

# S.U.S. ASTROTURFS OF OFFENSE GLOSSARY

## GENERAL TERMS

**The Crowd** is a social formation, a desiring machine. The crowd is temporal; it must discharge and disband. In its insatiable desire to grow, it is entropic. The crowd reduces internal difference, removes the fear of touch. The crowd is an artifice, a suspension of the individual and private. It is always potentially destructive. The crowd is a form of survivalism and a kernel with potential for a panic attack. The crowd is directional, driven by a shared common goal. It can take form around baiting, flight, prohibition, reversal, feast and excess, financial incentives. The crowd can be slow or fast, rhythmic or arrhythmic, open or closed, clouds or crystals. It is both material and symbolic, unpredictable and formulaic. The crowd is a tool.

**Grassroots:** An "organic crowd" formed by communities demonstrating political support or seeking political change. Long-term and bottom-up, these organizations materialize as crowds at demonstrations and rallies through long-term mutual networks of individuals catalyzing action. They are tied together by shared interests and mutual indebtedness to collective goals, sacrificing their own potential labor and leisure time.

**Astroturfed:** A "fake crowd" or "fake grassroots," astroturfed crowds materialize when individuals are paid by an external source with pointed political motivations to participate in a crowd formation. Astroturfed crowd members seek direct exchange value, in the form of financial credit, for their time. Astroturfed entities mimic grassroots organizations, and can sometimes engender grassroots formations.

## ACTORS/AGENTS

**Hecklers** irreverently call-out public figures in political protest. Due to political figures being unwilling to engage with displays of public indignation, the public perception of the heckler has shifted, over time, from a democratic to an anti-democratic force.

**The Claque** was an early form of paid crowds: professional clappers, criers, and laughers would influence audience responses to theater productions. The claque functioned through organized extortion of producers and performers.

**Delegated Performers** (per Claire Bishop) are people hired to perform societal roles in the context of visual arts. Performers are sometimes chosen for their position in social hierarchies.

**Disinterested Actor** is a strawperson of the public imagination, wherein a completely neutral person with no political or personal allegiance or investment acts with political consequence. As the barrier to entry for political actions lessens, there is increased anxiety over disinterested actors being pawns for catalyzing political change.

**Live Action Role Play (LARP)** is when participants assume characters and engage in a shared fantasy world. Common examples include war reenactments and IRL stagings of popular video games involving wizards, knights, and monsters. Politically, the term has been employed to denigrate an activist or group of activists who are who are perceived as pretending to take up a cause, either insincerely or naively.

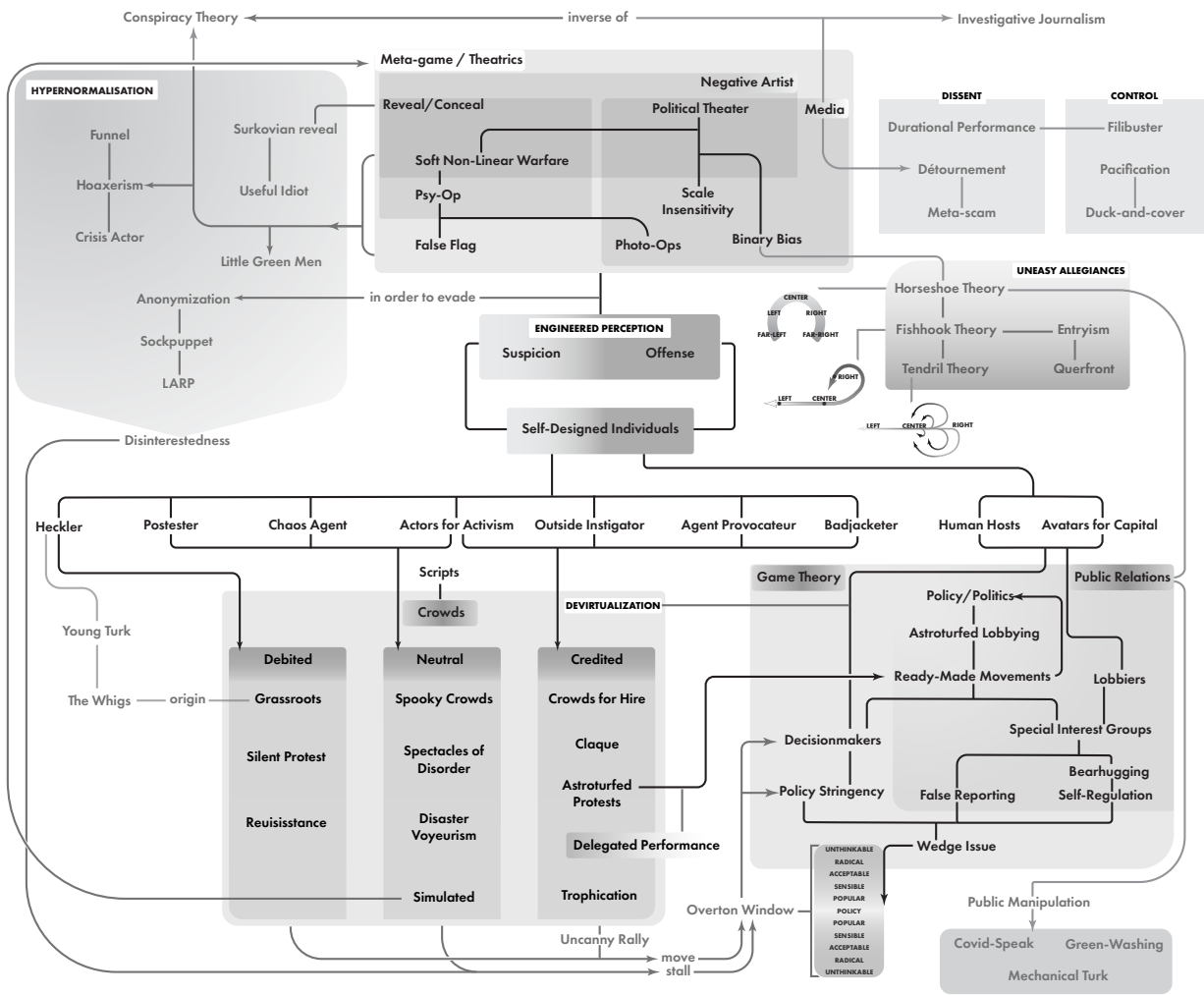
**Young Turk** comes from the group that successfully overthrew Ottoman Empire Sultan Abdul Hamid's absolute monarchy and created a constitutional government in 1908. The term has come to mean a progressive, revolutionary, or rebellious member of an organization or political party agitating for radical reform.

**Negative Artists** (e.g., Vladislav Surkov) use mechanisms of artistic production for nonequitable or non-humane purposes. Negative artists interface with always-persistent crowds weaponizing suspicion and cynicism generated by systems that encourage self-design.

**Postesters** 'do it for the gram.' They seek highly charged visuals. They are the result of social media logic (attention-driven performativity) transplanted into the physical arena of politics.

**Investigative Journalists** are reporters that seek to uncover the inner workings of a company, government or powerful person. Reporters often conduct interviews with workers or even go undercover as a worker to procure firsthand accounts.

**Mechanical Turk** (also known as The Turk or the Automaton Chess Player) represents a form of mechanical judgment and is an early example of technological hoaxing. Amazon uses the name



for its human-led 24/7 data-crunching workforce, carrying out tasks that some companies misleadingly promote as being accomplished through A.I.

**Badjackets** accuse fellow activists of being infiltrators or agents of the state. In doing so, they cloak the accused in a jacket of doubt.

**Crisis Actors** are people hired to act as victims during first-responder crisis training. In recent years, it has become a common bad-faith reflex to allege that victims pictured in real tragedies are "crisis actors" paid to amplify the emotional volume for the press.

**Useful Idiots** are people proselytizing for a cause without fully comprehending the cause's goals.

**Sockpuppets** are online accounts made without any traceable link to the user's identity in order to praise, defend, or defame a person or organization; to manipulate public opinion; or simply to circumvent a platform suspension.

**Agent Provocateurs** act under the pretense of being allied with a political action but engage in illegal activity to undermine its intentions. Police officers, state actors, or opposing political organizations have been known to use this tactic.

**Outside Instigators** enter a crowd-based political action with the intention of blending in and agitating tensions, especially when the crowd/organization's leadership is actively resisting said action.

**Chaos Agent** is a type of disinterested actor who attempts to inflame undifferentiated and undirected disobedience and disorder without allegiance to any action.

**Avatars for Capital / Human Hosts** are those occupying the dwindling number of managerial jobs still needed to facilitate the algorithmically-steered systems of global capitalism. Rewarded with a false sense of systemic security for making the "hard decisions" that ensure quarterly returns, these individuals are the embodiment of an emergent capitalist AI.

**Decisionmakers** are elected or appointed politicians, lawmakers, or commission members who are the target of lobbying. They impose restrictions and requirements through policy and are inclined to optimize for moderate or average policy stringency.

**Special Interest Groups** are lobbyists organized to accomplish specific political goals. They represent and are utilized by firms to lobby a decisionmaker to affect the stringency of a policy.

## CROWD DYNAMICS

*ACTORS/AGENTS: Hecklers, The Claque, Delegated Performers, Disinterested Actors, LARPers*

**Persistent Crowds** take hold in 24/7 protest sites such as occupied areas or ongoing event/art spaces, music festivals, and mass gatherings.

**Readymade Crowds** are at-the-ready groups with recurrent characteristics:

- Pre-established duration and scope of engagement
- Use of prefabricated materials
- Tone/tenor for group's affective register is scripted
- Inversion of expected power dynamics.
- The action/activism is contractual

**Scripts** are how political organizers (both grassroots and astroturfed) disseminate an action. e.g., chants at rally or march, slogans on protest signs, the path that a march takes, speeches given during a rally.

**Uncanny Rallies** reverse ordinary protesting logic. When people come together and demonstrate "for the government to do the right thing," they are usually "speaking truth to power" and "taking a stand against injustice." In an astroturfed demonstration, protesters invert this dynamic by advocating for domination by corporate entities or for the increased negligence of governance.

**Silent Protests** are a demonstration strategy utilizing silence when chanting is expected. It's often employed to bring attention to a group's censorship or a leader's refusal to address an issue.

**Durational Performance**, when astroturfed, is a kind of "brute force" hacking wherein financial resources are used to extend rally duration beyond organic will and stamina. In turn the point of political impact can be expedited.

## MEDIA/THEATRICS/MANUFACTURE

*ACTORS/AGENTS: Negative Artists, Postesters, Investigative Journalists, Mechanical Turks, Young Turk, Agent Provocateurs*

**Engineered Perception** is the practice of seeding and promoting narratives via mass media and popular culture as well as through governance and international diplomacy with the aim of reinforcing authority and providing cover for objectionable policies.

**Weaponized Aesthetics** is the technique of using art and aesthetics to achieve soft-power objectives.

**Non-Linear Warfare** is a military tactic devised by Vladimir Putin and Vladislav Surkov that creates instability and uncertainty in an opponent or region by introducing forces/agents that shift alliances, even mid-battle.

**Binary Bias** is a tendency toward compressing complex or wide-ranging data points into a simple, binary, either/or choice. Binary Bias may be exploited by media and politicians to sell products or align followers into in-/out-groups.

**Scope Insensitivity** is a cognitive bias in which differences in scope or scale are ignored. Can be rhetorically exploited by ascribing equivalence to issues operating on divergent scopes, scales or magnitudes.

**Hypernormalisation** (per Alexei Yurchak) emerges as a shared condition where extraordinary contradictions between lived reality and propaganda newscasts are internalized as ordinary.

**Funnels** are a feature of online content platforms wherein algorithmic preferences direct people towards further radicalization.

**Uneasy Allegiances** are fragile formations between disparate groups held together by shared political affinities. Unpredictable in their collective actions, they can introduce bivalent points of intervention into oppositional political organizing

**Horseshoe Theory** plots the political spectrum from left to right along a curved line resembling a horseshoe, suggesting that the extremities are in fact topologically and therefore also ideologically close. The theory valorizes centrism as the only sensible opposition to radicalism, and forecloses a more nuanced and complex accounting of political allegiance.

**Spectacles of Disorder** appear when leaders are unable to maintain a coherent narrative in the face of a crisis and there is confusion over who is responsible for what action (grassroots or astroturfed). There is a voyeuristic fascination with public disorder, and it can be seeded through binary bias, scope insensitivity, and engineered perception.

**Devirtualization** of an action happens when reality outruns its own production—i.e., structures and patterns occurring in reality are digitized and then this simulation is re-materialized, now differing from original referent.

**Reusissance** is a mutual imbrication of economy and protest. (taken from the concept of jouissance, a mutual imbrication of the economy and pleasure.)

**Credited & Debited Crowds** is a concept introduced by astroturfing company Crowds On Demand CEO, Adam Swart wherein paid protesters are immediately credited for time spent in protesting, while volunteer activists are essentially debited for time spent with future compensation paid in the form of beneficial policy outcomes.

**Self-Design** happens when mediated communication nudges an individual to construct a highly aestheticized identity and persona to optimize their social/professional success (particularly online).

**Surkovian Reveal** interacts with systems that produce self-design, to incite doubt and cynicism among audience/mass. (e.g. Vladislav Surkov's competing stagings of political theater laid bare by Surkov himself as a collection of artificial constructs.)

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

*ACTORS/AGENTS: Crisis Actors, Useful Idiots, Sockpuppets, Outside Instigators, Chaos Agents, Badjackets, Avatars of Capital / Human Hosts*

**Conspiracy Theories** are counter-narratives of historical events that purport to reveal deeper truths of power and control. Though sometimes seeded by an individual entity and very often containing selected proven facts, they evolve through distributed networks of strangers forging connections between disparate and often unrelated bits of information or "evidence."

**Meta-Scam** turns a root scam against itself. The meta-scam uses an oppressive structure to its own disadvantage. In media, meta-scams can take the form of a political parody shared in earnest and thereby unwittingly exposing/endorsing contradictory or goofy political positions.

**Psy-Ops (Psychological Operations)** is a tactic wherein individuals, groups, and/or governments are targeted with a particular information set so as to influence emotions, motives, and objective reasoning. The term Psy-Op has also become vernacular for describing suspicious activist behavior.

**White Psy-Ops** are actions attributable to a known source due to said source issuing an official statement or an action clearly emanating from it.

**Grey Psy-Op** are actions by sources that remain deliberately ambiguous; actions neither confirmed nor denied, obfuscated by doubt.

**Black Psy-Ops** are designed to appear to be emanating from an oppositional source. The Black Psy-Op architect is hidden and would deny any and all involvement. Vernacular usage of Psy-Op commonly refers to Black Psy-Ops.

**Little Green Men** are unidentified troops deployed by states. The term originated during the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 when Russia deployed special forces without insignia to Crimea. This "grey psy-op" was also deployed in response to uprisings across the U.S in 2020.

**False Flags** arise when a government or organization acts under disguise creating the illusion that the given (often incendiary) action is carried out by the opposition. Often used with the aim of swaying public opinion.

**Détournement** is French for "reroute," "divert," or "hijack." Describing a critical avant-garde technique of appropriating images and language and recoding them to expose underlying ideological truths, the term was coined in the 1950s by the Letterist International and adapted by the Situationist International. It is commonly used in the sense of "turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself."

**Hoaxerism** is the calculated layering of Conspiracy Theories to dismantle historical and scientific consensus. The hoaxer will often dubiously reframe pivotal political events as False Fags.

## LOBBYING / POLICY

*ACTORS/AGENTS: Decisionmakers, Special Interest Groups*

**Simple Model of Lobbying** is an ideal that assumes a neutral dynamic between special interest groups and a decisionmaker wherein this relationship informs a non-partisan equilibrium for policy.

**Game Theory** reduces social relations to quantified mathematical models rendering humans as "rational actors" therein. This quantification of behavior abstracts and detaches issues from their lived experiences. It is often used to justify neoliberal models of governance.

**Bearhugging** is a corporate strategy of embracing an opposing party, smothering them with praise and subsidies in order to muffle dissent, and even render them beholden to corporate interests.

**Self-Regulation** is a corporate counter-lobbying strategy wherein a firm commits to regulate its own practices. This allows firms to eschew external critique.

**Public Relations (PR)** is the practice of shaping public interest and desire through strategic mass communication. The profession of PR was first outlined in the 1910s-20s by Edward Bernays, who aiming to expand the tobacco market to women, famously set up a photo-op during a suffragettes march, subsequently advertising cigarettes as "freedom torches."

**Green-Washing** is a PR strategy used by companies to present a more ethically environmental brand image as a way of a.) distracting from or covering up other other harmful practices (e.g., labeling a food 'all-natural'), and/or b.) increasing profit margin by reducing service/quality while maintaining or even increasing cost to consumer (e.g., cut-back on hotel/travel amenities)

**Covid-Speak** happens when terminology that gained mass public awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic is misappropriated in non-pandemic contexts. The term "contact tracing" has been misused to describe the well-established practice of network tracing through state surveillance, and called on to identify outside agitators in Minnesota.

**Wedge Issues** are divisive topics upon which binary biases are reified and polarized by special interest groups.

**Trophification** results when a person becomes an icon/trophy by being held up as a living example for the importance and righteousness of a specific cause. This practice can be undertaken voluntarily or through ethically dubious coercion and payment.

**Overton Window** (also known as the window of discourse) is the space of perceived political viability for a given idea. Per Joseph P. Overton, ideations of governance move from Unthinkable (outside the window) to Radical, Acceptable, and Sensible until they arrive at Popular, and can then become Policy.