

# "The trends that created GENERATION X,"

by **B i l l H e b e r t**

Why is "Generation X" (to steal Alexander's cute-sy phrase, the "X-cellent Generation") in such an abysmal pit of despair and self-esteem deficit?

After all, it's a large spectrum (of presumably bright individuals) that has been sucked into the black hole of Unenlightenment by their political and social void of participation; their silence is the vacuum of empty space, often between their ears.

Let me humbly offer a few unintentionally sarcastic thoughts on the trends that have seemingly devoured us.

1) Computers—*non-existent* for the Baby Boomers (talk about Future shock!)—have appeared everywhere in a lousy 20 years. The world went from manual typewriters to hypertext so fast that it sprained its stomach. (Remember pong? The Commodore 64? When we're geezers our kids *will* laugh.)

The world is now full of artificial sophistication, as the last utterly unneeded technology scrambles over itself in a race to become obsolete, making way as it does for the new unnecessary corporate toy in one of the most successful marketing scams ever.

*Moral:* Just because you *can* do something "better" is no reason that you should.

{P.S. William Gibson, who coined the term 'cyberpunk,' has been quoted about cyberspace (ie. Virtu-

al Reality meets Internet) as saying: "It will be like free-basing American television."}

*"The national attention-span has shrunk to under 30 seconds."*

2) TV has supplanted books. (Read Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death AT ONCE! Incredible* book!)

As a result the national attention span has diminished to under 30 seconds. Worse, the factual elements perpetuated as journalism in this form of single-sided, double-density communication are completely without content or context; moreover, they are, utterly without scrutiny, accepted as factual—although the sheer bulk of images paraded on the screen precludes any serious attempt to confirm even the thin and vaporous content that this drivel pretends.

The sad result of the overwhelming onslaught of carelessly constructed images is that the American concept of reality has changed in the following drastic and possibly irrevocable ways:

a) Depth of meaning has been sacrificed for breadth of coverage.

b) Negative images of reality are the only ones respected by the news community—they sell—and so we are under constant barrage of the ambulance-chasing video footage. *Eg,*

Perfectly functional airplanes do not and cannot make news headlines; crashes, of course, do.

As a result, we have constant reminders of plane crashes (which are startlingly infrequent), not to mention crime, corruption, and child molestation. We are therefore, in my humble opinion—and despite our best intentions—misled to believe that every situation is worse, not better, than it appears. This contributes mightily to the prevailing nihilism of the day.

c) Advertising ought to be the cause of outrage and alarm! What would Pavlov (go ask a psyche major) have to say about the constant association of a repeated stimulus (such as any commercial provides neatly) with a *product*? Are we being programmed by their programming?

Alright, a word about Pavlov. He put drool tubes in the mouths of dogs to measure hunger by measuring drool quantity. At dinnertime, he rang a bell before feeding them. At the end of the experiment, *just ringing the bell*, at any time, was enough to produce a hunger

response. So what about Coke®? How many ads for Coke® have you seen in your lifetime, and to what degree does this stimulus-response program *you*? The answer, I dare say, is "too much." Any repetitious stimulus will produce the same effect—see b), above. Violence and sex on TV may well be a major source of our fear, violence, and repression in America of the present and future. TV may actually change our reality!

A nasty side effect of this is the presence of the TV screen itself—surely a repeated stimulus—which gives me the impression that the TV itself may promote the TV itself my promote the TV itself...

Scary, isn't it?  
e) Whether TV has a self-perpetuating effect or not—though I can hardly doubt it myself—it certainly does seem to have stolen the thunder of the printing press, permanently. So much for education—and we wonder why "grammar" schools and "high" schools (one name is misleading, the other sadly apt) have sunk to a new depraved low in efficiency!

f) What about children being 'raised' or 'babysat' by TV? What of the welfare demographic, who *probably* (I say cynically) watch a *little* TV, without a corresponding educational influence?

I'm a little disgusted to think that Marx may have been all too right about "control of the means of production," not to mention its influence on education and the people's view of reality. (Oh, you've never read Marx? sigh...)

f) The twenty-second format of advertising has provided us with pseudosolutions to fictional problems for enough generations—especially ours—that we have fast become, in the words of a great teacher, Jay Morsman, of Deerfield Academy, a "gobble, gulp, and go" so-

*"We wonder why 'grammar' schools and 'high' schools (one name is misleading, the other sadly apt) have sunk to a new depraved low in efficiency..."*