When there are no major upheavals on the scene, and things are percolating along on a restful plateau, I doubt we're all paying a high degree of attention. Perhaps we've all just gotten used to being torn to shreds, politically and psychologically, then heaving ourselves up on the bank for a bit, gasping and panting, trying to suck down more air and stay alive, for the next round.

It feels like that most days, since this presidential election contest began, back in May of 1862. Which is to say, it just feels like that. *Or, maybe, I heard someone say that -- I'm not saying it, myself, you understand me -- I'm only saying I think I heard someone say that, and I think recently, but I am not sure I can be sure...*

(This campaign-speak stuff is terrible -- once you get some on you, it wants to bond with you, mate with you, and stay stuck on you forever, like the face-creature in the movie *Alien*.)

Then, after we've recharged some, things start to become energized and antsy, and change starts to happen and shift once again, taking on new tones, perspectives, goals. It is here, at the Outer Markers defining the current norms, that you and I might start to joke or kid about things "starting to get a little crazy" when occasional sneaker waves surprise us with low-impact, but unexpected, developments here or there.

Example? The announcement that Trump would run for President of the United States. Who could ever have taken that seriously, back then? It would have been only slightly more believable if a cab-sized jellyfish made the announcement, too. Remember those good old days?

Then: More change happens, in this paradigm, which generates additional, and more elevated, events and comments. When change is in full-on, earth-quaking mode, both the ground and horizon lines in full sway, it becomes harder to tell where the norms are, when the shaking stops in a while, or how to tell how bad the damage will be.

Example? That would be about now, in the aftermath of Trump-as-nominee -- itself once as believable as Godzilla showing up at the GOP convention in a clown suit. With tutu, and size 4200, triple-E-to-the-9th-power, floppy shoes.

This is when we start losing our abilities to find words hefty enough, strong enough, to pack the true weight we want them to lug for us. When we say, "things are absolutely nuts here right now," it's difficult to get a bead on what that means anymore, having moved through the increasing ranges of changing norms, from the ones and twos on the low end of the scale, and having made adjustments along the way, to the early sevens and eights.

The words have changed right along with us, too, or so it feels -- if not definitions and denotations, then certainly the connotations and the curb-weights.

Analogy swap:

In terms of paddling around, being a surfer's wave-spotter, we've graduated from choppy water, to *killer curls, dude*, to a full-bore storm-surge tsunami, all in record time.

Craziness, unlike wetness and pregnancy, is currently seen as being variable, not merely a yes-no, *either you are or you aren't* proposition. This is how it's possible to go, in this political season, for example, from "a little crazy," to "pretty crazy," and then on to "really crazy," and, now, today, to something really very close to "absolutely bat-guano
nuts
."

Words created long ago, like *nuts* and *crazy* and *insane,* all have dimmer switches in them. (It was all the rage, back then, when those words were manufactured.) So, when you bring the juice up slowly, we really lose the comparison of how bright -- or dim, mostly -- things can get.

By contrast, Trump brings friction, but without the benefit of illumination ***or*** heat -- unless you count the temperature of the people trying to make sense of his intents and ideas, by tracking his ever-muddled and forever-muddied

words
.

I'm in favor of all of us trying to find more descriptive ways to convey and encapsulate how it is that things are going, or seeming to go. I'm in favor of turning *nuts* and *crazy* and *insane* back into non-variable terms, to take the dimmer switches out.

Really, when you get down to it: a little bit crazy is still crazy, just as a little bit wet is still wet, and being just a little bit murderous is still being murderous, just as being a little bit of a liar is still being a liar.

It's easy to know how we got here: Absolutes and intangibles are nearly impossible concepts for humans to live with and discuss. Plus, we try to cut each other some slack for reasons ranging from hormones to households to having horrible days. (No one wants to be a hard-ass, except for hard-asses. Most of us want to be the recipients of a little slack from time to time, so we are normally willing to grant it for others, so we don't nitpick word-choice much.)

But: What do we do when words do not allow us to fully convey the depths of our disbelief in the current reality? What do we do when hyperbole, sarcasm, irony, and satire fail as linguistic conveyor belts of ideas? What do we do to describe to others the state of our being -- *speechless*?

More to the point -- what do we do when someone, *for the first time ever*, spits in our face and makes a game of running for president, thereby mocking the process, the post, and all thinking people?

What are we supposed to do when such a candidate refuses to respect even the most modest bits of decorum and self-restraint, and then also refuses to follow the basic understanding we all have of language itself -- that words have actual meanings?

What to do, when such a person ignores facts, including the notion that specific statements carry specific ideas, and are not, once issued, automatically set for "Variable Meaning,"

depending on the audience and/or day, while set adrift among the world's other ideas by virtue of speech or text?

Interesting stuff... and in the same way that wars, volcanic eruptions, famines, outbreaks of disease, and droughts are all *interesting stuff*.

* * *

Surely my own struggles to convey agitated exasperation and woozy disbelief are not alone. The Trumpian situations and struggles keep coming, and keep evolving, faster than the blessings of adaptation. If we keep up at this speed, I'm thinking, I'm going to need to evolve gills, solar panels, and a third or fourth eye, just to keep up.

Casual speech is a bit to blame, I know. We all say things like, "Ah, that's just crazy," and rarely if ever actually mean it. A return to the formality of stuffed-shirt speech, and stultifying *speechifying*, is no cure, either.

While in the midst of considering such major eddies and minor whirlpools of language, we are shaken when we are suddenly swamped by a water-tower-tank of lingusitic noise, chatter, and atonality.

What to do? In the old days, pre-Trump, we'd settle back in our chairs, more-or-less braced for another election of talking-points and decoder-ring cryptography, and are then blown clean away by a nutcase like Trump, Respecter of No Rules -- linguistic or otherwise.

Just when we thought we knew what the Monopoly Game was, what the rules were and how it was played, in bounds a wet werewolf, chewing on a sheep, shaking off water and wool and blood at us, howling and growling. *Surprise! Your move! Do not pass Go!*

* * *

The last 30 years or so of elections have experienced change, but not the sort of jarring change we have now, where we go from apples to pears to *extinction-level-event, incoming-meteor* kinds of change. Gone are the days of working toward compromise for the good of the nation. It's been replaced with the go-for-the-jugular knife-fight, for the ratings, to get the audience involved, hanging on every turn of the game-- and on every commercial.

Gone, too, are factual debates/ Now, there are shouting matches, veritable staged cage-matches of verbal fisticuffs by babbling jabbers. Gone are the discussions of ideas, just a running of the think-tank, focus-group, lobbyst-and-RNC-approved spewing points. Gone, the honesty of information and fact -- on to the Brave New World of gut feelings and propaganda.

Language, long tortured in the dungeon, has been broken on the wheel and, this year, it's been made to confess. Its pains are obvious, but it's too late.

We've moved on now. Words are whatever we want them to be. *Whenever.* Statements are whatever you think they could be.
Howsoever.
Trump is no more interested in what words mean than in learning any facts, or gaining any information, or developing any policies or plans.

Trump doesn't really want what we thought he wanted -- which was the highest job in the land, as we've come to call it. *Too frustrating. Too much work. Too little pay. Too much to know.* Trump can't be bothered, and we should have known that -- it's not his style. We had just never been fooled at such a level before, been gamed as we have.

Running for President of the United States of America has this year been downgraded, in just one election cycle, and by one person, into a springboard opportunity for a new, overarching, goal -- a new Highest Post in the Land, as Executor for the Hearts and Minds of the Ignorant, the Dispossessed, the Frightened, the Left-Behind, the Disappointed, the Frustrated, the Superstitious...

How could we know Trump never wanted the gig? We could have guessed, but we blamed his ignorance and arrogance for his constant, *both-feet-in-mouth* festivals. To my knowledge, we never had a candidate for President of the United States purposefully
throw
the match. (If we have, they at least had the grace and good sense make it
look
good.)

So, here we all are, once again.

You thought we had troubles when we found out we couldn't talk to each other, because the conversational arena had been poisoned by right-wing propaganda.

You thought we had problems when we discovered some of us tried to use facts and information in conversations, and others demanded we use nothing but gut feelings and passing fancies.

What problems do we have now? A candidate who communicates in microbursts of short phrases, shorthand shouts, and streaming insults, who panders to crowd racism and hate, insisting that his outright lies and fabrications are gospel truth solid information...

We have a candidate who absolutely refuses to subscribe to the outmoded notion that words and sentences actually had fixed meaning, ***and that words and speech and text are not handy placeholders for intense and changeable feelings of the moment, which can mean different things to different people, at different times.***

* * *

We've been played. We've been had. We should have guessed, when Trump was promising control of all activities, foreign and domestic, to his Veep -- but that one was just one more Trumpism in a vast, vast sea of them. We'd become used to them. This one didn't stand out as a clue more than any of the others -- but it was right there, all the time.

If you think we're having fun now, just wait until you see the new empire which will be built from the bones of this presidential race, by a man who played us as chumps and fools, running for office just to reach higher, to a new level, to a new world order, about to be revealed:

From the world of triumphant Trumpian trust: ***Trumphate Media Corporation.*** **They'll be billing themselves as**
T
he Fox Killers
or maybe something cuter, like all rightwing-nut organizations, like
American Sacred Freedoms & Liberty's Sons Institute
or some such.

The corporation, by the way, will be pronounced *TRUMP-fate* -- **Part Fate, Part Hate, All Trump.**

As for the presidential race? Bah -- who cares? Trump's headed for real power. Trump's unofficial motto: *Whoever points the propaganda, spears the rewards.*

Let the long-simmering, far-right coup boil over and begin.

* * *

Paging the descendants of General Smedley Butler -- please pick up any red-white-and-blue courtesy phone and respond, please. Paging the descendants of General Smedley Butler for a very urgent call, please...

Today's Odds and Ends:

Meditation on Language: http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/trump-the-university-of-chicago-and-the-collapse-of-public-language

Meditation on Trump: http://www.politicususa.com/2016/08/31/hypocrisy-lies-15-donald-trump.html

More? Search for *1930's US coup* -- happy reading. Brace yourself.