

Fall of the House of Felix?

An Investigation of the Mediumship of Kai Mügge and the Felix Circle

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In 2004, when the Parapsychology Association's annual convention was held in Vienna, I convened a panel on physical mediumship. One of the speakers was Rosemarie Pilkington, talking on ectoplasm. Hence we were both aware that we shared an interest in physical phenomena. A few years later, on the occasion of another conference, she took me aside and asked me whether I had heard of the new German circle devoted to the study of the physical mediumistic phenomena of Kai Mügge, calling themselves the Felix Circle, and as my reply was affirmative she suggested I should pick a colleague of my choice in order to form a committee for investigating the phenomena allegedly occurring. In the meantime, she would try to raise some money for the investigation, which eventually led to establishing the Gilbert Roller Fund. My choice was A.P. with whom I had discussed some aspects of Schrenck-Notzing's work earlier; nominating a US colleague did not cross my mind due to the increased travel expenses. Anyway, the Roller Fund decided on Stephen Braude as co-investigator. I felt embarrassed about A.P., but 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' as the saying goes. Thus, on 27 March 2010, Stephen Braude and I found ourselves in the small German town of Hanau where we met the Mügge family and the seasoned members of the circle.

Hanau 2010

The Mügge family received us with the utmost hospitality (dinner invitation at a restaurant, etc.), however, Kai Mügge's friendliness appeared to me a bit obtrusive. Braude emphasised the importance of building up friendly relations as a basis for mutual trust and, while basically agreeing with that, I could not help but have some reservations. Having in mind the indisputable fact that the history of physical mediumship is a history of trickery,

fraud and exposure, I felt that too much of a leap of faith might not be appropriate. Moreover, I was aware of the danger of fraternisation and the consequent lack of critical distance. The best example of how to reconcile the conflicting aspects of friendly relations and strict control conditions is the conduct of Feilding, et al., during the Naples sitting with Eusapia Palladino. During the day they tried to please her as much as possible, driving her around in a carriage, etc., but during the sittings they applied the strongest possible control measures.

Stephen Braude and I were guests at a home Circle located in a private home where we were received as esteemed guests and treated with the utmost hospitality. Thus we were confined to the rôle of mere observers and not investigators: we were bound by the rules of courteousness towards our hosts and we had no possibility for implementing any control measures ourselves.

Prior to the first séance we were shown a large collection of alleged apports in the living room of the Mügge family. Kai Mügge had asked me in our previous exchange of e-mails to bring along some 'inspirational objects' and I had chosen a knotted handkerchief from a séance with Rudi Schneider (as Kai's goal was reviving physical mediumship in the style of Rudi Schneider) and some other souvenirs from the by-gone days of Austrian parapsychology.

One of the peculiarities of Rudi Schneider's trance phenomena was that 'Olga', his 'spirit control', would tie a knot in a handkerchief. Usually, a white handkerchief (easily observable in the dim red light) was placed on the table while Rudi Schneider was sitting outside the empty cabinet; following the reports of the witnesses, the handkerchief was taken by invisible means and pulled into the cabinet only to be thrown out again through the opening between

the curtains of the cabinet with a knot tied in it. I happen to be in possession of such a handkerchief allegedly telekinetically knotted during a séance with Rudi Schneider.

I decided to do a psychometric experiment. Instead of the original Schneider handkerchief I brought along a nice old embroidered but otherwise unremarkable handkerchief in which I had tied a knot myself. Eager to learn whether Mügge would realise that it was a red herring, I watched him touch the piece of fabric with great reverence, as he did likewise with the genuine letters I had also brought with me. Of course, I did not reveal the nature of the test to him, or to the other persons who were present, but I do not over-estimate the outcome as the link between mental and physical phenomena may not be a strong one.

The First Cabinet Séance

Our first cabinet seance was held on 30 March 2010. From the beginning, my suspicions were raised. In the first place, all metal objects had to be removed. Obviously removing electronic devices is a safeguard by the medium that observers cannot bring spy cameras and the like into the séance room. As I recorded in my notes taken the morning after the séance:

In the small anteroom, mobile phones, wrist watches and major metal objects needed to be removed from the body and are collected in a large card box. I put my watch and my mobile phone into it, and also my wallet as it contained a great number of coins. I forgot about my belt buckle (really, not pretended) that happened to be a rather heavy one, however, it was hidden under my jumper and, as it turned out later, it did not do any harm to the ostensible phenomena.

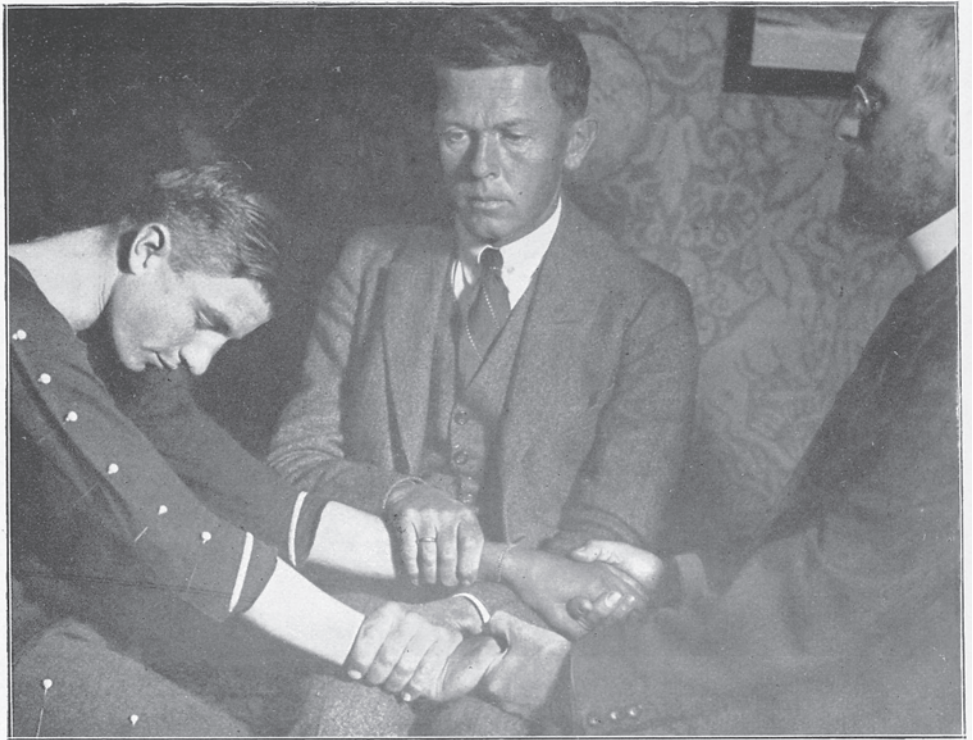
However, what I found to be even more suspicious were the detailed rules of conduct imposed on the participants of the séance, in particular, the instruction to keep our limbs tightly to the body and not to stretch our legs into the area of action. We were strongly requested to keep our legs under the stools and our arms tight to the body (unless we were instructed to hold our neighbours' hands) and not to grab at anything that might touch us. This instruction makes perfectly sense for a human being moving in the dark, be it a fraudulent medium, be it an accomplice.

Braude, in his report in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, wrote: 'Peter was suspicious of the cabinet séance from the beginning. He especially distrusted Kai's injunction against sitters sticking their arms or legs into the area where the object movements were occurring.' While this is true, Braude's text does not give the full picture in two respects. Not only is my consideration on the obligation to remove all metal objects omitted, moreover, the following incident (my observation strongly indicating trickery) is neither reflected in Braude's paper nor was it mentioned in his talk at the Society for Scientific Exploration meeting.

Of course, we had closely inspected the room before the séance commenced, however, the area behind my stool and to the left and right of my place could not be thoroughly searched. That side of the room was not a wall but a curtain behind which Kai Mügge's work space was located containing his computer and various other things. That left a certain ambiguity. At that point in time I did not mind, as this first séance was mainly intended to make us familiar with everything and not for producing decisive evidence, even more so as another cabinet séance was on the agenda (which later was cancelled).

I will not describe the entire sequence of ostensible phenomena, as they are covered by the reports of other participants, instead let me just pick that portion during which I made an observation strongly indicating trickery. Again from my notes taken the morning after the séance:

Next, the sitters started reporting sensations of being touched. I was touched three times, whereby the first sensation on my right leg was very faint and I rather attribute



The medium Willy Schneider dressed in a séance tricot with luminous armbands, luminous pins along his arms and legs, held by professors Gruber and Zimmer as primary and secondary control persons (Schrenck-Notzing, 1922). Prof. Mulacz suggested this method to Prof. Braude for future séances with Kai Muegge, although it has yet to be implemented.

it to an involuntary movement of my righthand-side sitter. The next one was very clear, it happened on the left side of my chest, and it was a gentle touch of something soft, going up for a few centimetres and touching me thrice in a quick sequence, like something elastic that was repelled by each touch but kept coming back – it felt like being touched by a balloon. The third sensation was quite different; I was under the impression that something small and solid had touched my hand just in passing when I just reached down to feel the temperature as some of the sitters reported a cool air current at their feet. We had been told not to try to grab anything if we were touched; however, this touch was so that fast that I would not have been able to catch that 'something'.

Whereas the 'spirit touchings' happened from the inside of the circle (felt on the chest, on the face, etc.), this solid thing that accidentally touched my hand was moving below the stools, sliding over the floor from right to left (i.e., in the direction towards the medium's side) as if it was pulled. It felt like a little hook and its movement became momentarily retarded when it touched my hand upon which I tried (in vain) to grab and hold it. My

observation made it perfectly clear to me that there was something fishy going on, although I could not (and cannot) say what happened in detail.

From this point on I was on the alert, looking out for other clues indicating trickery. At the same time, the one who operated the device in question (the rod or the string to which the hook presumably was attached) must have felt that the hook had met some resistance, thus there was a likelihood that one of the sitters along that side of the room had realised that something had happened that ought not to have happen if the phenomena genuine. I believe Mügge suspected that I was the culprit as I felt a change in his behaviour towards me. While on the surface we both remained very friendly towards each other, it became rather like playing a game of cat-and-mouse with each another.

I had suggested to Braude that we both take independent notes after each séance and exchange them as a basis for discussing our observations, including the possible next steps of our investigation, and also as raw material for a later joint publication. Following that, I duly informed Braude of my observation, so he was fully aware of it. Apparently, he has disregarded my observation completely, both in Hanau and in his later written and oral statements.

I did not inform the others – neither the medium nor the sitters[1]

– as this would both warn the medium and jeopardise future séances and the chance for an exposure, i.e., conclusive evidence of the ‘smoking gun’ type. The fact that Mügge cancelled the stipulated second cabinet séance is likely to have been caused by his awareness that somebody (i.e., myself) had made an observation that might give him away.

For the same reason I did not disclose the details of my observation in the various parapsychological discussion lists on the internet. When confining myself to the statement that I had reasons to be highly sceptical of the Mügge ‘mediumship’, I had to bear fierce accusations of drawing my conclusion prematurely and even of a lack of open-mindedness, which I feel were totally unjustified.

Beside that strong indication of fraud (quite sufficient on its own) there was a further element that raised my suspicion: the fact that all kinds of ostensible phenomena appeared in a certain sequence. It would begin with sounds from the small wind chimes hanging from the middle of the ceiling, then – after removal of the chimes by the circle leader – knockings and a brushing sound, then moving of small objects (e.g., a handkerchief, the silhouette of a part of which is visible against a luminous plaque, whether it is pulled or pushed remains unclear), then sometimes the silhouette of a structure resembling the fingers of a human hand would become visible against the luminous plaque, then the trumpet, placed carefully in the middle of the circle, was moved, then the a/m touchings occurred, and eventually the séance culminated in the display of ostensible ectoplasm in a roughly hand-like shape, like a glove. At no time did any of these various categories of ‘phenomena’ occur simultaneously, e.g., knockings during touchings or other acoustic phenomena during the movements of small objects placed on the luminous plaque.

Back in Vienna

I had some exchange of e-mails with Hermann Haushahn, a long-standing member of the circle. He had been present during the séance I attended, but gradually became suspicious of fraud and eventually left the circle soon afterwards. He kindly informed me (and Michael Nahm independently) of his observations that, in his opinion, indicated fraud[2] and he put me in contact with some other people who had attended

Mügge’s séances in Switzerland. One lady in particular sent me a detailed account of her observation of faking ectoplasm and of using very fine threads to manipulate the heap of ‘ectoplasm’ on the floor. Nonetheless, all these people, though being disappointed by Mügge, remained convinced spiritualists.

Conclusive evidence of some kind might be achieved by grasping the ostensible ectoplasm – in my opinion evidence for fraud, but in case I were wrong, such action might turn out to be evidence for genuine paranormal phenomena. Either I would hold some very earthly fabric in my hand or the stuff that I had studied throughout the classical literature and desired to experience myself more than everything else. Yet leaving one’s place and particularly seizing the ostensible ectoplasm is clearly an act of non-compliance with the rules, moreover it is a breach of the standards of conduct as a guest. Facing this dilemma I sought guidance from a friend who is a professional philosopher and specialist on ethics at the Institute for Human and Social Sciences. Based on the balance of interests, he advised me that – provided that I am truly convinced that it is a matter of fraud – trying to seize the ectoplasm in order to secure evidence and thereby prevent the further deceit of trusting people would be ethically permissible.

While I was thinking of another trip to Hanau together with Braude, events took a different turn. Another joint visit to Hanau did not materialise; apparently I had become persona non grata at the Felix Group. As no more possibilities for a joint observation arose, our teamwork came to an end, yet both of us continued on our own. Braude was kind enough to keep me up to date on his second trip to Hanau and also on the outcome of the later séances at the Austrian farmhouse, yet he did not counsel before going public. I have to thank him for sending me his presentations; however, in the ensuing discussion he was not able to dispel my strong doubts concerning, e.g., the rationale of the marker of the boundary, see below, and also the control conditions.

Mügge gave a series of séances in Vienna of which I only got notice when they were half way over (a fact I find very telling), so that all the seats were already booked and I could not attend. We had a short conversation by telephone, during which Mügge promised that he would invite me to a séance on the occasion of his next visit

to Vienna.

Indeed, he kept his promise. What he did not keep was the promise that video-recording under infra-red would be permitted. Of course, he had been cautious enough not to bluntly promise it, but he announced that he would mediate with the spirit operators (called ‘The Chemists’) that they should give the ‘go ahead’, which of course never happened.

The Second Cabinet Séance

The second cabinet séance took place on 13 April 2010 in a private apartment belonging to a couple – Ernesto L. and Barbara K. Ernesto ran an ‘esoteric’ seminar centre for spiritual development from these premises. Although this seminar centre is a commercial enterprise, the attendees were still guests and had to adjust their conduct accordingly. Under these conditions, I took part in the Mügge séance together with Gerhard Holischka, a board member of the Austrian Society for Parapsychology, who is very knowledgeable and experienced in sleight of hand and stage magic. The checks on the attendees, who had to sign a consent form in advance, were rigorous: all metal objects, including such innocent ones as fingerrings, had to be removed and were put in a container outside the séance room. Again the probing question arises: cui bono? Who profits from such checking? What needs to be prevented? Obviously, the medium is safe that no-one could flash a torchlight or use night-vision goggles, so possible deception could not be detected visually.

Just to have all options open, I had the IR-capable camcorder with me. It did not come as a surprise that Mügge did not permit video-recording, lengthily explaining that such a project needed to be arranged with the spirit group well in advance.

The admission was 180 Euros (about £130) per person, which was collected by Barbara. How this amount, said to cover the travel expenses of Kai Mügge and his fiancé Julia, was divided between the apartment owners and the Mügges was unclear.

The evening started with a lecture by Mügge, preceded by an introductory round in order to get to know each other. In his lecture, Mügge spoke about physical mediumship in general and about his mediumship in particular, giving guidelines of conduct during the séance identical to those he gave in

Hanau. He explained the security precautions, i.e., searching the séance room and the persons. Ernesto, acting as the local circle leader, explained that the light bulbs would be removed in order to prevent accidental switching-on of the ceiling lights, and nominated two people – myself and another gentleman – to search the room and do the body check of himself. Mügge made an occasional remark on the lay-out of the séance room where an inverted bucket, fixed to the floor by tape, served as small table to hold the luminous plaque at a certain period of the séance, and a slightly elevated marking on the floor. This was a distance marker that could be felt in the dark, as, so he explained, when an entity takes possession of the medium's body it is bound to the limitations of the physical body, i.e., that entity cannot see in the dark. I do not need to emphasise that this explanation does not make sense from a spiritualist's viewpoint; however, that marker is very useful for a fraudulent medium.

Mügge mentioned how physically demanding the sittings are for the medium, that he feels exhausted in the aftermath, often suffering from headaches (and that he had already taken a pill against headache as a precautionary measure), and the need to drink a lot, at least three litres a day – saying so he took another sip from a bottle of mineral water that he had brought along. The suggested use of cable binders to fix the medium's arms to the armrests of a seat (the best method for immobilisation) was labelled as unnecessary. Thus the medium was free to move around save for the actions of the two control people.

Searches

Before the start of the séance, Ernesto invited one other gentleman (Max) and me to carry out a body search of himself and then he did the same with the two of us – very similar to the procedure at an airport, including a metal detector that had been brought along by Mügge himself. Ernesto then searched Max whilst the ladies were searched by Julia and Julia in turn by Barbara. During the body search of the others, Max and I could inspect the room – the light bulbs were already removed, so we used torches provided by Julia – including the cabinet (an assembly of curtains attached to a large 'hula hoop'), the medium's seat, the bucket provided in case the medium should throw up, and the towel (all items similar to

Hanau), the curtains of the room, the seats and underneath the seats, etc. Everything looked very innocent. From experiences with stage magicians, one may draw the conclusion that whatever items members of the audience are permitted to inspect are necessarily innocent; the problem lies with the items one cannot inspect.

Julia had a voice recorder with her in order to tape the entire séance as Mügge, so we were told, does not know what goes on when he is in trance. The voice recorder was kept in a little bag in order to avoid any light emitted by its LEDs to trouble the séance. Moreover, there were two spare batteries placed on the table. Only in hindsight did it occur to us that the use of these cylindrical batteries was not explained: the two torches used rectangular batteries, and the voice recorder very likely much smaller batteries. So, what were these batteries for?

Seats could not be chosen freely. It was Julia who assigned the seats to everybody. Furthermore, she controlled the medium on his right hand side, while Ernesto did so on his left. Thus, control was entirely in the hands of people who might be confederates of the medium – at least this suspicion cannot be ruled out. Moreover, this type of control was rather primitive and totally unsatisfactory when compared to the level of elaborate control such as that applied in the experiments with Willy Schneider by Baron Schrenck-Notzing in the 1920s.

After everybody had taken their seats, Ernesto announced that he would, together with one or two of us, search the medium in the adjoining room and then bring him, still in a state of meditation, into the séance room and guide him to the cabinet. The medium was supposed to be stripped to his underwear and his séance garment was supposed to be checked by Ernesto and one of the sitters. Ernesto invited me and/or Max to accompany him. For the reasons given above, I declined and remained in the room, particularly in order to see whether Julia would do anything suspicious; yet such I could not observe. Then the three of them came back, Ernesto, Mügge (his arms raised like a surgeon after having cleaned and disinfected his hands, yet again carrying his water bottle) and Max. The red light was on and Julia illuminated the path to the cabinet with her torch. Mügge took his place inside the cabinet, the lights were

extinguished and the séance commenced soon afterwards. Ernesto and Max – who later turned out to be rather sceptical – reported they did not observe anything suspicious during the body search of the medium and his clothing.

All the attendees had been instructed to behave in a way that restricted their movement (no touching the structures if being touched by them, no free movement of limbs) and had to sign a consent form to comply with these rules. Everyone had been searched in order that they should not bring any items, such as small spy cameras or similar, into the séance room, so the medium could be sure that no exposure could happen. From the sitter's viewpoint, the room, the cabinet and the medium had been searched in order to avoid any possible fraud.

Loopholes

However, there were two loopholes: the large batteries on the table; and the green plastic bottle of mineral water that Mügge carried with him all the time, firstly during his lecture, and then from the preparatory room to the cabinet – a very natural movement that did not raise any suspicion when it occurred. The bottle (holding a content of 1.5 litres) was the only item that had not been inspected by us. At the onset of the séance, we, the sitters, could see it only when Mügge took it with him in the already much dimmed light; no one could see whether it was translucent, like a real water bottle, or opaque, and no one could even say whether it was the same bottle from which Mügge had drunk during his lecture. Moreover, there was no guarantee that it was a real water bottle; it could very well have been a prepared container[3] in the shape of a water bottle. There could be anything in it (an expandable rod, fabric for fake ectoplasm, etc.).

As all details have been discussed before the onset of the séance, including all the mutual safety precautions, bringing the 'water bottle' along was a clear violation of the agreement on Kai's part. Following this, I no longer felt bound by the consent form or oral agreement.

Jumping to the end of the séance, everybody, except for Julia and Ernesto, was ushered out of the room by the 'Hans Bender' personification. Mügge remained in the cabinet while Julia was talking to him – 'How do you feel, sweetheart?' – through the

cabinet. Then I had to leave, too. After Ernesto came out, I demanded to inspect the room, which was granted after consultation with someone inside the room. When I was permitted to re-enter the séance room, Mügge had already left the cabinet for the adjoining room, taking that water bottle with him. Thus the water bottle remained the only unchecked item before, during, and after the séance. As I anticipated, there was nothing suspicious to be found in the cabinet or the room.

The séance, as such, was divided into two parts with a break in between, during which the windows and the door were opened to let fresh air in; some light came in from the street and, via the door, from the anteroom. One person kept talking to me all the time, which distracted me from observing what Julia was doing considerably. Kai remained in the cabinet during the break, with the curtains of the cabinet closed. The 'Hans Bender' personality even demanded to extend the break for some more minutes (perhaps preparations inside the cabinet were not yet finished). Anyway, I could not observe anything suspicious during the break myself, on the other hand, people were chatting a lot and the noise might have covered up something. Julia made a curious remark on possible electrical discharges – the crackling of a plastic bottle might sound similar.

New Phenomena

The two parts of the séance were quite similar to the séance in Hanau, with a few exceptions, namely, lights floating around and, during the second half, masses of alleged ectoplasm shown. Personally, I received, not only the 'visit by two deceased persons', but also a gift, a tiny Buddha sculpture wrapped in the 'ectoplasm' (or 'materialising' from it) that Julia carefully freed from the veils of 'ectoplasm' and later, after the end of the séance, handed to me. That a solid object should appear within a mass of ectoplasm is a unique phenomenon in the parapsychological literature.

The way Mügge went into trance (or alleged trance) was the same as in Hanau, by increasing the breathing rate (hyperventilation, like holotropic breathing method of Stan Grof). Likewise, the 'spirit team' of the 'Chemists' and the trance personality of 'Hans Bender' remained unchanged apart from the fact that a 'Rudi Schneider' personality had joined the 'Chemists' in after my visit to Hanau.

The phenomena during the first period were acoustic (raps) and the movement of small objects (rattles) indicated by their sounds, etc.; then optical, lights floating around, sometimes one sitting on the floor, in isolated cases more than one light at the same time, looking and behaving like fireflies, yet, different from those lovely creatures. They could only be observed from one side, i.e., either the sitters on the window side of the room could see them, while the ones seated opposite saw nothing, or vice versa. In other words, these lights were not three dimensional, they had a distinct luminous side and a dark back, which makes one think of something man-made rather than paranormal.

Then various parts of sitters' bodies sitters were touched. We were encouraged by Julia to report when being touched (which would provide good feed-back for a fraudulent medium or accomplice). The first contacts were around the lower legs and very soft, as if they were accomplished by a structure like sponge rubber. At no time did sitters who were placed far from one another report being touched; the contacts always occurred from one person to the next as if something was moving clockwise inside the circle. My neighbour kindly explained to me, 'That is Tommy. He is five years old.' I tried fixing that structure with my feet but failed.

Most of the time we had to hold the hands of our neighbours. I should mention that I was twice able to free one hand for some time, holding the right hand of my neighbour on the left and the left hand of my neighbour on the right with the fingers of my left hand. This is a technique frequently used by fraudulent mediums. This went unnoticed by my neighbours. Unfortunately, holding my right arm and hand in a position where my righthand neighbour could not feel that something was different from usual was very tedious and I gave up – prematurely, as I have to confess in hindsight.

The next structure touching me happened to touch my hands. It felt cool (at room temperature, not the temperature of a human body) and solid, like a piece of plastic – like a child's toy. I could feel some uneven structure like a seam. Unfortunately, I could not grab it.

The next set of occurrences were forms appearing on the luminous plaque that Julia had placed on the inverted bucket. One could see the coarse shapes of a few fingers or a

hand of different sizes, very similar to those in Hanau. It was strange that again this could be seen only from one side at a time; the sitters on the other side of the room reported that the plaque was obstructed totally.

Strangely, during this period I felt something touch my left ear, again a solid structure that I could feel with my fingers. I immediately tried to grab it, moving my hand towards my ear, and indeed I could touch and feel it, but the lady on my lefthand side kept clinging on to my hand as if her life depended on it, so I could not free myself. Although I could press the structure with my fingers to my ear I could not hold it or rip it off from whatever it was fixed to. I had the impression that the structure came from above, perhaps suspended from a fishing rod, or similar. We were not supposed to feel any touches while the luminous plaque phenomena were taking place and this was the only incident where two alleged phenomena occurred at the same time – a 'failure of the dramaturgy', so to speak.

The second part commenced after the break with alleged mental phenomena in the form of 'visitors'. These were a man with the same name as the 'Hans Bender' personality who introduced him – he appeared dressed in a skiing suit – accompanied by an aristocratic lady with a fur collar, her name consisting of three letters, but a difficult name, etc. Though well understanding what it was about, I kept silent until the medium said these visitors came to me, so I replied, 'fine, that fits well, I recognise them, and I am very happy about their visit, but I'd like to ask for more details or a message', which did not occur; then a visitor for my lefthand neighbour 'came through' (very unimpressive to others, but pleasing that lady tremendously).

The man dressed in the skiing suit 'was' the late physicist Hans (Hans, like Hans Bender) Thirring who, himself a keen sportsman and skier, invented this special suit; the lady was Zoë (three letters), Countess Wassilko-Serecki (the complicated name), both of them co-founders of the Austrian Society for Parapsychology back in 1927, both of them mentioned on the website of the Society and, likewise, on my own website. The detail of the skiing suit is briefly mentioned in the German version of Wikipedia; in addition, a Google search would provide a few pictures. In other words, all that information is readily available on the web.



An alleged apport of a small Buddha figurine found in supposed ectoplasm during the séance.

The highlight took place towards the end of the séance: the production of ostensible ectoplasm. This was shown several times and exposed to the red light for quite a long period during each opening of the curtains of the cabinet. The 'emission of ectoplasm' was preceded by strange sounds from the medium (like regurgitation). The medium then gave the commands to open and close the cabinet by tapping the floor with his foot. Julia explained that the medium was not able to speak during this period as the ectoplasm would inhibit his uvula. Be that as it may, there were veils of ostensible ectoplasm in the shape of stripes of some 20 cm width clearly visible when the curtains of the cabinet were opened, at one end fixed to the medium's mouth, covering large parts of the medium's body (similar to the well-known pictures of Einar Nielsen or Jack Webber), and at the other end reaching down to the floor. Whether the ectoplasm came out of his mouth or was just held between the lips cannot be decided upon as we could not observe the emergence and formation of it, only the final state. Although Mügge in his preceding lecture had spoken of autonomous movements of the ectoplasm, I could not observe such; those movements of these veils that I could see appeared to be caused by movements of Mügge's body.

The medium unfolded some of these veils showing us 'the inside of the ectoplasm': a demonstration he had announced during his talk as one

of the possibilities that could take place. The impression was like unfolding a gauze bandage. During one of these demonstrations, one small object was eventually unwrapped by the medium and allowed to slip into Julia's hand as she reached into the cabinet. From my seat, I could neither see any details of that tiny object as long as it was covered by layers of the veils, nor could I distinguish what it was once it was freed from the veils. Julia, who sat next to the red light that she operated during the séance, announced that it was a little Buddha made of green jade, and the 'Hans Bender' personality declared that it was a very precious gift specifically brought along to please me, to which I replied with appropriate polite thanks. That was the end of the séance as such, the 'Hans Bender' personality declared that only Julia and Ernesto were to stay in the room and to assist the medium while all others were to leave the room quietly so as not to disturb the medium, who now needed some rest.

After the séance, we retrieved our belongings and gathered for a glass of wine and some biscuits to discuss what we had witnessed. Everyone was very excited and happy (the social dynamics of such a group of mainly believers are very interesting), so I explained the background of my 'visitors' (Thirring and Wassilko) and mentioned to Mügge, who had just rejoined us, that he might have read about that before, as he is very well read in the history of psychical

research, and that he might have reproduced this unconsciously during his trance state. I said this as I did not want to appear to accept the 'visitors' at face value, such uncritical behaviour could not be expected from me and, had I displayed it, would have raised suspicion. In reality, I realised this was not an unconscious trance production, but a conscious and very deliberate action. Also, in order to demonstrate my enthusiasm, I showed around the tiny 'jade Buddha' Julia had given to me meanwhile. It was only Max who remarked that it might be made of glass rather than jade, whereas I, in order to demonstrate how impressed I was, insisted that it was made of jade. It goes without saying that the 'precious jade Buddha' is indeed made from pressed glass; a very cheap object one can buy in any esoteric store around the corner. Several of the other attendees took photographs of it.

In several e-mails since, Mügge has asked for a summary of my observations and impressions for his blog. Likewise, Jochen Söderling (pseudonym) e-mailed to enquire how the Vienna séance had worked out. I sent Mügge a non-committal statement with advice on necessary improvements of control conditions, such as permitting infra-red video-recording, supervision of the medium by 'external' persons and not those who are close to him, eating blueberry compote in the presence of witnesses before the séance, and using a mesh hood through which the ectoplasm should penetrate – and that only when these conditions are fulfilled could I make a statement, although I assured him (privately) that of course I was 'very impressed' by the development of his mediumship and of the phenomena, particularly the ectoplasm, since my visit to Hanau.

At this point in time, which was still before the Halloween cobweb disclosure,[4] I was more than ever convinced that the alleged phenomena shown during Mügge's séances were fraudulent. Although there was no proof – ultimate proof would only be an exposure catching Mügge red-handed – all the evidence pointed in one direction. All that happened during the 'séance' could have been achieved by means known to any stage magician while nothing at all happened that might be difficult to explain in these terms; the entire layout was tailored to secure the 'medium' from possible exposure. The question remains whether Mügge accomplishes this all by himself, or

with the help of others.

Conclusion

The loss of control on the side of the investigators puts an end to any approach claiming to be a scientific one. This is the core problem in a setting where all arrangements are in the hands of individuals allegedly on 'the other side', which means in practice that they are dictated by the medium. Permitting friendly ties between the investigators and the medium (fraternisation) aggravates this problem. It becomes difficult to tighten the control conditions as much as necessary.

Would-be investigators of cases of physical mediumship who carry out their investigation at the house of the medium or at any other private home are – by virtue of the fact that they are mere guests and are compelled to behave accordingly – automatically restricted to the rôle of passive observers because they cannot actively impose control conditions they consider necessary and, even worse, they are being obstructed by the conditions imposed on them. Attending such séances at home circles has but little value; scientific séances must occur under laboratory conditions where the investigators are in control.

There is an abundance of ideas and instructions in the older parapsychological literature as to how to prevent mediums from cheating. A cane chair can be used, the sounds of which would give the medium away if he leaves his place. In his experiments with Stanisława Popielska, Schrenck-Notzing used a special 'séance

garment', a one-piece jumpsuit with gloves sewn onto the sleeves and a mesh hood for the face. The mesh keeps regurgitated mock ectoplasm within the hood, while genuine ectoplasm is thought to be able to penetrate the mesh and appear outside of the hood. Karl Krall invented an electrical control apparatus, which was used in Schrenck-Notzing's laboratory[5] and is similar to the apparatus built by Amereller for Harry Price. A continuous dimmed red light illumination should be used with the emphasis on 'continuous' as opposed to Mügge who decided when to switch the red light on and off. Alternatively, the use of infra-red video-recording should be permitted, which would render continuous illumination unnecessary.

The failure to enforce any of these measures makes hitherto 'investigations' into the Mügge 'mediumship' look rather amateurish and renders them ultimately worthless. In case a medium does not display any sign of preparedness to cooperate and to accept strict control conditions (which in case of a fraudulent medium is only understandable from his point of view) it is necessary to abort the investigation.

It is not the rôle of the parapsychologist to explain how a medium has possibly faked phenomena. The task of the parapsychologist is to study genuine phenomena and in order to be able to do so should undertake all possible state-of-the-art measures to secure the investigation against cheating and

fraud.

One needs to distinguish between deliberate fraud that is planned well in advance and 'unconscious' fraud during trance, so-called 'mixed mediumship'. An example of the latter is Eusapia Palladino, who clearly stated that during her trance the urge to produce the phenomena was so strong that unless her extremities were controlled by the sitters she would rather use them instead of the obviously more demanding production of ectoplasmic limbs. Mügge's case is quite different from that of Palladino.

The case of Mügge, like the historic case of the 'flower medium' Anna Rothe, shows pre-meditated action undertaken prior to presenting 'phenomena' during the séance. Rothe was observed buying flowers from the market that would later 'rain' from the ceiling as apports during the séance. Subsequently, she was put on trial and convicted of fraud. In Mügge's case, we have the fake cobwebs. Where there is conscious and deliberate fraud it is absurd to speculate whether some of the ostensible phenomena might perhaps be genuinely paranormal (although the desire of some disappointed observers 'to save what can be saved' is psychologically understandable) and it is a waste of resources – time as well as money – to continue investigations of such pseudo-mediums. From my observations, I conclude that Kai Mügge's 'physical mediumship' is a deliberate deception from beginning to end. Ψ

NOTES

- [1] At this point in time Michael Nahm was still a believer.
- [2] He also sent me a few screenshots depicting a 'MrFree' (obviously a pseudonym used by Kai Mügge himself) searching in a WWW-newsgroup for people interested in becoming sitters at the Felix Circle: 'not about the confirmability of séance room phenomena but the story from a scientific and social viewpoint as movie film project' (my translation, emphasis in the original German text).
- [3] It is easy to prepare such bottle so that one may pour some liquid out of it and yet the stuff in the other compartment remains dry.
- [4] According to Braude, 'Investigations', pp. 329-30, following rumours that he had used decorative Hallowe'en cobwebs to simulate ectoplasm, Mügge stated that he did buy a quantity of such material but in an attempt to demonstrate how his supposed ectoplasm differs from it, although Braude found this an unsatisfactory explanation – ed.
- [5] Schrenck-Notzing: 'in future such apparatus must not be lacking in any parapsychical laboratory as it fills a gap in the hitherto used methodology and provides in respect of the particularities of the phenomena the highest conceivable degree of reliability' (my translation).

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