

# Franek Kluski

Franek Kluski (1873-1943) was a Polish banker who exhibited psychic abilities and for some years submitted to investigation as a materialization medium. His séances were notable for producing wax moulds of ectoplasmic forms.

## Biography

### Background

Franek Kluski was born Teofil Modrzejewski to middle-class parents in Warsaw, where he spent most of his life. His main profession was banking: by the 1920s he was on the board of one of the main banks in Warsaw. He enjoyed a happy family life and acquired a large circle of friends during a varied career which also included creative writing, journalism and military service.

Kluski never performed publicly as a medium, never made any public references to his mediumship, never profited financially from it, and gave it up after a fairly brief period of intense experimentation. His recorded 'career' as a physical medium began in 1918 and lasted, with an interruption during the Russian-Polish war in 1920 when he joined up as a volunteer, until 1925-6.

Although he achieved a brief period of notoriety as a medium (he himself described it as a 'circus'), his real vocation was that of a man of letters. He achieved considerable success writing for the theatre, had a regular column as the economics correspondent for one of the Warsaw dailies, and wrote occasional articles and poetry. Significantly, he refused to write about his mediumistic experiences, fearing that the kind of sensationalism this would attract would damage his good name.

### Personality

According to [Gustave Geley](#), the French psychical researcher who investigated Kluski when he was about fifty, Franek Kluski was extremely impressionable and emotional, very likeable, highly congenial, intelligent, very well educated, and a polyglot. His psychic gifts were probably inherited from his father who found spontaneous phenomena constantly happening in his presence.

Most available information about Kluski's childhood comes from Geley's *L'Ectoplasmie et La Clairvoyance*. That childhood was full of paranormal experiences, which made all the more impression on him as he suffered a number of serious illnesses and some of his siblings died at an early age. A dreamy and contemplative child, he was subject to presentiments, visions of events at a distance and visits of 'phantoms' which he could not distinguish from living people and found welcoming and friendly.

We learn something about Kluski's personality from the poetry of his alter ego, Modrzejewski. It was very versatile, from seriously patriotic, through fervent social and political satire, humorous or frivolous mini-dramas and 'stage pictures', to

comic or sentimental songs, some of which became very popular. His social satires, full of indignation against various examples of injustice, inequality and hypocrisy, demonstrate a breadth of knowledge and awareness of wider social issues, but are expressed in easy, popular verses. A writer reveals himself to a certain extent in his work: most of Kluski's poetry reveals passionate commitment to justice issues, but the expression is always flippant, avoiding a display of emotional involvement.

According to Kluski's great friend Norbert Okolowicz, everyday life at the Kluski household was very different from that of the average family. The medium's enormous sensitivity, with frequent changes of mental state from confusion to total clarity, could be disconcerting even to those who were nearest and dearest to him.

He was a deeply religious Catholic, uneasy at the thought that the séances might provide grounds for the rise of a religious doctrine disapproved by the church. By 1928 he had withdrawn from physical mediumship but continued to produce automatic writing for friends. Reportedly, he gave up that as well when instructed to do so by his father confessor at the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.

### **Physical Characteristics**

Kluski suffered numerous serious illnesses of a strange nature. He might fall ill suddenly, with a crisis within a few hours, then the fever would suddenly abate and he could start normal life again. He might be in perfect health but within a few hours fall ill again with another grave illness, without the usual initial symptoms. These extreme and violent swings in his physical health were matched by swings in his mental and emotional state.

Generally, he worked during the day in a somewhat apathetic, mechanistic manner, coming alive only in the evening. Most of his activity, not just as a medium but as a poet and journalist, took place at night; he managed on as little as three hours' sleep.

At the age of 27, in about 1900, Kluski fought a duel that resulted in a bullet being lodged in his chest. He may have undergone a near-death-experience, since the surgeon regarded him as dead and was amazed at his recovery. This traumatic incident may also have been the cause of frequent and violent heart palpitations.

### **Sources**

Most of the available material on Kluski was published contemporaneously by Gustave Geley in the journal *Revue Métapsychique* and in his book *Clairvoyance and Materialization: A Record of Experiments*, also in the book by the Polish researcher and Kluski's friend Norbert Okolowicz *Wspomnienia z seansów z medium Frankiem Kluskim*. [*Reminiscences of Sitzings with the Medium Franek Kluski*].

### **Spontaneous Paranormal Phenomena**

Accounts by Kluski's professional colleagues confirm that strange phenomena pursued him outside séances. The most common was knockings from various items

of furniture in his apartment or apartments he visited, which did not seem mindless, and sounded more like responses to an unheard conversation. Kluski's apartment was also often full of noises which resembled furniture being moved, or steps, or rustling of papers. Typewriter keys typing by themselves happened both during and outside seances, the typing faultless and fast both in the light and in the dark.

Light phenomena were also quite common outside the séances. Witnesses reported 'little fires' appearing from inside his mouth. Light hazes were often seen around him, including when asleep. Light spots were observed on his body when he was deeply moved about something.

Compass needles were affected by his proximity, as well as electrical lights. A friend and work colleague jokingly reported that they always knew when Kluski came to work in the editorial office, since lights would begin to flicker and become unreliable. Kluski might also become agitated before and during a storm, with something like an electrical discharge going through his body, tingling and stiffening of toes and fingers and sometimes bluish flames streaming from the ends of his fingers.

Odours seemed to cling to and permeate Kluski's body to an extraordinary extent. The most frequent was the smell of ozone, but this also applied to things he came into contact with, such as alcohol or flowers. Smells produced during the séances – disease, animals, flowers – clung to him for a long time. His organism at times seemed to absorb other people's physical conditions at close range.

On a number of occasions, people close to Kluski observed his misty figure in their apartments in the evening or at night. Such an appearance was also observed by Dr Geley in November 1920, when he saw Kluski close to his old apartment in Paris, at a time when Kluski was in Warsaw – as was later established by checking his passport. When asked, Kluski claimed that he could travel like that consciously.

There are also reports of a strange cloud of 'presences' around Kluski. Apparently, throughout his life he had never felt alone; people sometimes entered his room to find him lying surrounded by luminous mists and lights, which then started to disappear, possibly because of the presence of visitors.

## **Séance Phenomena**

### **Sounds**

Raps, knocks and movements of objects accompanied most seances.

### **Lights**

Lights were regarded by Geley as the exteriorization of the 'primary substance', the first stage of materialization, and in Kluski's case were very varied and often spectacular.

Some were round, greenish, slow-moving lights, about 1 cm in diameter, not emitting any smell and often seen in Kluski's mouth outside the séances. Larger

greenish lights, nebulae with a brighter middle, travelled through the medium, the participants and the surrounding objects

There were highly phosphorescent lights smelling of ozone, with movements resembling human movements. Such lights also appeared on the medium's body, like a luminous liquid moving slowly under the skin, the size of a human hand. They sometimes continued to appear after a séance.

Lights illuminating materialized apparitions, like little electric lamps under a veil, appeared close to the phantoms' faces and suddenly illuminated them from different sides. Lights appeared as if at the ends of invisible moving fingertips, sometimes radiant like jewels. Jewel-like lights also appeared separately, as various shapes such as polygons or crosses, streaks and columns.

Luminous phenomena with phosphorescent vapours sometimes formed large masses of light, illuminating the participants and the surrounding objects, as well as the phantom. They were sometimes so intense that they left phosphorescent and odorous (ozone or other) clusters long after the séance.

Various nebulae, with different shapes, appeared throughout the séance. They could be so strong that they filled the whole room like a mist; they were usually grey-green and of varying density; smelling of ozone or other things, moving slowly. Their shapes were irregular, sometimes like flames which broke away from a fire, sometimes like human figures.

## **Odours**

Ozone was the most frequent odour occurring around Kluski, and was often associated with the luminous phenomena. The smell of ozone also appeared during experiments involving instruments such as a compass or a galvanometer.

Other odours included animal smells, rotting flesh, sweat and dirty clothing. There were also pleasant smells, such as fruit, leaves, flowers and incense, not associated with any specific phenomenon, and smells associated with particular phantoms, such as disinfectant accompanying those which appeared wounded or sick.

All the smells were concentrated in the medium, and when he was lightly dressed or naked it was possible to tell that the smells came from his chest, head, hands, armpits, and sweat.

## **Materializations**

### **Animal apparitions**

Animal phantoms started to appear from the earliest séances but were not properly recorded due to the abundance of phenomena. These usually seemed to appear with people, and were perceptible by touch, hearing, and smell rather than sight: an exception was squirrel-like creatures that were seen in the red light running around the table and up the participants' arms.

Among the early apparitions was also the ape-like creature, described in the reports as the 'primitive man' or 'Pithecantropus'. It had a light-brown hairy coat, a head full of tangled hair, and had the habit of loudly smacking its lips. It first appeared in July 1919 and gradually became much clearer, probably because of the interest of the participants. Attempts were made to photograph it, but the pictures were of poor quality.

### **Partial Materializations**

During the early period of Kluski's mediumship there were many partial materializations. They included unfinished busts and hands with missing fingers or fingers hanging on, also apparitions appearing to have been made from cardboard or rags. The artificial-looking phantoms were preceded by sounds like the rubbing of cardboard or fabric and the tearing of paper, but no such objects were ever found.

Sometimes materializations were partial or undersized, as the one described by FW Pawlowski, who witnessed one 'two thirds even one-half of the natural size'. He continued:

When I first saw such an apparition, I thought it was that of a child, but a closer examination revealed the wrinkled face of an old man or woman, only undersized. The leader of the séance would say then 'Let us help the medium' (a technical term in this circle), and would begin to beat time, so that the sitters might breathe simultaneously and deeply. The effect of this procedure is wonderful: the undersized apparition grows and in several seconds reaches full size.'<sup>1</sup>

Also seen were 'dark phantoms', seemingly an intermediate phase of the fully materialized ones that exhibited certain features of the medium, such as his gait. These sometimes divided into two, three, or more figures, materialized to different degrees. They seemed to have their own concerns and personalities, and sometimes seemed to be looking out for particular participants.

Materialized forms also emerged from light nebulae, creating floating and misty phantoms. These materializations seemed to undergo continuous transformations, scattering and then clustering again, and were often visible after the séance. They were mostly greyish-green in colour, sometimes exhibiting a smell.

The medium's state and mood was reflected to some extent in the phantoms, and vice versa. The participants' expectations also influenced the appearance of the manifestations. A phantom might appear, not very clearly but, on approaching a person who recognized it with emotion, gradually become clearer, both to that person and to others close by. On the other hand, on moving further away it would lose some of its expressiveness and individuality for the other participants, as if the emotional 'support' was involved in its creation.

### **Formation of Accessories**

Among the factors affecting the nature and clarity of the phantoms' accessories, Okolowicz includes the presence of relevant objects nearby. If a séance took place

in a room with lots of furniture and ornaments, and the participants' clothing was varied, the phantoms seemed to rub various objects prior to appearing, as if transforming the 'raw material' into what was needed. For example, an officer's phantom might have a clearly detailed military cap but the uniform would be a blur, vaguely resembling what the medium was wearing at the time. However, when attention was paid to the uniform, the phantom seemed to 'grow' one; the buttons would shine more strongly while the officers present at the séance felt their epaulettes and buttons being rubbed. Phantoms also seemed to rub against the soft furnishings, and the clothing of all those present, particularly Kluski, showed signs of wear after a séance.

## **Human Apparitions**

There were two kinds of human apparitions: those which illuminated themselves with the screen, and those which were self-illuminating.

Those which were seen in the light of a screen often materialized partially and appeared for a short period. Some persistently repeated the same activities; some, at times, had features which resembled the medium, especially when they appeared for the first time. During the initial period, almost all phantoms were unexpected, in the sense that there was no attempt to induce a particular kind of phantom and no discussion of what might happen. The 'primitive man' appeared quite unexpectedly and inexplicably. Other phantoms seemed to be strongly influenced by Kluski's preoccupations at the time: one apparition, of an elderly lady with a very characteristic face and costume, also appeared at the séances at IMI in Paris, at a time when Kluski happened to be writing a historical essay about an eighteenth century female spy.

There were cases where the phantoms kept appearing for some time, even months, without being recognized, until the right participant happened to attend and confirmed its identity.

The second group of phantoms, the self-illuminating ones, began to appear during a later phase of Kluski's mediumship. These figures would be constantly visible, illuminating themselves, and often the whole room, with a light much stronger than the light of the screen. Their behaviour was always dignified and solemn. They were totally dissimilar from the medium and differed clearly from each other. Their eyes had a deep, luminous expression. The phantoms would often react accurately to the thoughts of the participants before these were articulated.

## **Automatic writing**

Successful séances involving automatic writing were held from the beginning of Kluski's mediumship and continued after he had ceased experimenting with its physical aspect. This material was never made public – unfortunately, since the participants felt that both the form and content corresponded to the deceased personalities which claimed to communicate.

## **Seance Conditions**

## **IMI Laboratory**

The only séances with Kluski held in a laboratory were the ones which took place at the International Metapsychic Institute in Paris in 1920, described by Geley in his *Clairvoyance and Materialization*.

There were eleven successful sittings and three in which phenomena were absent or insignificant. With one exception they took place at the IMI laboratory, a room with no windows and with two entrance doors, both of which were locked after the medium and the experimenters had entered. The light used was sufficient to show the outlines of the medium and the experimenters.

The medium sat in an ordinary chair in front of the dark cabinet, which was not used. The controls consisted, essentially, of the medium's hands being held by the experimenters on his right and left. The experimenters also pressed against the medium's legs and knees, so that he could not make a move without it being felt. Kluski remained almost perfectly still throughout the séances, only placing his head on the table in front of him or on the shoulder of one of the controllers once he was entranced. His hands would not move at all. Geley stressed the researchers' certainty that the trick of hand substitution was never attempted, and discusses at length the impossibility of producing the large-scale phenomena even if hand control had been deficient.

Kluski was not undressed nor searched at IMI, but was subjected to medical examination by Geley both before and after the experiments, who was thus able to check discreetly that nothing suspicious was present.

## **Warsaw and Elsewhere**

The majority of the séances with Kluski took place in Warsaw in his large (136 m<sup>2</sup>) apartment located on the top floor of a four-storey block in the centre of Warsaw. The séances were held in Kluski's study, described in consistent terms in a number of different reports, together with drawings of the positioning of furniture and details of the participants. For recorded séances the room was searched prior to the séance and the door to the study remained locked throughout, the key remaining in the lock.

Clearly, it is impossible to rule out collusion on the grounds of such information alone. However, over a quarter of Kluski's séances (more than 90) took place in other locations, mostly in friends' apartments in Warsaw, and a further 34 took place abroad, including those conducted in Geley's laboratory at the IMI, with different participants. All of these séances involved similar phenomena which would be impossible to produce without skilled accomplices.

A typical séance in Kluski's study would start with weak red light, which, however, usually extinguished itself, after which the only illumination came from phosphorescent screens. The light from these depended on the quality of the luminous paint. At first it was bright enough to read by, then weakened after about 20 minutes. However, the light phenomena (including the later self-illuminating apparitions) could be very bright and sometimes lit the whole room.

In the early stages of Kluski's mediumship the most elaborate controls were employed, both in his apartment and in those of his friends. He was tied up or placed within a net, without the phenomena being affected. Once it was established that the phenomena were the same regardless of the controls, the more intrusive methods were abandoned. Kluski did, in fact, sit totally naked for Geley and Richet in Warsaw in 1922 (24 April), but this did not stop the phenomena from appearing. Eventually, the researchers settled on controllers on either side of the medium holding his hands and touching his legs with theirs.

### **Record-Keeping**

Alongside Geley's reports of experiments at IMI, more than 350 séances were recorded in Warsaw and elsewhere. As the routines developed, it became possible to keep highly detailed records. Okolowicz, the main researcher and Kluski's friend, produced his own notes but also collected accounts from the other participants over several days. All the reports of 'official' séances list the names of the sitters who also signed the combined reports.

### **Participants**

The usual number of participants was 6 to 8, sitting in a closed circle. The duration of a séance was between 30 minutes to an hour, but sometimes it would continue after a break. The best atmosphere was created by easy-going and relaxed conversation. Regular participants were often assigned specific tasks, such as observing the timing and the order of the phenomena.

Given Kluski's successful career, varied interests and wide circle of friends, the list of participants in his séances reads like a 'who's who' of Polish intelligentsia of that time. Among the participants we find many 'larger-than-life' figures: famous artists, theatre directors, writers, painters, academics, business people, high-ranking politicians and military officers and medical doctors. Some of these were also experienced psychical researchers. While individual séances did not involve the same people, the atmosphere was generally close to the sittings of 'home circles', a relaxed and intimate gathering conducive to the production of phenomena.

The participants influenced the phenomena indirectly by telling the medium about their expectations and their wishes before the séance, and directly during the séance, by concentrating on specific phenomena or 'supporting the medium' by, for example, breathing calmly in unison.

### **Development of Phenomena**

Kluski's career as a medium began at the end of 1918, when he was invited to a test séance with the medium anonymously referred to as 'N' (Jan Guzik, according to some sources), said to be the source of strong phenomena. Nothing had happened in the previous five séances with the medium, but on this occasion rustles and knocks were heard and touches were felt, not near the medium, but near Kluski.

Kluski's recorded mediumship lasted from 1918 to 1925. There was a definite development of mediumship, from the less sophisticated phenomena such as



knocks and movements of objects, to self-illuminating, life-like interactive apparitions.

The séances divide into three periods.

### **Phase 1: December 1918 to November 1920**

The medium and the sitters were overwhelmed by various unexpected phenomena taking place simultaneously, and documentation was fragmentary and limited. There are about a dozen reports from that period, mainly describing séances which included the taking of photographs.

A unique séance, one that conveys the possible scale of poltergeist-like phenomena in the early period, took place on 24 August 1919. There were eight male participants apart from Kluski.

After an unsuccessful attempt to obtain photographs ... the medium left the room and came back extremely annoyed about something. There were no lights, just kinetic phenomena which became so violent that people feared for their safety ... Immediately after turning off the light, in the corner, about 1.5 metres from the medium, a wooden column (weighing ca 20kg) noisily broke away from the surrounding furniture, rose to the ceiling and hung there hitting the ceiling for a few moments... At almost the same time, a small easel rose to the ceiling and fell with a deafening noise at the same point as the column. This lasted about ten to twelve minutes and was so unnerving that it was decided to stop the séance.

They then had a break, put the furniture back and tried again twice, but the violence and the levitations became worse in spite of their efforts to calm things with words and incantations.

Finally, a carafe with red wine standing next to the fireplace rose to the ceiling and fell to the floor, breaking into pieces. The séance was stopped immediately, and in the light it was found that the carafe was broken in such a way that a third of it, together with the base, looked as if it had been cut off with a knife, while the upper part was broken into tiny pieces.<sup>2</sup>

Between late 1919 and early 1920, materializing séances declined in favour of automatic writing séances, which were less exhausting for the medium. However, the dominance of automatic writing seemed to have a negative effect on the richness of the materializing séances, which then became of poorer quality.

### **Phase 2: November 1920 to February 1921**

In 1920, after the Bolshevik attack on Poland, Kluski served in the army as a volunteer, and séances were suspended until the autumn of that year. They then continued, with stronger materializing phenomena, until Kluski's departure for Paris. Apart from a few séances, in Warsaw, this period covers the experiments at IMI in Paris, and Kluski's other séances abroad. (Geley's reports on the IMI phenomena are discussed below, 'Kluski Hands' and Possibilities for Fraud.

After Kluski left France he went to Italy and Austria to visit friends, who wished to experience the phenomena; accordingly, séances were held in Florence and Vienna. They were arranged spontaneously and the witnesses were random, but the phenomena were similar to those produced in Warsaw and in IMI, heavy objects being lifted in the air and phantoms appearing simultaneously.

Excerpts from a séance on 17 March 1920, at Kluski's Warsaw apartment, describe typical aspects of the formation of the phenomena:

The screen lying on the table rose suddenly in the air and lit a clearly distinguishable human face, which resembled the face of the medium, close to the heads of the participants. This face appeared again, but now above the middle of the table and above the heads of the participants. It was similar to the previous one, but differed from it by having an unruly abundant head of hair and a trailing beard. At that time the medium did not have a beard, only a moustache. It was seen again for the third time after a while, still higher and further from the medium, with the hair but without any facial hair.

Later on:

The screen suddenly rose in the air and, suspended there, began to approach the participants in sequence and to light in detail the apparitions of four faces which appeared consecutively. Between the appearance of these faces, one could hear rustles and knocks and see various little lights. The first observed apparition was formed shapelessly, as if out of a piece of white fabric in which the eyes and the nose were irregularly located, and thus barely resembled a human face. When those present demanded a clearer face, one immediately appeared, better formed but giving the impression of a cardboard cut-out... The third face seemed to be Chinese, similar to the two previous faces. One could see the slanting eyes and abundant black moustache, but it did not at all look like a living human face...

The fourth face, a woman's face, illuminating itself with the screen held by a hand invisible to those present, approached each participant when requested, as did previous ones. Some participants had the impression that the face kept changing. First it was the face of an older woman, then suddenly it became young. This face showed itself to the other participants very clearly from every side, so that all those present could distinguish its features in detail...

After the apparition of the faces there appeared, first close to the medium and then above the heads of the participants, very intense lights achieving the size of a hen's egg and at times shining with a brilliant green-silver light...

From these lights, floating in the air, came what looked like shining smoke, accompanied by a very strong smell of ozone, which the participants smelled until the end of the séance. Some of the participants were touched by what seemed like a shining, flowing stream which over a period continued to shine on the hands, hair, and faces which it touched. The little fires, which kept appearing in increasing numbers, started to travel through the medium and come out of him...

The screen, previously lying motionless on the table, suddenly turned bright side up, and against its background there appeared first a small hand, immediately followed by a pair of intertwined hands. These hands looked like the hands of a dummy, but with the temperature of a human body. The little finger of one of these hands was partly broken off and hung on a thread. These hands allowed the medium and the participants to clasp and shake them, and even to pull them towards themselves. However, when they all firmly clasped the hands and the medium cried out 'light!', the hands dissolved without a trace, and after a moment appeared again against the screen...<sup>3</sup>

### **Phase 3: February 1921-March 1925**

Published records of séances end in 1925. This period saw the richest phenomena, in particular lights and materializations of human apparitions. The medium fell into a deep trance immediately at the beginning of the séance, and remained in that state almost throughout, while the séances became quieter and more systematic.

There was a significant decrease in the quantity of small lights and the emergence of increasingly powerful nebulae, strongly phosphorescent and smelling of ozone. Also during that period phantoms appeared that seemed like two or even three figures filling the same shape simultaneously. Observed continuously, the face of the figure changed, becoming, for example, clearly male without losing some of the features and accessories of a woman, and the reverse.

At that time phantoms of military figures, mostly Polish, appeared with increasing frequency. These apparitions were varied in their looks, age and rank, and were often recognized as friends or relatives of those present.

At the end of May 1923, human figures and lights became dominant, with increasing numbers of self-illuminating apparitions and phantoms of a Christian or spiritual nature.

The séance on 6 June 1923 seems to have been the first occasion featuring the new kind of self-illuminating phantom. It took place in Kluski's study at about 23:30 and lasted for over an hour. It began with noises, various lights and apparitions illuminating themselves with the screen.

This was followed by a period of strong and beautiful light phenomena. Flames with a large nucleus of light and small nebulae were followed by groups of smaller lights which would suddenly concentrate into one larger light and then disperse again. One had the impression that these lights were attached to the fingertips of a human hand which created these beautiful effects by quickly moving its fingers...

The rustles then moved to the middle of the room and began, very discreetly, to repeat the same noises, as if rubbing hands on woven fabric. The impression was that there was a desire to draw the participants' attention in that direction. After a moment, at a distance of about a metre from the participants, two lights appeared suddenly and simultaneously. They were stronger and


bigger than anything else seen at that séance. These lights, the size and shape of a human hand, emitted a great amount of luminous vapours, which together with the lights illuminated the middle of the room, thus illuminating the participants closest to it and the phantom itself. This turned out to be the figure of an elderly man of typically Eastern appearance, in a white sumptuous cloak which covered the head and seemed to flow through the arms bare to the elbows... The face was swarthy and ascetic, eyes dark, penetrating, set under thick and strongly drawn eyebrows. When the lights appeared in the room it became so bright that the figure could be examined in great detail...[4](#)

The figure appeared twice, and then disappeared without sound, leaving the room full of phosphorescent mists and a strange smell, not of ozone.

## The 'Kluski Hands'

A unique feature of the Kluski phenomena was the production of plaster moulds of materialized limbs. These were obtained by the ectoplasmic 'phantom' submerging a hand, foot or sometimes part of a face into a bowl of warm paraffin wax and letting the resulting mould set (a process which could be accelerated by dipping it into cold water). Where the impression was of a hand, it narrowed at the wrist, a highly significant detail obtained by the fact of the 'hand' – as a temporary ectoplasmic structure – simply dissolving instead of withdrawing from the mould, as a living person would have to do, causing it to break apart.

Figure 1: plaster casts made from wax moulds obtained during sittings

 photograph of plaster casts made from wax moulds of 'phantom limbs' obtained during sittings

Successful attempts to take 'glove' impressions were made from the earliest séances with Kluski. The moulds were occasionally similar to Kluski's hands; on average three were produced during a single sitting. However, they were so fragile that few survived.

For Geley, the production of intact moulds of hand and wrist stood as a permanent paranormal object, one that could not be created by any normal means. Inevitably, this has occasioned controversy that continues to the present day, with sceptical writers offering descriptions of how such a thing might be achieved by a non-paranormal process. One is to identify a means by which an object can be made smaller once the mould has been created. For instance, a hand can be made to swell by tying a tourniquet tightly around the arm, and then returned to its normal size when the tourniquet is removed, making it possible to withdraw it without breaking the mould. Another way might be to use a soluble cast that dissolves once the mould has been made, or one that is inflated and can simply be deflated and removed. Alternatively, a rigid cast can be removed through a slit in the mould and the paraffin resealed while it remains flexible.

All these activities require equipment, time (some fifteen minutes for the cooling), dexterity (particularly when creating moulds of complex hand configurations) and good light. The natural explanations offered by Coleman [5](#) and by Polidoro and

Garlaschelli<sup>6</sup> on the basis of their own experiments rely on withdrawing the hand from the paraffin, which needs to be done very carefully, like pulling off a tight glove. In the absence of collusion amongst all the participants on every occasion, neither this or any other method could be employed under séance conditions, even if Kluski or accomplices had been able to free their hands from the controls unobserved.

If Kluski could not have produced the moulds fraudulently during the séance, the next most obvious scenario involving fraud is that moulds of all shapes and sizes were prepared beforehand, and smuggled into the séance room by the medium and his accomplices: this is the explanation for particularly complex moulds offered by Polidoro and Garlaschelli.<sup>7</sup> However, many reports have detailed description of mould formation: the wax is heard to splash, and within about a minute soft gloves, different in size, character, and arrangement, drop on sitters' hands, in their laps, or on the table. They tended to be so thin (1mm) and fragile that very few of them survived. Nevertheless, most remained intact sufficiently long for people to feel them when they were warm and soft, continue to hold them, and then examine them closely when they had cooled.

Experiments conducted in France by Gustave Geley, Charles Richet and Count de Gramont at the IMI in Paris in 1920 provide the best picture of how the moulds were obtained. What follows are excerpts from Mario Varvoglis's account of the procedure:

The sessions took place in low red light, which was sufficient to distinguish the outlines of those present. All sitters locked hands during the sessions... Typically, Kluski's hands (and not just the wrists) would be held by Dr. Geley on one side, and Charles Richet or Count de Gramont on the other. The experimenters also maintained permanent leg contact with the medium. All contacts were verified before the light was dimmed. Once the session had begun, the controllers would give frequent reports, checking and verbally confirming their certitude that they are holding one of Kluski's hands.

The system used at the IMI involved a circular tank 30 centimetres in diameter, containing several kilograms of wax that floated on electrically heated water, thus producing a 10-cm deep layer of liquid wax. The system was placed on a table, in the centre of the circle formed by the sitters, 60 centimetres in front of the medium. Rather than using a second bowl for cooling, the IMI researchers preferred to allow the wax moulds to rigidify on their own, this being, as we shall see, a precaution against fraud. Following the sessions, the investigators would pour plaster into the fragile wax moulds, to obtain a more permanent object; once the plaster hardened, they would simply plunge the ensemble into boiling water and strip away the wax layer.

While the olfactory, visual and tactile phenomena came soon after sessions began, it generally took 15 to 20 minutes before any sign appeared that a mould was in the process of forming. The experimenters would first hear the sound of the 'hand' dipping into the paraffin, and then feel it touch their own hands, moist with warm wax. It would then be heard dipping in the container again, and finally come out and deposit itself next to them. Once begun, this

whole process would evolve quite rapidly - within 1 to 2 minutes. As Geley remarked this was quite surprising, given that paraffin's normal time to solidify at room temperature is much longer.

December 27th session: Just prior to beginning, Richet and Geley had secretly added a bluish colouring agent to the paraffin. Control of the medium was considered excellent, with controllers regularly checking and verbally reporting 'I am holding the right hand', 'I am holding the left hand'. Splashing sounds were heard about twenty minutes into the session, and one to two minutes later two warm paraffin gloves were deposited next to the controllers. Both wax moulds had precisely the same bluish tint as that of the tank, strongly suggesting that these were indeed created during the séance, and not smuggled in by the medium. An additional control was the weighing of all substance. Prior to the experiment, the paraffin was 3.920 grams, while at the end of the session it weighed 3.800 grams. The two moulds weighed 50 grams, and there was considerable wax scattered near the medium (around 15 grams), on his clothing, and on the floor 3.5 meters away from him (about 25 grams). Insofar as the sum of these weights correspond very closely to the initial weight, this further establishes that the wax gloves were produced during the session. Finally, it should be mentioned that the wax moulds were less than a millimetre thick (thinner than a sheet of paper).<sup>8</sup>

We also have a detailed account by Hewat McKenzie, the principal of the British College of Psychic Science, who described the experiment which he himself conducted with Kluski at Kluski's apartment in May 1922:

The medium's right hand was held by Mrs McKenzie's left, and the medium's left hand was held by another sitter. The five wax gloves... were produced within about five minutes of the time when the first was laid lightly upon my hand and coat sleeve, and while still in the hot molten state. As it was laid upon my hand several drops of hot wax splashed from it upon my clothes. The remaining four were placed upon the table in close succession, at about one minute interval between each.

The medium, previous to the experiment, was stripped naked and examined by me, in the presence of my interpreter, a gentleman who had never before sat with M. Kluski. The medium then put on another suit of clothes after same had been carefully examined. After the medium and six friends were seated, I was requested to lock the door. A 60-candle power electric lamp illuminated the room for some minutes after the séance began. Soon after this was extinguished, splashing was heard in the molten wax, which was contained in a basin upon the table immediately in front of me, creating a sound similar to what one might expect if a hand or hands were being actively moved amongst the liquid paraffin.

These gloves were without doubt freshly constructed, being soft to the touch when the first one was laid on my arm.<sup>9</sup>

There are also accounts (including Geley's on another occasion) where the participants see luminous hands being inserted in the paraffin.

## Possibilities for Fraud

Geley divides what was observed into categories of phenomena, instead of providing accounts of consecutive events (but we do get such reports from other sources). He makes a case against the possibility of fraud on the basis not only of the location (laboratory) and the controls maintained during the séances, but also what was observed during the séances and whether it could be produced fraudulently.

An obvious means of imitating little lights artificially is by using phosphorescent substance. However, the lights produced at the Kluski sittings were of different shapes, dimensions, and consistencies, appearing and disappearing very suddenly. They were numerous and scattered, flying far from the medium, and seemed purposeful, often associated with touches and materializations. There would have to have been collusion and accomplices, since ‘The distance of the lights, the multiplicity of the phenomena, the variations of luminosity, the forms and faces, could never have been imitated by a single liberated hand.’<sup>10</sup>

The same arguments apply to the issue of materialized faces, which were observed at all the séances at IMI, where human faces of natural size were seen above the heads of the medium and the participants. In addition, descriptions of some of the apparitions which appeared at IMI are similar to those seen at other séances in other circumstances, which would entail the same props and accomplices being available whenever required.

## Photographic Evidence

Photographs of Kluski’s apparitions are widely available online and at first glance appear to be unconvincing fakes. That applies to most photographic evidence of physical mediumship, however detailed the arguments may be against the possibility of fraud in the particular circumstances. An implicit assumption here is that that physical mediumship should produce stable and natural-looking effects.

In cases involving ectoplasm, photographs capture moments in a gradual development from a cobweb-like substance, through flat-looking portraits, to three-dimensional figures representing mental images created by the medium and the sitters – a particular issue in the case of photographs of Eva C’s phenomena published by Albert Schrenck-Notzing.<sup>11</sup> Most reports, not just those concerning the Kluski sittings, stress the volatility of the phenomena and their dependence on the minds controlling them. A more useful approach might be to examine each case fully in its context, assess the genuineness (or otherwise) of the material, and revise our expectations where necessary.

There are twelve published photographs of Kluski’s apparitions. The reports provide detailed descriptions of the sittings when photographs were attempted. In most cases we are given a description of the equipment and the procedure, the identity of the photographer, and a list of participants who then signed the report. Usually the film was developed immediately after the sitting, in the presence of witnesses. All the photographs can be related to specific detailed reports.

All come from the early period of Kluski's mediumship (1919-1921) and were taken in Warsaw at his apartment. At that time the phenomena were varied and the sitters had little idea of what to expect. The apparitions (without any assumptions as to their nature and origin) were supposed to give a signal when they were sufficiently formed to be photographed, but the procedure was not always successful, and the magnesium light sometimes ignited at the wrong time, when the forms were disintegrating and being reabsorbed into the body of the medium.

The medium tried to stay awake when photography was attempted, to avoid being shocked by the sudden explosion of light and sound. However, this meant that the phenomena tended to be kinetic and noisy; the more sophisticated phenomena were associated with deep trance. Later séances evolved towards producing more light displays and self-lighting apparitions, with the medium in deep trance, and this presumably acted as a disincentive to photography.


## Examples

The first séance at which photographs were attempted was on 30-31 August 1919. The person taking the photographs, Jan Dłużynski, was a military man with a distinguished career in the military police. He used a portrait camera, format 18 x 24, with Agfa film and an ordinary automatic lamp with a pyrite igniter and magnesium. Seven persons were present at the sitting apart from the medium. The films were developed immediately after the sitting and the report was signed by all the participants.

There were three attempts: the first photograph showed nothing; the second showed what looked like a part of a hairy head merging with the medium's head (amorphous shapes were observed above the medium's head while the photograph was being taken).

The third photograph showed figure of a bird, like a large hawk, which had not been present either before or after in Kluski's apartment. Before the photograph was taken, those present could hear rustles resembling large bird wings being stretched, and then breezes as if from the movements of a large fan. This took place in the light of a red lamp, about three metres from the medium. An indeterminate shape was visible close to the medium in that light, but nobody had any idea that it might be an apparition of a bird. This was established only after the film was developed.[12](#)

Figure 2: Unexpected figure of a bird

 Photograph of Franek Kluski during a seance with the unexpected figure of a bird


A séance on 23 November 1919 was attended by six participants besides Kluski. The intention was to obtain paraffin moulds, and then to photograph the apparition. During the production of the moulds the participants who faced the red lamp observed shadows of ends of hands appearing as reasonably clear silhouettes above the container with the hot paraffin. This was followed by a display of lights some two metres from the floor, and the typewriter on the desk some distance away, fully visible in the red light, started typing very fast, no fingers being visible. After the



white light was switched on, three paraffin moulds of hands were found on the table, and on the typewriter a piece of paper with the following sentence: 'I am the smile of balance, my poem of love and life has survived epochs'.

After a short break a second séance was held, during which strong light phenomena were observed, in the form of a ball of light, individual small lights and nebulae. A signal for photograph-taking was heard but there was some confusion as to whether it was completed. A photograph was taken, using the same camera as previously, and the film was developed immediately afterwards.

Figure 3: Impression of remnants of clothing and hair of apparitions being absorbed into the medium. The most visible is the part of some white cloak and a clump of tangled hair.

 Photograph of Franek Kluski during a seance showing the forms of clothing and hair

A séance on 29 September 1921 was attended by six participants (apart from Kluski), including Gustave Geley and Count du Bourg de Bozas, who all signed the report.

They waited for more than an hour, and the medium found it difficult to stay awake. He groaned as if in pain, then started screaming. At the same time loud noises were heard behind him. In the light of the screen they saw a figure standing behind the medium and two photographs were taken.

Throughout the séance the medium was strictly controlled by the two participants sitting next to him. After a pause of some minutes the red lamp was lit, the white light extinguished, and the photograph was developed in the presence of all the persons who participated in the séance (Figure 3). The second photograph, taken with the 8x10 camera, was taken away by Count du Bourg to develop at home. While the photograph was being developed there appeared numerous and very large lights and a number of light-misty figures by the medium.[13](#)

Figure 4: Figure in military uniform standing behind the medium (film partially broken)

 photograph showing a figure in military uniform standing behind the medium

In the final example the figure behind the medium looks quite convincing, and could be interpreted as an accomplice wearing a costume. But if we assume that the conditions were lax enough to allow the entrance of accomplices, in spite of the claims to the contrary, or that there was widespread collusion, why not make a better job of the other fakes? Why drape bits of cloths and wigs over Kluski's head and shoulders (Fig. 3) and even a stuffed bird (Fig. 2)?

The photographs might represent different stages of the development or disintegration of the phenomena, as described by Schrenck-Notzing, and that the

sitters are trying to record events as faithfully as possible. Some intermediate form of matter is described in a number of reports involving physical phenomena. In an experiment with Palladino, Julian Ochorowicz reports that the impression of her hand in clay (created from a distance under controlled conditions), looked as if it had been made through a scarf.<sup>14</sup> Well-controlled experiments with Rudi Schneider show variously shaped appendages and amorphous masses, sometimes with beginnings of faces in them, where the substance leaves evidence for 'thread-like or fibrous structures'<sup>15</sup> and sometimes appears as a 'thick, greyish mist'.<sup>16</sup> As in the case of Kluski, this substance seems to develop in response to the minds of the sitters – a process of which a photograph captures only a moment.

## Conclusions

The phenomena that took place around Kluski are on a spectacular scale but they are not unique. Like much physical mediumship, they have their echoes in poltergeist reports of raps, levitations, movements of objects, lights and apparitions. What makes Kluski unique is the development of his mediumship and the way it reflects his mental life. It is usual for the medium to be controlled and guided by 'spirits', or experimenters, thus becoming instruments, experimental objects. By contrast, Kluski's attitude was from the beginning that of a detached observer of his own phenomena, and the participants and investigators were his friends and equals, as well as contributors to the formation of the phenomena. In a sense the chief experimenter was Kluski himself, whether he was conscious or not, since the phenomena related in a number of ways directly to his imagination and his creative powers.

Many of the materializations are linked to Kluski's preoccupations at the time of particular séances, especially during the initial period, 1919-1920. In the early phase of his mediumship, he is usually awake at least some of the time. In the later phases he falls into very deep trance almost immediately and remembers nothing of what happened. Yet strangely, the later period demonstrates greater control by what might be called the 'creative director' – the séances are no longer chaotic, the phantoms are clearer, the lights provide magnificent displays, and in the final stage we get what might be interpreted as symbolic and visual emanations of Kluski's spiritual depths, bringing to mind parallels with the lofty messages uttered by mental mediums. With Kluski, we seem to be in a realm where the boundary between physical and mental needs to be redrawn.

Zofia Weaver

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) Pawłowski, 1925, p. 502.
- [2.](#) Weaver, 2015, p. 71.
- [3.](#) Weaver, 2015, pp. 74-5.
- [4.](#) Weaver, 2015, p. 81.
- [5.](#) Coleman, 1994.
- [6.](#) Polidoro and Garlaschelli, 1997.
- [7.](#) Polidoro and Garlaschelli, 1997, p. 62.
- [8.](#) Varvoglis, 2002.
- [9.](#) McKenzie, 1922-23, pp. 185-187.
- [10.](#) Geley, 1927, p. 217.
- [11.](#) Fischer, 2005, p. 100.
- [12.](#) Weaver, 2015, p. 52.
- [13.](#) Okolowicz, 1926.
- [14.](#) Casimir and Weaver, 2018, p. 100.
- [15.](#) Gregory, 1985, p. 401.
- [16.](#) Gregory, 1985, pp. 178-79.

