

Editorial: Robert K. Merton

ARTHUR J. KOVER
Editor

ROBERT MERTON died recently. He was an important sociologist. In the days in which advertising research, psychology, and sociology were well-joined triplets, Merton made important contributions to our field. After the radio research group moved to Columbia, Merton and Lazarsfeld did pioneering work on listening patterns, impact, and research that (perhaps unfortunately) led to our current practice. As *The Economist* noted in an obituary, Merton is credited with the invention of focus groups. This was not to evade quantitative research (as so often happens today) but rather to explore the personal feelings and responses to media that both preceded and followed up good quantitative research. To me, it is enlightening to see how these pioneers, including Merton, either stumbled on or brilliantly intuited many of the media and advertising research techniques we use now.

This editorial, however, is not to celebrate that pioneering work. Rather it is to point to Merton as an exemplar of good writing. He dealt with complex, difficult, often obscure social issues, and yet he wrote directly and clearly. He was a kind of Hemingway of social science. Both academics and lay people read Merton with interest and sometimes even delight. For me, as a fledgling sociologist, it was with an intense feeling of discovery that I read his articles on theories of the middle range and on the bureaucratic personality.

In advertising research, we deal with complex, difficult, and often obscure issues. Finding solu-

tions or insights can affect both researchers and people who view advertising (one hopes for the better). Merton offers an example for us. As an editor, I sometimes feel as if I am a laborer in a diamond mine. How many tons of soil and gravel must I sift through to find the gem? The gems are there in most submissions. But they are hidden, coy, asking for more labor from the reader than is needed.

Therefore, Merton's death leads to this appeal to us, his successors: Think of Merton's example. Please write directly and as clearly as possible. Take your ideas and research and lay them before the reader, spare and lean and unencumbered. As with any authorship, the writing of research is a shared venture, shared by the writer and the reader. It should lead to insight, new knowledge, and (yes) even joy.

Or is this editor having a utopian dream?

NOTE

The *Journal of Advertising Research* has accepted an article by Christian Derbaix and Claude Pechecux (Laboratory for Consumer Behavioral Analysis, Catholic University of Mons, Belgium). It will be published in an upcoming issue. The article contains a scale that measures children's (8- to 12-year-olds) attitudes toward TV advertising in general. To protect the authors' priority, that scale can be obtained before formal publication by writing to Christian Derbaix at derbaix@fucam.ac.be. 