

## Celebrating Katz

### *Introduction*

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On March 6 and 7, 2014, more than 200 of Elihu Katz's colleagues, friends, family, and current and former students (many of us falling into more than one of these categories) gathered at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication to celebrate him as both a scholar and a person. The stated reason for this gathering was Elihu's transition, after more than 20 years as a member of the Annenberg faculty, to emeritus status, though of course no excuse is needed for honoring someone whose intellectual contributions are as deep, varied, and lasting as his. For well over half a century, his works—and, more importantly, his ideas—have been central to the formation and development of the field of communication and media studies. Indeed, in the genealogical tree of the field, Elihu's place is more root or trunk than branch.

The highlight of our two-day celebration was a talk by Elihu himself, followed by reflections on both the scholarship and the person from two of our field's leaders, Sonia Livingstone and Paddy Scannell. Edited versions of these insightful and engaging presentations follow this introduction. As all three describe in more detail and from different perspectives, Elihu's intellectual and geographic journey has been a rich and rewarding one. He received his BA, MA, and PhD (all in sociology) from Columbia University. At the time, Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research and its collection of eminent theorists and researchers were engaged in applied and scholarly studies on the influence of various forms of interpersonal and mass communications, research that would become one of the foundations of the communication field. The bureau was also a leader in developing a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and research designs for measuring media effects.

Elihu was more than a student during this nascent period, working as a research associate at the Bureau and later holding a lecturer position in Columbia's Department of Sociology and School of General Studies. During this time, he coauthored (with Paul Lazarsfeld) *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, one of the most influential (no pun intended) books in the history of communication studies. Serving as first author on this ambitious project, the book and related work established the "two-step flow" theory of communication, a theory that remains the subject of study and debate to this day and that has gained new purchase as research and theorizing on social networks and social media have blossomed. *Personal Influence* was so significant to the field that it was republished on its 50th anniversary with a new and insightful introduction by Katz.

Few scholars ever produce a work with the import of *Personal Influence*, let alone do so while completing a PhD! But this was only the beginning for Elihu. He went on to a distinguished career, first at the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology, then as a professor of sociology and communication

at Hebrew University, and finally as the Distinguished Trustee Professor of Communication at Penn's Annenberg School. Along the way, he also held visiting professorships at the University of Manchester (England), the University of Padua (Italy), Keio University (Japan), the University of Vienna (Austria), and the University of Southern California.

During this illustrious career, Elihu has published more than 20 books and 200 articles, book chapters, and essays. Collectively this body of work has shaped the theories, methods, and findings at the heart of communication and media studies. Paddy, Sonia, and Elihu himself each provides insightful reflections on this oeuvre and its impact, but let me indulge in my own thoughts on his "greatest hits" following *Personal Influence*. His 1966 book, *Medical Innovation*, established "diffusion" as a core concept in communication studies. His 1969 book, *The Politics of Community Conflict*, established the importance of communication networks in local decision making and policy development. His 1973 book, *Bureaucracy and the Public*, was influential in illustrating the centrality of both internal and external communication processes to organizational and bureaucratic theory and performance. His 1974 book, *The Uses of Mass Communications*, helped make "uses and gratifications" theory a staple of the field. Through a series of books, articles, and chapters, Elihu was among the first researchers to see the profound significance of television to culture, politics, and society, and more recently was also among the first to see what he provocatively called "the end of television" in the digital media age in which we now live. His 1993 book, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*, introduced the notion that audiences were more than passive consumers and that the meaning taken from mass mediated content resulted from an interactive process that was culturally dependent. *The Export of Meaning*, along with a number of his other publications, also helped establish communication as a global comparative field. And it reintroduced focus groups as a method for academic research. His 1993 book, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, established the concept of "media events" as yet another major contribution to the field. And through a series of articles and his most recent book, *Echoes of Gabriel Tarde*, Elihu has played a central role in establishing deliberation and conversation as communication processes of crucial import.

Were this not enough, Elihu also played a significant role outside of the academy. He was asked by the government of Israel to head a task force charged with the introduction of television broadcasting in the late 1960s, a position he took and successfully completed, serving as the founding director of Israeli Television from 1968 to 1969. He has also served as a consultant to both the Columbia Broadcasting System and the BBC, as a member of the Israeli Council on Culture and Arts and the Israeli Film Council, and as a chairman of the U.S. Educational Foundation in Israel.

Elihu's many accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. He is the recipient of more than three dozen major international awards and honors, including honorary degrees from Northwestern University, the University of Ghent, the University of Montreal, the University of Paris, Haifa University, the University of Rome, the University of Bucharest, and the University of Quebec; fellowships from the International Communication Association, the Bellagio Study Center, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Ligura Center for Arts and Letters, the Center for Advanced Studies at Hebrew University, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford; and major book and career awards from such organizations as the National Association of Broadcasters, the World Association for Public Opinion

Research, the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Judaism, and the governments of Germany, Canada, and Israel.

Such accomplishments could easily lead someone to become larger than life, but what has impressed me as much as his scholarship during my 11 years as his colleague, and as is evident in the reflections of Sonia, Paddy, and Elihu, is the man himself. Throughout his career, he has been a dedicated mentor to dozens of sociology and communication PhD students, many of whom have gone on to become leaders in their field. I can think of no other scholar who so consistently “talks the talk” while “walking the walk,” modeling the importance of deliberation and conversation in his everyday professional and personal life with intelligence, grace, wit, and humor. In short, he epitomizes what I imagined a teacher and scholar to be when I first contemplated academics as a career.

I will miss my day-to-day interactions with Elihu, but am certain he will continue to move the field forward in creative and provocative ways. As a way of keeping him (in a sense) and his work at Annenberg and in the field of communication, I am happy to announce that starting this fall our school has inaugurated the “Elihu Katz Colloquia,” in which our own and visiting scholars will present their latest research, to be followed by—what else—deliberation and conversation. We are also in the process of creating a comprehensive digital and interactive archive of Elihu’s publications, papers, notes, and intellectual exchanges that will be available to scholars around the world. In the meantime, I invite you to get a feel for the personal and professional influence of Elihu Katz in the essays that follow.