, wrote Mozart, was “the best gift I have my divine Maker to thank for” (p. 45).

Friedrich Nietzsche described in his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, how he composed *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It was during the winter of 1886 in Rapallo, Italy, that Nietzsche was, as he put it, “invaded” by the idea of Zarathustra. “Can any one at the end of this nineteenth century possibly have any distinct notion of what poets of a more vigorous period meant by inspiration? If not, I should like to describe it. Provided one has the slightest remnant of superstition left, one can hardly reject completely that one is the mere incarnation, or mouth piece, or medium of some almighty power. The notion of revelation describes the condition quite simply, by which I mean that something profoundly convulsive and disturbing suddenly becomes visible and audible with indescribable definiteness and exactness. One hears — one does not seek; one takes — one does not ask who gives: A thought flashes out like lightning, inevitably without hesitation — I have never had any choice about it... Everything occurs without volition, as if in an eruption of freedom, independence, power, and divinity” (Ghiselin, 1952, p. 202).

The author who proclaimed that “God is dead” does not hesitate to use religious language to describe his inspiration: “incarnation,” “mouthpiece,” “medium,” “almighty power,” “revelation,” “without volition,” “divinity.” Everything in his narrative points to a process in which ordinary egoic awareness is pushed “convulsively” aside so that something else is allowed to stream through. The key phrase is “without volition.” The author “never had any choice.” One does not seek,” wrote Nietzsche. The conscious mind does not seek during states of inspiration; the latter “erupt” with the force of “divinity.” One is reminded of Picasso’s words: “I do not seek, I find.”

Inspiration, according to Nietzsche, is an experience of enhanced vitality. “When my creative energy flowed most freely, my muscular activity was always greatest. The body was inspired; let us leave the ‘soul’ out of

consideration. I might often have been seen dancing; I used to walk through the hills for seven or eight hours on end without a hint of fatigue. I slept well, laughed a good deal — I was perfectly vigorous and patient.” On the other hand, it is notable that prior to and immediately after this prolonged burst of inspiration, Nietzsche, like many mediums, was in poor health.

The next example of inspired creative dissociation describes a great poet’s attempt to free his poetic energies. It was on May 15, 1871, that Arthur Rimbaud wrote a letter to Paul Demeny, detailing his counter-Cartesian method of achieving the dissociated state of the poetic seer (1957, pp. 28–35). Rimbaud was at this time 16 years old; by the age of 19 his writing career was over.

The letter, which declares itself a “discourse on the future of poetry,” was written on the heels of the adolescent immersing himself in books on magic and the occult. Twice he mentions the idea of “universal soul” or mind. For Rimbaud, the measure of the poetry of the future would be its visionary originality. Each poet would “define the amount of unknown arising in his time in the universal soul.” Rimbaud thought of the poet as an explorer of the unknown. “So I am working to make myself a visionary,” he wrote (1957, p. 34).

Central to the project of making himself into a *voyant* or visionary was a technique of creative dissociation. “For, I is someone else (*autre*),” reads the most quoted sentence of this famous letter. The ordinary I is not the I of the true poet but of a mere “functionary.” The “other” self is what the poet seeks to awaken. To do this he had to dissociate from his conventional ego and its conventional way of perceiving the world. “The first study for a man who wants to be a poet is the knowledge of himself, entire (1957), pp. 28–35.” In our normal, fragmented state, we are unconscious of the “entire” self that we are, the universal soul.

To make oneself into a visionary and reveal the entire self is an act of violence, and “the soul has to be made monstrous.” Like Prometheus, the poet is a “thief of fire” who “makes himself a *visionary* through a long, a prodigious and rational disordering of all the senses. Every form of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he consumes all the poisons in him, keeping only their quintessences (1957, p. 32).” This systematic disordering of conventional sense-life is the way to the other self and to the unknown that is the goal of the future of poetry. Rimbaud speaks of the poetry of the future being a return to the Greeks, a point he does not elaborate, but that probably refers to Plato’s idea of sacred madness being essential to the true poet. Rimbaud’s theory of conscious dissociation from the conventional ego and ordinary sense-life was taken up again by the surrealists in the early twentieth century, a topic we return to after the next section.

### Mediumship

Inspiration is cognate to mediumship (Salter, 1961, pp. 78–94). Let us say that a medium is anybody with a facility for communicating with unconscious sources during dissociation. This definition is neutral with regard to claims about communicating with the dead or with spirits. Weighing the evidence for such claims is not our concern here, which merely is to illustrate the concept of creative dissociation. I use the word *creative* because some mediums reportedly produce artistic works of quality, extraordinary physical effects, purportedly paranormal cognitions, guidance from supposed supernatural entities, as well as supposed communications with the dead.

One way to approach the dissociative side of mediumship is through the idea of the *Control*. Mediums usually work through Controls, constructs whose job it is to mediate between worlds or between strata of consciousness. Exactly what these Controls are — spirits, guardian angels, secondary selves, or subpersonalities — is a question we need not ask here. It is what they do that interests us: namely, expedite traffic between psychological realms of being, help dissociate the ego from its central position in the consciousness. The Control is experienced as autonomous, as “automatic,” literally “self-moving.” In the following examples, another ego, agency, or center of consciousness inserts itself in the normal stream of a person’s mental life.

#### Pearl Curran

On July 8, 1913, Pearl Curran, a 31-year-old housewife, was manipulating a ouija board when it spelled out the words: “Many moons ago I lived. Again I come — Patience Worth my name.” This day marked the beginning of a

series of astonishing literary productions. “Patience Worth,” a unique personality and self-proclaimed spirit from the seventeenth century, produced through Curran’s mediumship thousands of poems, six novels, and reams of philosophical musings that apparently transcended the abilities of the medium in her ordinary state.

Patience Worth served as a Control, a vehicle that facilitated Curran’s creative dissociation. An early investigator concluded, “Mrs. Curran is an intelligent woman, but her mind is much inferior to that of Patience Worth. In short, here is a subconscious self far outstripping in power and range the primary consciousness... In some ways the dissociation has resulted in the formation of a self with greatly increased caliber” (Prince, 1964, p. 431).

Examples of this “greatly increased caliber” included the ability to write historical novels that elicited the highest praise from critics of the *Hartford Courant*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*. The writings were full of obsolete, archaic, and dialectical words, as well as recondite and obscure historical facts quite outside Curran’s normal knowledge. The manner of her literary production was remarkable for its “phenomenal memory, phenomenal speed, and phenomenal complexity of mental operations” (Prince, 1964, p. 487). Often she would stop writing, attend to some chore, and later resume as if there were no interruption. Like Mozart, her literary productions seem to have been completed in some deeper mental stratum; she seemed merely to have to read them, as if from some readily available prompter. Patience Worth could change styles instantly, for example, to writing *Telka*, in which, as Caspar Yost wrote, “no book since the days of Layamon, with the exception of Wycliffe’s Bible, is as exclusively Anglo-Saxon as this work of Patience Worth’s” (Prince, 1964, p. 361).

Summarizing his careful analysis of this case, Prince argues, concerning the appearance of Patience Worth, that no ordinary person “suddenly blazes out in maturity in the exercise of extraordinary mental powers, who has given no sign of them before.” Prince concluded that this case of Patience Worth showed either that we have to revise our concept of the unconscious or admit that some agency outside Pearl Curran’s mind was the source of Patience Worth’s deliverances. This is a remarkable claim, and the interested reader should study the original source. My point is that it was by means of the Control that Mrs. Curran became dissociated from her normal self and was thus able to *associate with her supernormal, creative self*.

Similarly, for the other cases I want to discuss, creative dissociation may be thought of as a phase of higher association. The ordinary self seems to lose its autonomy through the Control, but only in order to gain access to a hidden extraordinary self. What I want to stress is that dissociation, often patently maladaptive, can also become a tool for creativity. The case of “Patience Worth” demonstrates that ordinary people may secretly harbor within themselves extraordinary poetic, imaginative, and spiritual abilities.

### **Joan of Arc**

Creative dissociation has played a role in extraordinary leadership. A dramatic illustration is the case of a young girl who heard voices and saw visions that instructed her to lead an army against the English occupiers of her country. Joan of Arc was 16 years of age when her Controls took over, assuming the identity of St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret. Interpretations of Joan of Arc’s experiences run the gamut from hallucination induced by temporal lobe seizure to supernatural visitation. What is certain is that they profoundly changed her life and, in fact, changed the course of Western history.

Something quite *other* displaced the perspective of Joan’s normal self, which happened to be pious and wholesome from the start. Her voices and visions — her dissociated personae — took over with obsessive force, inspiring her to perform deeds unheard of for a teenage girl. She demonstrated a brilliant capacity to argue with her social superiors and coped with the overwhelming skepticism she encountered at every stage of her mission; she endured physical hardship, and with uncanny speed healed from wounds she bore in battle; and finally she remained resolute in face of being burned at the stake (Gies, 1981).

In one instance, there is evidence of precognition concerning a wound she would suffer. Two weeks before the event she wrote a letter saying she would be wounded in battle before Orleans. Also, her confessor, Paquerel, reported that the day before battle she said she would be wounded the following day and would bleed from above her breast (Sackville-West, 1936/1991, pp. 361–362).

Another curious incident is worth mentioning because of what it implies about her “voices.” According to trial records, Joan leaped from a 65-foot turret in an attempt to escape imprisonment in Luxembourg. She did so contrary to the explicit commands of her voices, a fact at odds with the view that her voices were merely expressions of her own inward desires. The fact that she survived this leap without seriously injuring herself is also notable (Sackville-West, 1936/1991, pp. 254–258). The incident testifies to the alien, dissociated nature of her voices.

Hallucinatory voices and visions are clearly dissociative phenomena, but without them the marvelous career of Joan of Arc would have been unthinkable. Once again we note the paradox of creative dissociation: What appears at one level to involve being disconnected from the routine ego later emerges as part of an overall creative process.

### **Eusapia Palladino**

If Pearl Curran and Joan of Arc embodied literary and social creativity through their “Controls,” the next two examples are preeminent in reports of their paranormal physical and mental capacities. I am begging off from assessing evidence for paranormality in these cases, which would require more space than I have at my disposal; I will, however, state my view that in both instances the evidence is at least suggestive (Carrington, 1909; Salter, 1950). What I wish to emphasize is the Control construct and how it relates to creative dissociation.

Thus, in the case of Palladino, the Control was a deceased spirit, “John King.” The *soi-disant* King presented himself as a romantic spirit, in life a buccaneer, knight, and governor, and in death, a portentous guru. The John King Control was interesting because it was an intermediary or “daemonic” construct coveted and enjoyed by many mediums, beginning with the Davenport brothers in 1850. Subsequently, the dashing John King appeared as the Control in the mediumship of two New Yorkers, Joanna Kellog and Mary Jay; in England, of Fanny Marshall, Agnes Guppy, and Georgina Haughton; and of the redoubtable Madam Blavatsky. John King is said to have materialized so clearly that an artist was able to sketch him. He was said to have been responsible for the physical phenomena of the American medium, Etta Wriedt. And John King became the reputed Control for the Neapolitan medium, Eusapia Palladino (Fodor, 1966, pp. 190–191).

Palladino baffled most of the investigators who studied her, compelling them to conclude, as Crookes (1972) did with D. D. Home, that unknown physical powers manifested through her. An uneducated peasant from southern Italy, Palladino’s childhood was marked by abuse and personal trauma. More competent professionals studied her than any other medium; Italian, French, English, Polish, Russian, and American investigators were convinced she possessed paranormal abilities. A few held out, like Richard Hodgson and Eleanor Sidgwick, who felt that because Eusapia was known to play some inept tricks, some of them perhaps a product of her dissociated state, no positive conclusions could be drawn.

Palladino’s clumsy attempts at legerdemain were known to all her serious investigators; however, despite the most stringent precautions, puzzling phenomena were still observed (Feilding, 1963). For Palladino, creative dissociation was a group process. Some experimenters failed to understand this; it was not easy for them to be critically circumspect and at the same time warmly supportive. The French physician Joseph Maxwell wrote of Hodgson and the Cambridge group whose findings were negative that they “were responsible for her frauds, and almost wholly responsible for the failure of her experiments. They appear to have neglected the psychological side of a medium’s role, and forgot that a medium is not a mechanical instrument” (Carrington, 1909, p. 55).

Dr. Joseph Venzano (1907), present at a series of *seances* with Palladino, emphasized the importance of the right group dynamic for producing positive effects, stating that rich phenomena “were due to the exceptionally harmonious condition of the circle and to a special mediumistic condition on the part of the medium” while “discordant conditions” render phenomena more difficult to achieve as well as lend themselves to fraudulent behavior (p. 167). Eric Dingwall (1962, pp. 178–217), in his account of Palladino’s mediumship, calls attention to the veiled distaste and hostility of some leading English investigators toward the vulgar and sometimes overtly sexual Eusapia. This attitude may have aggravated “discordance conditions” and resulted in the medium’s apparently poor performance during the 1895 Cambridge sittings. The right group dynamic is sometimes essential for freeing the potential of creative dissociation.

The fact is that in Palladino's presence unusual events were said to have occurred, including: movements of objects, levitations of objects and people, undulation of curtains, the appearance of apports (arrival of objects through an apparent penetration of matter), changes in the medium's weight, inexplicable blows and raps, impressions in plastic substances, touching and grasping by invisible hands, appearance of luminous points, clouds and mists, appearance of strange hands and faces, and other oddities. For the present purpose, I want to stress that these phenomena were observed when the medium seemed to be in a dissociated state and her Control was most active. Carrington (1909), whose book is the most comprehensive treatment of the subject in English, wrote: "It seems that when 'John King' (whatever that may mean) is merged with her personality, amnesia takes place, and the more important phenomena are produced" (p. 312).

### **Leonore Piper**

Next, consider the best investigated *mental* medium, first brought to the attention of the scientific world by William James. Hodgson, trained in law and philosophy, had a gruff skeptical temper, exposed the chicanery of Madam Blavatsky, doubted Palladino, and hired detectives to make sure that Leonore Piper was not resorting to trickery. In the end, Piper convinced Hodgson of postmortem survival and brought William James to the brink of assent (Murphy & Ballou, 1960, pp. 197–210).

What sort of a woman was she? She was described as quite normal, honest, and straightforward. Her gift was that as a young woman she had learned to enter dissociated states. Throughout Piper's long career as a medium, there were always one or more spirit Controls, in charge during her dissociated episodes. In the early years of her career, it was Phinuit, a purported French physician who could barely utter a word of French; next, in perhaps her most creative phase of mediumship, Phinuit was joined by George Pelham, a recently deceased young man from New York, who in life had been a skeptical friend of Hodgson. The Pelham persona possessing the medium's psyche repeatedly identified the surviving friends of the deceased man at seances; it picked out the people Pelham had known in life and spoke to them intimately, stating specific details, and generally carrying on exactly as if the living George Pelham were in the room. Later the Pelham persona faded, another group of spirits took over, and Piper's mediumship gradually shifted to automatic writing.

A careful study of the Piper phenomena suggests that either some human beings survive the death of their bodies or that the paranormal mental powers of some mediums may be vastly greater than mainstream science is prepared to admit. Piper's mediumship is a remarkable illustration of the creative potential of dissociation, for it provides data about possible alternate realities and about the extensive paranormal powers of some human beings.

As to the Controls that seem to be omnipresent in mediumship, their reality status may be obscure but not their essential function. Carrington (in Smith, 1964, p. 37) puts it like this: "...although the evidence for the existence of these trance personalities was of the slightest, they did nevertheless succeed in bringing through a vast mass of supernormal information which could not be obtained in their absence." A literal-minded and rigid insistence on the personal identity of the Controls (or trance personalities) would obviously be fatal to the whole process.

I believe that mediumistic Controls reveal something about the creative function of mythology. Indeed, the belief in spiritual agencies, such as saints and guardian angels, seems to involve imaginative constructs that are useful in liberating exotic aspects of human potential (Grosso, 1992). From a psychological point of view, an attitude of rationalistic literalism impedes that potential.

### **Surrealism**

When looking at examples of inspiration and mediumship, we find that under certain conditions one can both disconnect from and transcend the limitations of mainstream consciousness, behaviors, and self-concept. Surrealism is my last example of creative dissociation.

Surrealism, closely allied to Dada and Futurism, became an international movement dedicated to a way of life based on hatred of war and of middle-class rationalism, a revolutionary fusion of art and psychology. Leading theorist André Breton (in Rubin, 1968) defined surrealism as "pure psychic automatism, by which one intends to

express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind. Dictation of thought [occurs] in the absence of any control exercised by reason, and beyond any esthetic or moral preoccupation.” Again, “Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought.” “I believe,” Breton said, “in the future resolution of the states of dream and reality, in appearance so contradictory, in a sort of absolute reality, or *surréalité*” (Rubin, 1968, p. 64).

It is clear that surrealism is based on dissociation, the keynote being the pursuit of “pure psychic automatism,” escape from the control of reason, and even from esthetic and moral considerations. Logic, esthetics, and morals would be impediments to “pure automatism.” Breton describes the conjunction of dream and reality as a form of neglected “association,” which again illustrates the idea that creative dissociation is not just a matter of disconnection but of reconnection to some larger whole.

Surrealism brings creative dissociation to a new level of meaning. “Surreality,” according to Breton, is a project of the future in which the states of dream and reality are resolved or synthesized, and the unconscious is made conscious in a concrete way. Freud is an influence here; Breton started out as a psychiatrist. The therapeutic project of surrealism was present from the start, except that for Breton, unlike for Freud, authentic therapy is impossible without social revolution.

Some surrealists were in fact, attracted to Marxism; they wanted to destroy the traditions that worked hand in hand with the oppressive established “reality.” Actually, the surrealist idea of a “future resolution” of the tension between dream and reality is full of apocalyptic overtones (Grosso, 1995, pp. 340–351).

The surrealist revolution, by definition, had to take place on the plane of consciousness. So, I would like now to finish this section by reciting several surrealist techniques designed to evoke the dissociative process meant to lead to this new consciousness. Bear in mind that these were techniques that worked as artistic devices *and* as meta-esthetic strategies for bringing about the revolution of surreality. What follows could be described as notes on the mechanics of inspiration.

De Chirico, one of the heroes of the surrealist movement, emphasized learning how to view things in such a way that they “escape all human limits.” The barriers of “logic and common sense” must be overcome, so one can return to “regions of childhood vision and dream.” De Chirico tells of a wintry day in Versailles when he discovered that every column, every marble statue, every window he looked at seemed to be looking back at him with questioning eyes. It was as if everything “possessed a spirit, an impenetrable soul.” De Chirico reflected: “Original man must have wandered through a world full of uncanny signs. He must have trembled at each step” (Chipp, 1969, pp. 397–409). The painter was talking about the realms we now refer to as the sacred or the mythical. Dissociation from the limits imposed by logic reveal an “original” mythical and animistic consciousness of things. For many people, learning to live in that consciousness would lead to a cultural revolution.

The basic technique of surrealism is automatism, employed to loosen the constraints of the ego. This sometimes took a peculiar form of experiment in automatic writing called the “exquisite corpse.” The brainchild of Breton, each participant wrote a word, phrase, or image on a piece of paper, unaware of what the others wrote; then all papers were collected and randomly shuffled. The results of this process can form wholly unexpected — dissociated — patterns that may become the basis of an original poem or artwork. This could be a model for other experimental group procedures; one could try it in art, but also in therapy, or in problem solving. By randomizing our thought processes, “exquisite corpses” could help us break out of self-limiting mindsets.

Salvador Dali developed something he called “paranoic critical activity,” the main idea being to try systematically to concretize one’s obsessions. Dali’s were with putrefaction, masturbation, time, death, hell, and so on. Paranoic critical activity is similar to Victor Frankl’s paradoxical intention. Instead of denying or repressing the negative, we affirm and express it; we force ourselves to look at it in a concrete way. We exaggerate, *make it monstrous*, as Rimbaud said. We get the paranoia out of our system, so to speak, and at the same time, transform it into something artistically engaging or therapeutically helpful. This “activity” seems to me part of the healing power of art. It must have worked for Dali, who said, “The only difference between me and a madman is that I am not mad” (Bosquet, 1969, p. 83).

The technique of accidental or incongruous juxtaposition was a favorite surrealist ploy. The idea was to undermine our routine sense of reality by letting things randomly combine. Collage is a way of dissociating oneself from repressive logic. As defined by Max Ernst, it is the “systematic exploitation of an accidental or deliberate meeting of two unrelated realities on a plane that is related to neither” (Schneede, 1973, p. 19). The meeting of the two unrelated realities is a type of dissociation; logical expectation and habitual perception are confused, and imagination is forced to make a new connection, forge a new meaning. The technique of collage is a way of baffling our mental habits in order to stimulate a creative response. The therapeutic implication of this seems considerable once we realize that ordinary life is a constant “collage” of meetings between “unrelated realities.”

### Conclusion

In my view, creative dissociation represents the mind’s evolved ability to escape, transform, and possibly transcend the limitations of ordinary reality, which are, generally speaking, dangerous, depressing, and frequently traumatic.

Judging by the span of time our examples encompassed, creative dissociation may be a basic feature of human experience. From the cases we surveyed, I think it is possible to discern a line of development. The phenomenon seems to have evolved from the spontaneous and the individual to the voluntary and the collective.

Under the heading of inspiration, we noted the sacred madness that Plato praised and the idea of Muses who inspire artists. We confront the notion of genius as daemonic displacer of the ordinary mind or self; the poet, in Plato’s *Ion*, is described as literally *ekphron*, “out of [his] prudent mind.” With the nine Muses, there is hope that this spontaneous inspiration may be, if not controlled, then at least teased out via the magical language of invocation.

The examples I chose from mediumship were ones that have been carefully investigated and about which much data have been gathered. In my estimation, Joan of Arc, Leonore Piper, Eusapia Palladino, and Pearl Curran constitute a challenge to mainline psychology, for the records illustrate that their behaviors deviate from what our ruling paradigms permit. In this chapter, however, my sole concern has been to show that the remarkable behaviors of these women were the fruits of dissociation.

The more voluntary dissociation becomes, the easier it is to exploit its creative potential. Thus, the inspired prophet, medium, or artist is receptive when the floodgates open but also tries to capture the inspiration in a culturally useful form. One seeks to widen the scope of the voluntary. Plato went so far as to define philosophy as the practice of death, which, as Plato defined it, means dissociating oneself from one's body. Voluntary dissociation was also part of the invocation of the Muses while the cult of Dionysos dissociated through dance, psychedelics, and hyperventilation.

The great dissociated mediums and prophets revealed the vast sprawling geography of the imaginal realm that has ruled the spiritual life of humanity while psychical researchers have tried to sift the kernels of fact that may be embedded in their narratives. A substantial body of data clearly shows that when the mind is dissociated from mainline “reality,” new dimensions of human potential are sometimes revealed (Krippner, 1994b).

The question that interests me is whether it is possible to facilitate the process. Is it possible to experimentally incorporate creative dissociation into everyday life? And can it be done in a group, social or collective setting? To these questions the surrealists answered “yes,” representing a critical turn in the history of creative dissociation. With surrealism, dissociation became a revolutionary weapon for overthrowing the entire postwar reality principle, the fundamental thought structures that sustained established reality.

Surreality — my candidate for the advanced development of creative dissociation — was an attempt to revive the cult of the Muses. A new invocation becomes possible in light of psychoanalysis and psychical research, providing new insights into the mechanics of inspiration. Surrealism left a legacy of hypercartesian techniques with one main goal: the controlled liberation of automatisms that would serve as the gateway to new behaviors, new modes of consciousness, and new self-concepts.

But the novelty here was pursued for social not just individual ends. For Breton, de Chirico, Dali, and company, dissociation was the basis of a cultural revolution, a kind of post-religious eschatology that preached the necessity for disengagement from and destruction of the prevailing reality principle. Repressive rationality becomes the Satan to be vanquished by the Saviour of the Unconscious. Surrealism, in homage to the “magical child” in us all, wants to make our dreams come true. Surrealism constitutes a frontal assault on ordinary reality. For the surrealist, creative dissociation becomes a principle for the art of enhanced living, allowing the meanderings of dreams to surface into the concrete texture of lived life; it involved learning how to navigate semiautomatic states at will.

We are living in exciting and dangerous times and need new ways of learning to play what might be called the reality game. The greatest therapeutic potential for a person suffering from “reality” is to be able to say: We are not alone; each one of us is multiple. Whether we think of this as referring to multiple mental strata or multiple worlds, the challenge is to learn the art of creative dissociation from the limitations of everyday life.

This would consist of each person being free to seek the right balance between the spontaneity of our dreams and the repressive nature of ordinary reality. Surreality is what happens when we surrender to the unfettered play of thought, and when we believe with our whole being in the creative power of dreams. How can we make use of such an idea? What, if any, is its therapeutic, its emancipatory value?

In my opinion, there is no one answer to this question, no formula we can instantly apply, because there is always something unpredictable about dissociated, automatic states. After all, in dissociation the ego becomes another. We change, sometimes dramatically. Creativity implies novelty, and novelty is by definition an open-ended concept. And this, to my mind, is the appeal of the perspective I am presenting. The phenomena of creative dissociation imply the possibility of new learning experiences, new cognitive adventures, and new stories.

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