Les Nouveaux Réseaux Ont Besoin des Nouvelles Insultes

We’re living in the age of the technological insult. Whether it's how we use technology, what we do with technology, or what technology does to us, some of that behavior is going to be off-the-wall, cringe-inducing, or plain old stupid. And when that happens, few things are as satisfying as coming up with a good zinger to match the person or deed.

Mind you, I'm not saying this is a golden age of insults. That would be Shakespeare's time, when the Bard himself penned such gems as *knotty-pated fool*, *bull's-pizzle*, and *bolting-hutch of beastliness* (to name only three from a single play, *Henry IV*). Or one could make a strong case for the eighteenth century, when the likes of Swift, Pope, and Voltaire filled the air with affronts and, most notably, the great Samuel Johnson served up such notable snubs as *blunderhead*, *fopdoodle*, *lackbrain*, and *slubberdegullion*.

In our time, technology itself is often baked right in to each brickbat. For example, if we stumble upon a **luser** (a blend of *loser* and *user*) who is out of touch or clueless, we might describe the poor sap as **404**. That adjective comes from the classic Web server error message "404 Not Found," thus making it the Web equivalent of "the lights are on but no one's home." These and similar insults along the lines of someone "not playing with a full deck" are called **fulldeckisms**.

In this age of instantaneous transmission, the meaning of a new word can change from positive to negative in the blink of an eye. Take **pajamahadeen**, for example. It began its linguistic life a few years ago as a catchall term for bloggers who expose errors made by the traditional media. This blend of *pajama* and *Mujahadeen* (in the sense of "fighter") was coined for the bloggers who proved that Dan Rather was fooled by forged documents when questioning the National Guard service of George W. Bush. A former CBS executive defended Rather by characterizing the typical blogger as "a guy sitting in his living room in his pajamas." However, a few years later people were also using *pajamahadeen* to refer to those whose idea of activism is clicking the "Forward" button in their email software (presumably while wearing pajamas). Such folk are also denigrated as **slacktivists**.

If a person can't even be bothered to rise to the level of **slacktivism** and in fact routinely expresses indifference or apathy toward problems or causes, call that person a **meh-sayer**. *Meh* (pronounced like the "me" in *medal* or *message*) is an interjection, often accompanied (in person, anyway) by a shrug of the shoulders, used to signal that one is bored by, or apathetic or indifferent to, something.

Technology has been a big help when we need to slam people who are acting thoughtlessly. For example, people who refuse to accept new ideas are said to have a **ROM brain**, while folks who use the Internet exclusively for reading pages and posts instead of creating their own content are put in their place as **read-only users**. Recent coinages include **robo-signer**, a person who signs a legal document without reading it or understanding the document's contents; **digi-necker**, a driver who slows down when passing an accident to take a picture of the scene with a digital camera; **fauxtographer**, someone who creates faked photographs, usually by manipulating the images with software; and **foreclosure mill**, a law firm that processes foreclosures perfunctorily and without due process. (The foreclosure necessitated no doubt by the original purchase being run through an **appraisal mill** and then a **mortgage mill**.)

Modern mudslinging also takes aim at the **Wikipedia kid**, a student who has poor research skills and lacks the ability to think critically (probably because his research begins and ends on Wikipedia). No doubt he'll end up a **freshmore**, a second-year high school student who must repeat some or all of his first-year classes. If he's cute but also socially awkward, then feel free to describe him as **adorkable**.