



How Real is our "Reality"?

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere and applying the wrong remedies". (Groucho Marx)

"What else will do except faith in such a cynical, corrupt time? When the country temporarily goes to the dogs, the cat must learn to be circumspect, walk on fences, sleep in trees, and have faith that all this woofing is not the last word. (Garrison Keillor)

"Publicity is like poison, it doesn't hurt unless you swallow it". (Joe Paterno)

Given that we are now living in an era wherein boundaries between virtual and apparently actual realities are increasingly unclear, with photo shop, green screens, and computer generated imagery, the business of orchestrating fake enthusiasm from flash mobs to campaign trails has become quite commonplace. We live in 2016 America and fame is big business...but the rabbit hole goes deeper than the unaware might ever imagine. Crowds for hire, is especially big business these days...and growing exponentially with resources around our globe. Perhaps you remember the social media dust-up and in the twitter-sphere, when it was revealed that Donald Trump's campaign allegedly paid actors \$50 each to show up in slogan Tee-Shirts, carry colorful signs and cheer when he first announced his candidacy.

This should have been no surprise given the long standing practice of "astro-turfing", which Webster's Dictionary defines as, "the practice of disguising an orchestrated campaign as a spontaneous upwelling of public opinion". As the theory goes, fake

support can generate enough media-buzz, which can actually evolve into genuine support as voters are increasingly exposed to aspiring candidates. Orwellian propaganda tactics or simply a "marketing strategy", perhaps inspired by legendary showman P.T. Barnum's: "Nothing draws a crowd like a crowd"? (Daniel Alef, **P.T. Barnum: Greatest Showman on Earth**, 2008).

Political protests, social justice movements and other demonstrations also have a long history of utilizing these dubious tactics to fortify their numbers, as temporary workers and homeless citizens have been similarly employed to walk picket lines during a strike. Well staged scenarios also create opportunities for well paid, professionally trained, scripted, crisis and improvisational actors, agent-provocateurs and other skilled agitators to show up, intent to liven up the action.

These talented operatives, who have signed confidential, non-disclosure agreements, given the sensitive nature of their role assignments, will likely be accompanied by equally well-paid camera crews to be on hand in order capture these "spontaneous" events, often designed to shift the media narrative. (see also: ASJ: "Crisis Actors": **Lightning On The Horizon: Trauma and The Human Condition: Vol III**, 2016) (Facebook also has a "Lets Out Crisis Actors" page with over 1,000 members which might be of interest, along with <http://crisisactors.org>: "Trained Players Making it Real").

Political campaign or protest organizers need only reach for their omnipresent cell-phones to contact a company such as Los Angeles based "Crowds on Demand" ("Our business is about cultivating perception"), that provides crowds for campaign and other rallies; with services offered in San Francisco, New York City and Washington D.C. with their crowd actor traveling troupe also available, in political hotspots such as Iowa and New Hampshire. CEO and founder Adam Swart, a UCLA graduate who majored in Political Science, claims that he has done work for dozens of congressional and senate candidates, mostly those who suffer from a lack of enthusiasm /turnout in rallies in need of a "game change"... and only one presidential hopeful, so far.

Swart maintains that his services have led to increased poll-numbers, and in many cases made the margin of victory for a number of reasons. These reasons include photo-ops at rallies of a diverse group of staged attendees, (age, race, gender),

surrounding the candidate as well as the fact that enthusiastic crowds draw more attention and can shift the narrative toward "grass-roots" support and we can provide great interview quotations for the press. Swart goes on to explain that his crowd services can provide a sense of legitimacy for a candidate among existing supporters who can then feel that they have their money on the right horse. Crowd services support also serves to boost the candidates' self-confidence, in order to up their game on stage. (Alexander Higgins blog: April 4, 2016).

Included in this burgeoning business, we have "Crowds for Rent", the allegedly Trump engaged, "Extra Mile Casting", along with international companies set up to provide fake support or opposition for politicians and other causes. In Britain, for example there is Envisage Promotions, as well as Rent A Crowd, which boasts of more than 10,000 registered crowd and crisis actors available for events throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Such is our **Brave New World**. Oh, and by the way, if you should find yourself short of cash in Ukraine, "Easy Work" pays \$4/hour to support or oppose local politicians (rent-a-mob?). (Dan Schneider, "1-800-Hire-A-Crowd", the atlantic.com, July 22, 2015).