Promissory Mediumship: A Comment on Kai Mügge’s Methods

MICHAEL NAHM

In a recent article in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, I described my experiences with the Felix Experimental Group, or, more precisely, with its medium Kai Mügge (KM).[1] During a period of four-and-a-half years, I participated in twenty-one sittings with KM. Finally, it turned out that at least some of the phenomena were produced by fraudulent means and that KM’s main trance control, ‘Hans Bender’, is, at least on occasion, likewise faked. After its publication, my article stirred discussions on the internet, especially in Robin Foy’s semi-public forum ‘Physical Mediumship 4U’ (PM4U)[2] — and in another forum, ‘spiritualismlink’, that focuses on physical mediumship. To my surprise, postings that contained critical opinions about KM and other supposed physical mediums were usually deleted from PM4U by its administrator within hours, and authors who insisted on the validity of their criticisms were sooner or later banned entirely from PM4U, myself included. In contrast, the administrators of the spiritualismlink forum allowed critical as well as supportive postings.[3]

Frequently, members of PM4U copied critical postings to the spiritualismlink forum before they were, as expected, deleted from PM4U. I had not actively dealt with these two forums before, and it was an interesting experience to follow these discussions and the different conduct of their administrators in dealing with criticisms of supposed physical mediums. Due to the PM4U policy, I would recommend interested readers to follow the discussion threads on KM and the other mediums at spiritualismlink.com.

Here, I will only add a few comments about what I came to call ‘promissory mediumship’. Among many other issues, I have described in my paper how KM’s former long-term circle leader helped me to find out that KM used a red LED device in several sittings between 2011 and 2013. Curiously, since my paper has been published, KM keeps announcing an article in which his former circle leader is supposed to ‘clear things up’ and to ‘set the record straight’, thus defending the genuineness of KM’s mediumship ‘in the not too distant future’. His circle leader always acted under a pseudonym and still prefers not to reveal himself in public. But, naturally, he is just as disappointed as I am regarding KM’s use of the red LED, and he is equally disappointed regarding KM’s secret use of Hallowe’en decoration cobwebs.[4] As a result, in personal conversations with me and several other people, KM’s circle leader has repeatedly stressed that he is quite unwilling to write anything positive about KM and his mediumship, and that he has in fact hardly been in contact with KM for several months. Those who still expect a supposed defence by KM’s former circle leader have a long wait ahead of them.

Making promises that never come true is a key characteristic of what I call ‘promissory mediumship’ (in reference to Karl Popper’s concept of ‘promissory materialism’). And, judging from my experience of the development of KM’s mediumship since 2008 and all the unfulfilled announcements he has made, and on how he has ‘improved’ his phenomena in sittings during the recent months (about which I was kept informed by critical sitters), KM appears to epitomise a prime example of promissory mediumship. Promissory mediums continuously try to keep interest in their mediumship alive by advancing promises regarding future developments of phenomena and control methods that are finally never kept — or are kept in only such a form that they always remain unsatisfying. Looking back, even our sittings with KM in Austria in 2013 are no exception in this respect, although the applied control conditions seemed reasonable. But after all, the most important key phenomena that we were told we could expect, such as observing or even filming Macro-PK in red light and the disinintegration of ectoplasm, did not take place, and all ostensible trance phenomena and the apports that we observed in Austria could be explained as trickery without difficulty, and I believe that they were indeed faked.[5]

Promissory mediums must be differentiated from mediums such as Rudi Schneider and Eusapia Palladino, who have, year after year, at times week after week, readily agreed to very strict control conditions suggested by their investigators. Consequently, if contemporary mediums, including KM, wish to leave the category of promissory mediumship and are willing to join scientific investigations, they should definitively agree to working in (dim) light, or otherwise with infra-red or thermographic cameras.[6] When we were on friendly terms, however, KM always rejected, ignored or postponed my requests for using IR techniques in informal test sittings with selected trusted people, although introducing such kinds of scientific controls was one of KM’s claimed goals when I started visiting the circle.

Another intriguing method of control is letting the medium wear sealed boxing gloves during scientific investigations, as has been applied previously with alleged success.[7] For example, KM does not use his hands to produce several of the main phenomena of his sittings, and usually lets them be held and controlled by neighbouring sitters. Therefore, the latter method would offer an elegant and non-invasive way to positively demonstrate that he does not use his hands or fingers during critical stages of the séances — especially, during the many darkened intervals between the phenomena, which might well provide perfect opportunities for KM and/or for confederates to prepare the phenomena, including the generation of ectoplasm.[8] Not surprisingly, KM reacted very hesitantly when Stephen Braude related my suggestion to him when planning potential future investigations.[9] At present, it seems, the next Rudi Schneider or Eusapia Palladino is nowhere in sight.

NOTES


[8] I consider cable ties and other methods to bind the hands of mediums inferior because it is easier to tamper with them.