You Are What You Search

Paul Boutin

Paul Boutin is a journalist and writer for Valleywag: Silicon Valley's Tech Gossip Rag. *Born in Lewiston, Maine, in 1961, he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he later worked as an engineer and manager on Project Athena. Known for his lively writing style and ability to translate tech-speak into everyday English, he has written for the* New York Times, Slate, *the* Wall Street Journal, *the* New Republic, *MSNBC.com,* Reader's Digest, Engadget, *Salon.com,* Outside, Cargo, Business 2.0, InfoWorld, Independent Film & Video Monthly, *and* PC World. *From 1996 to 2007, he worked as both a writer and an editor for* Wired *magazine.*

In the following article, published online in Slate *on August 11, 2006, Boutin uses the search records of 650,000 AOL members to examine the reasons that people search the Internet. Although his division is not a scientific study, it relies on his experience and that of others (such as his editors at* Slate*) who are accustomed to examining large volumes of data. Rather than simply provide a collection of random personal search sequences, he grouped the searches in a way that was meaningful to* Slate*'s nontechnical readership and human-interest focus.*

Reflecting on What You Know

Reflect on how you usually use the Internet to search for information. Make a list of the five subject categories you look for most often, and place them in descending order of frequency. What does the list say about your interests and about you in general?

AOL researchers recently [2006] published the search logs of about 650,000 members—a total of 36,389,629 individual searches. AOL's search nerds intended the files to be an academic resource but didn't consider that users might be peeved to see their private queries become a research tool. Last weekend, the Internet service provider tried to pull back the data, but by that point it had leaked all over the Web. If you've ever wanted to see what other people type into search boxes, now's your chance. 1

The search records don't include users' names, but each search is tagged with a number that's tied to a specific AOL account. The *New York Times* quickly sussed out that AOL searcher No. 4417749 was sixty-two-year-old Thelma Arnold. Indeed, Arnold has a "dog who urinates on everything," just as she'd typed into the search box. Valleywag has become one of many clearinghouses for funny, bizarre, and painful user profiles. The searches of AOL user No. 672368, for example, morphed over several weeks from "you're pregnant he doesn't want the baby" to "foods to eat when pregnant" to "abortion clinics charlotte nc" to "can christians be forgiven for abortion." 2

While these case studies are good voyeuristic fodder, snooping through one user's life barely scratches the surface of this data trove. The startup company I work for, Splunk, makes software to search computer-generated log files. AOL's 36 million log entries might look like an Orwellian nightmare to you, but for us it's a user transaction case study to die for. Using the third-party site splunkd.com, I've parsed the AOL data to create a typology of AOL Search users. Which of the seven types of searcher are you? 3

The Pornhound. Big surprise, there are millions of searches for mind-bendingly kinky stuff. User No. 927 is already an Internet legend. When I clicked Splunk's "Show Events by Time" button, though, I found that porn searchers vary not only by *what* they search for, but *when* they search for it. Some users are on a quest for pornography at all hours, seeking little else from AOL. Another subgroup, including No. 927, search only within reliable time slots. The data doesn't list each user's time zone, but 11 p.m. Eastern and 11 p.m. Pacific appear to be prime time for porn on AOL's servers. My favorite plots show hours of G-rated searches before the user switches gears—what I call the Avenue Q Theory of Internet usage. User No. 190827 goes from "talking parrots jokes" and "poems about a red rose" before midnight to multiple clicks for "sexy dogs and hot girls" a half hour later. An important related discovery: nobody knows how to spell "bestiality." 4

The Manhunter. The person who searches for other people. Again, I used Splunk's "Show Events by Time" function to plot name searches by date and time. Surprisingly, I didn't uncover many long-term stalkers. Most of the data showed bursts of searches for a specific name only once, all within an hour or a day, and then never again. Maybe these folks are background-checking job candidates, maybe they're looking up the new cutie at the office, or maybe they just miss 5

old friends. Most of the names in AOL's logs are too ambiguous to pinpoint to a single person in the real world, so don't get too tweaked if you find your own name and hometown in there. I've got it much worse. There are 36 million searches here, but none of them are for me.

The Shopper. The user who hits "treo 700" thirty-seven times in three days. Here, the data didn't confirm my biases. I'd expected to find window shoppers who searched for Porsche Cayman pages every weekend. But AOL's logs reveal that searches for "coupons" are a lot more common. My favorite specimen is the guy who mostly looked up food brands like Dole, Wendy's, Red Lobster, and Turkey Hill, with an occasional break for "asian movie stars." How much more American could America Online get?

The Obsessive. The guy who searches for the same thing over and over and over. Looking at the search words themselves can obfuscate a more general long-term pattern—A, A, A, A, B, A, A, C, A, D, A—that suggests a user who can't let go of one topic, whether it's Judaism, real estate, or Macs. Obsessives are most likely to craft advanced search terms like "craven randy fanfic-wes" and "pfeffern**sse."

The Omnivore. Many users aren't obsessive—they're just online a lot. My taxonomy fails them, because their search terms, while frequent, show little repetition or regularity. Still, I can spot a few subcategories. There are the trivia buffs who searched "imdb" hundreds of times in three months and the nostalgia surfers on the hunt for "pat benatar helter skelter lyrics."

The Newbie. They just figured out how to turn on the computer. User No. 12792510 is one of many who confuses AOL's search box with its browser address window—he keeps searching for "www.google." Other AOLers type their searches without spaces between the words ("newcaddillacdeville") as if they were 1990s-era AOL keywords.

The Basket Case. In college I had to write a version of the classic ELIZA program, a pretend therapist who only responds to your problems ("I am sad") with more questions ("Why do you say you are sad?"). AOL Search, it seems, serves the same purpose for a lot of users. I stumbled across queries like "i hate my job" and "why am i so ugly?" For me, one log entry stands above the rest: "i hurt when i think too much i love roadtrips i hate my weight i fear being alone for the rest of my life." Me too, 3696023. Me too.

If you want to try sifting through the AOL data, install the latest Firefox browser or use Internet Explorer 6. Then go to splunkd.com and click on one of the sites on the "Mirror List." If you're behind a firewall, the URLs with numbers in them ("www.ocs.net:8000") might not work. Once you click, wait a minute for the Splunk interface to load itself into your browser. You should see a search box at the top and something like "36,389,577 events indexed" below it.

To search AOL records, type something into the search box. As you type, a panel will appear that lists the number of possible results for what you've typed so far, such as "slate (2766)." That's a good way to quickly see how many searches for a particular word are in AOL's logs.

After typing a word or two, click the ">" button at the right to run your search. The results page looks like a cross between Google and a nuclear reactor console—a hip, stylish Web 2.0 reactor, of course. For help with the interface, click on "Cheat Sheet" at the upper right. You can also pop open the Splunk Assistant in the lower right corner for as-you-go hints. If all else fails, read the manual. Yes, "Splunk" is a pun on "spelunking," as in data mining.

The format of each search log entry is: user number, search term, time stamp. If the user clicked on one of their search results, there are two more fields: the results rank and the URL of the link they clicked. The results are easier to read if you find Splunk's Preferences menu and turn off Show Event Meta Data—you're not troubleshooting a denial of service attack.

Thinking Critically about This Reading

Do you think that AOL should have saved the search logs of 650,000 of its members, making it possible for computer sleuths to attach searchers' names to search queries? Google, which makes billions of dollars by analyzing Web search data, saves search logs and names for eighteen months and then deletes them. Do you think it's right that Google saves this information for any length of time? Explain.

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. What is Boutin's purpose in this essay? (Glossary: *Purpose*)
2. What does the author's "typology of AOL Search users" (paragraph 3) reveal about AOL's data? How, if at all, do you fit into his typology?

Friends, Good Friends—and Such Good Friends

Judith Viorst

Judith Viorst was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1931 and attended Rutgers University. She has published several volumes of light verse and collections of prose, as well as many articles in popular magazines. Her numerous children's books include the perennial favorite Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day *(1972). Her recent books for adults include* Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies, and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Grow *(1997),* Imperfect Control: Our Lifelong Struggles with Power and Surrender *(1998),* Suddenly Sixty: And Other Shocks of Late Life *(2000),* Grown-Up Marriage: What We Know, Wish We Had Known, and Still Need to Know about Being Married *(2002), and* I'm Too Young to Be Seventy: And Other Delusions *(2005).*

The following selection appeared in Viorst's regular column in Redbook *in 1977. In it she analyzes and classifies the various types of friends that a person can have. As you read, assess the validity of her analysis by trying to place your own friends into her categories. Determine also whether the categories themselves are mutually exclusive.*

Reflecting on What You Know

Think about your friends. Do you regard them all in the same light? Would you group them in any way? On what basis would you group them?

Women are friends, I once would have said, when they totally 1
love and support and trust each other, and bare to each other the secrets of their souls, and run—no questions asked—to help each other, and tell harsh truths to each other (no, you can't wear that dress unless you lose ten pounds first) when harsh truths must be told.

Women are friends, I once would have said, when they share the 2
same affection for Ingmar Bergman,[1] plus train rides, cats, warm rain, charades, Camus,[2] and hate with equal ardor Newark[3] and Brussels sprouts and Lawrence Welk[4] and camping.

In other words, I once would have said that a friend is a friend all 3
the way, but now I believe that's a narrow point of view. For the friendships I have and the friendships I see are conducted at many levels of intensity, serve many different functions, meet different needs, and range from those as all-the-way as the friendship of the soul sisters mentioned above to that of the most nonchalant and casual playmates.

Consider these varieties of friendship: 4

1. Convenience friends. These are women with whom, if our 5
paths weren't crossing all the time, we'd have no particular reason to be friends: a next-door neighbor, a woman in our car pool, the mother of one of our children's closest friends, or maybe some mommy with whom we serve juice and cookies each week at the Glenwood Co-op Nursery.

Convenience friends are convenient indeed. They'll lend us their 6
cups and silverware for a party. They'll drive our kids to soccer when we're sick. They'll take us to pick up our car when we need a lift to the garage. They'll even take our cats when we go on vacation. As we will for them.

But we don't, with convenience friends, ever come too close or 7
tell too much; we maintain our public face and emotional distance. "Which means," says Elaine, "that I'll talk about being overweight but not about being depressed. Which means I'll admit being mad but not blind with rage. Which means that I might say that we're pinched this month but never that I'm worried sick over money."

But which doesn't mean that there isn't sufficient value to be 8
found in these friendships of mutual aid, in convenience friends.

2. Special-interest friends. These friendships aren't intimate, and 9
they needn't involve kids or silverware or cats. Their value lies in some interest jointly shared. And so we may have an office friend or a yoga friend or a tennis friend or a friend from the Women's Democratic Club.

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[1]*Ingmar Bergman* (1918–2007): Swedish film writer and director.
[2]*Albert Camus* (1913–1960): French novelist, essayist, and playwright.
[3]*Newark:* a city in northeastern New Jersey.
[4]*Lawrence Welk* (1903–1992): American band leader and accordion player whose *The Lawrence Welk Show* aired on television in 1955–1971.

"I've got one woman friend," says Joyce, "who likes, as I do, to take psychology courses. Which makes it nice for me—and nice for her. It's fun to go with someone you know and it's fun to discuss what you've learned, driving back from the classes." And for the most part, she says, that's all they discuss. 10

"I'd say that what we're doing is *doing* together, not being together," Suzanne says of her Tuesday-doubles friends. "It's mainly a tennis relationship, but we play together well. And I guess we all need to have a couple of playmates." 11

I agree. 12

My playmate is a shopping friend, a woman of marvelous taste, a woman who knows exactly *where* to buy *what*, and furthermore is a woman who always knows beyond a doubt what one ought to be buying. I don't have the time to keep up with what's new in eyeshadow, hemlines, and shoes and whether the smock look is in or finished already. But since (oh, shame!) I care a lot about eyeshadow, hemlines, and shoes, and since I don't *want* to wear smocks if the smock look is finished, I'm very glad to have a shopping friend. 13

3. Historical friends. We all have a friend who knew us when . . . maybe way back in Miss Meltzer's second grade, when our family lived in that three-room flat in Brooklyn, when our dad was out of work for seven months, when our brother Allie got in that fight where they had to call the police, when our sister married the endodontist[5] from Yonkers,[6] and when, the morning after we lost our virginity, she was the first, the only, friend we told. 14

The years have gone by and we've gone separate ways and we've little in common now, but we're still an intimate part of each other's past. And so whenever we go to Detroit we always go to visit this friend of our girlhood. Who knows how we looked before our teeth were straightened. Who knows how we talked before our voice got un-Brooklyned. Who knows what we ate before we learned about artichokes. And who, by her presence, puts us in touch with an earlier part of ourself, a part of ourself it's important never to lose. 15

"What this friend means to me and what I mean to her," says Grace, "is having a sister without sibling rivalry. We know the texture of each other's lives. She remembers my grandmother's cabbage 16

[5]*endodontist:* a dentist who specializes in diseases of the teeth and gums.
[6]*Yonkers:* a city in southeastern New York, just north of New York City.

soup. I remember the way her uncle played the piano. There's simply no other friend who remembers those things."

4. Crossroads friends. Like historical friends, our crossroads friends are important for *what was*—for the friendship we shared at a crucial, now past, time of life. A time, perhaps, when we roomed in college together; or worked as eager young singles in the Big City together; or went together, as my friend Elizabeth and I did, through pregnancy, birth, and that scary first year of new motherhood. 17

Crossroads friends forge powerful links, links strong enough to endure with not much more contact than once-a-year letters at Christmas. And out of respect for those crossroad years, for those dramas and dreams we once shared, we will always be friends. 18

5. Cross-generational friends. Historical friends and crossroads friends seem to maintain a special kind of intimacy—dormant but always ready to be revived—and though we may rarely meet, whenever we do connect, it's personal and intense. Another kind of intimacy exists in the friendships that form across generations in what one woman calls her daughter-mother and her mother-daughter relationships. 19

Evelyn's friend is her mother's age—"but I share so much more than I ever could with my mother"—a woman she talks to of music, of books, and of life. "What I get from her is the benefit of her experience. What she gets—and enjoys—from me is a youthful perspective. It's a pleasure for both of us." 20

I have in my own life a precious friend, a woman of sixty-five who has lived very hard, who is wise, who listens well; who has been where I am and can help me understand it; and who represents not only an ultimate ideal mother to me but also the person I'd like to be when I grow up. 21

In our daughter role we tend to do more than our share of self-revelation; in our mother role we tend to receive what's revealed. It's another kind of pleasure—playing wise mother to a questing younger person. It's another very lovely kind of friendship. 22

6. Part-of-a-couple friends. Some of the women we call our friends we never see alone—we see them as part of a couple at couples' parties. And though we share interests in many things and respect each other's views, we aren't moved to deepen the relationship. Whatever the reason, a lack of time or—and this is more likely—a lack of chemistry, our friendship remains in the context of a group. But the fact that our feeling on seeing each other is always, "I'm *so* glad she's 23

here" and the fact that we spend half the evening talking together says that this too, in its own way, counts as a friendship.

(Other part-of-a-couple friends are the friends that came with the marriage, and some of these are friends we could live without. But sometimes, alas, she married our husband's best friend; and sometimes, alas, she *is* our husband's best friend. And so we find ourself dealing with her, somewhat against our will, in a spirit of what I'll call *reluctant* friendship.)

7. Men who are friends. I wanted to write just of women friends, but the women I've talked to won't let me—they say I must mention man–woman friendships too. For these friendships can be just as close and as dear as those that we form with women. Listen to Lucy's description of one such friendship:

"We've found we have things to talk about that are different from what he talks about with my husband and different from what I talk about with his wife. So sometimes we call on the phone or meet for lunch. There are similar intellectual interests—we always pass on to each other the books that we love—but there's also something tender and caring too."

In a couple of crises, Lucy says, "he offered himself for talking and for helping. And when someone died in his family he wanted me there. The sexual, flirty part of our friendship is very small, but *some*—just enough to make it fun and different." She thinks—and I agree—that the sexual part, though small, is always *some,* is always there when a man and a woman are friends.

It's only in the past few years that I've made friends with men, in the sense of a friendship that's *mine*, not just part of two couples. And achieving with them the ease and the trust I've found with women friends has value indeed. Under the dryer at home last week, putting on mascara and rouge, I comfortably sat and talked with a fellow named Peter. Peter, I finally decided, could handle the shock of me minus mascara under the dryer. Because we care for each other. Because we're friends.

8. There are medium friends, and pretty good friends, and very good friends indeed, and these friendships are defined by their level of intimacy. And what we'll reveal at each of these levels of intimacy is calibrated with care. We might tell a medium friend, for example, that yesterday we had a fight with our husband. And we might tell a pretty good friend that this fight with our husband made us so mad that we slept on the couch. And we might tell a very good friend that the reason we got so mad in that fight that we slept on the couch had something to do with that girl that works in his office. But it's only to our very best friends that we're willing to tell all, to tell what's going on with that girl in his office.

The best of friends, I still believe, totally love and support and trust each other, and bare to each other the secrets of their souls, and run—no questions asked—to help each other, and tell harsh truths to each other when they must be told.

But we needn't agree about everything (only twelve-year-old girl friends agree about *everything*) to tolerate each other's point of view. To accept without judgment. To give and to take without ever keeping score. And to *be* there, as I am for them and as they are for me, to comfort our sorrows, to celebrate our joys.

Thinking Critically about This Reading

The third type of friend Viorst writes about is the "historical friend." Why is it important to have a friend who "puts us in touch with an earlier part of ourself" (paragraph 15)?

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. In her opening paragraph, Viorst explains how she once would have defined *friendship*. Why does she now think differently?
2. What is Viorst's purpose? (Glossary: *Purpose*) Why is division and classification an appropriate strategy for her to use?
3. Into what categories does Viorst divide her friends?
4. What principles of division does Viorst use to establish her categories of friends? Where does she state these principles?
5. Discuss the ways in which Viorst makes her categories distinct and memorable.
6. What is Viorst's tone? (Glossary: *Tone*) In what ways is her tone appropriate for both her audience and subject matter? (Glossary: *Audience*) Explain.

Classroom Activity Using Division and Classification

The following drawing is a basic exercise in classification. By determining the features that the figures have in common, establish the general class to which they all belong. Next, establish subclasses by

A friend will give up his life for you.
A *real* friend will help you move.

Doubts about Doubletalk

■ **William Lutz**

William Lutz is a professor of English at Rutgers University–Camden and was the editor of the Quarterly Review of Doublespeak *for fourteen years. Born in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1940, Lutz is best known for* Doublespeak: From Revenue Enhancement to Terminal Living *(1990) and* The New Doublespeak: Why No One Knows What Anyone's Saying Anymore *(1996). His most recent book,* Doublespeak Defined: Cut through the Bull**** and Get to the Point, *was published in 1999. (The term* doublespeak *was coined by George Orwell in his novel* Nineteen Eighty-Four. *It refers to speech or writing that presents two or more contradictory ideas in a way that deceives an unsuspecting audience.) As chair of the National Council of Teachers of English's Committee on Public Doublespeak, Lutz has been a watchdog of public officials who use language to "mislead, distort, deceive, inflate, circumvent, and obfuscate." Each year, the committee presents the Orwell Awards to recognize outrageous uses of doublespeak in government and business.*

The following essay first appeared in the July 1993 issue of State Government News. *As you read, notice how Lutz organizes his essay by naming and defining four categories of doublespeak, describing each one's function or consequences, and giving examples of each type. This organizational pattern is simple, practical, and easy to follow.*

Reflecting on What You Know

Imagine that you work for a manufacturing plant in your town and that your boss has just told you that you are on the list of people who will be "dehired" or that you are part of a program of "negative employee retention." What would you think was happening to you? Would you be happy about it? What would you think of the language that your boss used to describe your situation?

During the past year, we learned that we can shop at a "unique retail biosphere" instead of a farmers' market, where we can buy items made of "synthetic glass" instead of plastic, or purchase a "high velocity, multipurpose air circulator," or electric fan. A "waste-water conveyance facility" may "exceed the odor threshold" from time to time due to the presence of "regulated human nutrients," but that is not to be confused with a sewage plant that stinks up the neighborhood with sewage sludge. Nor should we confuse a "resource development park" with a dump. Thus does doublespeak continue to spread.

Doublespeak is language which pretends to communicate but doesn't. It is language which makes the bad seem good, the negative seem positive, the unpleasant seem attractive, or at least tolerable. It is language which avoids, shifts, or denies responsibility; language which is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language which conceals or prevents thought.

Doublespeak is all around us. We are asked to check our packages at the desk "for our convenience" when it's not for our convenience at all but for someone else's convenience. We see advertisements for "preowned," "experienced," or "previously distinguished" cars, not used cars, and for "genuine imitation leather," "virgin vinyl," or "real counterfeit diamonds." Television offers not reruns but "encore telecasts." There are no slums or ghettos, just the "inner city" or "substandard housing" where the "disadvantaged" or "economically nonaffluent" live and where there might be a problem with "substance abuse." Nonprofit organizations don't make a profit, they have "negative deficits" or experience "revenue excesses." With doublespeak it's not dying but "terminal living" or "negative patient care outcome."

There are four kinds of doublespeak. The first kind is the euphemism, a word or phrase designed to avoid a harsh or distasteful reality. Used to mislead or deceive, the euphemism becomes doublespeak. In 1984 the U.S. State Department's annual reports on the status of human rights around the world ceased using the word "killing." Instead the State Department used the phrase "unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life," thus avoiding the embarrassing situation of government-sanctioned killing in countries supported by the United States.

A second kind of doublespeak is jargon, the specialized language of a trade, profession, or similar group, such as doctors, lawyers, plumbers, or car mechanics. Legitimately used, jargon allows members of a group to communicate with each other clearly, efficiently, and quickly. Lawyers and tax accountants speak to each other of an "involuntary conversion" of property, a legal term that means the loss or destruction of property through theft, accident, or condemnation. But when lawyers or tax accountants use unfamiliar terms to speak to others, then the jargon becomes doublespeak.

In 1978 a commercial 727 crashed on takeoff, killing three passengers, injuring twenty-one others, and destroying the airplane. The insured value of the airplane was greater than its book value, so the airline made a profit of $1.7 million, creating two problems: the airline didn't want to talk about one of its airplanes crashing, yet it had to account for that $1.7 million profit in its annual report to its stockholders. The airline solved both problems by inserting a footnote in its annual report which explained that the $1.7 million was due to "the involuntary conversion of a 727."

A third kind of doublespeak is gobbledygook or bureaucratese. Such doublespeak is simply a matter of overwhelming the audience with words—the more the better. Alan Greenspan, a polished practitioner of bureaucratese, once testified before a Senate committee that "it is a tricky problem to find the particular calibration in timing that would be appropriate to stem the acceleration in risk premiums created by falling incomes without prematurely aborting the decline in the inflation-generated risk premiums."

The fourth kind of doublespeak is inflated language, which is designed to make the ordinary seem extraordinary, to make everyday things seem impressive, to give an air of importance to people or situations, to make the simple seem complex. Thus do car mechanics become "automotive internists," elevator operators become "members of the vertical transportation corps," grocery store checkout clerks become "career associate scanning professionals," and smelling something becomes "organoleptic analysis."

Doublespeak is not the product of careless language or sloppy thinking. Quite the opposite. Doublespeak is language carefully designed and constructed to appear to communicate when in fact it doesn't. It is language designed not to lead but mislead. Thus, it's not a tax increase but "revenue enhancement" or "tax-base broadening." So how can you complain about higher taxes? Those aren't useless, billion dollar pork barrel projects; they're really "congressional projects of national significance," so don't complain about wasteful government spending. That isn't the Mafia in Atlantic City; those are just "members of a career-offender cartel," so don't worry about the influence of organized crime in the city.

New doublespeak is created every day. The Environmental 10
Protection Agency once called acid rain "poorly-buffered precipitation," then dropped that term in favor of "atmospheric deposition of anthropogenically-derived acidic substances," but recently decided that acid rain should be called "wet deposition." The Pentagon, which has in the past given us such classic doublespeak as "hexiform rotatable surface compression unit" for steel nut, just published a pamphlet warning soldiers that exposure to nerve gas will lead to "immediate permanent incapacitation." That's almost as good as the Pentagon's official term "servicing the target," meaning to kill the enemy. Meanwhile, the Department of Energy wants to establish a "monitored retrievable storage site," a place once known as a dump for spent nuclear fuel.

Bad economic times give rise to lots of new doublespeak designed 11
to avoid some very unpleasant economic realities. As the "contained depression" continues so does the corporate policy of making up even more new terms to avoid the simple, and easily understandable, term "layoff." So it is that corporations "reposition," "restructure," "reshape," or "realign" the company and "reduce duplication" through "release of resources" that involves a "permanent downsizing" or a "payroll adjustment" that results in a number of employees being "involuntarily terminated."

Other countries regularly contribute to doublespeak. In Japan, 12
where baldness is called "hair disadvantaged," the economy is undergoing a "severe adjustment process," while in Canada there is an "involuntary downward development" of the work force. For some government agencies in Canada, wastepaper baskets have become "user friendly, space effective, flexible, deskside sortation units." Politicians in Canada may engage in "reality augmentation," but they never lie. As part of their new freedom, the people of Moscow can visit "intimacy salons," or sex shops as they're known in other countries. When dealing with the bureaucracy in Russia, people know that they should show officials "normal gratitude," or give them a bribe.

The worst doublespeak is the doublespeak of death. It is the lan- 13
guage, wrote George Orwell in 1946, that is "largely the defense of the indefensible . . . designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." In the doublespeak of death, Orwell continued, "defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets. This is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry. This is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers." Today, in a country once called Yugoslavia, this is called "ethnic cleansing."[1]

It's easy to laugh off doublespeak. After all, we all know what's 14
going on, so what's the harm? But we don't always know what's going on, and when that happens, doublespeak accomplishes its ends. It alters our perception of reality. It deprives us of the tools we need to develop, advance, and preserve our society, our culture, our civilization. It breeds suspicion, cynicism, distrust, and, ultimately, hostility. It delivers us into the hands of those who do not have our interests at heart. As Samuel Johnson[2] noted in eighteenth-century England, even the devils in hell do not lie to one another, since the society of hell could not subsist without the truth, any more than any other society.

Thinking Critically about This Reading

According to Lutz, doublespeak "alters our perception of reality. . . . It breeds suspicion, cynicism, distrust, and, ultimately, hostility" (paragraph 14). What is Lutz's plan for combating doublespeak and its negative effects?

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. What is Lutz's thesis? (Glossary: *Thesis*)
2. The author divides doublespeak into four categories. What are they?
3. For what purpose has Lutz used division and classification? (Glossary: *Purpose*)
4. Why might Lutz have ordered the categories as he has? (Glossary: *Organization*)
5. Are Lutz's illustrative examples good ones? (Glossary: *Example*) Why or why not? Should he have used fewer examples? More examples? Explain.

[1]*"ethnic cleansing"*: Lutz is referring to the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Balkan region of southeastern Europe in the early 1990s and the 1992–1995 genocide centered in the cities of Sarajevo and Srebrenica.
[2]*Samuel Johnson* (1709–1784): an important English writer.