

MEDIUMSHIP, PSYCHICAL RESEARCH, DISSOCIATION, AND THE POWERS OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

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ABSTRACT: Since the 19th century many psychiatrists and psychologists have considered mediumship to be related to the subconscious mind and to dissociative processes produced mainly by internal conventional processes of the medium's mind. However, some psychologists and psychical researchers active between the last decades of the 19th century and the 1920s expressed a different view. Individuals such as Théodore Flournoy, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, Frederic W. H. Myers, Julian Ochorowicz, Charles Richet, Eleanor Sidgwick, and Eduard von Hartmann, argued that some mediums combined dissociation with supernormal phenomena such as knowledge acquired without the use of the senses, and the production of physical effects seemingly beyond the normal bodily capabilities. Depending on the theorist, other issues such as pathology and discarnate agency were also part of the discussions. The supernormal was never accepted by science at large and today is rarely mentioned in the dissociation literature. But ideas related to the supernormal were part of this literature. A complete history of dissociation, and of the subconscious mind, should include consideration of this body of work.

Keywords: subconscious mind, dissociation, history of mediumship, psychical research, telepathy

In his book *The Discovery of the Unconscious* Ellenberger (1970, pp. 317–318) argued that by 1900 four main functions of the unconscious mind had been established. These functions were conservative (the repository of memories and perceptions), dissolutive (automatic and dissociative aspects that may interfere with normal functions), creative, and mythopoetic (or fictional fabrications of all sorts). In this paper I will focus on one function not included by Ellenberger, what we would refer to today as “parapsychological.” These phenomena were also referred to as psychic, metapsychic, and supernormal. My discussion will focus on theoretical ideas about mediumship and the subconscious mind that include the supernormal, ideas prevalent from the late 19th century to late in the 20th century. The purpose of the paper is to reacquaint contemporary students of dissociation and of mediumship with this nearly forgotten past, a past that at the time interacted with and affected contemporary psychological and psychiatric work toward constructing the concept of dissociation and the idea of hidden powers of the subconscious mind.

To this day the term dissociation has different meanings and conceptualizations (Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011; Spitzer, Barnow, Freyberger, & Joergen, 2006), but it is frequently used to refer to a misunderstood process underlying disruption or separation of memory, identity and sensations from consciousness. The term was not used by the authors discussed in this paper but they evidently believed in such hypothetical process to refer not only to the equally ill-defined mediumistic trance, but to the various manifestations of hypnosis, and hysteria, the latter which some postulated included fugues, amnesia, and so-called “secondary” (or more than two) personalities.

Although I (Alvarado, 2002, 2010a) and several others (e.g., Crabtree, 1993; Ellenberger, 1970; Plas, 2000; Shamdasani, 1994) have argued for contributions to the study of psychic phenomena or the supernormal, to psychology and psychiatry, and particularly to ideas about dissociation and concepts about nonconscious levels of the mind, here I focus on ideas that have not received much attention.

Mediumship in Context: Spiritualism, Psychical Research, and Psychiatry

The psychical researchers of the 19th century inherited from previous movements the idea that human beings had powers that could transcend physical limitations (for overviews see Alvarado, 2012; Crabtree, 1993; Inglis, 1992; Méheust, 1999a; Podmore, 1902a, 1902b). The work of the mesmerists—as seen in books such as *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance* (Esdaile, 1852)—promoted the view that some people could influence others at a distance to produce phenomena such as cures and thought transference. In addition to publicizing psychic

phenomena, thus creating an intellectual and experiential context for the unorthodox, mesmerism was important for the development of Spiritualism and mediumship in various ways. Among them were the various discussions in the mesmeric literature on nonphysical ideas (Alvarado, 2012, pp. 39–40) and the “mediumistic-like” phenomena reported by some mesmerized individuals (Crabtree, 1993, pp. 196–212).

As social reformer Robert Dale Owen (1860), who lived from 1801–1877, discussed in *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, Spiritualists assumed that some individuals had the ability to perceive and to channel phenomena caused by spirits of the dead. Psychical research emerged as an attempt to continue and systematize the work of the mesmerists and the Spiritualists by exploring hidden dimensions of human functioning and the possibility of spirit agency (Gauld, 1968; Lachapelle, 2011; Moore, 1977; Wolfram, 2009).

While most contemporary scientists seemed to accept a closed model of the mind in which the workings of the subconscious and the phenomena of dissociation were explained by intrapsychic psychological, physiological, and medical factors (including outside influences such as suggestion and trauma), some of the psychical researchers (like the Spiritualists) argued for a model in which the mind was an open system not bound by the limitations of the nervous system and the senses (Gauld, 1968). Although the work in London of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in 1882, focused on different supernormal phenomena, such as spontaneous and experimental telepathy (e.g., Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886; Guthrie, 1884; see also Gauld, 1968; Le Maléfan, 2008; Luckhurst, 2002), one of the major lines of work that the SPR and researchers outside England conducted was the study of mediumship.

Several historians have chronicled the prominence of mediumship in the 19th century. Some examples are historical studies about spiritualism and mediumship in England (Owen, 1990), Italy (Biondi, 1988), and the United States (Braude, 2001) (see also Alvarado 2010a; Alvarado and Zingrone, 2012, Edelman, 1985, and Galvan, 2010). Some mediums, such as Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1899) and Cora L.V. Tappan (later Richmond; 1840–1923), were trance or inspirational speakers on social, scientific and philosophical topics (Hardinge, n.d.; Tappan, 1875). Many communications recorded through mediums suggested to some, as one historian wrote, that mediums were in “an elevated state, providing access to spirits and therefore to knowledge of the world beyond inaccessible to conscious human beings” (Braude, 2001, p. 87). The early American spiritualist literature contained many spirit communications about the nature of the afterlife and moral and philosophical topics (e.g., Hammond, 1866; Hare, 1855). Many recorded communications from famous individuals, among them Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) (Edmonds & Dexter, 1853), Thomas Paine (1737–1809; Hammond, 1866), and American presidents George Washington (1732–1799) and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826; Spicer, 1853). Some, like Allan Kardec (pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Rivail Denizard, 1804–1869) in France, questioned the spirits through mental mediums (Kardec, 1857). The “spirits” dictated teachings about such issues as God, the spiritual world, reincarnation, the intervention of spirits in life, moral laws dealing with various issues (e.g., society, progress, freedom), evocation of spirits, and mediumship, among many other topics (see also Edelman, 1995; Sharp, 2006). But there were also more specific communications in which mediums presented verifiable information about deceased individuals (e.g., Moses, 1879).

Among the influential phenomena of mediumship were verbal communications, automatic writing (including the production of literary works), as well as visions (e.g., Edmonds & Dexter, 1853; Moses, 1879). Many were impressed by what one author called personification, or “the appropriation or adoption of the name and many times of the character of a personality foreign to that of the medium” (Aksakof, 1890/n.d., p. 30; this and other translations are mine). Such phenomena, reported through the history of Spiritualism and psychical research with many mediums, received much discussion (see Alvarado, 2011b).

In addition to the mental mediums, there were physical mediums thought to manifest spirits through physical manifestations. These phenomena included acoustic ones such as raps (sounds produced on objects) or voices, the movement of objects, luminous effects, the appearance of writing on slates or paper, and materializations of figures, both solid and misty, that supposedly represented the spirits of the dead. Two famous examples were mediums Florence Cook (1856–1904), well-known for her materializations of a “spirit” called Katie King (Corner, Corner, Luxmoore, Tapp, & Harrison, 1873), and D. D. Home (1833–1886), in whose presence sitters reported levitations of tables and of the medium, remarkable beautiful materializations of hands, and immunity to fire, among many other manifestations (Adare, 1869).

From the beginning of mediumship there were many attempts to explain the phenomena in conventional terms, that is, in terms of the closed model of the mind described above. Other than fraud, there were a variety of medical and psychophysiological explanations of mediumship (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2012; Crabtree, 1993; Le Maléfan, 1999; Owen, 1990). These included the view that some mediumistic phenomena represented examples

of automatic activities of the nervous system (e.g., Faraday, 1853). Others argued that trances frequently were a disease of the nervous system “in which the cerebral activity is concentrated in some limited region of the brain, the activity of the rest of the brain being for the time suspended” (Beard, 1879, p. 67).

Many physicians wrote about mediumship, particularly mental mediumship, as manifestations of psychopathology. (On mediumship and pathology, see Alvarado and Zingrone, 2012; Le Maléfan, 1999; Moreira-Almeida, Almeida, and Lotufo Neto, 2005; and Owen, 1990.) These works included ideas of uterine pathology (Marvin, 1874). Pierre Janet (1859–1947) wrote that mediumship was related to “a particular morbid state analogous to those that may later become hysteria or insanity: mediumship is a symptom and not a cause” (Janet, 1889, p. 406).

The medical interpretation of mediumship was reinforced by evidence of personality changes that resembled spirit communications in contexts other than mediumship. These included spontaneous changes of personality (e.g., Elliotson, 1846), among them the famous Félicité X case (Azam, 1887), as well as seeming secondary personalities that appeared during the hypnotic trance (e.g., Janet, 1889; Lang, 1843), or as the result of suggestion. This is what one researcher referred to as “objectification of types” (Richet, 1883).

The production of these dramas under hypnotic suggestion opened the door to later psychological speculations about mediumship, such as those assuming that some spirit communications were the “product of the medium’s subconscious imagination, working from recollections and latent worries” (Flournoy, 1899, p. 144). This and later analyses of the mediumistic romances of a previous life in India and France and of life on Mars produced by the medium Hélène Smith (pseudonym of Catherine Elise Muller, 1861–1929; Flournoy, 1900) supported one of the main assumptions of the medical and psychological model: Mediumistic phenomena were produced by the internal mental resources of the medium, perhaps influenced by suggestion. This is what one writer referred to as the “enormous suggestibility and autosuggestibility of mediums” (Flournoy, 1900, p. 443).

However, there were others who argued that the subconscious mind had more than psychological and pathological functions in mediumship. These individuals proposed the concept of supernormal powers of the subconscious mind to explain mediumistic phenomena. Although ideas along these lines were present earlier during the 19th century (Alvarado, Nahm, & Sommers, 2012; Crabtree, 1993), my focus will be examples published between the late 19th century and the 1920s. I will start with the work of two important and influential pioneers, and will follow with the work of others to account for specific cases of mediumship. My summary of relevant ideas will be confined to a small number of students of the subject, and the reader should be aware that my discussion is not exhaustive.

The Influential Writings of Frederic W. H. Myers and Eduard Von Hartmann

An important early theoretician who influenced thinkers such as Pierre Janet and William James (1842–1910) was Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901). Myers—a classical scholar, psychologist and psychical researcher—conducted theoretical work about the subliminal (subconscious) mind and the supernormal in the context of the early SPR. In his view, “the stream of consciousness in which we habitually live is not the only consciousness which exists in connection with our organism. Our habitual or empirical consciousness may consist of a mere selection from a multitude of thoughts and sensations, of which some at least are equally conscious with those that we empirically know” (Myers, 1892a, p. 301). Myers assumed that a subliminal self manifested in disintegrations of personality as well as in more positive phenomena such as creativity and mediumship. In addition, he believed that the mind was in charge of the body and independent of it, a view different from many of his contemporaries who followed physiological and pathological assumptions (Crabtree, 2003).

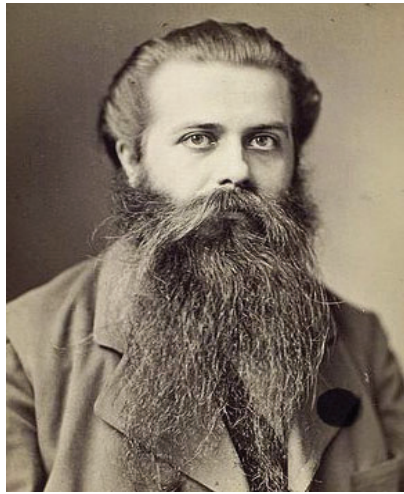
Myers argued that mediumship and other phenomena such as creativity and telepathy were expressions of the subliminal mind. This took place largely through sensory and motor automatisms (Myers, 1892b, 1893). Sensory automatisms included visions, voices, dreams, and intuitions, whereas motor automatisms included phenomena such as automatic writing and table turning as well as trance speaking. Both types of automatisms were, according to Myers, conveyors of messages. In his view, “the message which they bring comes from a stratum or phase of our own personality which is chaotic and fragmentary . . . a message conveyed by automatic action from the subconscious to the conscious or waking self . . .” (Myers, 1889, p. 535).

In an early paper Myers (1884) argued that many mediumistic communications could be explained without assuming any supernormal ability. For example, automatically produced scripts seemingly done without the conscious knowledge of the automatist could take place, Myers suggested, at will or through low- or high-level unconscious guidance from the automatist’s mind. However, Myers also mentioned two other possible causes of these communications that do involve supernormal function: telepathy from the sitters and the influence of discarnate

beings. Although he did not discuss the spirit hypothesis in any detail, Myers stated that a few cases suggested thought transference from the sitters attending the séance. This idea was further discussed in a later paper, where he suggested that during motor automatisms a secondary self had a “purposive activity of its own” (Myers, 1885, p. 27). Myers further wrote: “It is the *secondary* self . . . which receives or recognises the telepathic impact . . . and in some way or other furnishes an intelligent reply” (Myers, 1885, p. 28).

Later Myers discussed the action of spirits of the dead. He argued for “contact between the discarnate mind and the *brain* of the automatist . . .” (Myers, 1903, p. 196). The spirit communicator, he believed, used the “capacities” of the medium’s brain to communicate, an idea not new with Myers (cf. Kardec, 1863, p. 281). However, in Myers’ view the communication process “must be limited by the idiosyncracies of the medium” (Myers, 1903, p. 249). Communications, he argued, generally presented a mix between influences from the medium’s subliminal mind and a discarnate agency.

Another influential theoretician in Europe was German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906; see Treitel, 2004, pp. 13–15, 21–22; Wolfram 2009, pp. 41–43). In his view, a medium was a person capable of entering a somnambulistic state either spontaneously or through some induction procedure. Mediums showed “a certain disorganization of the nervous system; that is, the lower and the middle nerve centres are too independent of the highest, reflex-prohibiting centre of consciousness self control; they are, in other words, . . . hysterical . . .” (Von Hartmann, 1885, p. 406).



Eduard von Hartmann

According to von Hartmann, mediums showed two types of somnambulism: manifest and masked. In manifest somnambulism mediums had no recollection of the phenomena they produced. The masked type implied that the waking consciousness during mediumistic phenomena had no awareness of the action of a secondary consciousness. Like others before him (for a review see Crabtree, 1993), von Hartmann believed that some of the automatic manifestations of mediumship, such as automatic writing, could take place without any guiding intelligence, being the action of nervous mechanisms without consciousness. But many other manifestations showed a “somnambulistic consciousness accompanying these mechanical material brain processes and enlightening them with real intelligence” (p. 420).

Von Hartmann explained the mediumistic tendency towards symbolization and personifications as the simultaneous action of waking consciousness and enhanced memory access, as well as thought transference and clairvoyance. All of this worked together with the “symbolizing and personifying tendency of the somnambulistic consciousness . . . to put these communications in the mouth of an absent person, its dramatic metamorphosing talent must at the same time, succeed in dressing out the communication with all sorts of small external traits appropriate to the person represented” (p. 453).

Von Hartmann also argued that the somnambulistic consciousness could manage nervous forces that, when exteriorized from the body, could cause mediumistic physical phenomena. As he wrote:

This liberation of directive radiation of nerve force is under all circumstances . . . not a function of those parts of the brain which serve as support to the conscious will, but of deeper-lying layers of the brain which

either coincide with those supporting the somnambulant consciousness, or are more approximate to them than to the first. It is therefore, no wonder that the development of a magnetic-mediumistic nerve force is stronger in the somnambulistic than in the waking state (p. 442).

These ideas are part of an old tradition of ideas of “magnetic,” “nervous,” or “psychic” forces related to the workings of the human body and considered to be the agent behind the physical phenomena of mediumship (Alvarado, 2006, 2008; Alvarado, Nahm, & Sommer, 2012; Crabtree, 1993).

Speculations on the Mediumship of Leonora E. Piper

In the mid 1880s psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910) had an experience with the American medium Leonora E. Piper (1857–1950) that led him to write that “taking everything that I know of Mrs. P. into account, the result is to make me feel as absolutely certain as I am of any personal fact in the world that she knows things in her trances which she cannot possibly have heard in her waking state, and that the definitive philosophy of her trances is yet to be found” (James, 1890b, pp. 658–659). Mrs. Piper was the first mental medium studied under controlled conditions for a prolonged period of time. Many researchers conducted studies with her during the late 19th century.

Mrs. Piper’s trance phenomena passed through different stages over time, changing or adding spirit controls including the well-known “Dr. Phinuit” and the George Pelham (really called George Pellew) controls. She communicated through automatic writing and trance speaking. In trance speaking, Piper’s spirit control relayed information from a supposed spirit, sometimes answering questions posed by séance participants. In addition, sometimes she seemed to be possessed by the communicating spirit. These performances convinced others besides James that she acquired information beyond the reach of the senses.

Following James, psychical researcher Richard Hodgson (1855–1905) conducted the first systematic investigations of Piper’s trance phenomena (see Berger, 1988, pp. 11–33). The following was written by a sitter, Reverend and psychic investigator Minot J. Savage (1841–1918), as reported in Hodgson’s (1892) first report showing personation and apparent veridical information. The doctor mentioned was “Dr. Phinuit,” the medium’s spirit control at that time:

Immediately on becoming entranced, her control, Dr. Phinuit, said there were many spirit friends present. Among them he said was an old man, whom he described, but only in a general way. Then he said, “He is your father, and he calls you Judson.” Attention was called to the fact that he had a peculiar bare spot on his head, and Mrs Piper put her hand on the corresponding place on her own head My father had died during the preceding summer He wasn’t at all bald, but when quite young had been burned; so that there was a bare spot on the right side of the top of his head, perhaps an inch wide and three inches long, running from the forehead back towards the crown This was the spot that Mrs. Piper indicated. Now as to the name by which he addressed me: I was given the middle name, Judson father always used, when I was a boy, to call me Judson, though all the rest of the family called me by my first name, Minot. (Hodgson, 1892, p. 100)

In his first report Hodgson (1892) stated his belief that Piper’s trance was of the “type where the change to the trance personality involves a partial obliteration of the facts known to the normal waking self” (pp. 55–56). He did not believe that there was enough evidence to support the discarnate agency hypothesis, although he said at the end of the paper that further developments in the Piper mediumship were suggestive of this. Nonetheless, Hodgson concluded that the trances showed “a large residuum to be attributed to some supernormal faculty” (p. 9). Regarding his first six sittings with Piper, Hodgson thought that the medium “had access to portions of my ‘subconscious’ mind” (p. 10). Still, Hodgson did not think telepathy could explain all the veridical communications. As mentioned below, he later stated his belief in spirit communications.

Another early Piper researcher, classical scholar and banker Walter Leaf (1852–1927; see Anonymous, 1927), argued that in the medium’s “abnormal state there is a quite exceptional power of reading the contents of the minds of sitters; but that this power is far from complete” (Leaf, 1890, p. 567). The thought transference process suggested by Leaf was one related to sitters’ subconscious minds, that is, content not consciously recollected at the time of the séance. This gave the impression that a spirit was communicating. Others, such as American philosopher

William R. Newbold (1865–1926; see Sidgwick, 1926), doubted that Piper’s telepathy and clairvoyance could be organized by the medium’s mind into a “mosaic of thought, which . . . often irresistibly suggests the habits, tastes, and memories of some friend deceased . . .” (Newbold, 1898, p. 9).

Frank Podmore (1855–1910; see Dingwall, 1963), an SPR member well-known for his skepticism regarding physical phenomena, was impressed by Piper. In an early statement Podmore (1897) said that the medium presented evidence of “something beyond telepathy” (p. 454). He did not clearly state his belief in the supernormal in a later article (Podmore, 1898), but in his book *Modern Spiritualism* expressed his conviction that Piper’s trance utterances provided evidence of supernormal perception (Podmore, 1902b, p. 342). Trance personalities, he concluded, were “illustrations of the plastic powers of the medium’s own spirit, rather than as representing alien intelligences” (p. 343). Podmore (1908) argued that it was clear that Piper’s changes of personality were shaped in part by suggestion but those suggestions could be psychically conveyed, “telepathically filched” (p. 329) from the sitters (see also Podmore, 1910).

Educator and once principal of Newnham College Eleanor Sidgwick (1845–1936; see E. Sidgwick, 1938) authored an impressive psychological study of Mrs. Piper that also addressed telepathy. As she concluded regarding Mrs. Piper’s trance:

I think it is probably a state of self-induced hypnosis in which her hypnotic self personates different characters either consciously and deliberately, or unconsciously and believing herself to be the person she represents, and sometimes probably in a state of consciousness intermediate between the two. In the trance state her normal powers transcend in some directions those of her ordinary waking self And further — what makes her case of great importance — she can obtain, imperfectly and for the most part fragmentarily, telepathic impressions. (Sidgwick, 1915, p. 330)

More than this, Sidgwick argued that telepathy could provide the “material necessary to successful personation” (p. 319). This assumed that a dissociative process (the trance and the personation accompanying it) could incorporate telepathic information.

In Germany, philosopher Traugott Konstantin Oesterreich (1880–1949; see Melton, 2001, p. 1139) was skeptical of the spirit explanation of mediumship. He believed that the subconscious creative imagination of Mrs. Piper was active during her trance, a process “of daily occurrence in modern occultism by reason of traditions and beliefs which are passed on from one medium to another” (Oesterreich, 1923, p. 49). But in his view Piper’s subconscious imaginative potential consisted of more.

Oesterreich suggested that Mrs. Piper’s veridical communications involved “an elaboration by the creative imagination of Mrs. Piper’s telepathically-acquired knowledge and by her telepathic faculty working in conjunction with the minds of others” (pp. 44–45). Echoing Leaf, he argued further that the medium’s telepathy could tap into the latent thoughts of living people.

Others defended supernormal explanations that related to the spirits of the dead. In his second report on Piper, Hodgson (1898) became convinced that the supernormal content of Mrs. Piper’s trances required spirit intervention. Some spirit communicators were more clear than others; Hodgson believed that this should not be the case if thought transference was in operation. In addition, confused communications suggested to Hodgson that they reflected the communicator’s illness or other relevant conditions at the time of death. In Italy and in the United States, respectively, others defended the idea of spirit agency to explain Mrs. Piper’s veridical trance phenomena (Bozzano, 1926; Hyslop, 1901).

William James, on the other hand, did not seem so sure of the final explanation of the phenomena produced by Mrs. Piper. Studying the Piper communications that allegedly came from the deceased Richard Hodgson, James (1909) was willing to consider their content supernormal. He wrote: “The active cause of the communications is on any hypothesis a will of some kind, be it the will of R. H.’s spirit, of lower supernatural intelligences, or of Mrs. Piper’s subliminal . . . yet the major part of it is suggestive of something quite different—as if a will were there, but a will to say something which the machinery fails to bring through” (p. 116). This “will,” he suggested, could

“tap,” possibly the sitter’s memories, possibly those of distant human beings, possibly some cosmic reservoir in which the memories of earth are stored, whether in the shape of “spirits” or not. If this were the only will concerned in the performance, the phenomenon would be humbug pure and simple, and the minds

tapped telepathically in it would play an entirely passive rôle—that is, the telepathic data would be fished out by the personating will, not forced upon it by desires to communicate, acting externally to itself. (pp. 116–117)

James expressed the belief that there were traces of a will to communicate coming from Hodgson and that Mrs. Piper's telepathy was not enough to explain the results. But he was willing to speculate on the interactions of many factors. For example, James argued that there could be combinations of two different wills. One was a "will to personate," and another the will to communicate, the latter coming from a discarnate source (p. 117). Furthermore, he also speculated on the interaction of the sitter, the medium and the communicating spirit: "The sitter, with his desire to receive, forms, so to speak, a drainage-opening or sink; the medium, with her desire to personate, yields the nearest lying material to be drained off; while the spirit desiring to communicate is shown the way by the current set up, and swells the latter by its own contributions" (p. 120).

Speculations on the Mediumship of Eusapia Palladino

Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918), a well known Italian physical medium, has been generally considered to have played an important role in the development of psychical research. Not only did her performances contribute to the development of ideas about mediumship, but she also was instrumental in convincing many researchers that phenomena such as telekinesis and materializations were real (Alvarado, 1993, 2011a; Carrington, 1909).

During a séance Palladino usually sat on one side of a table around which several sitters were posted. Behind her was a "cabinet" formed of a corner or area behind a curtain where objects were sometimes placed to be affected by telekinesis. The following is a typical example:

The séance began in full light, and whilst the medium was still quite conscious, movements at first slight, then stronger, began in the séance table, which raised three of its feet. In full light the slight outward movements of the curtain on the left were observed. The medium asked by means of the table (five raps) that the light might be lessened; this was done rather slowly, and the strong red light . . . fell directly on to the medium's eyes, which occasioned in her a fit of hysteria; she wept and cried out as if demented, hitting her face repeatedly with her fists. This was a genuine fit of hysteria

When the attack was over, Eusapia was no longer in her normal state of consciousness, and no longer spoke in the first person; she spoke as if she were John King In the meanwhile, the table on which the toys had been placed, and which we call No. 1, made a noise in the interior of the cabinet, from which it at last came out completely. Then there began to arrive on the séance table many objects from table No. 1: a sheet of paper, a little wooden sheep and a mandoline; the latter was accompanied by the curtain which covered the handle; the curtain . . . came back and covered the handle of the mandoline, and a hand, which was not that of the medium or of the sitters, pulled the hair of the person who had pushed back the curtain. At the same time we heard a scratching on the strings of the mandoline. (Aggazzotti, Foà, Foà, & Herlitzka, 1907, pp. 366–368)

Phenomena of this sort were frequently observed by Palladino's investigators, many of whom were convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena while recognizing the medium committed fraud frequently. Three of these researchers were Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909), Polish psychologist Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917), and Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1852–1929; see Domanski, 2003, Guarnieri, 1988, Knepper & Ystehede, 2013).

In Lombroso's (1892) view, Palladino could produce telekinesis and other phenomena while entranced but she was also a hysteric that showed signs of epilepsy. In his view hysterics and hypnotized individuals had some nervous centers activated at the expense of others that were paralyzed or arrested. This allowed for a transposition and transmission of psychic forces, which in entranced mediums could be exteriorized from the body as a motor force to cause telekinesis and other physical phenomena.

In a later book, translated into English as *After Death—What?*, Lombroso (1909) classified Palladino's phenomena in relation to the medium's mental state. In his experience "the rarer and more important of the phenomena (for instance, apparitions of phantasms), so much the heavier is the trance of the medium" (p. 120). Eventually,

Lombroso (1908, 1909) argued that some phenomena were produced by spirits who used the medium's vital force to accomplish such feats as the medium's levitation. In addition to Lombroso, other researchers argued that some of Palladino's phenomena, particularly full body materializations, could not be explained solely by the medium's vital force directed by her subconscious mind (e.g., Carrington, 1909; Venzano, 1907).

Ochorowicz (1896; see also Alvarado, 2010b) did not accept spirit intervention to account for Palladino's phenomena but did accept the force model. He divided the manifestations of mediums into inferior and superior ones using Palladino as an illustrative case. Inferior manifestations were those consisting solely of fraud and automatism; superior manifestations were those produced beyond the confines of the body. Most mediums used fraud frequently due to lax controls and the expectations of the circle. Fraud, according to Ochorowicz, "dominates their repertoire and the habits of their nervous systems" (p. 111).

In Ochorowicz's view, at the beginning of a séance it was important to give the medium time to go through phases of physiological "doubling" or dissociation that would eventually culminate in phenomena beyond conventional dissociation. This doubling referred to unspecified brain centers of automatic action, as well as to consciousness in relation to somnambulistic ideas and autosuggestion. But Ochorowicz was clear that it was possible for Palladino to exteriorize a force from her body to produce telekinesis and materializations and that the process could involve the forces of other sitters as well. This view was discussed in a later publication unrelated to Palladino. Ochorowicz discussed a new and revolutionary form of dissociation shown by mediums. This was a process that took place "between organs and the dynamic principle that animates them; which can go as far as extra-organic manifestations, that is . . . out of the body" (Ochorowicz, 1909, p. 757).

Enrico Morselli, whose book *Psicologia e "Spiritismo"* (Morselli, 1908a, 1908b) was almost completely dedicated to Palladino's mediumship, also contributed important ideas. Like so many before him, Morselli argued that mediumship was "an abnormal fact of human physio-psychic personality . . ." (Morselli, 1908a, p. 95). But he became fully convinced that Palladino produced physical effects such as telekinesis and materializations. According to Morselli (1908a) the low intellectual content of these effects was indicative of psychological disaggregation (or separation of mental processes) because the medium's "inferior personality" (p. 219) manifested at a low intellectual level.



Enrico Morselli

The séances he had with Palladino convinced Morselli that she could project a biopsychic force from her body, a force that could join with other forces coming from the other persons in the mediumistic circle (1908a, p. 350). This force could be imprinted with the "oniric or subconscious thought of the medium" (1908a, p. 243), which constituted the principle guiding telekinesis and shaping materializations. Morselli (1908b) believed that the subconscious thought and will of the medium directed the phenomena (p. 552). However, their uniformity and repetitive nature suggested to him that Palladino had "fixed ideas," or delusional dominant ideas affecting both actions and thought. These ideas probably helped the production of the phenomena by her subconscious mind and also suggested hysteria (1908a, p. 251).

Morselli (1908a) admitted that all these psychological considerations did not really explain the so-called

biopsychic effects, that is, that an “unknown modality of energy . . . is exteriorized and projected into space” (p. 266). In his view the “constitutional morbidity” of mediums and their trances was not enough to explain physical phenomena nor veridical perceptions (1908b, p. 543). While Morselli believed that the subconscious mind was the domain of abnormal states such as ecstasy, hallucinations and the hypnotic trance, he was unsure if it was involved with the actual exteriorization of force. Physical phenomena, he noticed, could occur in different states of consciousness, such as the waking state or superficial or profound hypnotic states (1908a, p. 268). During superficial hypnotic states “Eusapia . . . says incoherent phrases, has muscular shudders, changes the tone of voice, has the fixed and glassy look of an hypnotized person . . .” (1908a, p. 272). During profound hypnotic states—a somewhat less developed version of Charcot’s lethargic stage of hysteria, visible materializations take place. The exteriorization of the force seemed to Morselli to be stronger the less the medium’s consciousness participated in the process. This led him to hypothesize that the trance inhibited the superior centers, leaving the inferior ones to act automatically with the force. This automatic action, Morselli (1908a) considered, was an inferior form of mental activity related to the “narrowing” of consciousness from the conscious mind (p. 322).

Further Speculations on Mediumship

Former Attorney General of Bordeaux, France, and physician Joseph Maxwell (1858–1938; see Evrard, 2009a) was influential in European psychical research (Maxwell, 1903/1905). Like many other “metapsychists” of his times, Maxwell had séances with Palladino and became convinced of the validity of the whole range of mental and physical mediumistic effects.

One of Maxwell’s contributions was his discussion of personifications, or the adoption of secondary personalities in mediumistic manifestations (Alvarado, 2011b). This included spirit controls, spirit communicators, and any manifestation that claimed to have a personality of its own. The phenomena, Maxwell said, “may personify God, the devil, angels, legendary personages, fairies, etc.” (Maxwell, 1903/1905, p. 64). These personifications could change with the composition of the mediumistic circle. On occasion, “sort of a collective consciousness is formed” (p. 65). Presumably coming from the sitters themselves, such a phenomenon “forms part of an . . . undeciphered chapter on the psychology of the crowds” (p. 65). According to Maxwell, this personification could appear with mediumistic communications as well as with physical phenomena such as raps indicating intelligence.

Maxwell saw in the mediums he studied an impressionability or nervous instability favorable for the phenomena. But Maxwell did not mean pathology such as that found in hysteria, neurasthenia, and other nervous affections.

Another important researcher and theoretician was Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920). Flournoy wrote about the combination of subliminal and telepathic resources:

A medium personifies a dead person whom he has never known in a manner so admirable that it carries conviction to the sitters. They do not dream that perhaps one of them carries with him a group of memories which at the very moment that they are organized and flashed upward in the form of a composite portrait of the departed is telepathically reflected in the subconsciousness of the medium, as a living mirror, which immediately translates this image or imprint into words and gestures, portraying without a doubt a certain resemblance, but one in which the defunct has no share.

Combine, now, the facts of mental transmission with the products to which memory and subconscious imagination of the sitters can give birth, and you will understand what unforeseen complications may always be expected in spiritistic séances. So extraordinary do the revelations appear that it is very difficult to exclude the possibility that they are due to a play of action and reaction between the medium and the other persons present . . . (Flournoy, 1911, pp. 212–213)

Flournoy argued that the phenomena of psychical research could be explained by the subconscious powers of the living human mind. These powers, he said, manifested in certain individuals and “under certain psychophysiological conditions (secondary states of consciousness, somnambulism, etc.)” (Flournoy, 1911, p. 323). Flournoy, always open minded, said that this did not mean discarnate agency was not possible, but he emphasized that “before daring to give a verdict in favor of the discarnate, much more must be known as to the foundation and groundwork of our own constitution, with all its resources and endless possibilities . . .” (Flournoy, 1911, p. 323)

The most scientifically eminent of the writers and researchers to be discussed in this section was the French physiologist Charles Richet (1850–1935). Richet (1883) experimented widely with hypnosis, and he witnessed and

induced many changes in personality using suggestion.

Like other individuals discussed in this paper, Richet accepted both mental and physical mediumship as genuine beyond dissociative explanations. Nonetheless, he was not a believer in spiritualism. To the contrary, he was a well-known skeptic on the issue of survival of bodily death in general, and of the question of spirit agency in mediumship in particular, although it is sometimes argued that he changed his view later in life (e.g., Alvarado, 2009).

Richet argued that in mediumship “a new personality is created by auto-suggestion” (Richet, 1923, p. 41). To him, mediums’ personifications, including spirit controls, could be explained by the workings of the unconscious mind. Referring to Piper, Richet wrote: “No doubt the personalities that present themselves . . . showed impressive traits of psychological individuality, and kept them distinctively in writing, voice, style, and thought” (p. 144; see also Richet, cited by Leaf, 1890, pp. 618–620). Many of these cases were seen by Richet to be an example of the “talents of the unconscious,” considered to be more creative than the conscious mind (p. 44).

Going beyond typical dissociative phenomena, Richet argued that in some mental mediums “metapsychic cognitions group themselves around the personality created by auto-suggestion” (p. 77). This assumed first the existence of telepathy and clairvoyance (or cryptesthesia, as Richet called it) in normal individuals, shown to occur both in real life as well as under experimental conditions, and secondly, an organization of these cognitions into a personality structure.

Another European psychical researcher, the Italian biologist William Mackenzie (1877–1970; see Melton, 2001, p. 952), published an interesting treatment of this topic in *Metapsichica Moderna*. Like previous writers, Mackenzie (1923) was clear in stating that in mediumship, the dissociative process presented in some cases phenomena beyond current scientific explanations (p. 162). Dissociation sometimes included a supernormal quality whose nature had not been elucidated but that allowed some phenomena to manifest “outside of the somatic system of the subject” (p. 167). This quality or element may be active in normal individuals while awake, in dreams and through intuitions. It may “assume great importance in some hypnotic states and in somnambulism; finally, it may be of maximum importance during the deep *trance* of the completely developed medium” (p. 168).



William Mackenzie

Regarding table tipping, Mackenzie referred to the “formation of a polypsychic collectivity” (p. 183) formed by the sitters around the table. This psychic *quid* formed during a séance was not the simple addition of the subconscious of the medium and the sitters. Both were necessary to produce phenomena. “But the agent . . . is a *product* (and not an addition . . .) the ‘polypsychic person’ . . .” (p. 286). This was not simply the addition of separate elements but a new collective, a new entity from the dissociated aspects of the medium and the sitters.

Like Ochorowicz before him, Mackenzie theorized that the medium showed two types of dissociation. One was mental dissociation while the other was a new form of dissociation, a dissociation of matter taking place as a “function of a concomitant dissociation of the psyche” (p. 200). This physical dissociation consisted of a molecular and atomic decomposition of the medium’s body to create telekinetic and materialization phenomena.

Another psychical researcher who wrote about these ideas was the Frenchman René Sudre (1880–1968; see

Evrard, 2009b), who was also known as a science writer. In his textbook *Introduction à la Métapsychique Humaine*, Sudre (1926a) wrote about “prosopopesis,” or “brusk, spontaneous or provoked changes of psychological personality” (p. 85). This referred to the appearance of new personalities in mediumship, hypnotic states, possession cases, and in cases of double and multiple personality (see also Sudre, 1926b, 1946). The metapsychic type of prosopopesis was different from other types of dissociative personation phenomena in that sometimes it could be accompanied by phenomena such as “metagnomy” (clairvoyance) or materializations.

According to Sudre the association between metagnomy and prosopopesis made sense because both occurred during dissociation. Metagnomy, he thought, was common during trance and hypnosis, whereas prosopopesis was favored by the reduction and retraction of the waking consciousness. Although the combination of metagnomy and the dramatization of an external personality had convinced many that spirits of deceased individuals communicated through a medium, Sudre believed that metagnomy and prosopopesis, although perhaps sharing a common psychophysiological process, were different, independent functions.

As Sudre wrote, there are phenomena of prosopopesis “free of all supernormal element . . . where the subject adopts the speech and manner of a person whom he knows or fancies and by whom he claims to be invaded” (Sudre, 1926b, p. 129), and metapsychic phenomena without personality changes. In his words:

Between these two extremes come the spiritistic phenomena which proceed from an apparent synthesis of the two functions. But we can always separate them, as does the chemist when he decomposes water into oxygen and hydrogen. We thus show that the medium creates in himself a new personality which is like the character personated in proportion as his faculty of clairvoyance allowed him to get information. If experience did not demonstrate that the two functions exist independently, if there were only spiritistic phenomena, we should not be entitled to make this distinction. (Sudre, 1926b, p. 130)

Physical phenomena were also related to personation and to dissociation. Sudre argued that a force exteriorized from the body was guided by the medium’s mind. In his words, “the subject’s intelligence, both conscious and unconscious is related to one of the dissociated layers of his personality” (Sudre, 1926a, p. 290).

In addition to some of the above mentioned individuals, many others accepted that some mediumistic phenomena could be explained by the supernormal powers of the living, while at the same time defending strongly the influence of discarnate spirits on mediumship (e.g., Bozzano, 1926; Delanne, 1902; Hyslop, 1901; Thomas, 1922).

Concluding Remarks

As argued before (Alvarado, 2002; Le Maléfan, 1999; Méheust, 1999b) ideas of the supernormal as regards dissociation and the subconscious were not integrated into the psychology and psychiatry of the times discussed in this paper. Although most medical men held a closed model of the mind (and of dissociation) in which the phenomena were explained mostly by internal resources and a few external influences such as suggestion, few accepted a more open model of mind, such as the one some psychical researchers upheld based on powers that extend sensory and motor capacities beyond the confines of the body. Nonetheless, and as seen in the writings of some such as James (1890a), these psychic or supernormal concepts were part of the same general interest in understanding the mind and its myriad of layers as the more accepted ideas of individuals such as Janet (1889). This situation has been documented by Ellenberger (1970) and by later historians (Crabtree, 1993; Gauld, 1992; Le Maléfan, 1999; Méheust, 1999b; Plas, 2000).

Interestingly, these ideas about the powers or capabilities of the subconscious mind were also connected in some cases to pathology. This was not only the case with those, like Janet (1889), who reduced everything to intrapsychic concepts, but also with those like Lombroso (1909) and Morselli (1908), who admitted the existence of the supernormal as a process related to pathologies such as hysteria. But most of the persons discussed here did not write about pathology.

The topic discussed here is also a reminder that the functions of the subconscious listed by Ellenberger and mentioned at the beginning of the article are incomplete without consideration of the psychical research perspective. In the period discussed here, psychical researchers considered that the functions of the subconscious went beyond memory, pathology, creativity, and imagination. In the case of mediumship, psychical researchers extended current ideas about dissociation (in this case trance and personation) by adding the supernormal to the equation.

We should keep in mind that for the period discussed here “supernormal” meant both the extended abilities of the living, such as telekinesis and telepathy, as well as discarnate agency. In other words, the trances of mediums such as Piper and Palladino were believed to facilitate both extraordinary human faculties and the workings of spirits. These ideas, I must add, were involved in controversy that I have not discussed in this paper. This included the anti-spiritualistic writings of some psychical researchers (Richet, 1923; Sudre, 1926a), the criticisms that believers in spirit action presented about ideas of secondary consciousness, dissociation, and telepathy (e.g., Delanne, 1902; Noel, 1885), and the writings of those skeptical of the supernormal in its totality (e.g., Janet, 1889; Jastrow, 1906).

It is my hope that the material discussed in this paper will remind current students of mediumship of aspects of a past forgotten by many. Furthermore, I hope that my writings and those of others will influence the general historiography of psychiatry and psychology, a trend clear in the work of a few writers (e.g., Crabtree, 1993; Plas, 2000). Currently most of this work refers to the “closed” model of the mind and of dissociation represented by Janet and others. But to limit historical analysis in this way produces an incomplete picture of the past, the details of which are ignored or dismissed by many historians as well as by psychiatrists and psychologists. Regardless of the many subjective aspects of the study of history, attempts to study ideas about the mind should seek to represent the past in its own terms, a history which most certainly includes ideas such as those discussed in this paper.

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Abstracts in Other Languages

German

MEDIALITÄT, PSYCHISCHE FORSCHUNG, DISSOZIATION UND DIE KRÄFTE DER UNTERBEWUSSTEN PSYCHE

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Seit dem 19. Jahrhundert haben viele Psychiater und Psychologen Medialität in Zusammenhang mit der unterbewussten Psyche und dissoziativen Prozessen gesehen, die in erster Linie durch interne konventionelle Prozesse der Psyche des Mediums hervorgebracht wurden. Einige Psychologen und parapsychologische Forscher aus den letzten Jahrzehnten des 19. Jahrhunderts und den 1920er Jahren haben jedoch eine unterschiedliche Auffassung vertreten. Personen wie Théodore Flournoy, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, Frederic W. H. Myers, Julian Ochorowicz, Charles Richet, Eleanor Sidgwick und Eduard von Hartmann waren der Meinung, dass bei manchen Medien Dissoziation mit übernormalen Phänomenen einhergehen könnte, etwa beim Wissenserwerb ohne Verwendung der Sinnesorgane und bei der Produktion physikalischer Effekte anscheinend jenseits normaler körperlicher Fähigkeiten. Je nach Theoretiker wurden andere Themen wie Pathologie oder jenseitige Wesenheiten zum Gegenstand der Diskussionen. Das Übernormale wurde niemals von der Wissenschaft allgemein akzeptiert und wird heutzutage in der Literatur zur Dissoziation nur selten erwähnt. Aber Vorstellungen in Bezug auf das Übernormale sind Teil dieser Literatur. Eine umfassende Geschichte der Dissoziation und der unterbewussten Psyche sollte diese Forschungsarbeit mit berücksichtigen.

Spanish

MEDIUMNIDAD, INVESTIGACIÓN PSÍQUICA, DISOCIACIÓN, Y PODERES DE LA MENTE SUBCONSCIENTE

RESUMEN: Desde el siglo 19 muchos psiquiatras y psicólogos han considerado que la mediumnidad está relacionada con la mente subconsciente y procesos disociativos producidos principalmente por los procesos convencionales internos de la mente del médium. Sin embargo algunos psicólogos e investigadores psíquicos activos entre las últimas décadas del siglo 19 y la década de 1920 expresaron una opinión diferente. Individuos como Théodore Flournoy, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, Frederic W. H. Myers, Julian Ochorowicz, Charles Richet, Eleanor Sidgwick, y Eduard von Hartmann argumentaron que algunos médiums combinan la disociación con fenómenos sobrenaturales tales como el conocimiento adquirido sin el uso de los sentidos y la producción de efectos físicos aparentemente más allá de las capacidades corporales normales. Dependiendo del teórico en cuestión, otras cuestiones como la patología y agencias desencarnadas también formaban parte de las discusiones. Lo supernormal nunca fue aceptado por la ciencia en general y en la actualidad rara vez se menciona en la literatura sobre disociación, pero las ideas relacionadas con lo supernormal fueron parte de esta literatura. La historia completa de la disociación y la mente subconsciente deben considerar este cuerpo de trabajo .

*French*MEDIUMNITE, RECHERCHE PSYCHIQUE, DISSOCIATION,
ET LES POUVOIRS DE L'ESPRIT SUBCONSCIENT

RESUME : Depuis le XIXe siècle, de nombreux psychiatres et psychologues ont considéré la médiumnité comme étant liée à l'esprit subconscient et aux mécanismes dissociatifs produits surtout par des processus internes conventionnels dans l'esprit du médium. Toutefois, certains psychologues et parapsychologues du tournant du XXe siècle ont exprimé une vue différente. Des individus tels que Théodore Flournoy, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, Frederic W.H. Myers, Julian Ochorowicz, Charles Richet, Eleanor Sidgwick et Eduard von Hartmann, ont affirmé que certains médiums combinaient la dissociation avec des phénomènes supernormaux, tels que la connaissance acquise sans l'emploi des sens, et la production d'effets physiques semblant déborder les capacités somatiques normales. Dépendamment du théoricien, d'autres questions relatives à la pathologie ou aux agents désincarnés furent également incluses dans les discussions. Le supernormal ne fut jamais accepté par la science dans son ensemble et, aujourd'hui, il est rarement mentionné dans la littérature sur la dissociation. Mais les idées associées au supernormal constituent une part de la littérature sur ce sujet. Une histoire complète de la dissociation et de l'esprit subconscient ne peut faire l'impasse sur ce corpus.