
With its iPads and iPhones, email, IM, texts, and tweets, the digital age has, for better and worse, transformed our professional and personal lives. The average teenager spends more than six hours a day in front of a screen. Using phones as if they were extensions of their bodies, they send well over 100 texts per day. Millions of working Americans are literally and figuratively “linked in.” With free time, enough money to buy gadgets and gizmos, and a desire to stay in touch with family and friends, older adults account for a larger share of Facebook users than those 17 and under.

Caught up in mega-tasking, Liesl Schillinger suggests, we can take some satisfaction in putting names to the behaviors associated with the millennial mindset. In *Wordbirds*, she coins 200 new words (that first appeared on her Tumblr). Adorned with 150 illustrations of birds designed to generate “avian alphabetic synergy,” her lexicon cleverly captures the new normal of the twenty-first century. Some of her neologisms, in fact, may well stand the test of time.

An essayist, book reviewer, and translator, Schillinger brings a twentieth century sensibility to the millennial mindset. She expects readers to recognize *All About Eve*, *Vertigo*, and Andy Rooney. And she dubs a man that people assume is gay because he is polite, attractive, and good at dancing and singing, an "Astaire."

*Wordbirds* is at its best, however, when it turns to digital devices and workplaces. Schillinger calls an email to which a file was inadvertently not attached a “Hollowgram.” She refers to non-demanding jobs, like those held by heroines of Hollywood romantic comedies, as “Occuplaytions.” She labels the practice of confusing which device does what a “Droidian Slip;” a person who bombards inboxes with jokes and links a “Unispammer;” and an individual prone to artificially upbeat posts “Facebook Happy.”

Schillinger's bon mots also cover fashion and style, media, politics, and celebrity. An “Anorexual,” she writes, despises people whose bodies do not reflect an equation between emaciation and intellectual rigor. “Social Crawlers” mix with people they mistakenly consider elite. “Baitfaces” adorn their mouths, nostrils, and eyebrows with metal rings and studs. “Parrot Tops” have pastel hair, “making it look from a distance as if tropical birds perched on their shoulders.” “Actorvists” use their stardom to promote political agendas. “Journaleers” opine in newspapers and on blogs, even though they know little or nothing about the subject at hand.

"The Way We Live" now, Schillinger suggests, we tend to "Apologibe," excusing ourselves in a manner that demonstrates that we feel no regret; "Deliberote," wasting hours, days, or years over a situation until we are powerless to change it; "Rationalose," by declaring that an unsatisfactory status quo is acceptable or even good; and experience frequent "Will Power Outages."

Taken as a whole, *Wordbirds* presents a mostly unflattering portrait of the millennial generation. We are “Screen Stressed,” Schillinger suggests, and we can no longer hide from bosses, relatives, frenemies, and stalkers. We are hyper-scheduled, with days and evenings filled with "Velocifeeding" (eating while we are on the move) and "RBS (Rather Be Sleeping)” activities that are tedious and unsatisfying. And the long view, Schillinger claims, "is not particularly consoling to those of us who are engaged in the current scramble to achieve or restore solvency in a challenging job climate, as the stock market continues to jitter and carom like a greased pinball."

Along with its considerable virtues, connectivity clearly has a downside. It has, all too often, eviscerated or eliminated complexity in the name of brevity. It threatens as well to annihilate the present. Tethered to our iPhones, we are incessantly interruptible, almost always take the call, and sacrifice opportunities to lose ourselves in the moment. And, as *Wordbirds* reminds us, it has accelerated another tendency of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the celebrification of culture. As reality presents itself as role-playing, with each of us acting as the "star" of our own lives, connectivity makes all the more pervasive what the historian Christopher Lasch once called "the banality of self-awareness." And makes it more difficult for us to identify and tap the sources of strength within us: self-esteem, a healthy sense of identity, and a capacity for intimacy.

Glenn C. Altschuler is the Thomas and Dorothy Litwin Professor of American Studies at Cornell University.