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# Measuring the Pulse of Katie King

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In some of the séances conducted in Modern Spiritualism, spirits have appeared with physically perceptible bodies. This phenomenon is called ‘materialization’. A British medium, Florence Cook, was famous for the full-form materialization of a female spirit, Katie King, and two eminent scientists, James Manby Gully and William Crookes, measured the pulse of King during the séance. Their pulse measurement suggests that King had a lively body even though she was the spirit of a dead woman. This paper focuses on the flesh-and-blood body of the materialized spirit of Katie King and examines the bilateral nature of materialization phenomena.

キーワード : Modern Spiritualism, materialization séance, Katie King

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The practice of pulse measurement has a long history. The relationship between heartbeat and pulse was already described in *Ebels Papyrus*, which was written in ancient Egypt around 1550 B.C. Herophilos of Chalcedon, a Greek doctor born around 330 B.C., used a water clock to compare the pulses of feverish and non-feverish patients. In 1628, an English physician, William Harvey, published *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus* and built a foundation for modern accounts of blood circulation and pulse. Pulse measurement technology made great progress at the end of the 19th century, which led to Willem Einthoven’s invention of the first practical electrocardiogram in 1903. All of them, of course, measured the pulse of living bodies.

The subject of this paper, however, is the pulse measurement of a ghost. Though a pulse is a vital sign, it seemed quite natural for some modern spiritualists that a ghost would have a

pulse. This paper will focus on the materialized body of a spirit that appeared in Modern Spiritualist séances. After giving an overview of the materialization phenomenon in Modern Spiritualism, the case of Florence Cook/Katie King will be examined. The goal of this paper is to reveal the dual nature of a materialization phenomenon and its meaning.

## 1. Materialization in Modern Spiritualism

Modern spiritualism has its starting point in the Hydesville Incident, where three sisters of the Fox family communicated with a spirit haunting their house. They used raps as a means of communication, so the spirit itself was not visible. As more and more séances were held and the number of the mediums increased, spirits began to appear in more flamboyant ways. For example, in the highly entertaining séances of the Davenport

Brothers, spirits played musical instruments while the mediums tied up their own hands and feet and locked themselves up in a 'spirit cabinet', a tiny chamber that helped mediums' concentration and protected them when they got into the trance state. Another example is the levitation phenomena of Daniel Dunglas Home, which made him one of the most famous Victorian mediums.

'Materialization', or the phenomenon where spirits come into perceptible existence in séances, was among these eye-catching ways of summoning spirits. Viscount Adare, one of Home's biggest patrons, wrote about the appearance of 'spirit hands' during the séance.

About half a minute after, I distinctly heard something moving along the side of the sofa, and immediately my double eyeglass was placed upon the back of my hand; I felt the hand that held it push it on, and then stroke and pat my fingers; I took three fingers of the hand in mine, and held them for some seconds; as I increased the pressure upon them, they appeared to withdraw themselves from me; I was again touched, and my hand stroked and patted, the fingers were like a delicately formed human hand, the skin feeling perfectly natural to the touch. <sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this kind of partial materialization, there were phenomena called 'full-form materialization', where a spirit appeared with a whole physical body just like a living person. Florence Cook is the first British medium who succeeded at this type of materialization.

## 2. Florence Cook and Katie King

Cook started her career as a medium in 1871 when she was 15 years old. At first, she attended public séances, but she could not control the power of the spirits that she herself summoned; the spirits threw her over the heads of the sitters or even got rid of her clothes. After those embarrassing experiences, she withdrew from public séances and attended only private ones.

In 1872, a female spirit called Katie King appeared in Cook's séance and promised her that she would stay with Cook for three years. Katie King was already famous among spiritualists because she had appeared in some of the séances conducted by the Brothers Davenport.

The materialization of Katie King first occurred in Cook's séances in April 1872, with only a materialized face between the curtains of the spirit cabinets. The form of the spirit gradually got closer to a full one. James Manby Gully, a medical doctor who attended Cook's séances regularly, explained this process as follows.

That the power grows with use was curiously illustrated by the fact that, for some time, only a face was producible, with, occasionally, arms and hands; with no hair, and sometimes with no back to the skull at all – merely a mask, with movement, however, of eyes and mouth. Gradually the whole form appeared – after, perhaps, some five months of séances – once or twice a week. This again became more and more rapidly formed, and changed, in hair, dress, and color of face, as we desired. <sup>2</sup>

Gully was famous as a proponent of hydrotherapy, and his patients included Charles Darwin and Alfred Tennyson. He had a great interest in spiritualism and attended Cook's séances for two years.

Along with Gully, William Crookes was one of Cook's biggest supporters. Crookes, a prominent chemist and physician, was interested in spiritualism and had been involved in the research of the mediumship of Daniel Home. After attending Cook's séance for the first time, he contributed an article to the February 6 1874 issue of *The Spiritualist* and described how the phenomenon occurred.

The séance was held at the house of Mr. Luxmore, and the "cabinet" was a back drawing room, separated from the front room in which the company sat by a curtain.

The usual formality of searching the room and examining the fastenings having been gone through, Miss Cook entered the cabinet.

After a little time the form of Katie appeared at the side of the curtain, but soon retreated, saying her medium was not well, and could not be put into a sufficiently deep sleep to make it safe for her to be left.

I was sitting within a few feet of the curtain close behind which Miss Cook was sitting, and I could frequently hear her moan and sob, as if in pain. This uneasiness continued at intervals nearly the whole duration of the séance, and once, when the form of Katie was standing before me in the room, I distinctly heard a sobbing, moaning sound, identical with that which Miss Cook had been making at intervals the whole time of the séance, come from behind the curtain where the young lady was supposed to be sitting. <sup>3</sup>

## 3. Measuring the Pulse of a Spirit

There was always a suspicion with full-form materialization phenomena that the medium changed her/his clothes and disguised herself/himself as a ghost. A spirit cabinet had enough space for the mediums to change clothes, and séances were

always held in darkness where sitters could hardly recognize the face of the spirit in detail. To clear this suspicion, Crookes compared the physical features of Katie King and Florence Cook and tried to prove that they were not the same person.

Katie's height varies; in my house I have seen her six inches taller than Miss Cook. Last night, with bare feet, and not "tiptoeing," she was four-and-a-half inches taller than Miss Cook. Katie's neck was bare last night; the skin was perfectly smooth both to touch and sight, whilst on Miss Cook's neck is a large blister, which under similar circumstances is distinctly visible and rough to the touch. Katie's ears are unpierced, whilst Miss Cook habitually wears earrings. Katie's complexion is very fair, while that of Miss Cook is very dark, Katie's fingers are much longer than Miss Cook's, and her face is also larger. In manners and ways of expression there are also many decided differences. <sup>4</sup>

I have the most absolute certainty that Miss Cook and Katie are two separate individuals so far as their bodies are concerned. Several little marks on Miss Cook's face are absent on Katie's. Miss Cook's hair is so dark a brown as almost to appear black; a lock of Katie's, which is now before me, and which she allowed me to cut from her luxuriant tresses, having first traced it up to the scalp and satisfied myself that it actually grew there, is a rich golden auburn. <sup>5</sup>

In addition to these features, Crookes compared the pulses of the medium and the spirit.

One evening I timed Katie's pulse. It beat steadily at 75, whilst Miss Cook's pulse a little time after was going at its usual rate of 90. On applying my ear to Katie's chest



Plate 1) Gully measuring the pulse of Katie King

I heard a heart beating rhythmically inside, and pulsating even more steadily than did Miss Cook's heart when she allowed me to try a similar experiment after the séance. Tested in the same way, Katie's lungs were found to be sounder than her medium's, for at the time I tried my experiment Miss Cook was under medical treatment for a severe cough. <sup>6</sup>

Gully also measured the pulse of Katie King. Plate 1 depicts the scene where Gully had his fingers on the spirit's pulse. Gully told Epes Sargent, an American editor and an enthusiastic spiritualist, about the circumstances in which the photograph was taken.

When that photograph was taken, I held her hand for at least two minutes, three several times, for we sat three times for it on one and the same evening; but I was constrained to close my eyes by reason of the intense magnesium light which shone directly upon me; moreover, she desired that none of us would gaze at her whilst the lens was directed upon her. <sup>7</sup>

#### 4. A Spirit as a Mediator

Thus, the pulse of a spirit was measured in order to prove that the materialization was genuine, but it may sound unbelievable that a ghost could have a pulse. A pulse is 'the regular expansion of an artery caused by the ejection of blood into the arterial system by the contractions of the heart', so if a ghost has a pulse, it means that its heart still functions and causes its blood to circulate.<sup>8</sup> Is it really a ghost? For Crookes and Gully, however, it was quite natural that Katie King, a spirit, had a pulse.

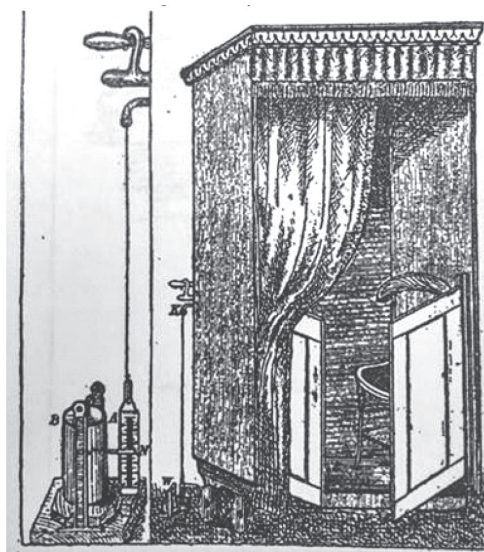


Plate 2) From 'Weighing a Medium during the Production of Spiritual Manifestations'

How does materialization occur? An article titled ‘Weighing a Medium during the Production of Spiritual Manifestations’ in the May 3 1878 issue of *The Spiritualists* reports an experiment where a spirit cabinet was put on a scale during the séance and the change in its weight recorded.<sup>9</sup> Plate 2 depicts the scale and the recording apparatus used, and Figure 1 shows the details of how the weight changed during the séance. The author notes that the medium’s weight was reduced almost by half during the materialization and was regained after the spirit disappeared.

In her book, *What I Know of Materializations from Personal Experience*, Elizabeth d’Esperance, a materialization medium like Cook, gives an account of the materialization process as told by a materialized spirit itself.

‘Emanations are being thrown off from all animate and inanimate things. The atmosphere you breathe is the emanation of the earth you live on. It is reabsorbed and becomes through the organism of animal and vegetable life part of the solid earth again.’

‘When you take into consideration this work of emanation, absorption, and reconstruction that is going on eternally, the Materializations of the séance room are not so extraordinary or unnatural as they appear at the first glance.’

‘The séance room is the laboratory of the spirit chemists, where they construct new forms by hastening or increasing the emanations from the sitters, using the matter thus collected to clothe and render some individual spirit tangible and visible.’<sup>10</sup>

According to these accounts, the materialized body of a spirit is composed of bodies of mediums and/or sitters. In other words, while a spirit is a soul of a dead person, its materialized body is not a purely spiritual thing.

The fact that Katie King had a measurable pulse reveals a resemblance between the bodies of materialized spirits and those of living humans, which sheds light on the role of materialized spirits. Namely, in modern spiritualism, it was thought that our world is connected to the other world and mediums were assumed to mediate between the two world. Just like mediums, materialized spirits were intermediate beings that could act as

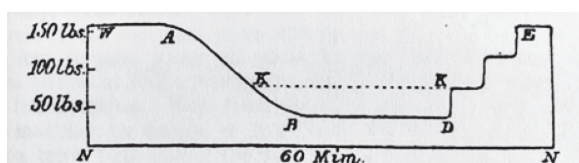


Figure 1) From ‘Weighing a Medium during the Production of Spiritual Manifestations’

a go-between. The flesh-and-blood body of Katie King thus showed that she existed in close proximity to living people even though she was not alive.

## 5. A Spirit as a Young Woman

Though measuring the pulse of a spirit might have some significance for spiritualists, the act of holding a materialized spirit’s hand would appear somewhat questionable, as Katie King was the spirit of a beautiful young woman. In fact, there were rumours that Florence Cook bewitched Crookes, an eminent elderly scientist, with her youth and beauty, resulting in him being deceived by her tricks. The disciples of Crookes thought that his relationship with Cook would damage his reputation, so after his death they destroyed most of the photographs of Katie King he had taken during Cook’s séances.

Spiritualist séances of the nineteenth century sometimes had a sort of erotic atmosphere, as many of the mediums of Modern Spiritualism were young women. Florence Cook was no exception. While it is uncertain if she was on intimate terms with Crookes, it is true that she was stripped off during her early séances. Such indecent atmosphere continued after the materialization phenomena began to take place, as Gully criticized quite bitterly.

I believe that much information might have been obtained from her concerning the outre-tombe, but the circle seemed always bent on talking chaff to her, complimenting her, and indulging in ordinary inconsequential conversation; for only on one or two occasions was I (who hate all the nonsense that was said to an by her) able to put a few questions on the subjects about which every thoughtful Spiritualist is naturally anxious.<sup>11</sup>

The youth and beauty of Florence Cook surely played a part in making the séances more attractive. The same thing can be said of Katie King, a materialized spirit with a young female body. She was both a spirit of a dead person and a glamorous young woman with a lively body.

## 6. Conclusion

In Modern Spiritualism, it was expected that our world would connect to the other world through séances, with mediums playing the role of mediators. Katie King’s flesh-and-blood body showed that she was an intermediary being between two worlds. While mediums reach their hands to the other world through their psychic abilities, materialized spirits approach us through their lively bodies. At the same time, the beautiful

young body of Katie King heightened the entertaining charm of the séances. Her vital body would make her presence livelier and would make the séances more attractive. This dual nature of Katie King reflects the bilateral character of the séances in the age of Modern Spiritualism — sacred and entertaining at the same time.

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  - 3 Crookes, Williams. "Miss Florence Cook's Mediumship" in *Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*. 4th edition. Los Angeles: Austin Publishing Company, 1922. 56.
  - 4 *Ibid.*, 61.
  - 5 *Ibid.*, 63.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, 65.
  - 7 Sargent, 54-55.
  - 8 "Pulse." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n. d. Web. 12 Sept. 2016.
  - 9 Harrison, William. "Weighing a Medium during the Production of Spiritual Manifestations" in *The Spiritualist*, May 3, 1878. 210-216. [Rpt. in *Spiritualism, 1840-1930*. Ed. Patricia Pulham, et al. London: Routledge, 2014. 259-265.]
  - 10 d'Espérance, Elizabeth. *What I Know of Materializations from Personal Experience*. London: 'Light' Publishing, 1904. [Rpt. in *Ghosts: A Social History. Vol. 4 1848-1914: Spiritualism and Hauntings*. Ed. Owen Davies. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010. 213.]
  - 11 Sargent, 55.

\*This paper is based on the presentation "Blood inside a Ghost's Body: Measuring the Pulse of Katie King" given at the panel "Whose Is That Blood?: Manifestation and Concealment in Representation of Blood" at the 11th Conference of the Association for Studies of Culture and Representation held at Ristumeikan University, July 9-10, 2016.

