



Political Games

Brian Schrank, Art Games Class, DePaul University

Political Game Types

- ❖ Institutional critique (games critical of game culture)
- ❖ Games to motivate politics or persuade people
- ❖ Under-represented people and perspectives
- ❖ Games that play with “The Real”

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Institutional Critique in Art



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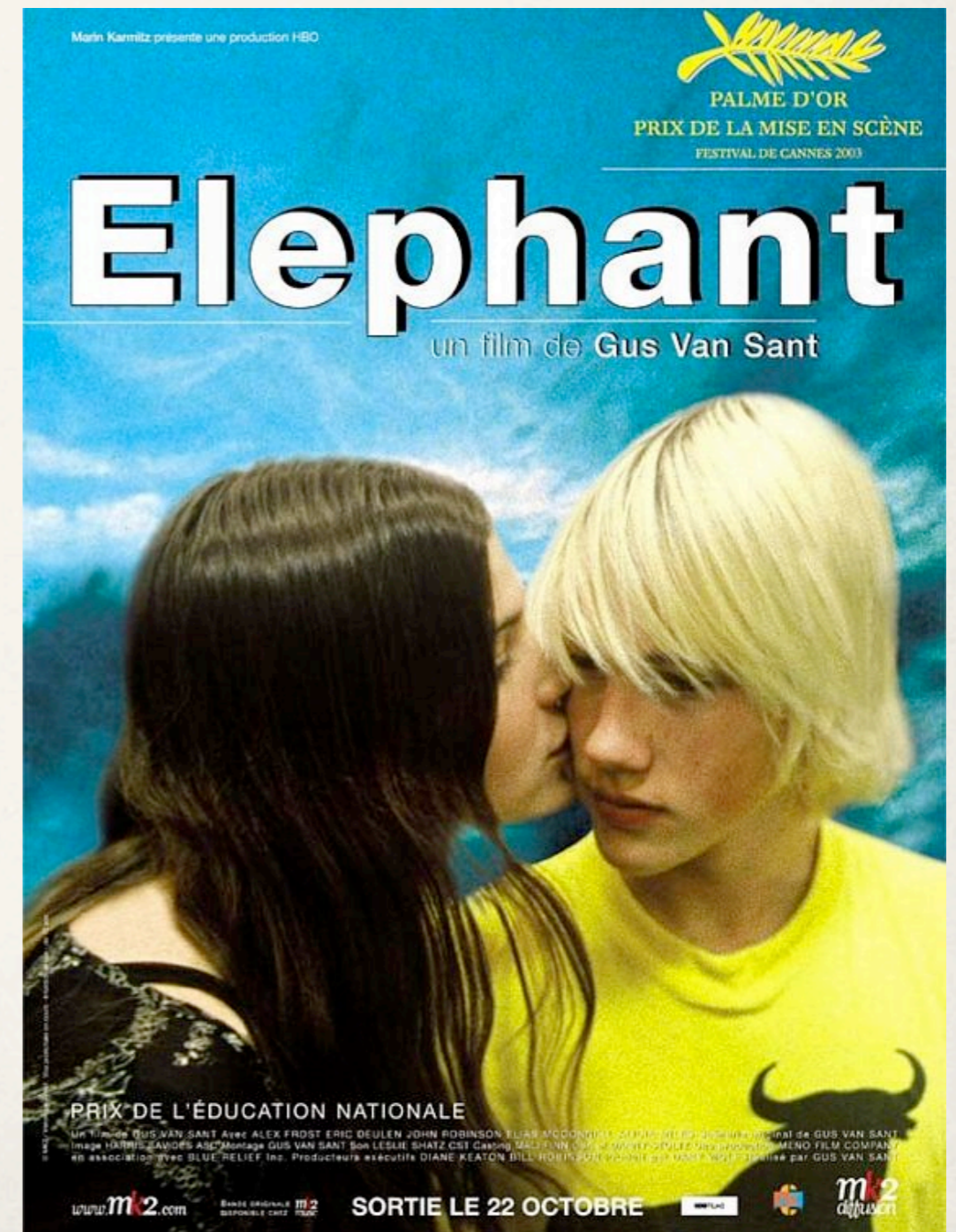


Institutional Critique in Games

- ❖ Super Columbine Massacre RPG!



- ❖ Is Super Columbine Massacre RPG! different from Elephant (a film about the same subject)?



Institutional Critique in Games

- ❖ “Dead in Iraq” performance by Joseph DeLappe in America’s Army
 - ❖ reads every soldier’s name who’s died in Iraq.



Institutional Critique in Games

- ❖ Velvet Strike actions in Counter-Strike

- ❖ kidnap teammates

- ❖ double-agent

- ❖ gay images

- ❖ peace images



Institutional Critique in Games

- ❖ SimCopter hack by Artmark and Yes Men founder Jacques Servin
 - ❖ programmer at Maxis put in gay “himbos”



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Games to motivate politics or persuade people

- ❖ Peace is possible, but extremely hard.
- ❖ Live “enemy’s” perspective

PEACEMAKER™ A Video Game to Promote Peace



Games to motivate politics or persuade people

- ❖ Basically anything at Games 4 Change conference



Games to motivate politics or persuade people

- ❖ Operation Pedo Priest by Molleindustria



Games to motivate politics or persuade people

- ❖ Games by Ian Bogost

- ❖ Disaffected!



- ❖ Airport Security



Games to motivate politics or persuade people

- ❖ BorderXing is about illegally sneaking across national borders
- ❖ The piece was exhibited at the Tate Museum of Art



Political Game Types

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- ❖ **Under-represented people and perspectives**
- ❖ Games that play with “The Real”

Under-represented people and perspectives

- ✦ anything by Auntie Pixelante

✦ Dys4ia



Under-represented people and perspectives

- ❖ games by women about being a woman

“Hey Baby”



Under-represented people and perspectives

- ❖ If you can find any games about race, e.g. what it's like to be Hispanic, Black, Asian, Jewish, etc. please let me know.



Under-represented people and perspectives

- ❖ “Special Force” by Hezbollah (designated as terrorist group by US)



Under-represented people and perspectives

- ❖ Al Qaeda game



Political Game Types

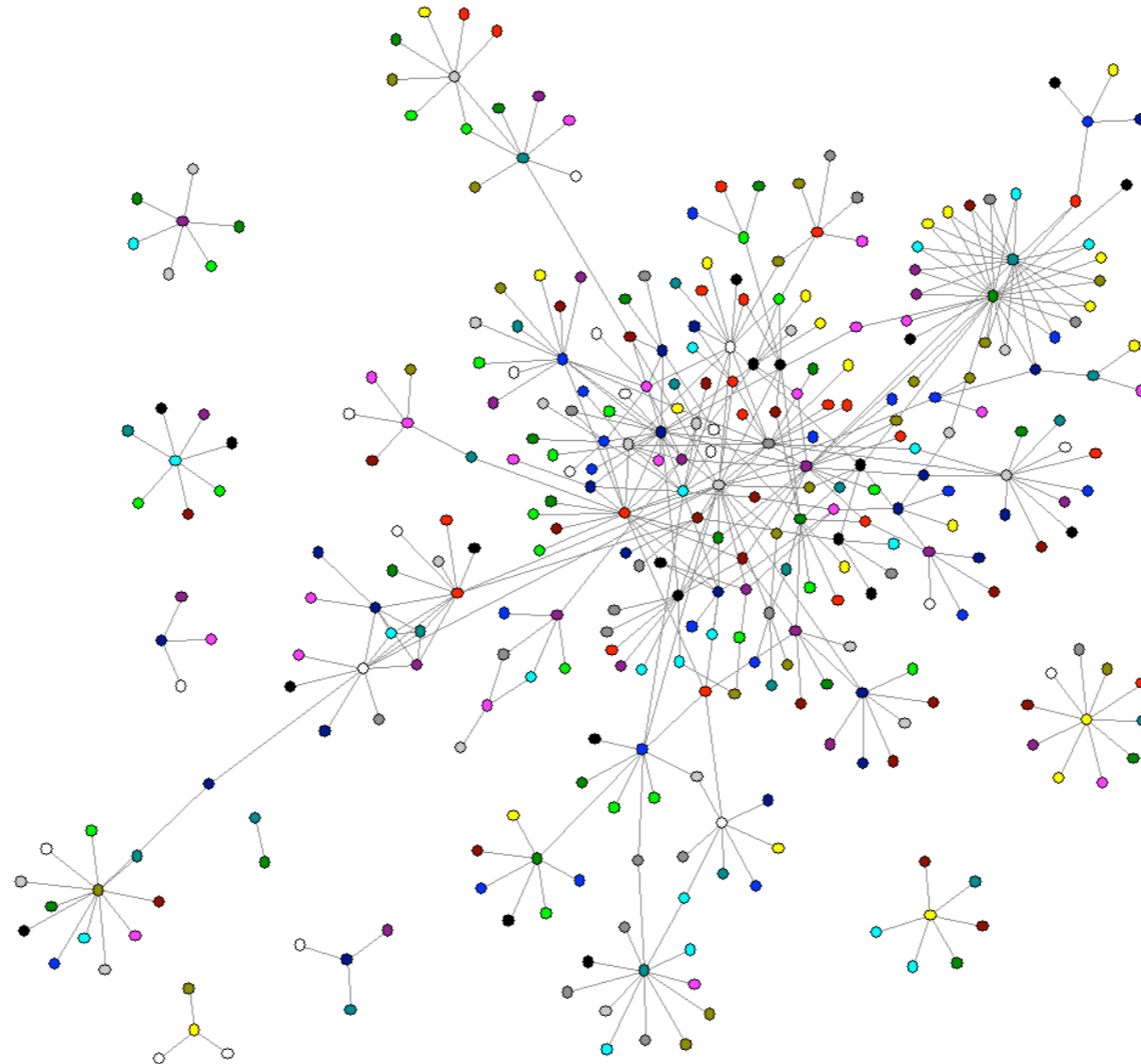
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Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)



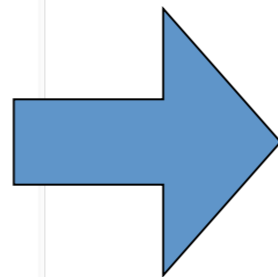
Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)

- “Symbolic Order”
 - is the social psychic structure

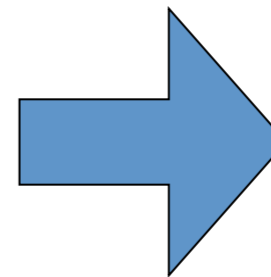


Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)

- “Symbolic Order”
 - it is **everything** we know about the world.

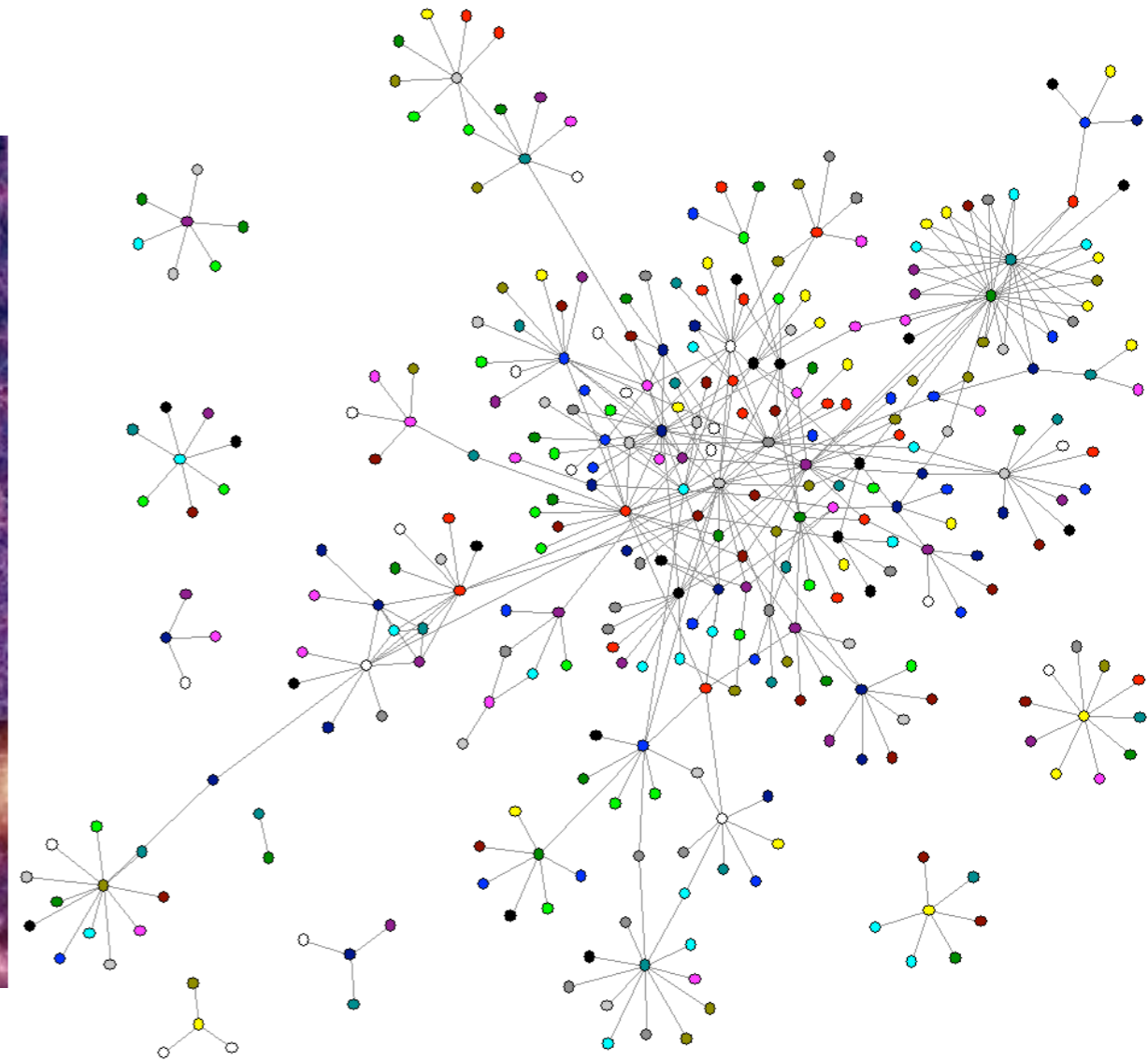


$$1+1=2$$



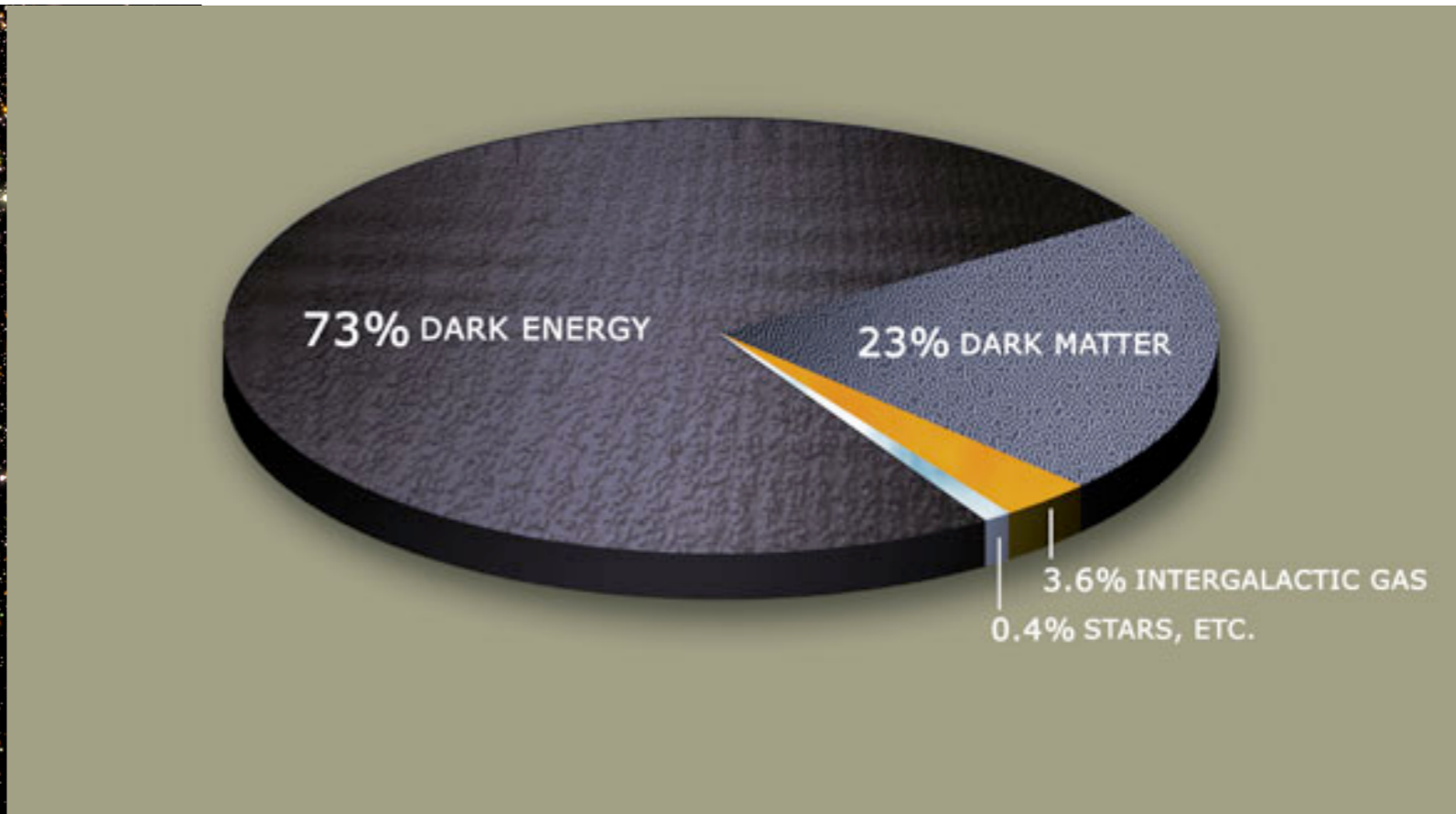
Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)

- “Symbolic Order”
 - colossal distributed network with unfathomable redundancy



Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)

- “Symbolic Order”
 - is the social psychic structure
- “The Real”
 - is everything outside our personal realities



Jacques Lacan (Psychoanalyst)

- “Symbolic Order”
 - is the social psychic structure
- “The Real”
 - is all that is lacking in the symbolic order
 - is everything we can't explain (so it seems to change)
 - is that which breaks down our symbolic order
 - is an unfathomable something that permeates things as a trace of the sublime

Alfred Hitchcock

- “The Real” breaks down our symbolic order



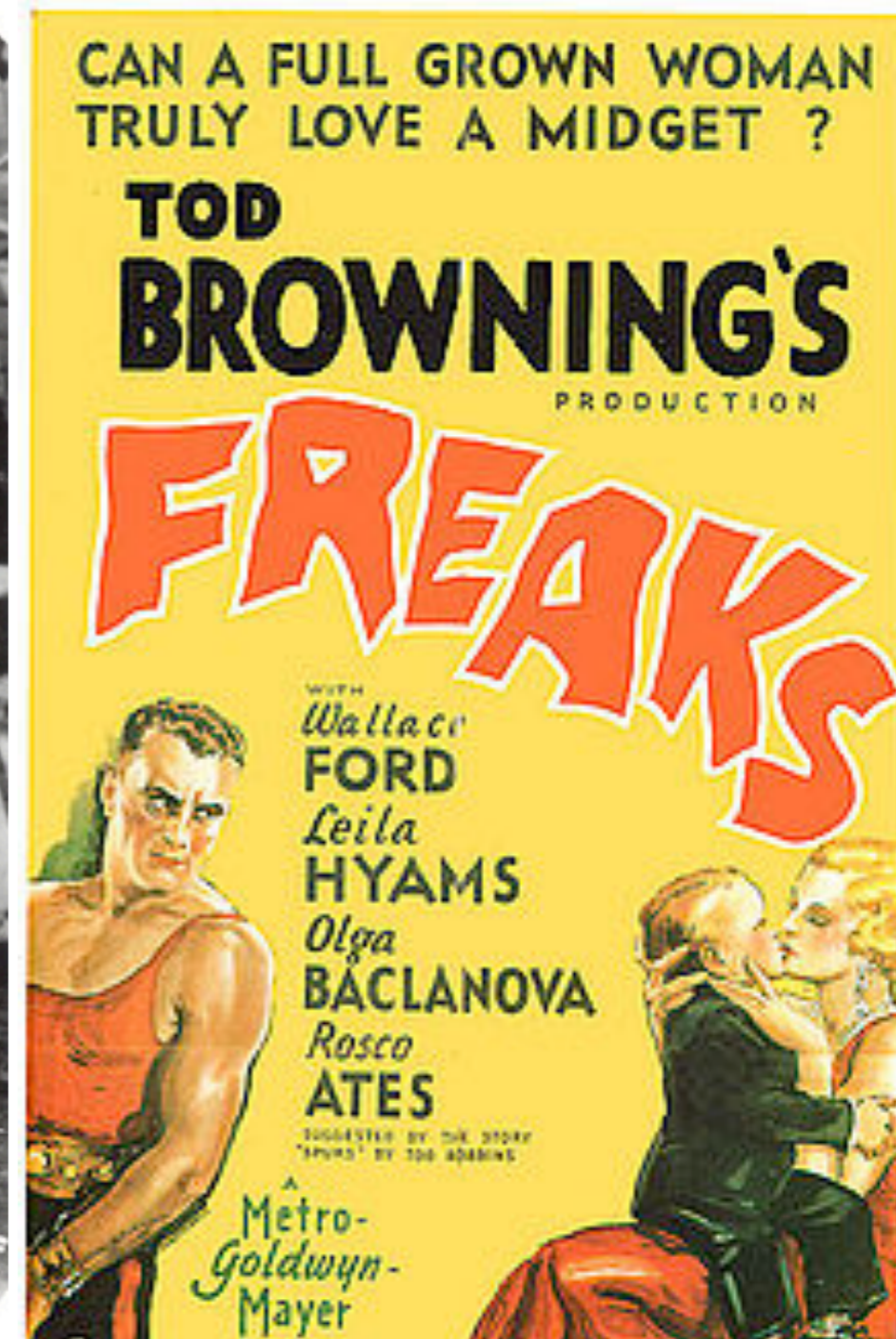
Cindy Sherman (Photographer)

- “The Real” is what’s lacking in the symbolic order



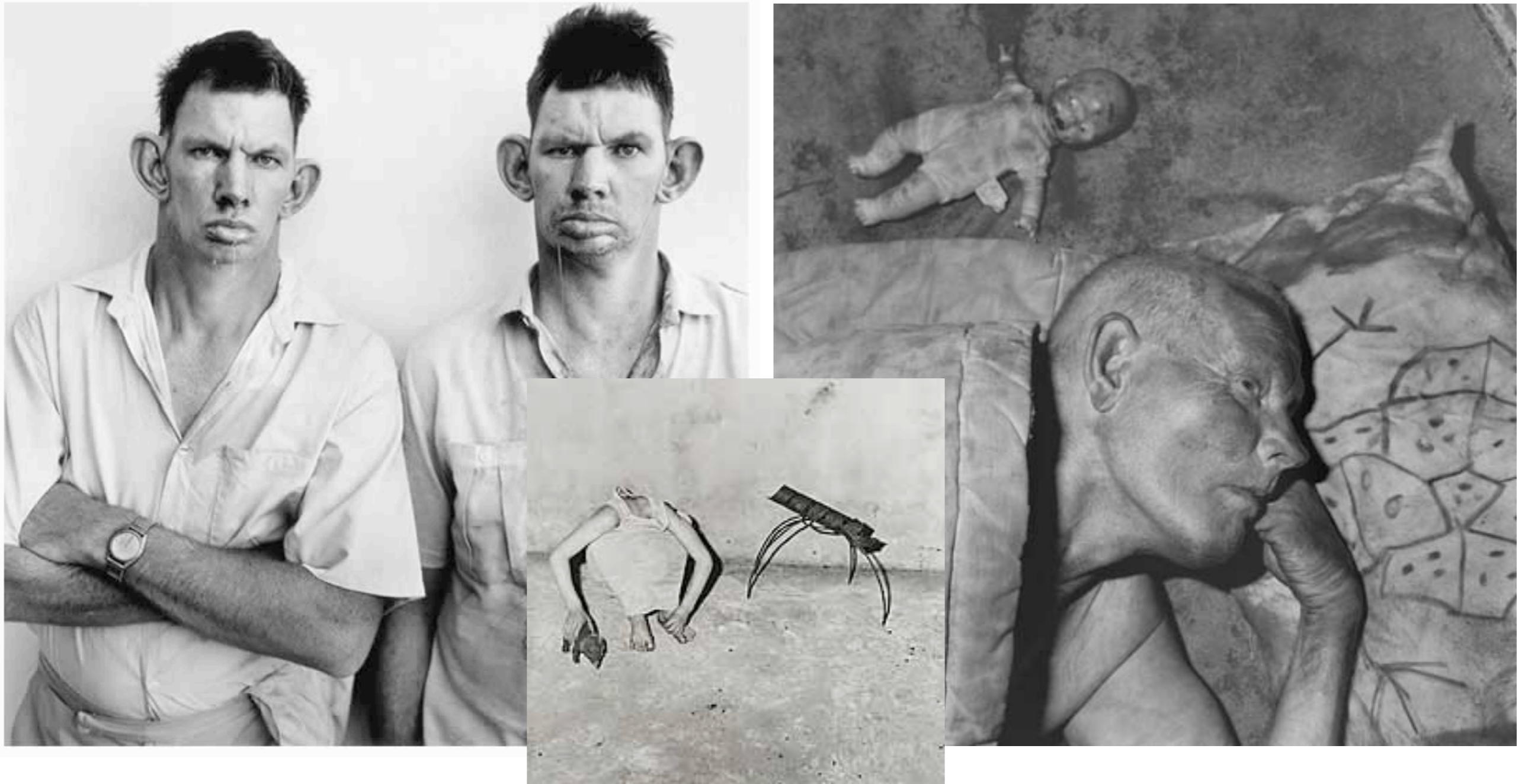
“Freaks” film

- “The Real” is what we struggle to identify with



Roger Ballen (Photographer)

- “The Real” unfathomable, terrible trace of the sublime



Just opened, near Widyaduta Klaten



Watch Žižek video

Magic Circle



“All play moves within a play-ground... forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.”



M

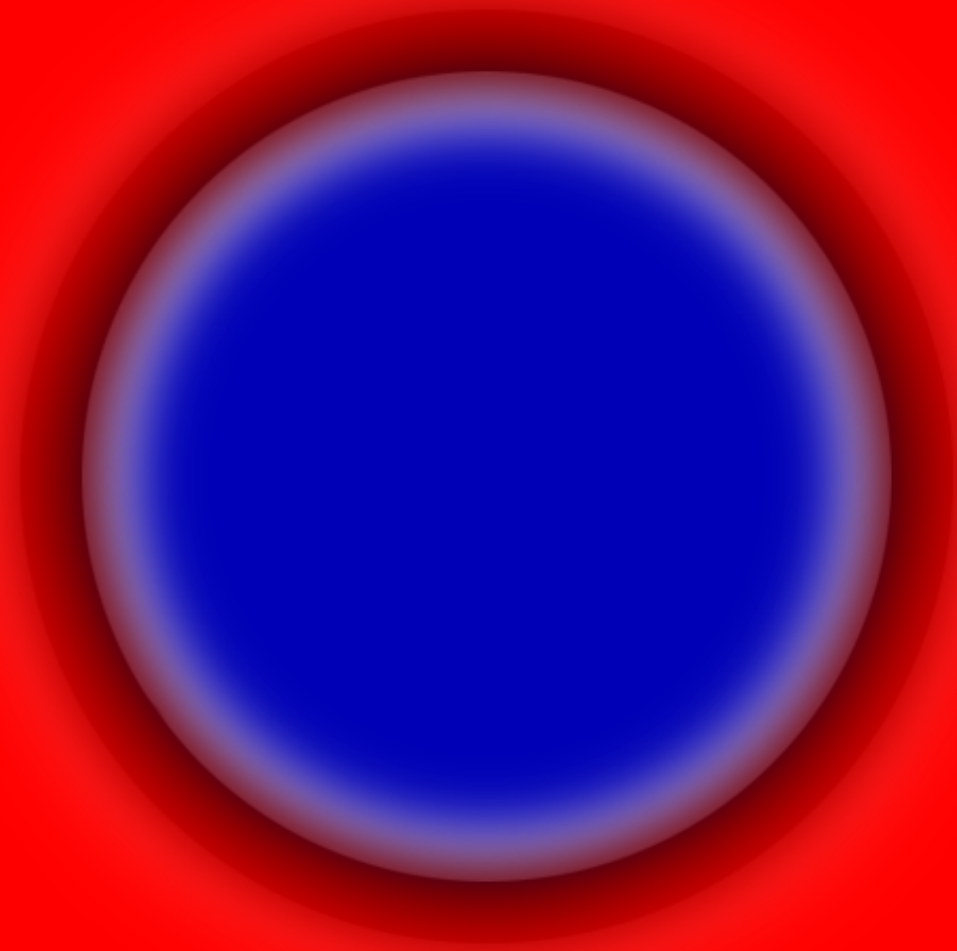
World: **1**

- robust, ordinary social world



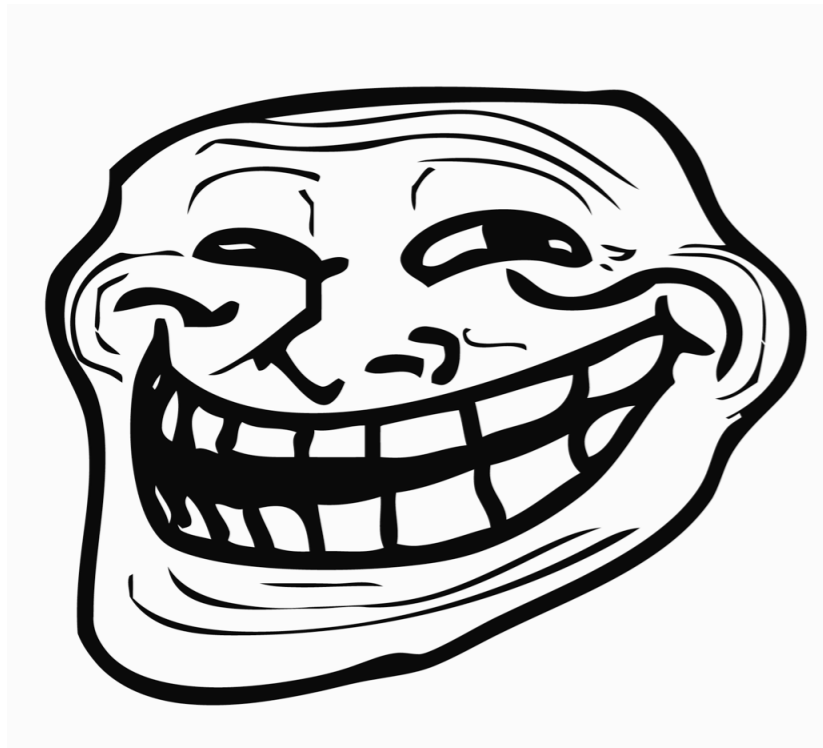
M

World: 2



- robust, ordinary social world
- delicate play-world

M



ordinary world wins

- “The spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. He reveals the **relativity and fragility** of the play-world. He robs play of its illusion.” —Huizinga

N

play-world wins



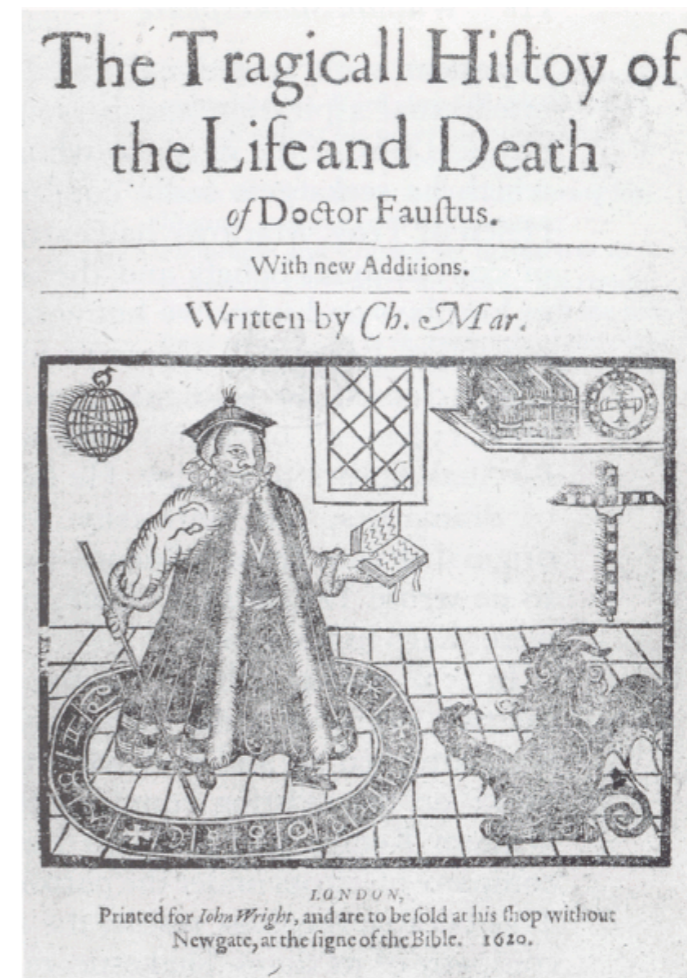
- “[Alternate Reality Games] consciously exploit the ambiguity of **expanding beyond the basic boundaries of the magic circle**. This leads to the point where the game interface is completely ambiguous: Any action could be a game action.” — Markus Montola

N



- This isn't unusual. It's common to have unusual or elevated experiences in public....
- The symbolic order remains unaffected.
- “The Real” has still not made its appearance.

Magic Circle must disrupt the Symbolic Order by invoking “The Real”



Doctor Faustus was 16th century play. Sells soul to devil for knowledge. Hero and fool. Science and magic. All categories are messed up and in play.

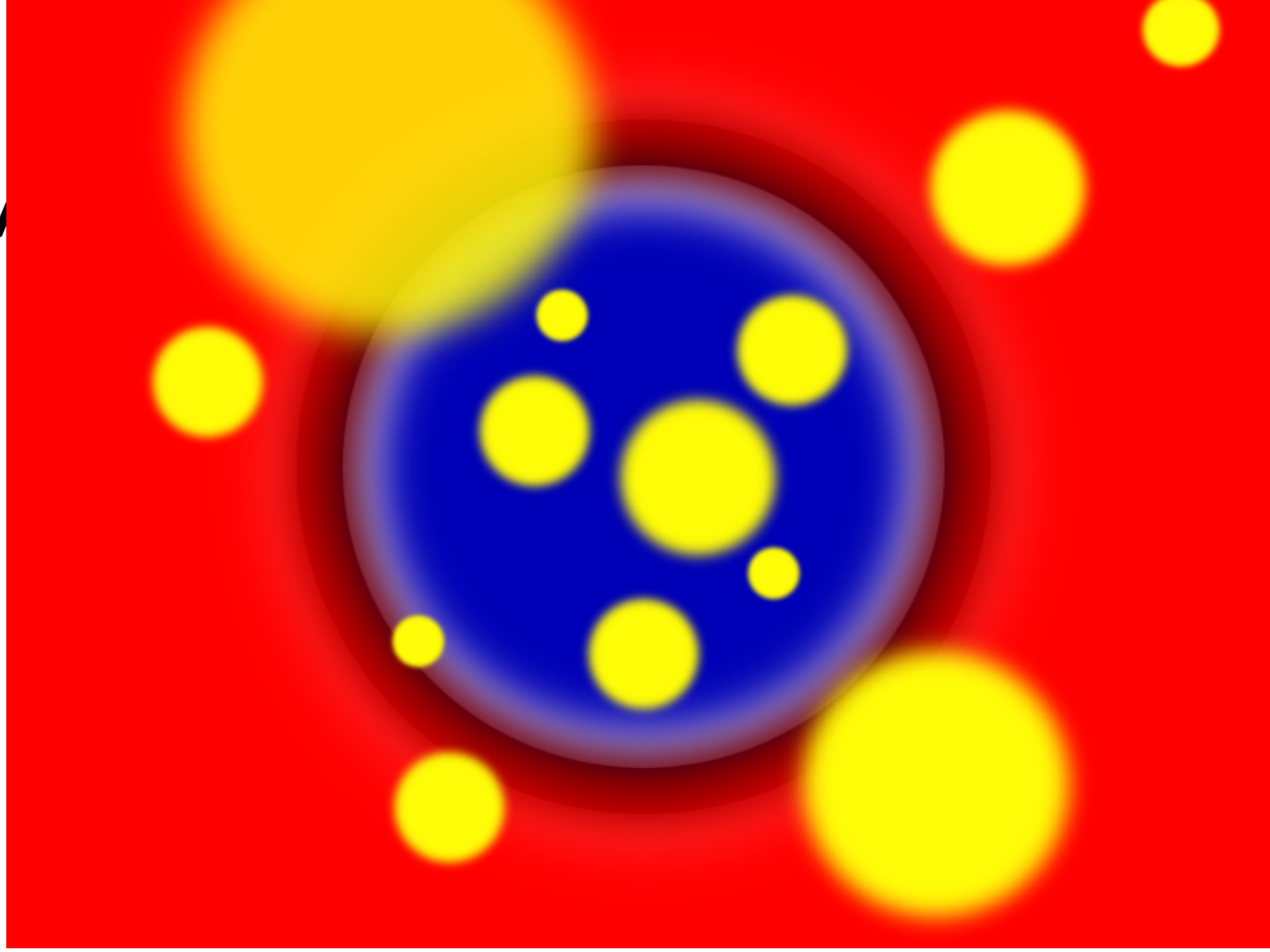
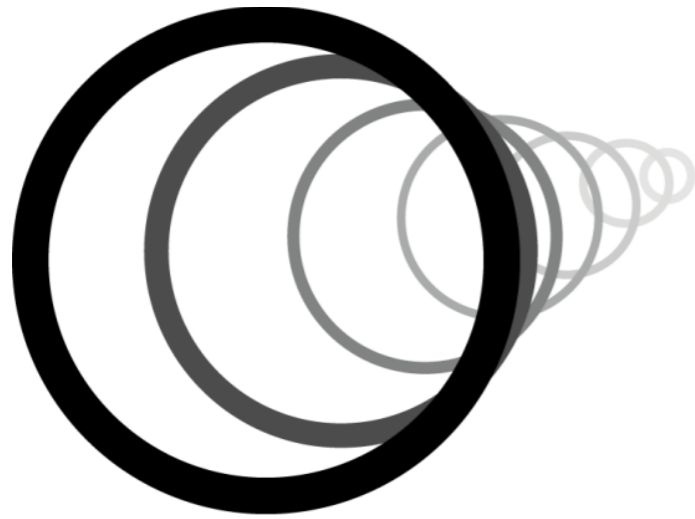
Magic Circle (in practice)



• “We have to reconstruct, within our own minds and with our own imagination, the landscape of the Foretime: filled with strange and frightening things, with a power that could as easily create or destroy—but every part of it is uniquely holy.”

• —Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: ritual magic in contemporary England

M



World: 3

1. robust, ordinary social world
2. delicate play-world
3. **real** or **sacred** world emerges

Magic Circle (in practice)



Magic Circle: playing with the real



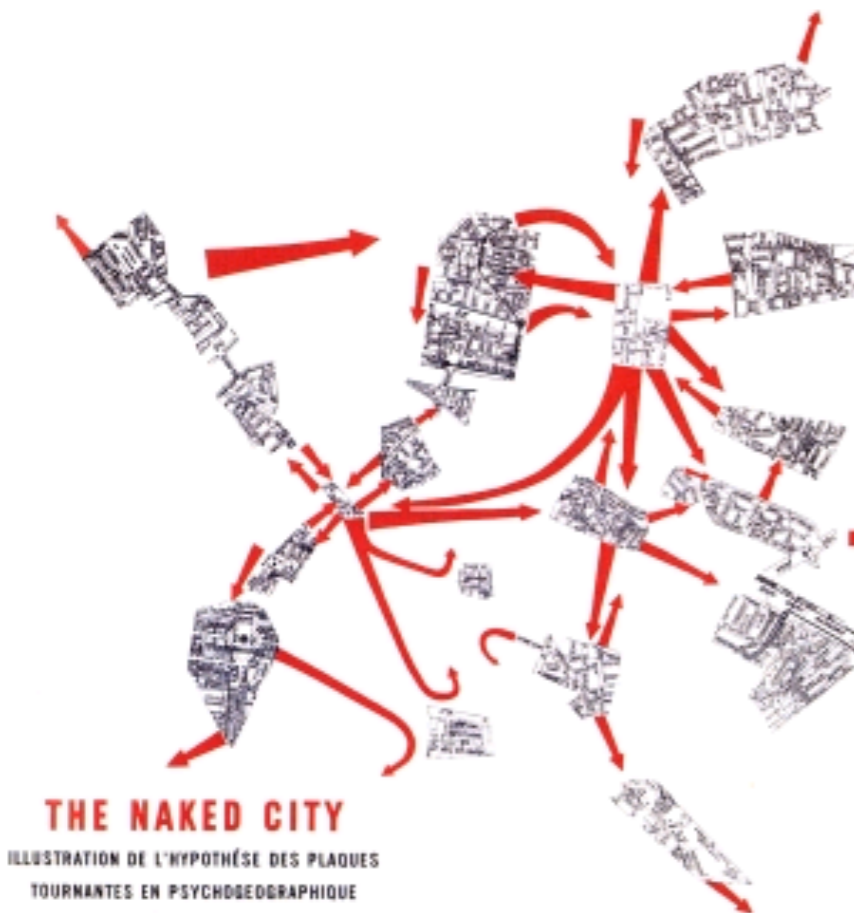
- Yoko Ono's Cut Piece (1964 and repeated)
 - mixes public and private
 - mixes violence and trust
 - mixes performer and audience

Magic Circle: playing with the real



- Wafaa Bilal's Domestic Tension (May 2007)
 - Iraqi-born man lived in a Chicago gallery for a month
 - With 24h webcam and remote-controlled paintgun
 - Online players shot over 60,000 rounds

Magic Circle: playing with the real



- Situationists
 - created games and art that gave voice and form to the mass, historic 1968 riots and strikes in France.

Magic Circle: playing with the real



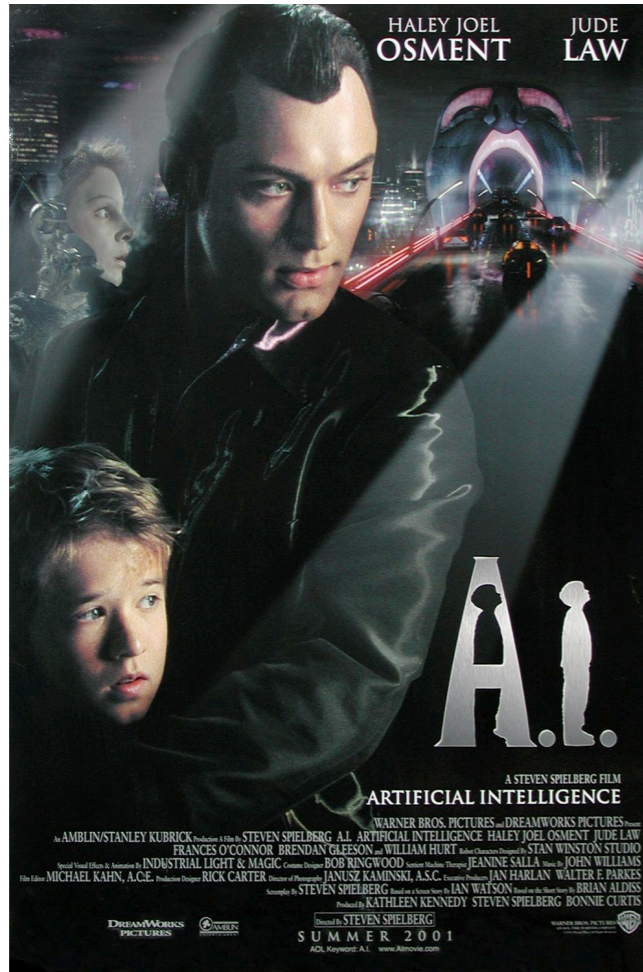
- “Pushing the Black Panther Party across the line from symbolic to literal violence was in fact one of the main goals of COINTELPRO, an FBI program.”

Magic Circle: playing with the real



- Alternate Reality Games (ARGs)
- World Without Oil
 - was not about oil, but disarming shock and empowering players to play with the “spectacle”

Magic Circle: playing with the real



- The Beast was an ARG meant to whip up buzz about the A.I. film.
- After the terrorist acts of 9/11, one highly effective player group called, “The Cloudmakers” began discussing “solving 9/11”
 - This is not a bug of ARGs, but a feature to be exploited.

Magic Circle: playing with the real



- Pac-Manhattan (run around city—don't get hit by a car!)

Magic Circle: playing with the real



Magic Circle: playing with the real



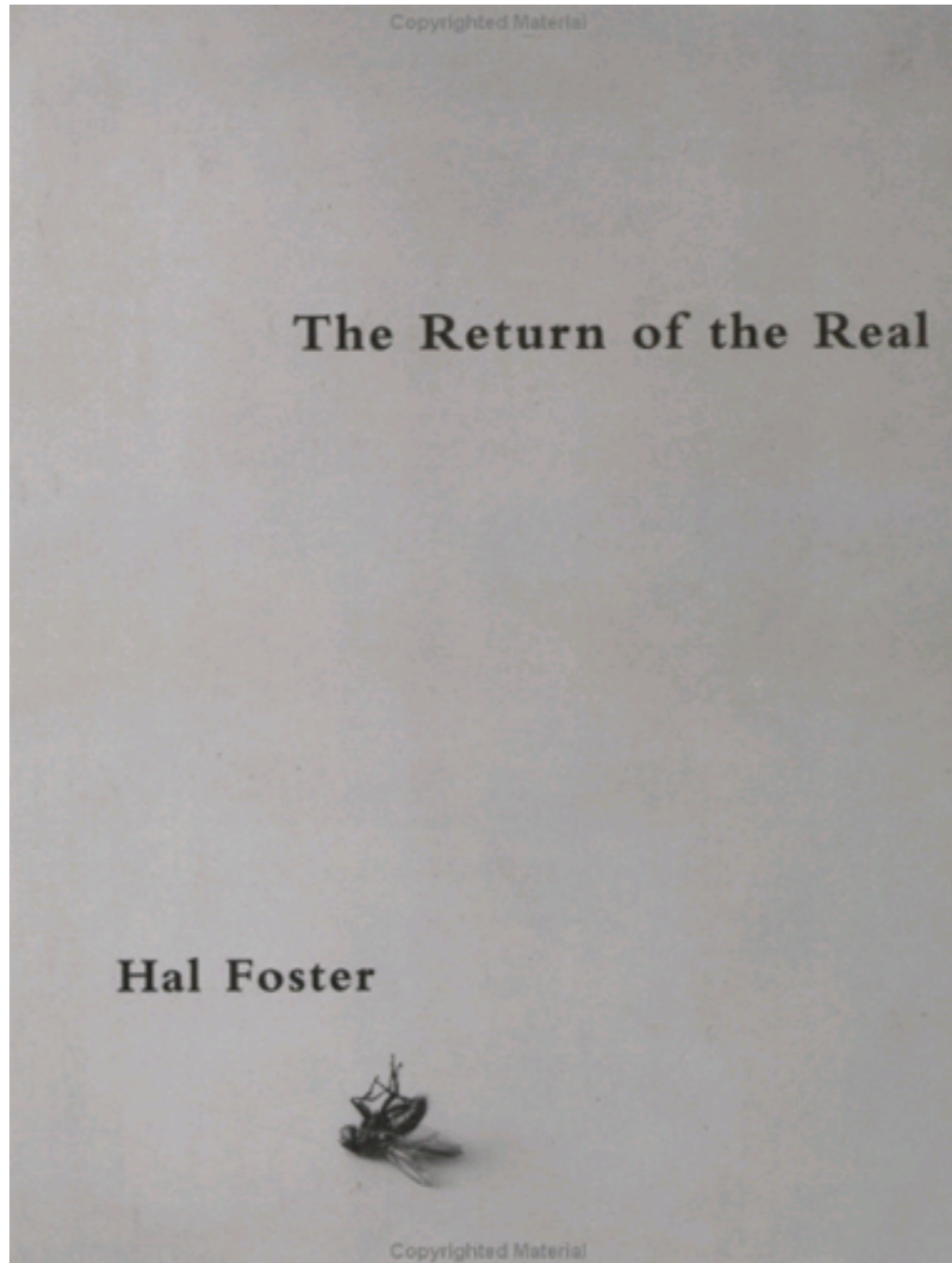
“Code Performer”

- // Grey Goo Number Nine
- // (cc) 2006 Gazira Babeli - gazirababeli.com
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- // =====
- // HOW TO: Drag/Copy/Add this script on a prim
- list GG = ["abe4de67-77e8-2fe2-c20d-118e7549b7b8", // super mario
- "6a32f6a0-c5f0-a7f6-1911-ca43e804dda6". // warhol banana

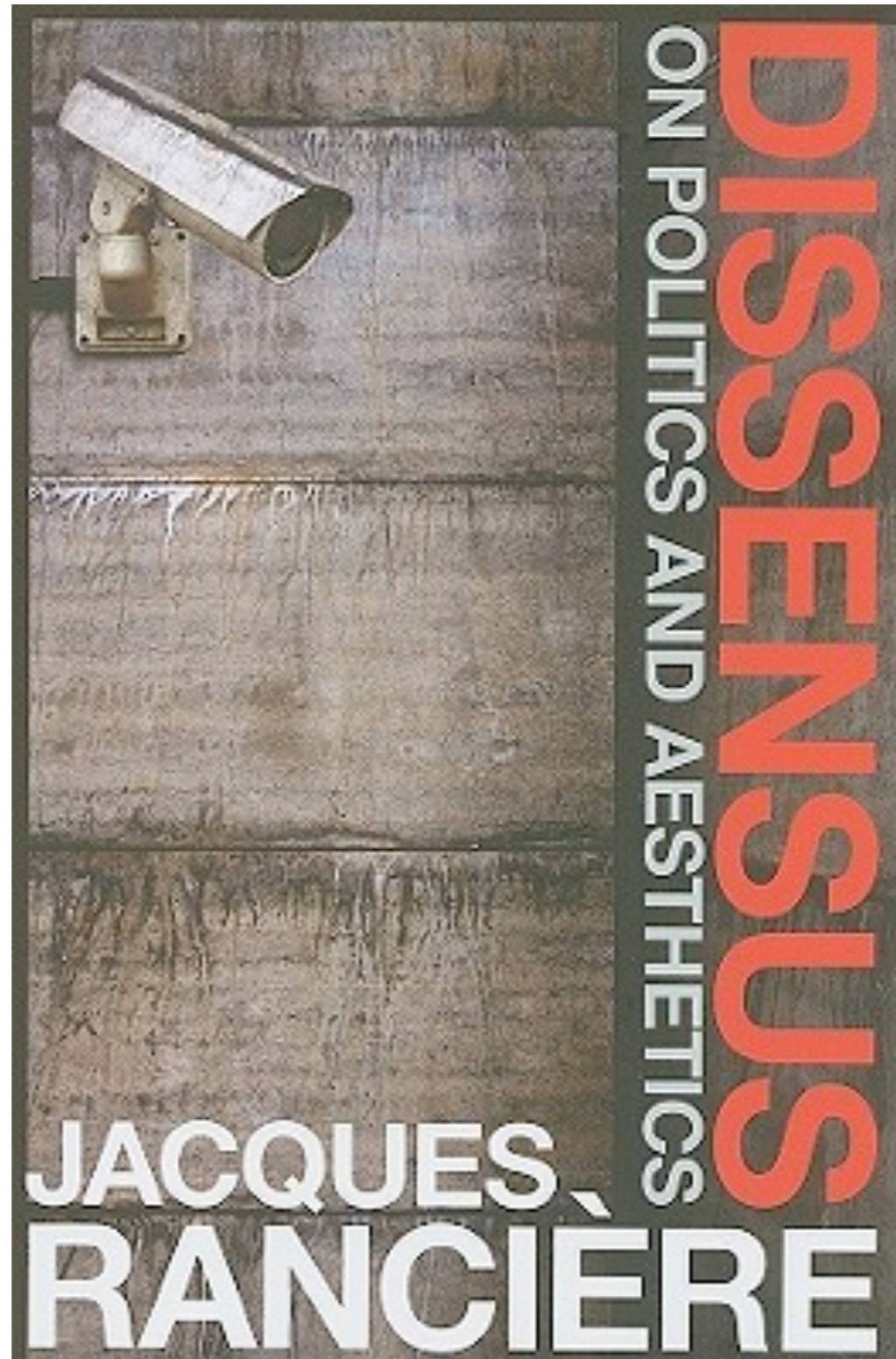
“Unauthorized Installations”

“ ‘griefing is a bourgeois concept’ —Leon Trotzky”

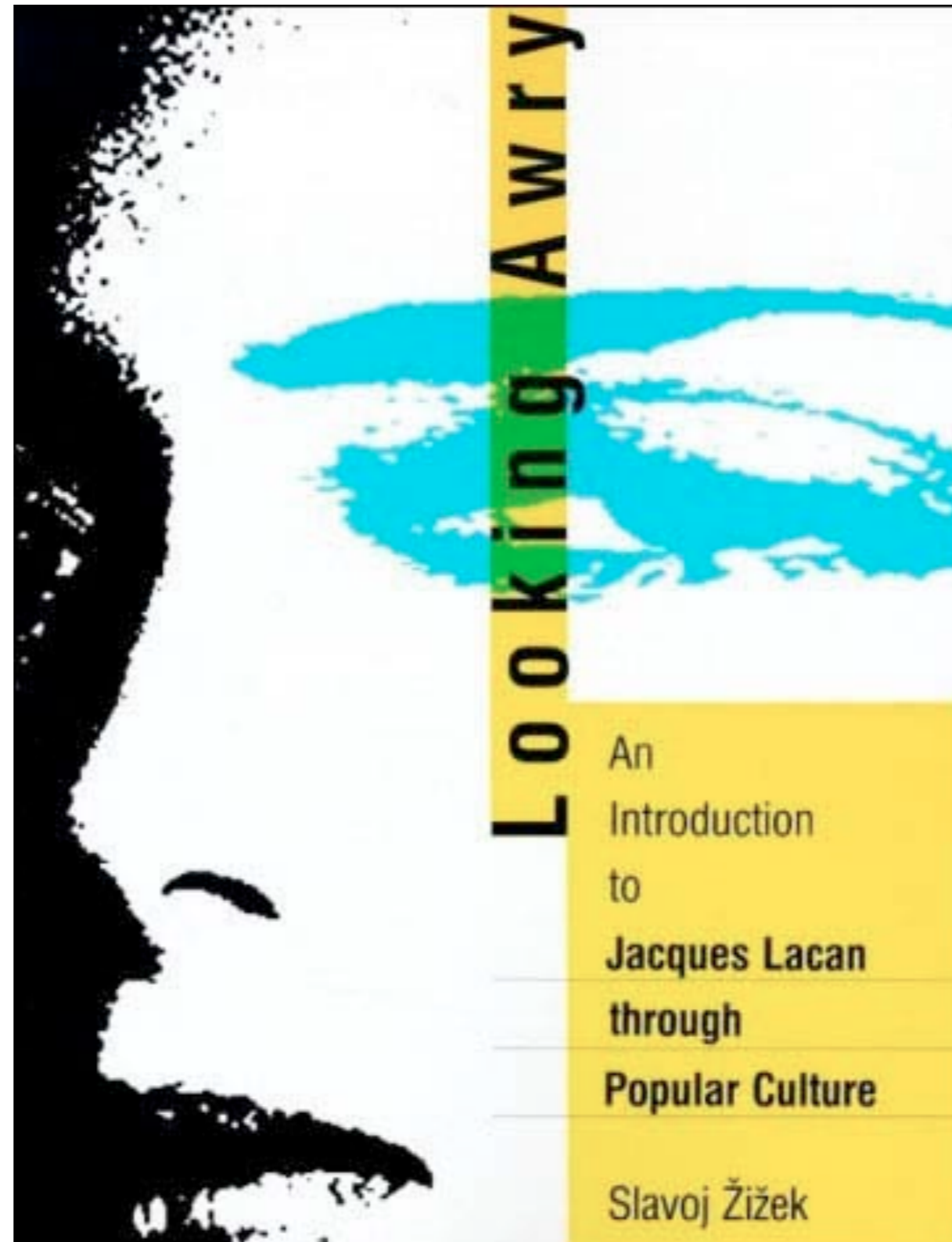
For more on “The Real” in art:



For more on changing the Symbolic Order through Art



For more on Lacan through Pop Culture references





Questions?