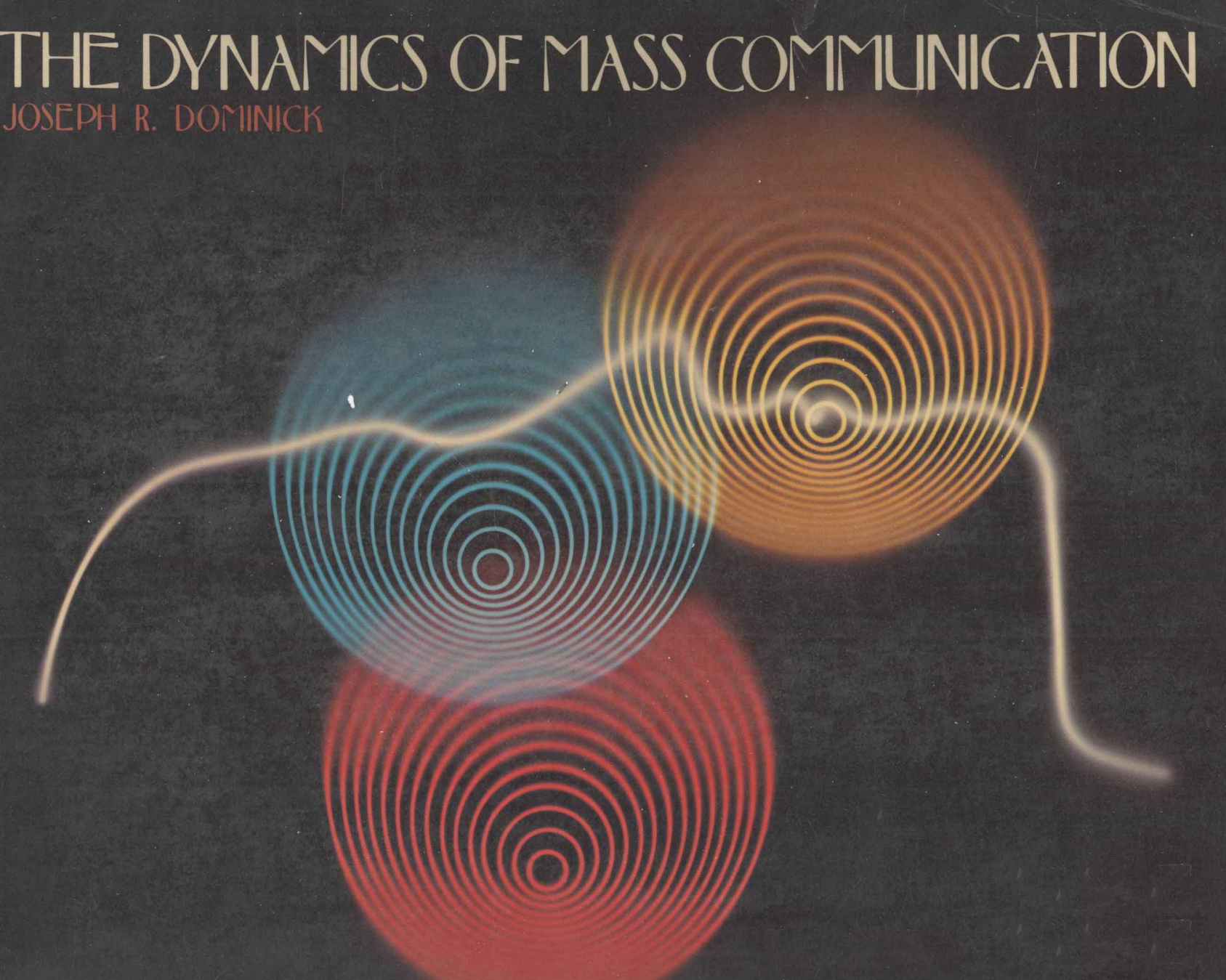
THE DYNAMICS OF MASS COMMUNICATION

JOSEPH R. DOMINICK



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PREFACE

This book was written with the idea of integrating more recent trends in the study of mass communication into a text that would be appropriate for an introductory level course. Instructors will find that the basic coverage encompasses most traditional topics included in a beginning survey course. I have attempted, however, to give more emphasis to several areas of increasing importance to students. One such area concerns media economics. Since the major mass media in the United States are commercially supported, it is desirable for students to appreciate where the money comes from, how it is spent, and what some of the consequences are that arise from the control of mass media by large organizations. In addition, this book contains two chapters on the effects of mass media, a somewhat heavy dose for an introductory text. Nonetheless, this is one area that has great import for any person planning to work in the media industries or for anyone who simply will become a consumer of media content. As informed members of society, we should have some basic knowledge of the effects of the mass media on our culture. Finally, there are three full chapters on media history. Believing that a study of history can reveal much about the present behavior of media institutions and recognizing that the introductory course may be the only exposure to history for many students, I have chosen to give this area extra emphasis.

The book is based on a new organization of content along two major tripartite divisions. First, I have divided communication into three basic forms: interpersonal, machine-assisted interpersonal, and mass communication. I hope this division will be useful in distinguishing several differentiating concepts across communication settings. Second, I have divided the media into three groups: the sight media (newspapers and magazines), the sound media (radio and sound recording), and the sight and sound media (television and motion pictures). Although this categorization differs from traditional methods of organization, I have

chosen it because it reflects the growing interdependence between newspapers and magazines, the radio and recording industries, and the film and TV industries. In fact, these industries may grow even closer with the coming of the new technologies, as discussed in the concluding chapter.

Since a book has physical limitations on the number of pages it can contain, I have left some topics for the instructor to cover. First among these is the structure and function of the advertising and public relations industries, which are prime users of the mass media. Next, the book contains only general instructions and advice on pursuing a career in the various media. Because detailed career information needs to be topical and up-to-the-minute, it is hoped that the instructor will provide additional information.

I have attempted to keep an informal style throughout the book without becoming too flippant or glib. The mass media are a fascinating subject, and it is tempting to become lost in the tinsel-and-glitter aspect of their operation. My intent has been to capture the excitement of working in these professions without losing the analytical depth and substance necessary to a college-level course.

A special feature of this edition is the inclusion of numerous selections of boxed material that I hope students will find both interesting and enlightening. Key media terms are boldfaced in the text where first defined, and these same terms have been collected in a glossary for easy reference. Because many forms of the mass media are captured in images, I have taken particular care in selecting photos and cartoons. I hope the resulting art program will be particularly appealing to students. I have also included a variety of figures and tables that I hope will illustrate and clarify concepts. However, students should keep in mind the basic premise that they are not expected to memorize all the information contained in this material. It is generally sufficient to come away with the main ideas illustrated. Finally, a list of recommended readings appears at the end of each chapter.

I owe thanks to many people for helping me with this project. Roger Wimmer, Barry Sherman, Jim Fletcher, and Tom Russell shared their professional libraries with me and never complained when I didn't return their books on time; Bill Lee and Len Reid provided helpful comments and suggestions. Syd Silverman of *Variety* offered valuable information about the film industry; Joseph T. Leichter provided helpful historical research, and Joan Leichter Dominick competently handled dozens of administrative and research odds and ends. Chuck Anderson and David Bolton provided photographic assistance, and Scott Shamp, James Weaver, Vicki Crawford, and Steve Knapp helped with library research that at times must have seemed to be rather bizarre. Manuscript typing was handled by three individuals whose considerable typing skills were exceeded only by their patience: Ann Spurlock, Julie Steedley, and Kay Weeks. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the manuscript reviewers who provided me with much reinforcement and guidance from beginning to end of this project: Barbara

L. Cloud of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas; Jennings Bryant of the University of Evansville in Indiana; Thomas Donohue of the University of Kentucky at Lexington; and Marilyn Matelski of Boston College.

In closing, let me note that the mass media are an influential, ubiquitous, and vital force in our lives. Unfortunately, their inner workings and impact on both individuals and society as a whole are not well understood. It is my hope that this book will be a step in the direction of better understanding.

Athens, Georgia
October 1982

J. R. D.

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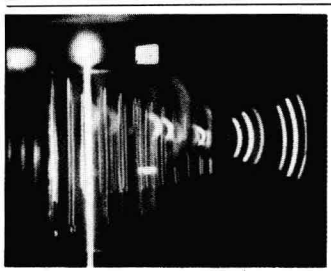

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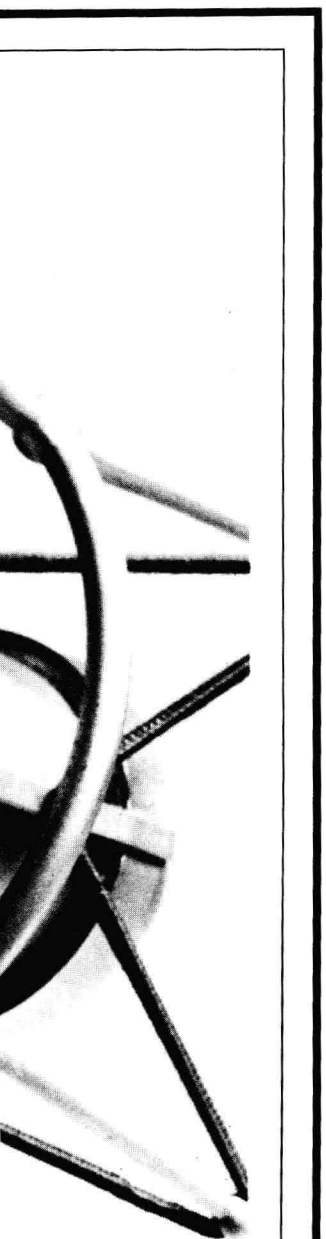

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PART

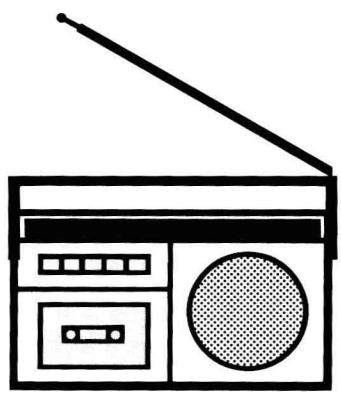
I

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF MASS COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER

1

COMMUNICATION: MASS AND OTHER FORMS



Human beings are constantly involved in the communication process—a process that is sometimes effective but that at other times leads to unexpected results, as the following examples illustrate.

February 20, 1971, was a fairly uneventful day. Had it not been for World War III, which apparently started early that morning, almost no one would remember it.

One of those who will not forget it is Flawn Williams. Working at Channel 44 in Chicago that morning, Williams was looking forward to an uneventful Saturday when the bell on the station's Associated Press wire machine began to clang. Williams walked over to the machine and discovered to his great surprise that World War III was beginning.

The keys on the machine were chattering out the following message:

Message authenticator: hatefulness, hatefulness. This is an emergency action notification (EAN) directed by the President. Normal broadcasting will cease immediately. Stations will broadcast EAN Message One preceded by the attention signal per FCC rules.

An EAN was to be transmitted only in the case of a nuclear war, an invasion from outer space, or some other cataclysmic event. Obviously, something serious was happening. Somewhat incredulously, Williams hurried over to the master switcher, where a rather dusty EAN folder was posted, to get further instructions on exactly what "Message One" was. With shaking hands, he ripped open the envelope and looked quickly for the secret code word, the authenticator, which would verify the message. There in front of him in black and white was the following:

Message authenticator: hatefulness.

Evidently it was the real thing. But to add to the confusion, a quick spin around the dial disclosed that every other TV station in Chicago was broadcasting its usual Saturday morning schedule. Perhaps Channel 44 was the first to notice? And to further obscure an already muddy situation, the EAN envelope did not contain Message One.

Williams was in an unenviable position. Seemingly, the President himself had declared a national emergency and ordered all the stations in Chicago off the air, except for WGN (which was to broadcast emergency messages). The nation was in desperate straits, but nobody seemed to care. Williams decided to follow procedure as best he could. In just thirty seconds, the station went dark. Throughout the country, fewer than 10 percent of broadcast stations followed orders and did the same. The other 90 percent evidently decided the whole thing was a mistake and kept on broadcasting their usual cartoons and kiddie programs. Fortunately, they were right. An Air Force technician at the National Warning Center in Colorado had loaded the wrong tape into the communication network.

The following item appeared in a recent wire service report: "Playboy Enterprises estimates that removing ornamental pants from its offices will save $27,000 a year."

On July 19, 1973, Senator Sam Ervin, head of the committee that was investigating the Watergate affair, thought he had just received some good news. Ervin, who was struggling to get President Richard Nixon to turn over tapes of White House conversations to his committee, was told by an aide that Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz was calling with an important message. Ervin took the call in a phone booth at the rear of the hearing room. When Ervin returned to the hearings he proudly announced to the committee and the assembled press that Secretary Shultz had informed him that the President was going to make the tapes available.

Ervin was wrong. He had been victimized by a hoax. The caller was not Shultz but a prankster playing a cruel joke on Ervin. Finally, Ervin had to announce that he had been taken in. Sheepishly, he admitted that his father had warned him about telephones.

A man's car was stalled on a Long Island freeway. The motorist quickly determined that his battery was dead and that he would need a push to get started. Luckily, he was able to flag down a passing motorist and ask for help. The motorist happened to be a young woman who had just started driving only a few months before.

"I have an automatic transmission," he explained to her. "You'll have to get it up to thirty or thirty-five miles an hour to get me started."

The young woman returned to her car, and the man sat down behind the wheel to wait for her to line up behind him. Glancing in the rear-view mirror, he noticed that the woman had backed up a long distance behind him. Although he thought it a little peculiar, he paid little attention and checked to see that his car was in the right gear and his ignition key on. When he glanced back at his mirror, he suddenly realized there had been a slight misunderstanding. There was the woman coming at him at about—sure enough—thirty to thirty-five miles an hour. Total damage to both cars was more than a thousand dollars.

In 1969, an oil platform off Santa Barbara, California, suffered a blowout that coated miles of coastline with an ugly oil slick. Hundreds of birds lost their lives when they became coated with the sticky oil. A Senate subcommittee on water pollution called in the president of the company to testify. A reporter for the *New York Times* was covering the hearing, and the next day the paper quoted the president as making a rather callous remark: "I'm amazed at the publicity for the loss of a few birds." The quote was picked up by NBC and repeated on their newscast. The *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine also printed it.

Public outrage grew toward the oil company and its president for making such an insensitive comment.

The only problem was that he didn't say it.

The official transcript of the hearing, which everyone agreed was correct, shows that the oil company president was talking about the efforts of his company to establish a bird cleaning and care center. He added, "I think we have to look at these problems relatively. I am always tremendously impressed at the publicity that the death of birds receives versus the loss of people in our country." It was later explained that the reporter for the *Times* had been called out of the hearing room during the president's statement and when the reporter returned, he asked one of his colleagues to fill him in on what he missed. The second reporter gave him a quick and not entirely accurate paraphrase of what was said. In the noise and confusion of the hearing room, the *Times* reporter mistook the paraphrase for a direct quote. The other news media lifted the quote from the *Times* without checking its accuracy.

These seemingly unrelated examples illustrate different types of human communication. They range from the relatively simple—two reporters conversing in a hearing room; Sam Ervin taking a phone call—to the relatively complicated—publishing a newspaper. Despite their apparent lack of similarity, these illustrations share certain elements common to communication. A glance at these elements will serve as a starting point for our examination of the differences between mass and other forms of communication.

ELEMENTS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

At a general level, communication events involve the following:

1. a source;
2. a process of encoding;
3. a message;
4. a channel;
5. a process of decoding;
6. a receiver;
7. the potential for feedback; and
8. the chance of noise.

A rough sketch of this process is provided in Fig. 1.1. We will refer back to this figure as we examine the process more fully.