

In Memoriam: Stephen Edward Braude (1945–2026)

The Sui Generis Jazz Philosopher

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On January 3rd, parapsychology lost not only its most consequential philosopher of the last few decades, but a one-of-a-kind polymath wit. Stephen E. Braude's prolific output (7 books and more than 100 other publications) was matched by incisive analyses and their implications (tinged at times with mordant humor), along with strong critiques of both skeptical and some mainstream parapsychological positions. Esteban (as I called him) and I met sometime around the turn of the century when we both lived in Maryland. We shared an interest not only in psi but in dissociation and, as it turned out, in obscure avant garde music. A brief obituary cannot do him justice, but I will introduce some of his main ideas and list resources so that interested readers can go much further (see also <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/stephen-e-braude>).

Macro-Psychokinesis

Braude was for decades one of the strongest proponents of macro-psychokinesis, a conclusion fueled by an experience of levitating a table in a group. Among other points, he stated that: 1) the evidence for macro-PK was persuasive and could not be

explained away, even after discounting fraudulent cases, and that 2) the distinction between micro- and macro-PK is fallacious (Braude, 1986, 2015). He also conducted observational studies of physical mediums and unusual people such as Katie, the “gold leaf lady,” on whom thin, brass foil would suddenly appear and partly cover her, and dismantled skeptical accounts of the Ted Serios “thoughtographs” (Braude, 2007; 2015). I value his daring to investigate phenomena in their occurring milieus, something that investigators at the beginning of psychical research carried out brilliantly but is rarely done nowadays.

Possible Survival of Death

When discussing the evidence for survival as suggested by different bodies of evidence such as mental mediumship, Braude (2003) made the case that good evidence from these sources cannot be explained away and weighed different psi explanations. Primarily he compared the “living-agent psi” (or “super-psi”) hypothesis that the source of information comes from living individuals with the hypothesis that the source is deceased individuals. His careful arguments are elaborated across more than 300 pages in one of his books and dismiss easy, pat answers: “we can say, with little assurance but with some justification, that the evidence provides a reasonable basis for believing in personal postmortem survival. It doesn’t clearly support the belief that everyone survives death: it more clearly supports the belief that some do... for a limited time” (Braude, 2003, p. 306). His conclusion is similar to that of the foremost scholar on mental mediumship, Alan Gauld (1983). In both authors, I appreciate their laying out of the evidence and arguments supporting their (moderate) conclusions, as compared with the strident authors who take it as axiomatic that survival without a functioning brain is impossible, or that the extant evidence proves *conclusively* that our personalities/selves continue beyond death.

Other Topics

Steve also discussed dissociation, particularly what used to be called *multiple personality disorder* (currently *dissociative identity disorder*; Cardeña, 2017), as well as hypnosis, dissociative processes, and personal unity, taking to task the deniers of dissociation and the possibility of recovered memories (Braude, 1991). With respect to proposals within parapsychology, he was sometimes dismissive of the experimental evidence and posited that psi in real life is much stronger (he prioritized PK, but for anomalous cognition examples see e.g., Stevenson, 1970). One lesson from him, not

learned to the necessary degree by the field in recent years, is that mental phenomena are of a different nature, and do not have to be investigated or understood the same way, than physical ones.

Steve expressed himself forcefully about the dishonesty of much anti-psi ignorant and dogmatic criticism (for some examples see Cardeña, 2015) and had also terse words for psi explanations that he thought did not elucidate much. The latter include retrocausal explanations of precognition (1986) and mechanistical explanations for parapsychological (and psychological) phenomena (Braude, 2014).

Despite the intolerance against psi, Steve became Emeritus Professor and former Chair of Philosophy at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, as well as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. He received many grants, fellowships, and awards, including the Distinguished Achievement Award from the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, and the F. W. H. Myers Memorial Medal from the Society for Psychical Research

Steve Braude: The Whole Person

As impressive as his philosophical contributions to parapsychology are, there was (or is?) a lot more to him (Braude, 2020). Always dapper, Steve created not only books and papers, but music. He called himself the “jazz philosopher” because he played piano jazz (recordings of some of his music with the Yamara Band can be found on Spotify, Apple Music, or be streamed from <https://www.jazzphilosopher.com/>; and scores of his compositions can be downloaded from <https://www.jazzphilosopher.com/scores>). He was also very knowledgeable of classical music and when I could not find a rare, out of print recording, I could often count on him recording it and sending it to me.

Steve was fearless and acted out of principle rather than self-interest. A couple of decades ago, before we had actually become good friends, I was attacked by Adrian Parker and his ally Göran Brusewitz because I got the position that Parker had also applied to. Over the course of more than 10 years their hostilities included trying to block me from becoming a member of a parapsychology closed list group, misrepresenting to an examiner the topic of one of my doctoral students’ doctoral dissertation, after which she resigned from the examining committee, and complaining to the Parapsychological Association for an award they gave me. In the midst of a deafening silence from many in the parapsychology community who sided with me only in private, Steven supported me publicly, something that I appreciated enormously.

In parting, I send my deepest condolences to Steve's partner in crime (and also always elegant), Djurdjina "Gina" Ruk.

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