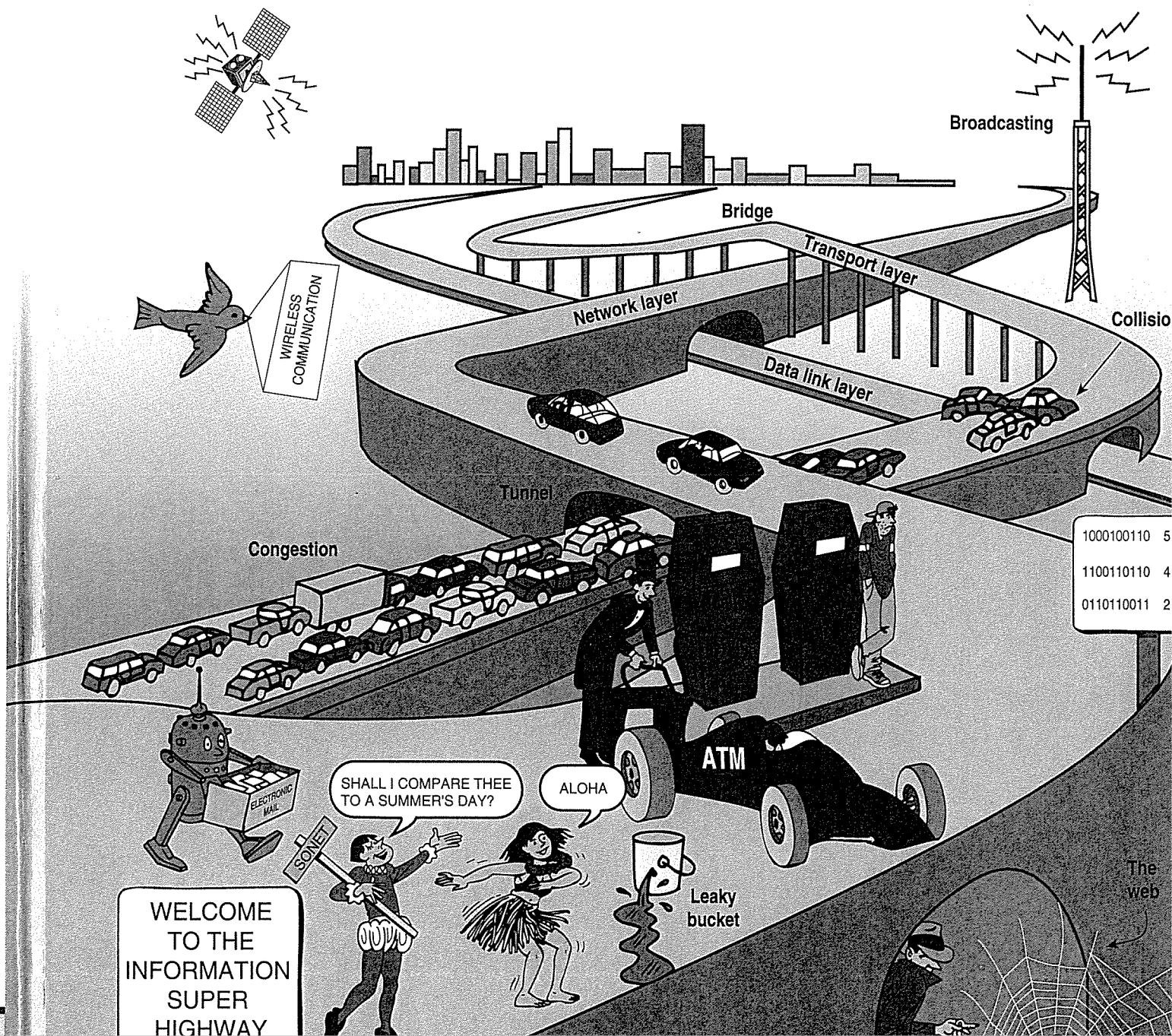


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ANDREW S. TANENBAUM



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town, and the other one's wife was the town telephone operator. He quickly saw that either he was going to have to invent automatic telephone switching equipment or he was going to go out of business. He chose the first option. For nearly 100 years, the circuit switching equipment used worldwide was known as Strowger gear. (History does not record whether the now-unemployed switchboard operator got a job as an information operator, answering questions such as: What is the phone number of an undertaker?)

The model shown in Fig. 2-34(a) is highly simplified of course, because parts of the "copper" path between the two telephones may, in fact, be microwave links onto which thousands of calls are multiplexed. Nevertheless, the basic idea is valid: once a call has been set up, a dedicated path between both ends exists and will continue to exist until the call is finished.

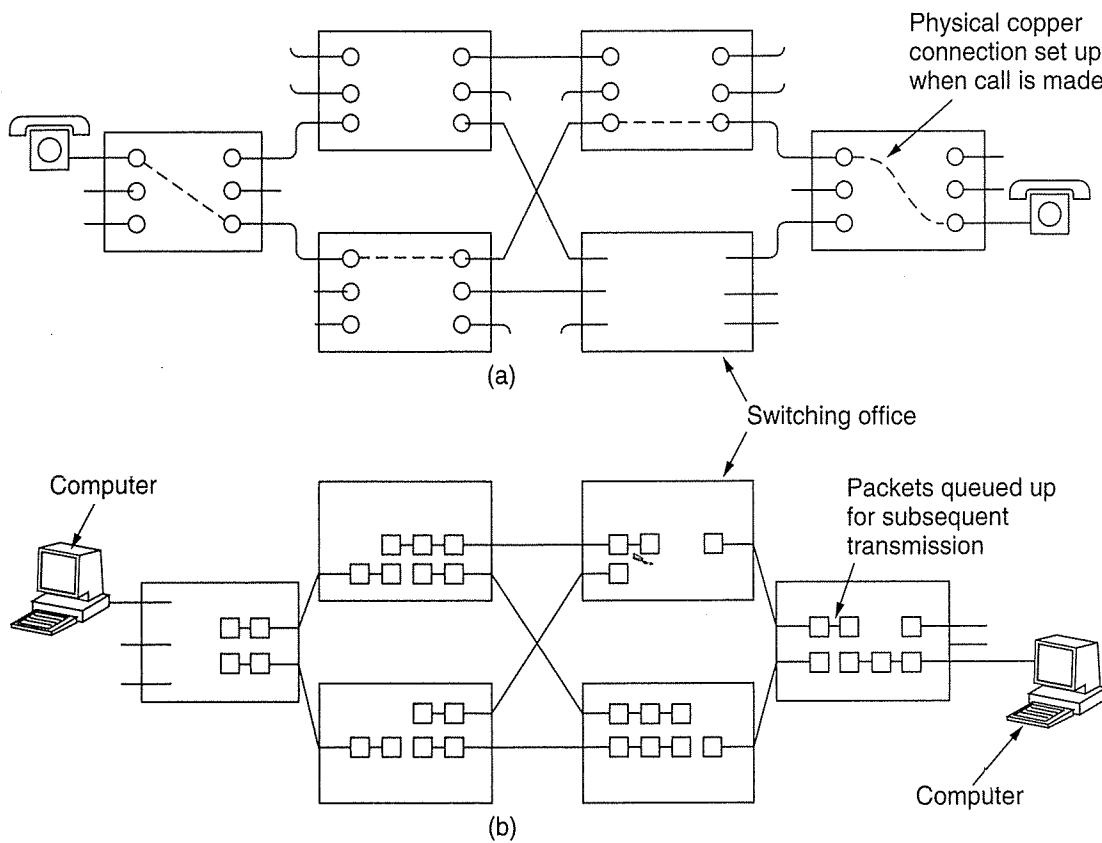


Fig. 2-34. (a) Circuit switching. (b) Packet switching.

An important property of circuit switching is the need to set up an end-to-end path *before* any data can be sent. The elapsed time between the end of dialing and the start of ringing can easily be 10 sec, more on long-distance or international calls. During this time interval, the telephone system is hunting for a copper path, as shown in Fig. 2-35(a). Note that before data transmission can even begin, the call request signal must propagate all the way to the destination, and be

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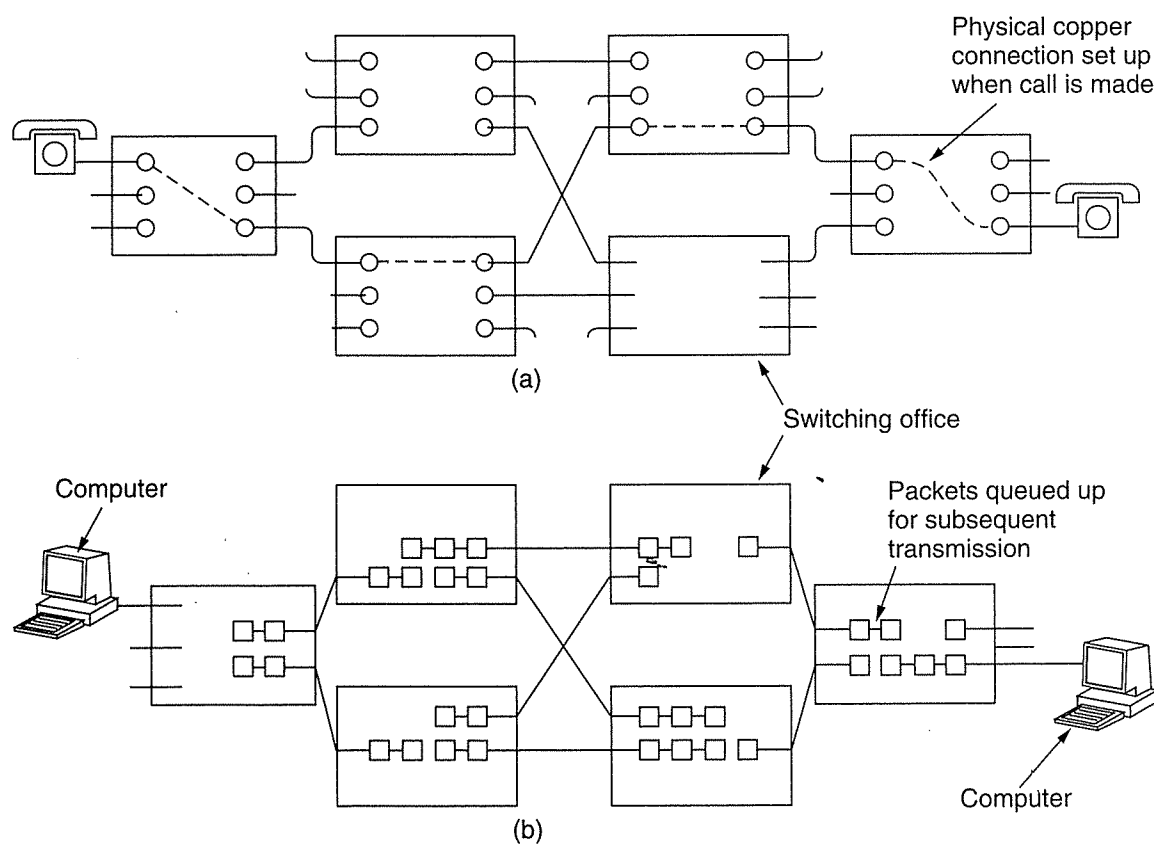


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acknowledged. For many computer applications (e.g., point-of-sale credit verification), long setup times are undesirable.

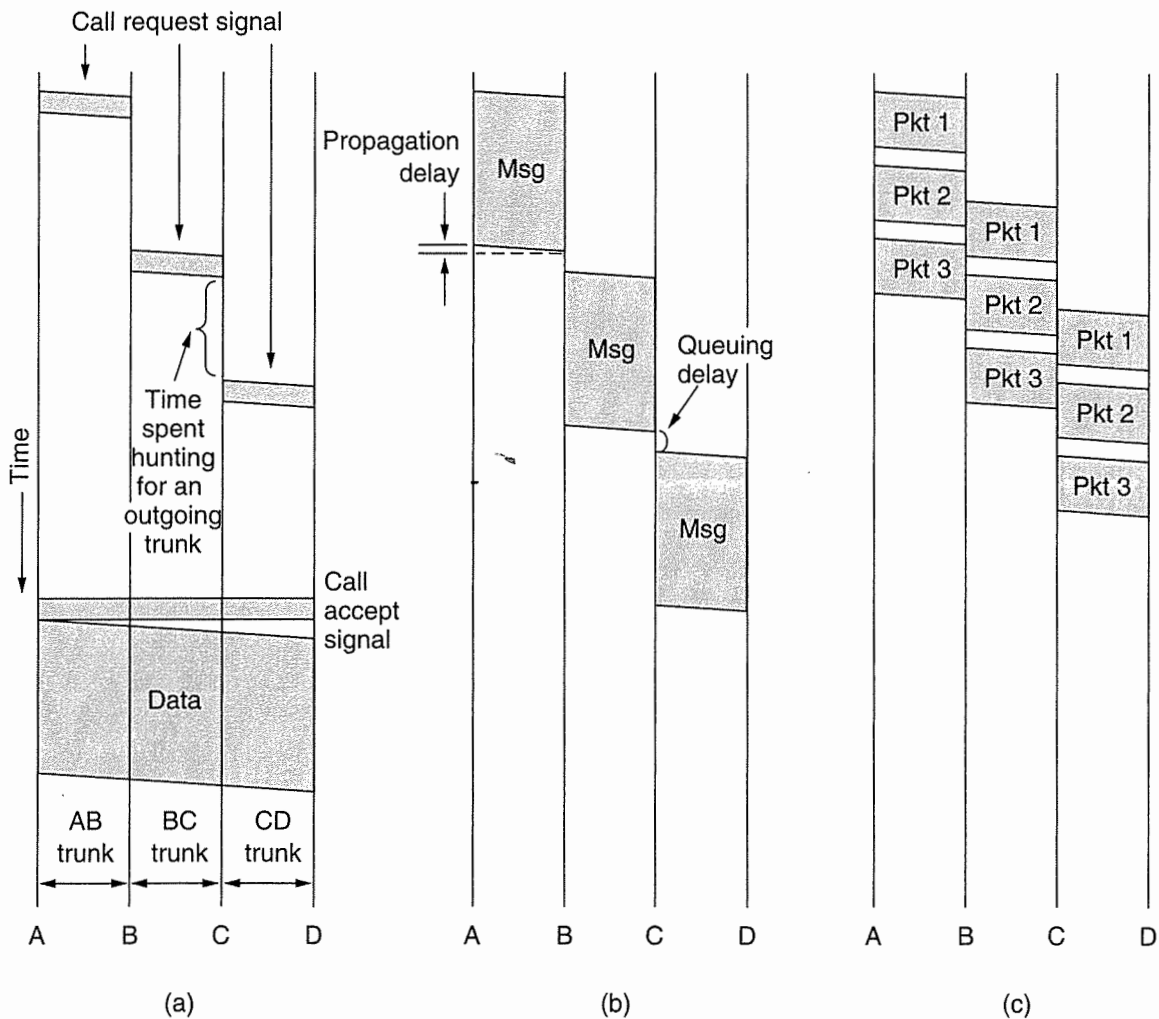


Fig. 2-35. Timing of events in (a) circuit switching, (b) message switching, (c) packet switching.

As a consequence of the copper path between the calling parties, once the setup has been completed, the only delay for data is the propagation time for the electromagnetic signal, about 5 msec per 1000 km. Also as a consequence of the established path, there is no danger of congestion—that is, once the call has been put through, you never get busy signals, although you might get one before the connection has been established due to lack of switching or trunk capacity.

An alternative switching strategy is **message switching**, shown in Fig. 2-35(b). When this form of switching is used, no physical copper path is established in advance between sender and receiver. Instead, when the sender has a block of data to be sent, it is stored in the first switching office (i.e., router) and then forwarded later, one hop at a time. Each block is received in its entirety, inspected

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