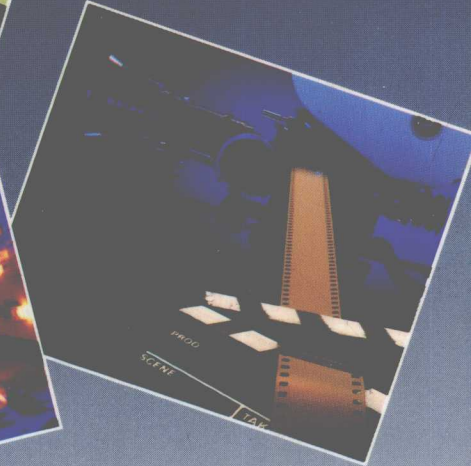
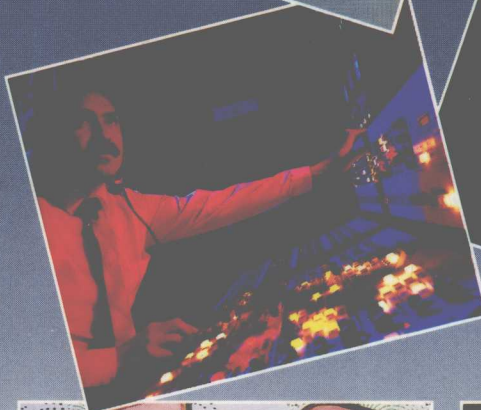


UNDERSTANDING MASS MEDIA



Fourth Edition

TANDING MEDIA VISUAL VISUAL

Jeffrey



National Textbook Company

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Preface

That roar you hear in the back of your consciousness as you read this fourth edition of *Understanding Mass Media* is the sound of the twenty-first century approaching. When the current century began, mass media communication was an infant. Yes, books and newspapers were mature.

By 1900, public libraries and news agencies, such as the Associated Press and United Press, were well-established; the popular *Saturday Evening Post*, one of the first magazines in the United States, was already eighty years old.

However, electronic media existed only as eccentric inventions. Samuel Morse's telegraph had been around for a while, but it could not communicate with the masses and it required overhead wires to work. W. K. L. Dickson had developed a motion picture camera, Guglielmo Marconi had a patent for a wireless telegraph, and Thomas Edison had already filed a patent application for something called a "talking machine." As the twentieth century began, these media were dreams. As the century ends, they are a commonplace in even the most remote villages around the globe.

Imagine how mass media will differ by the end of the twenty-first century. Will every person alive be able to communicate instantly with any other person in the universe at the

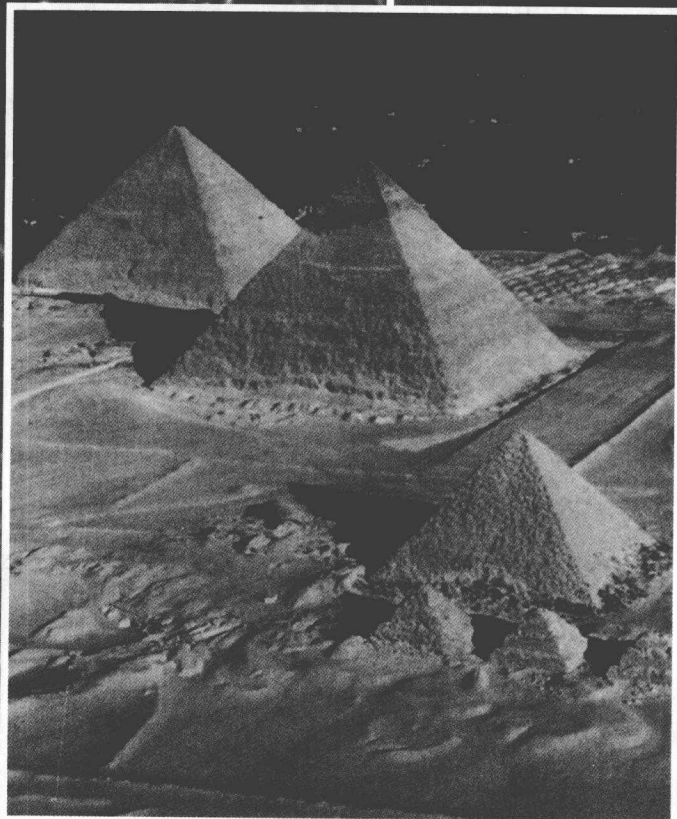
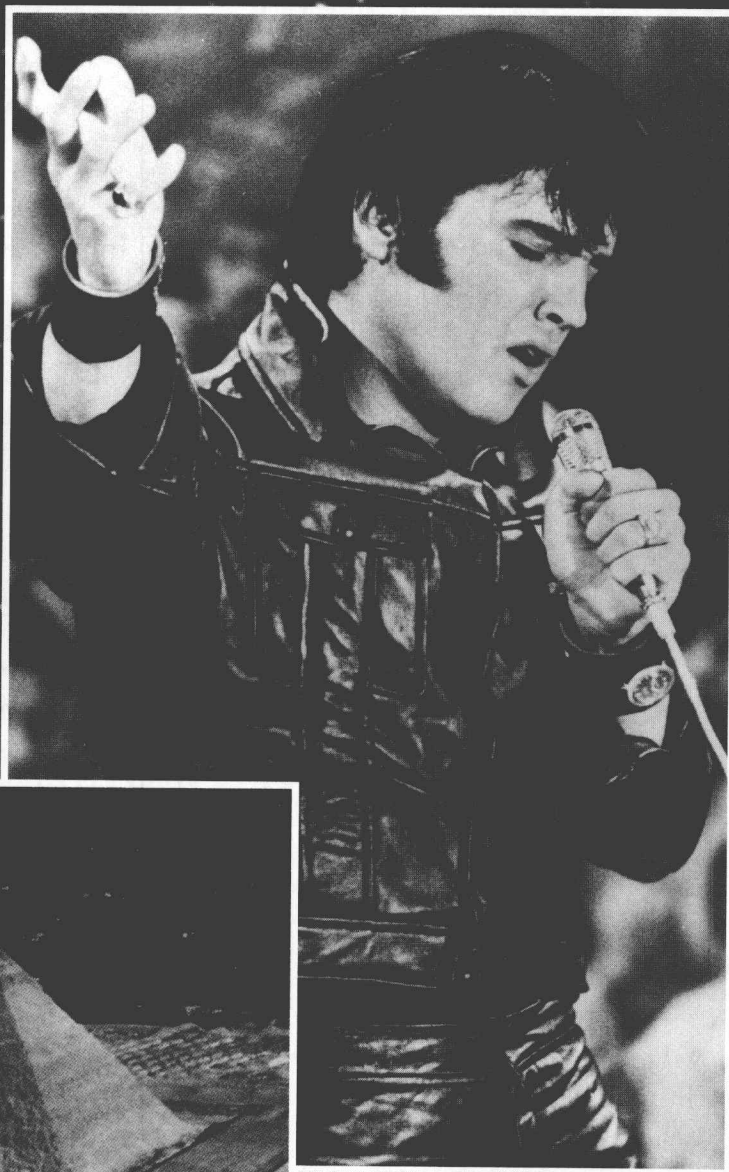
touch of a few buttons? For that to happen, we need to end the divisive medium of local languages. For truly global mass media, we need a global language.

Instead of street addresses and a variety of phone numbers, will each person in the future have a communication identity number that will enable the world to share ideas? And might the combination of a universal language and a global ID number draw us so close together as to make World War III unthinkable? Perhaps.

Or will electronic media become an addictive drug, pacifying the masses into a Brave New World controlled by media dictators? Will giant conglomerates replace outdated nations and dictate how we live?

The fact is, mass media will serve us if we understand their messages or control us if we ignore their power. That fact is why you are reading this textbook. That fact is why the study of mass media is a crucial part of a basic education.

Special thanks go to William Jawitz, English teacher at Manchester High School, Manchester, Connecticut, and John Holmes, Chair of the Broadcasting Department at Marshall High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for their reviews of *Understanding Mass Media* and for their helpful suggestions.



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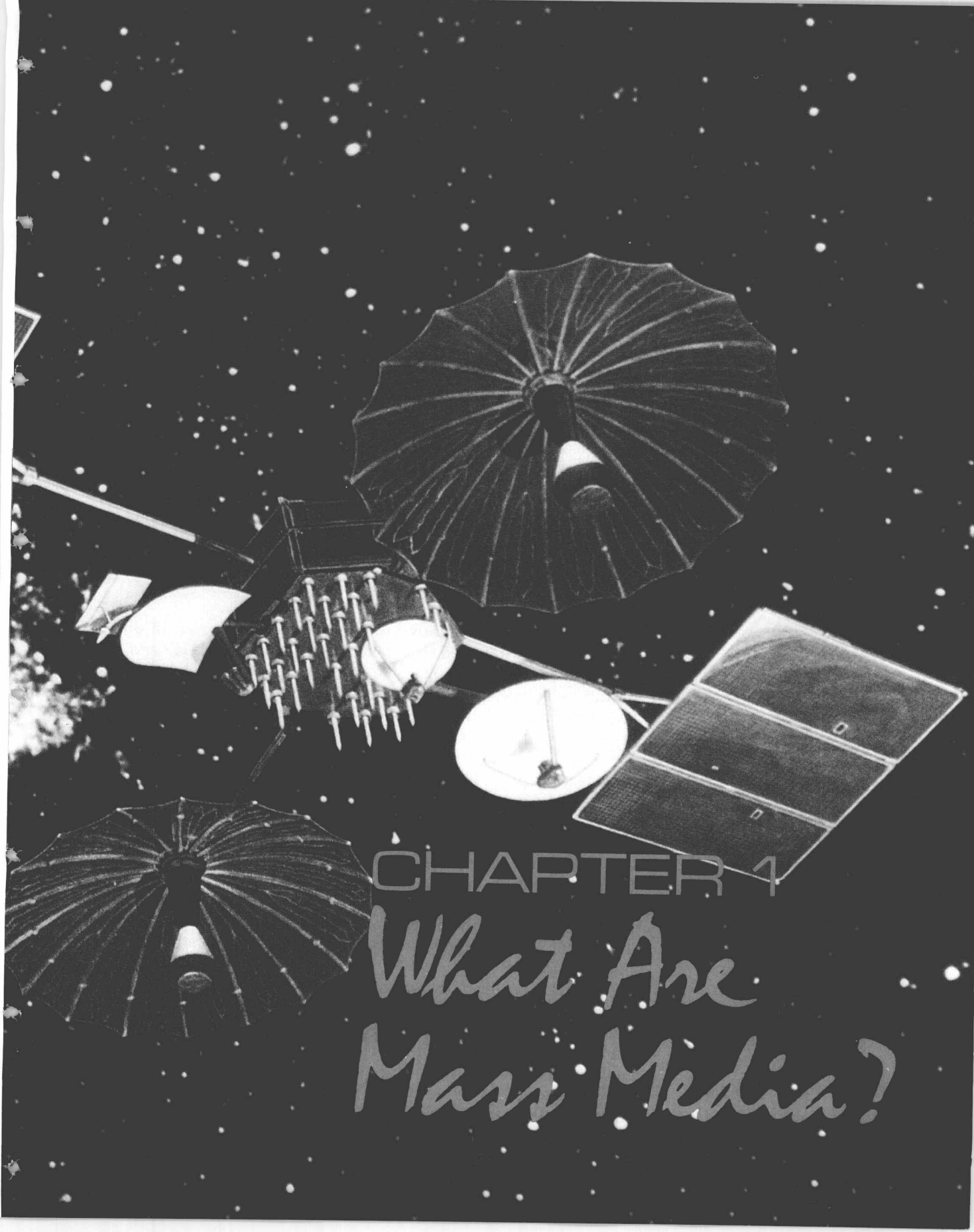
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CHAPTER 1
*What Are
Mass Media?*

WHAT ARE MASS MEDIA?

What do King Tut, Elvis Presley, and the crew of the Starship *Enterprise*™ have in common?

In past centuries imaginative writers described the “world of tomorrow.” They pictured time travel as easy as entering a car and dialing a future date. They saw a world in which the touch of a button would transport humans through time and over distance. They wrote of mechanical people, of mind reading, and of instantaneous worldwide communication. Their readers enjoyed such “science fiction,” but few believed it would really happen.

In fact, when the future arrived, few noticed. Consider the “Star Trek” series of television shows and movies. The U.S.S. *Enterprise* carries a transporter that casts a shimmering beam to convey people and objects. Crew members stand in the transport room and a beam of light moves them physically to the world below. Fortunately, the beam works both ways and often serves to rescue crew members from nasty interplanetary messes at the last instant by beaming them safely aboard. Perhaps you enjoy “Star Trek” as fiction, and think how much fun it would be to have your own transporter.

The transporter beam was a device to overcome the boundaries of distance. The ancient Egyptians also wanted to overcome distance (and time), so they created a low-tech version of the transporter. They mummified the bodies of kings and queens and built pyramids to put them in. According to religious belief, the pyramid served as a transporter room, as a sacred place from which the dead could move to another world. The Egyptians even

packed food for the trip, but no one ever returned to describe the journey. Today we have devices to conquer both time and space. Our inventions, however, are so unlike mummies and transporter beams that we often fail to realize how truly miraculous they are. We dream of the future, but when it comes, it comes in disguise. The future's most recent disguise is telecommunications.

When the future comes, it comes in disguise.

TRANSPORTERS TODAY

True, we still have no gadget to beam blood and bones instantly through space, but we can move what is more important to humans — we can move feelings, thoughts, ideas, voices, looks, and even facial expressions. We can touch a few buttons to transmit the subtleties of tone and demonstrate our ability to sing or play music. We cannot move our bodies in an instant, but we can move our spirit and image. Through telephones, television broadcasting, printing presses, recordings, and film, we can overcome the limits of time and physical space. We can beam voices and images to millions of people in an instant. Our voices and ideas can be in a thousand cities at one; our pictures can appear in a million households; our spirit can live well beyond the grave.

The history of mass media is the story of the human desire (and practical need) to break the prisons of time and distance. We strive to live beyond our allotted years on the planet; we want to move beyond the few miles we can walk in a day—media technology makes this possible. Right now, as you read this page, more people are watching performances of Shakespeare's plays than ever saw them while he was alive. Right now, over two hundred years after he set the notes to paper, countless thousands are listening to the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Elvis Presley lived only forty-two years but, thanks to mass media, he still entertains millions each year. King Tut would be impressed. Twentieth-century celebrities have achieved the immortality of which the Egyptians could only dream. Late-night television is populated by the voices and faces of long-dead stars of the silver screen. The mass media of printing and recording enable creativity to outlive the creator. Space and time are no longer inescapable prisons; we have conquered both through mass media.

Seven percent of
Americans say Elvis
may still be alive.

—1989 CBS
News poll

TO CONQUER DISTANCE

What are mass media? First, understand that a medium is merely a channel or system of communication. Speech is the most widely used medium. Other media (*media* is plural for medium—there are no communication “mediums”) include painting, sign language, the written word, music, images, or even smoke signals. A *mass medium* is a means of communicating to a mass, or large number, of people. Modern mass media include television, radio, newspapers and magazines, books, films, and recordings.

The spoken or written word itself is not a mass medium. If you shout as loud as you can or write a letter, you might manage to communicate with hundreds of people. However, communicating with a large number of people, or mass media communication, was not possible until the invention of the printing press in 1456 by Johannes Gutenberg. With the development of technology—radio, telephone, television, the microchip—mass media communication has begun to reach its full potential. What were the communication media before the development of mass media?



Most common were the town criers, forerunners of today's television news anchors. In medieval times, these loud-voiced representatives of the king wandered town streets literally shouting the news. But town criers were effective only in urban areas, where people lived close together.

Another medium that conquered distance was the runner. Paul Revere was a “news runner,” overcoming the barrier of distance as he rode his horse to announce in 1775, “The British are coming.” The most famous runner was the messenger Pheidippides, who brought news of the victory at Marathon to Athens in 490 B.C. His twenty-six-mile run is commemorated every time we run a marathon. Runners and criers helped spread the news, but not massively.

In some societies, a drum beat the message of imminent danger; in others, smoke signals spread the word. Both these media communicate over space, but the message had to be a simple one, such as “danger” or “good hunting here.” One thousand years ago, however, there was one important reason why you didn't really need *mass* media—there were very few masses. People were not concentrated; the largest cities would still be small towns by our standards. You could spread any message you could conceive by the original medium—“tellaperson.” Mass media require the social invention of large cities to take root.



TO CONQUER

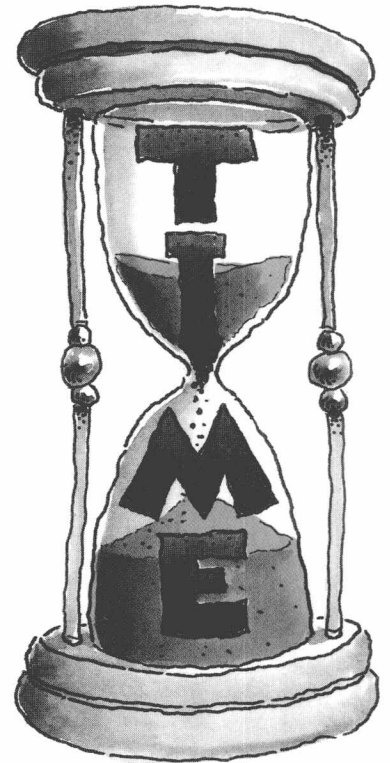
All mass communication pushes back the boundary of distance, but hardly conquers it. A runner, town crier, or even a smoke signal had a very limited range. Furthermore, none of these media conquered time. Once the echo of the crier bounced off the last wall, the message was gone forever; even the smoke signal lasted only a few minutes in calm air.

Our ancestor's first attempts to communicate across time were quite simple—they used song and rhyme as memory aids. Thanks to these simple techniques, a story might be remembered for years, instead of being forgotten in days. A minstrel singing a rhyme was a more effective communicator than a town crier announcing the news. Important rules and regulations were often set to rhyme as a learning aid. Today's catchy advertising jingles (the kind you find yourself humming in the middle of the day) have their roots in our early need to communicate in a memorable way—to expand the prison of time.

Ancient cultures who mastered mummification and monument-building fought to overcome time. Their buildings and artifacts communicated with future generations, but it was the invention of writing that enabled humans to send ideas into the future, as well as to learn from the dead.

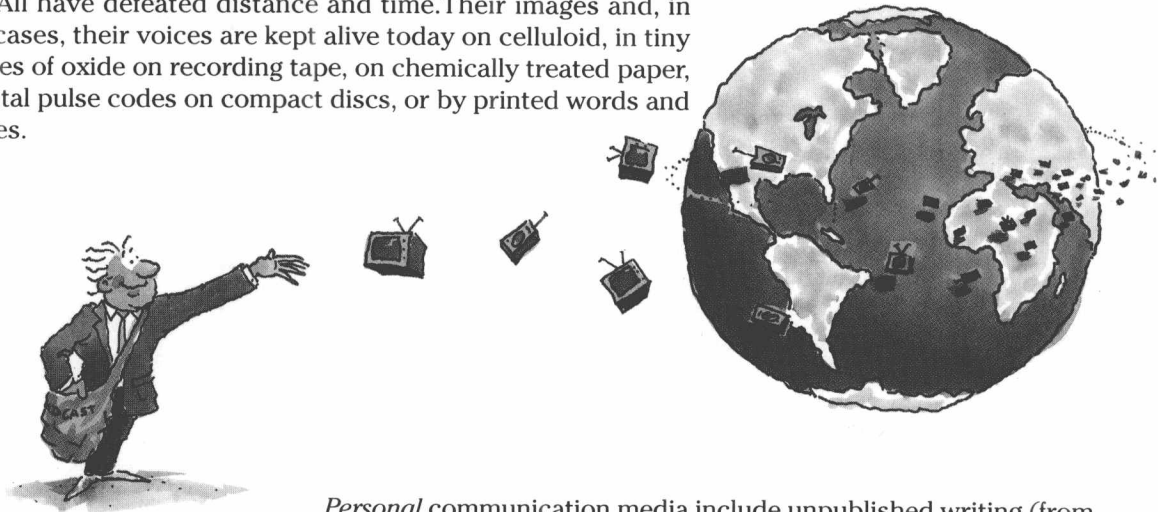
Even the best of archaeologists, however, can't definitely say what our ancestors looked like. We have no photograph of Alexander the Great, or Socrates. Paintings are not totally reliable. How could exact images of the present be preserved for the future?

...little boxes enabled ordinary people to preserve themselves better than King Tut...



Exactly how wasn't discovered until 1835, when William Henry Fox Talbot, the father of modern photography, set small boxes containing a lens and sheets of paper covered with silver halide chemicals about the lawns of his English estate. Talbot, a scientist and country gentleman, waited one-half hour, then brought the boxes inside and opened their doors. Inside each was a miniature picture of the object before which it had been placed. Talbot succeeded on a grander scale than the Egyptians—he invented photography—a way to conquer time, to send images into the future. Now, even the ordinary person's image could be preserved on chemically treated paper for future generations. Alive on earth today is the first generation of humans to know what their great grandparents looked like. William Talbot's little boxes enabled ordinary people to preserve themselves far better than King Tutankhamen or a feudal lord, who could afford the luxury of having their portraits painted.

So what is a mass medium? It's a means of communicating over time or space with a mass of people. And what do King Tut, the crew of the Starship *Enterprise*TM, and Elvis Presley have in common? All have defeated distance and time. Their images and, in some cases, their voices are kept alive today on celluloid, in tiny particles of oxide on recording tape, on chemically treated paper, by digital pulse codes on compact discs, or by printed words and pictures.



WHAT ARE BROADCAST MEDIA?

Personal communication media include unpublished writing (from a note on the refrigerator door to a letter delivered halfway across the world), a telephone or facsimile message, a snapshot for the family photo album, a tape recording mailed to a friend, or even a home video. All communicate through time and space, but none involves the masses.

Mass media include television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, recordings, and film. These are media intended for the public, for the masses. You can write a letter (a personal medium) to a magazine that can become a mass medium if published in the letters column. In other words, one medium can become the content of another. For example, a record or compact disc can become the content of a mass medium, such as a radio program. A photograph or film can be content for a television show.

Broadcast media are, specifically, radio and television. Broadcasting means using electric signals to reach a large audience. The word *broadcast* is borrowed from agriculture where it originally meant a way of hand-sowing grain or seeds by casting them broadly instead of planting one at a time. The telephone is a communication medium but it is neither a mass medium nor broadcasting. A telephone conversation is a personal medium, not "cast broadly" for the masses. Since most phone messages are carried through wires, not by radio waves, it is not broadcasting. But if that telephone conversation is part of a call-in radio show, that is broadcasting. Radio is the mass medium used to broadcast the telephone conversation.

A ship-to-shore radio telephone conversation is not broadcasting, nor is a call from a portable phone. Both use radio or microwaves to carry messages, but neither is intended for mass reception. The mass media of broadcasting today include televi-