

Why do none of Trump's jokes feel like jokes

Was he joking or not? That was the big question emerging from President Donald Trump's Tulsa rally on June 20, when he said "the bad part" about widespread coronavirus testing is the increased number of cases it reveals.

The walkback from various administration officials was quick and predictable: The remark was "made in *jest*, " "tongue in cheek, " just another presidential joke. Trump's own walkback of the walkback — "I don't kid" — may have struck some people as confusing.

jest 笑话; 玩笑

deadpan 面无表情的; 故作严肃的

Trump's chief model, it seems to me, is the *deadpan* performance-art comedy of people such as Andy Kaufman and Sacha Baron Cohen. They created elaborate put-on characters.

The key to pulling off this sort of comedy is to stick with the *ruse*, to stay in character, to *dupe* the audience for as long as possible.

ruse 策略; 诡计

dupe 欺骗; 愚弄

Trump has proved *adept* at sustaining the put-on. He never breaks character. He never laughs at his own jokes. On those rare occasions when he feels compelled to backtrack from an especially ridiculous comment, he does so with a scripted monotone of can't-miss-it *insincerity*.

adept 熟练的; 内行

insincerity 不真诚; 伪善

That may be the key to understanding the most head-snapping moments of Trump's presidency, from his insistence that his *Inauguration* Day crowd on the far-from-full Mall was bigger than Barack Obama's packed *throng* eight years earlier, to his *rambling* explanation for that shaky ramp walk at West Point last month. These moments are so bizarre, so out of proportion, so brazenly at odds with visible evidence that they make sense only as performance art. And in that respect, Trump is *peerless*.

inauguration 就职典礼; 开创

throng 人群; 众多

ramble 漫步; 闲逛

peerless 无与伦比的