

## *Education for the Twenty-First Century*

By JOHN TEBBELL

*(Professor of Journalism, New York University)*

The twenty-first century may turn out to be something of an anti-climax. The writers and artists and motion picture makers have led us to expect a great deal of it, and the poor old thing — or, more properly, the poor *new* thing — may not be equal to what is expected of her — or him, as the case may be. We are prepared for marvels, for super-lives, for the ultimate products of technology, for the best that men, money and machines can produce. I suggest that one quick-acting ingredient has been left out of this 21st century product, and without it we will not get the fast, fast relief from all our problems that the scientists have been promising. The ingredient is quality. Without it, quantity will not have much meaning.

Perhaps that is one of the things Stanley Kubrick is trying to tell us in "2001 — A Space Odyssey," in glorious Cinerama and 70 mm. Panavision, and to the total befuddlement of those of us who thought we were going to see an updated version of Tom Swift and His Electric Rifle. The critics have set us right, of course. What we thought were space ships were really Significance, and that lovable old computer, Hal 9000, with whom the audience seemed to be identifying most, was up to his electrodes in Symbolism.

Although I am supposed to be a communications expert, and possibly could be stripped of my transistors for making such a confession, I will have to admit that I lost Mr. Kubrick just this side of the Fourth Dimension. However, before I drifted off into another orbit, I got the impression that the director and his writer, Arthur Clarke, were distinctly saying that in the bright new world of the 21st century, man was somehow going to be little more than a less glossy machine. In the world Kubrick had so carefully created, there was, for example, not even the suggestion of sex. No one appeared to be in love with anyone else. No one, in fact, seemed to hate anybody else. When the hero, if he is one, is in deadly combat with Hal the Computer for control of the spaceship, he doesn't attack the soulless monster in a fine frenzy of morality, but calmly disconnects his memory centers with a screwdriver, until all poor Hal can do is sing the song his laboratory makers first taught him, "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true." And if you have never heard a computer sing "I'm half-crazy, all for the love of you," in a slowly-running-down baritone, you have missed one of the great moments of the modern cinema.

Earlier in the picture, people in a space station on the way to the moon — operated, naturally, by the Hilton interests — exchange platitudes with even less conviction than they do now in casual social encounters. A Russian talks to the American Scientists, asking him some pointed questions, and the ghost of James Bond rises dimly, but in the end they are terribly polite to each other and nothing whatever comes of it. The scientist talks by space television with his little girl at home, but mother isn't there. Kubrick doesn't say where she is, but he leaves us with the idea that things are not going to improve during the next 32 years in the Great American Home. Later, aboard the space ship enroute to Jupiter on a secret mission, one of the crew members gets a pre-recorded message on his television screen from mom and dad, back on earth. Their false heartiness would not fool even the most family-oriented child, and *this* offspring nearly goes to sleep listening to them.

The theatre where I saw "2001" was nearly two-thirds full of children. The rest of us were passing ourselves off as film buffs and science fiction writers. I hope Mr. Kubrick won't mind if I say that there were times during the picture when it was more rewarding to watch the children. My generation would have gaped open-mouthed in innocent awe at the flying spaceships and all the superb technical gimmickry the producer had summoned up. But not the television generation. They sat there, gloomily munching their popcorn, and stared at the screen with cold, critical eyes. In my newspaper days, I used to see the same look on the faces of movie critics assembled in a cold projection room at 10 o'clock in the morning to see the latest Hollywood extravaganza.

What were these children thinking, I wondered? I know it's all too easy to read more into the juvenile mind than is there, and sometimes it is even easier to read less, but momentarily I had a terrifying vision of my own of the 21st century. I could picture myself arriving there, a spanking 88, filled with enough transplanted organs to assure me another quarter-century of survival at least, and there would be these children, now in their forties and presumably efficiently running things. What would they be like, I wondered, after they had emerged from the schools of the next three decades, and what would *their* children be like?

The generation gap, I surmised, would have disappeared because, in a society organized by technicians, everyone would have the same values and there would be nothing to revolt against. On the television screen filling one wall at home, we would expect to see Dean Rusk talking about the American commitment in Antarctica because the Russian-American masters of the world would have ended the possibility of revolution, under the threat of instant annihilation. But undoubtedly there would be some other dedicated public servant on the screen talking about the shortcomings of the electorate in defying the government's efforts to save them from themselves, since presumably human error would not yet have disappeared from the world, particularly at the lower social levels.

Towering over everything in the future world, so it seemed, would be Organization, with a capital O. Man would program the machines and the machines would serve man — swiftly, efficiently, leaving him with only a few hours of work per week and all the rest of the time to do — what? This has been the vision of the world's future since H. G. Wells began to write about it, and it struck me that the reason the children in the theatre were accepting so calmly the vision of a time only a scant 32 years away was that so many of the things it projected were clearly visible, if only in embryo, now. These children, I had to remember, were growing up in a controlled wonderland of computers, space travel and electronic gadgetry of every kind, and possessed an increasing conviction among themselves that they were entitled to everything provided by a world whose values they otherwise rejected. The familiar image of the adolescent boy who confidently expects his father to finance his alienation is a symbol of the times.

If the plastic world of 2001 is governed by emotions equally synthetic and technologically controlled, it will be a clear-cut victory for the killers of the dream. And *there* is the, by now, familiar dichotomy of our era: the scientists produced by our educational system, creating a society of almost unimaginable ease and comfort, potentially, while at the same time the society itself and its educational system are proceeding in almost exactly the opposite direction, producing whole masses of people who increasingly find themselves unable to adapt to the twentieth century let alone the twenty-first.

One can understand the frustration and anger of millions of people in this country, and I don't mean entirely the black masses of the ghetto, by any means. The crisis in that particular segment of society engages much of our attention, but the malaise in these United States, and in other countries as well, is not composed entirely of racial discrimination and other kinds of bigotry. It has to do with the condition of man, and his inability to understand and govern himself.

No wonder so many young men and women find themselves alienated from the world they live in. And yet I would remind them of the futility of accepting alienation as a way of life, something they can't avoid because the world is the way it is. As Andre Maurois observes in his "Open Letter to a Young Man," "... You have been told that the world is absurd. But what, exactly, does this mean? A proposition is absurd when it is contrary to reason; a law is absurd when it offends common sense. But to say that everything is absurd is of itself an absurdity. The World is what it is; it has nothing to do with either common sense or reason; it is simply a fact, a point of departure. What do you expect? That the World should have been made for our pleasure? That would be a sheer miracle. The World wishes us neither well nor ill."

And Maurois adds these brave words: "The catastrophes that hang over us are of man's own creation, and by an effort of man's will they can be averted. Even if we are on the edge of a precipice we are not obliged to leap."

But the danger beyond the precipice is real enough. Maurois believes that a society is doomed to perish if its citizens live only for their vices and ambitions, if they tolerate violence and injustice, if they have no confidence in each other, and if they have lost their will. I need not belabor the fact of how perilously close we are to that condition in America today. It is obvious to any concerned and informed citizen.

The question, then, is how we are going to live in the technological paradise of the twenty-first century without first succumbing to the possibly fatal illness of the twentieth. I feel sure that, like me, you have been brought up to believe education is the ultimate answer to our problems. We have heard it, read it, spoken it thousands of times. It is an article of faith in this country, which believes in education for everyone. But education for what? When that question is asked, reason and logic are suddenly in short supply. We believe everyone ought to have an opportunity to go to college, but what is supposed to happen to him there? Is he presumed to emerge a better and wiser man, one more able to live intelligently in this century and prepare his children to live even more intelligently in the next? Not at all. In spite of the lip service given to cultural ideas, the college degree has become quite frankly a union card, without which it is extremely hard to get a good job.

One of the most shabby deceits in the American business structure is the pious declaration, heard over and over, that what business wants is bright young liberal arts graduates who can be trained. The bright young B. A.'s themselves have come to know better. Their future employers are profoundly uninterested in their affinity for the humanities. Their knowledge of history and love of English literature are not marketable commodities. The employer simply wants to know what they can do. Graduates of the professional schools are in no such panic when June comes. The newspaper business alone could use five times the number of graduates we turn out, and with some sadness we try to accommodate students who have no abiding interest in communications but who understand that an English major is not going to get them a job.

These same businessmen see no inconsistency in the common complaints which fill the days and nights in suburbia. A perpetual cry rises from harassed Americans, "How am I going to get the car fixed?" "Why does it take a week and a half to get a plumber?" "Doesn't anything in this house ever work?" I'm sure you could add a few more keenings from your own experience.

Service is one of the most serious manpower lacks in this country in an increasingly serious manpower shortage situation. The secretarial shortage in itself is a continuing headache to businessmen. Repairmen of every kind seem to be a vanishing breed. Yet the increasing use of machines demands more of them, just as the rapid proliferation of our population creates a demand for services, which there are simply not enough people to perform.

Where are they going to come from? Certainly not from our present educational system, growing though it may be. Who wants a service job after he has been awarded — I won't say earned — a B. A. or B. S.? Well, then, some people argue, since everybody isn't qualified to go to college, and since so many people are dropping out of college anyway, we'll always have a reservoir of people to perform these jobs — people who can't get anything better. Yes, and they will be people without pride or skill in what they are doing, frustrated and discontented, a multiplying, ticking time bomb in the society.

I believe it can be fairly argued that education is failing to produce the people who are needed to do the jobs that have to be done, and are instead turning out more and more prospective misfits, whose social and financial expectations are beyond the ability of society to supply.

Our educational system has what I regard as an even more serious defect. In subject matter it teaches such a mixture of illusion and reality that products of the curricula find themselves unable to understand or cope with the real world when they are compelled to confront it, and so perpetuate institutions and ways of living which are incompatible with the real demands of society.

Let me cite an example. It will be no news to this audience, I'm sure, that American history is the most hated subject in education, both among high school and college students. It is also the worst taught. This is not, to be sure, entirely the fault of the teachers. It is the fault of school boards, trustees, parents and all those entrusted with control of the schools, who will not permit history to be taught in any other way except according to the duly certified clichés about our past. The student learns a flash-card response. George Washington? Father of his country. Abraham Lincoln? Freed the slaves. McKinley? Fought for high tariffs. Wilson? Led the nation in the first World War. Then it begins to get sticky. Harding? Well . . . Coolidge? Again, well . . . Hoover? The depression was not his fault. Roosevelt? He introduced a great deal of controversial social legislation. By the time we get to Mr. Johnson in the classroom, the caution is thick enough to cut with a knife. As for the American wars, it appears that it was necessary to clear the Indians from the land, chase the Mexicans back into Mexico, protect Cuba and the Philippines from the Spaniards and chase off the Mexicans again before we could save the world for democracy — twice. Then, of course, there was that messy business at home in the 1860's, but how to deal with that is determined by what part of the country you live in, and which textbook you use.

Nor will it do us any good to blame the textbook publishers, as some do. They, too, are the victims of a vast, silent censorship which dictates what children are taught about their country. We hear more about censorship based on obscenity because it gets the most publicity in a press which seems to treat sex with adolescent sniggers. We hear far less about a much more serious kind of censorship, which is the self-serving protection of a certain segment of society from having anything adverse directed against it. In plain words, the preservation of the "image," which has become the new American religion.

It is now unsafe, or at least unwise, for anyone to imply that any political party, corporation, business, minority group, or in fact any group of individuals likely to write letters, is anything less than exemplary, or that it ever acts from any except the noblest motives. This includes the United States itself. Organized censors all over the country are constantly busy hunting out in school libraries any history or social studies book which dares to imply that America has ever been anything but imperishably right in the conduct of its foreign or domestic relations, or that the North really won the Civil War, or that there was such a thing as a robber baron.

The trouble with censorship is that there is no such thing as a little, or controlled censorship. It's like being a little pregnant. What starts out as a campaign against newsstand smut, will if it is not restrained, continue until the censorship group's particular idea of moral conformity is achieved. The urge to control other people's minds and activities progresses easily from sex to political ideas, and when it invades governing bodies, it not only distorts reality but becomes pervasive, and in the end authoritarian and destructive of all freedom.

Where textbooks are concerned, it is not simply a matter of teachers inadequately prepared in the subject matter, teaching one of the world's great stories as though it were a collection of dry-as-dust facts. It is the textbooks themselves too often, these victims of silent censorship by elected and appointed officials of a nation which, like the authoritarian states it professes to despise, wants only the official, laundered, stereotyped and often wholly inaccurate history of the country taught to its children.

The facts of the matter are simple enough. Textbook publishing involved, often, millions of dollars spent on a new series of books, or many thousands of dollars to procure and launch a basic book in a particular discipline. All textbooks involve substantial financial investment and consequent risk. The only way publishers can recoup their investment and make the profit which keeps them in business is to get their books adopted. Everyone in the business knows the sometimes extraordinary lengths to which publishers must go for adoptions. In any case, it means deploying men and money to persuade state superintendents, particularly, to adopt texts. The result is one of the most massive censorships in the country. It is the kind of censorship which makes us feel a certain kinship with Dr. Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, of Trinity College, Dublin, who remarked that Irish education was the most successful in the world because, as he said, "It has succeeded in its aims, which are to prevent children from thinking for themselves."

The melancholy truth is that we can fill our adult grade books with four-letter words these days, and discuss anything we want to in them, but we cannot tell the true story of this country and the men who made it in our history textbooks. The image of America and the world which appears in these textbooks has little relation to reality. Everything is carefully designed to offend no one. Some states, of course, are worse than



others. People who think a great victory for freedom was won in 1925 when John T. Scopes was acquitted on a charge of teaching evolution in Tennessee schools may be surprised to know that evolution is still not taught in Tennessee, and the biology texts adopted there must reflect that incredible fact. A similar dismal picture could be drawn from the records of any state in the union, varying only in degrees.

Our carefully laundered history depicts Washington in the dreadful winter of Valley Forge plodding through the snow and kneeling in it to pray for Divine aid. Yet the reality was not snow — there was only two inches of it that relatively mild winter — but cold rain and mud, and there is not the slightest evidence that Washington ever knelt there or anywhere else to pray. He was, in fact, a Deist. In all the 39 volumes of his letters and six volumes of diaries, the words "Christ" or "Jesus" do not occur and "God" is used only in official documents. He customarily referred to the Deity as "Providence."

Does this detract from Washington's greatness? Not when we consider that Deism was a respectable doctrine in those days, and that in religion, as in everything else, Washington put principle first above expedience. In his first term as President, when Congress sat in Philadelphia, he suddenly stopped going to church when the rector complained that he did not take communion. To the rector's letter of inquiry, Washington explained that his personal beliefs did not permit him to take communion, but he believed the President should set an example to his countrymen, and rather than dishonestly submit himself to the Sacrament or simply sit in his pew while others went to the altar, he would stay home. What a lesson in character! I doubt if any President of our time would dare to do as much. Yet, when I told this story to a D. A. R. luncheon — of all places — one good lady told me she was certain the Kremlin had paid me to circulate it. It is sad truth, I'm afraid, that most people prefer the historical lie, the historical public relations presentation, if you will, to the truth.

The essential unreality of American history teaching in our schools is matched by the failure to teach world history in anything like adequate, let alone realistic, terms. We are called upon to make large decisions in Asia, decisions affecting the lives of all the world's peoples, yet how many college graduates, not to mention high school students, have anything but the most fragmentary knowledge, if that, of the political, social and economic history of the Asian continent.

I am afraid we are all caught up in that expediency which Washington so studiously avoided. Today the end justifies the means. Publishers are in business to sell textbooks, and sell them they must to stay in business, and if what is in the books conveys a mythology perpetuated by ignorance and fear — and history is only one example — and if it is maintained by the power of pressure groups — well, what can be done about it?

Something, obviously, *will* have to be done. The complete alienation of a part of the present generation, the partial alienation of an even larger segment, and student unrest around the world which can only be described as the beginnings of a revolution — all these are the symptoms of education's sickness in this century, and a warning that things are going to be different in the next, whether we like it or not. We can no longer console ourselves with the comforting cliché that youth is always in revolt, that there is always a generation gap.

At the root of student revolt in Europe, no matter what demonstration banners say, is a profound dissatisfaction with the medieval, tradition-bound structure of education.

In England, the new redbrick universities have shown young men and women that other possibilities exist in life than joining the elite at Oxbridge, and in Oxbridge itself there is revolt against hoary tradition.

In America, the banners may talk of Vietnam, the draft, or pot, and these are all honest issues, with the students, but underneath there is a profound dissatisfaction with the quality of education they are getting. When students talk about having more of a say in the administration of universities, what they are really seeking is some means of changing traditional ways of doing business. They resent the bureaucracy, the depersonalization of large institutions, whether educational or not, and they don't like the corporation approach which most of these institutions take toward education. This approach is hardly surprising, since American universities have, in effect, become large business enterprises.

But deeper than depersonalization and the corporation approach is the feeling that university curricula, and the university itself, are not dealing with the realities of the world outside. There may be less of this feeling among students in the physical sciences, or in law and medicine, or in the other professional schools. These disciplines have been able to adapt to changing times much more easily, just as in the lower schools the benefits of new developments in teaching technology have been far more apparent in the science and language classes.

But in some disciplines, change is not easy. The classics professor complains that teaching his subject is not amenable to change. The English literature professor wants to know if, in the teaching of Elizabethan poetry, there is any real substitute for a sensitive reading of it in class, followed by discussion, and a setting of the poem in its proper social and literary context. Aside from using professional recordings to do the reading, and updating his discussion with contemporary parallels, there is not much he can get the new technology to do for him. His success, now as always, depends on how much of that indefinable quality he possesses which has always separated good or great teachers from mediocre or bad ones.

Yet change in the whole structure of education is inevitable as we approach the twenty-first century. This is true if for only one reason — the explosive growth of knowledge in our time, and its continuing expansion. It is becoming increasingly impossible to cram everything into a single curriculum in the old way. To take history again as an example, students certainly ought to know a great deal more about the country they live in than they do, but already American history is reduced to a freshman survey course in most colleges, with other courses available as "electives" in schedules so crowded only history majors are likely to be able to take them. But students also ought to know something about the rest of the world, too. They should know a good deal about the rise of dictatorships of all kinds in this century; they ought to know about contemporary political situations in major countries outside the United States. How can they possibly have informed opinions about American foreign policy, which they as voters help to shape, if they do not possess such basic knowledge? Some of our policy makers in Washington seem to have skipped a few fundamental courses themselves.

And history is only one example. Science is changing our world, and in a sense ruling it, but students who are studying science subjects feel it slipping beyond their grasp. The social sciences fairly bulge with knowledge these days. The sheer *amount* of knowledge in print is so staggering that a new science of information storage and

retrieval has had to be invented to try to find ways and means of organizing it and making it available.

A student going to high school and college in 1900 could graduate with the comfortable intellectual feeling that he had at least some kind of overall grasp of the world's knowledge, with a specialization in one subject. Today's graduate has the uncomfortable sensation that he has gone on a very fast ride in a roller coaster, and gotten off with the conviction that he would have done better to take the pony ride.

The big job in planning education for the 21st century, it seems, to me, is to find new ways of organizing the world's knowledge, and then find other ways of building individualized, selective curricula for students — curricula adapted to their individual needs and interests, keeping in mind that we must also educate people who will *mind* the machines as well as those who will *create* them and *program* them. The present system, based on the idea of an overall view of everything, is giving students intellectual indigestion, and in my opinion, they are actually learning very little. There must also be a heavy injection of realism into the curriculum, from the bottom up, especially in the humanities. In fact, I believe that the 21st century calls for nothing less than a complete rebuilding of the whole educational structure, from kindergarten to the last terminal degree.

If this is done — and I must add that I have only a slender hope that it will be, unless the most destructive events compel it — there is a major pitfall I hope will be avoided. In my business, communications, the magic word these days is "information." Book publishers are said to be coming into the age when they will be rather organizers and presenters of information, through their amalgamation with the big electronics companies and the makers of audiovisual devices and duplicators. Information banks, or memory banks will store all knowledge and make it available at home or in the classrooms at the push of a button. But nothing much is said about *what* information is to be transmitted, nothing about the *quality* of what is transmitted. Is it going to be the same old propaganda, the same old whitewash, the same old public relations presentations, the same ways of doing things we now use a less developed technology to disseminate? I don't think those kids who were watching "2001" with me are going to stand for it if we do. Long before the turn of the century, I think, they will have taken matters into their own hands, and it may not be a pleasant thing to see. Because they are not tolerant people, and as is already evident, they do not suffer opposition gladly.

They have one hopeful common denominator, however. They are, everywhere, looking for *something*, for *someone*, to believe in. Senator McCarthy's attraction for the young is a highly visible example of this almost desperate searching on the part of young people everywhere. They yearn for the truth, and they do not find it in our society, its present leaders, nor in its educational system.

What they believe in, at bottom, is contained in an obscure passage from one of those books which is widely admired and little read, "*Dr. Zhivago*." Boris Pasternak's work may not have been a great one, and I don't doubt that most of those who loved the movie would have hated the book, but it contained one passage well worth remembering now, in our time of trouble — in our time of transition to that century we all hope will be the doorway to a new freedom.

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