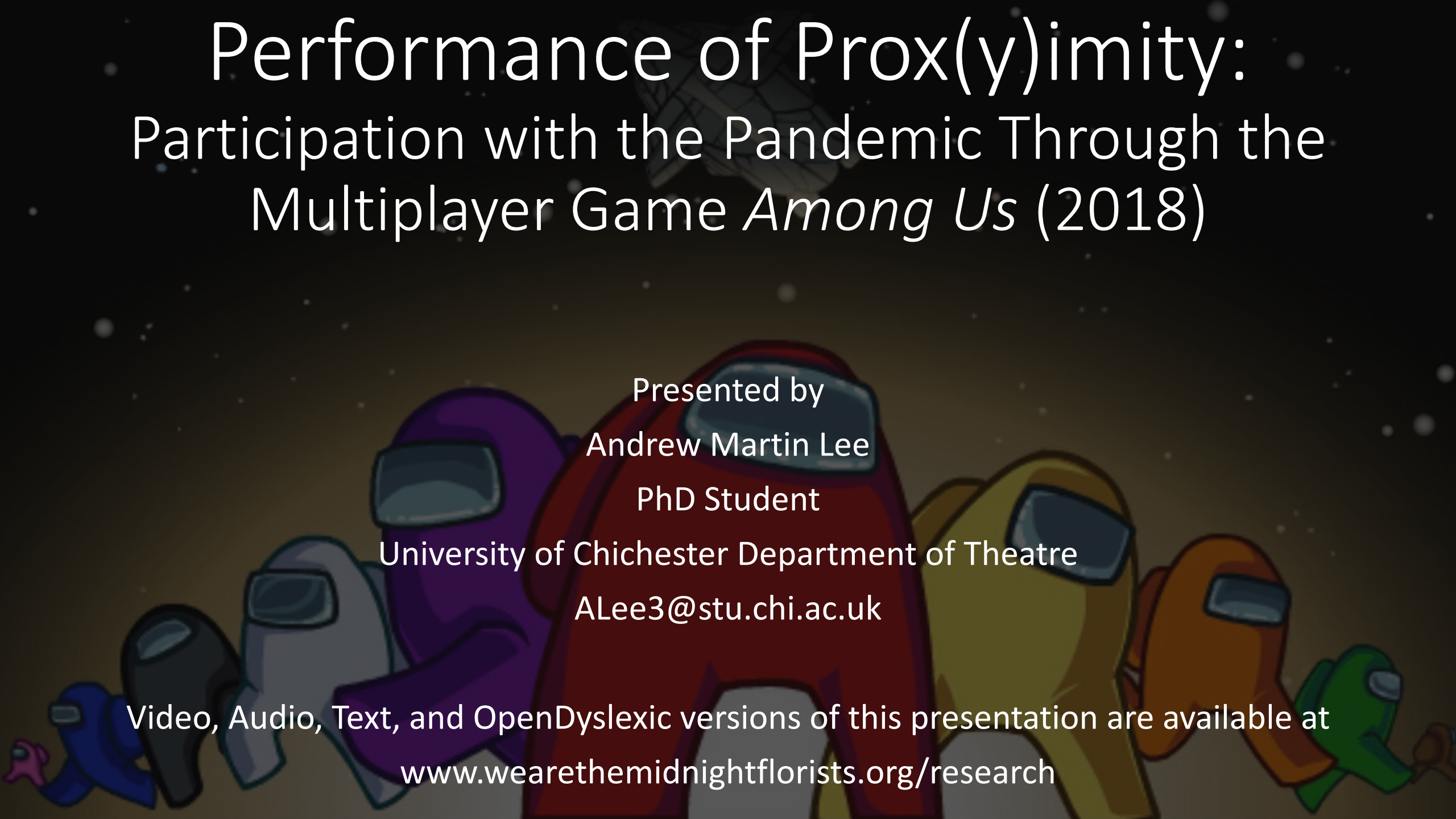
Performance of Prox(y)imity:
Participation with the Pandemic Through the Multiplayer Game *Among Us* (2018)



Presented by

Andrew Martin Lee

PhD Student

University of Chichester Department of Theatre

ALee3@stu.chi.ac.uk

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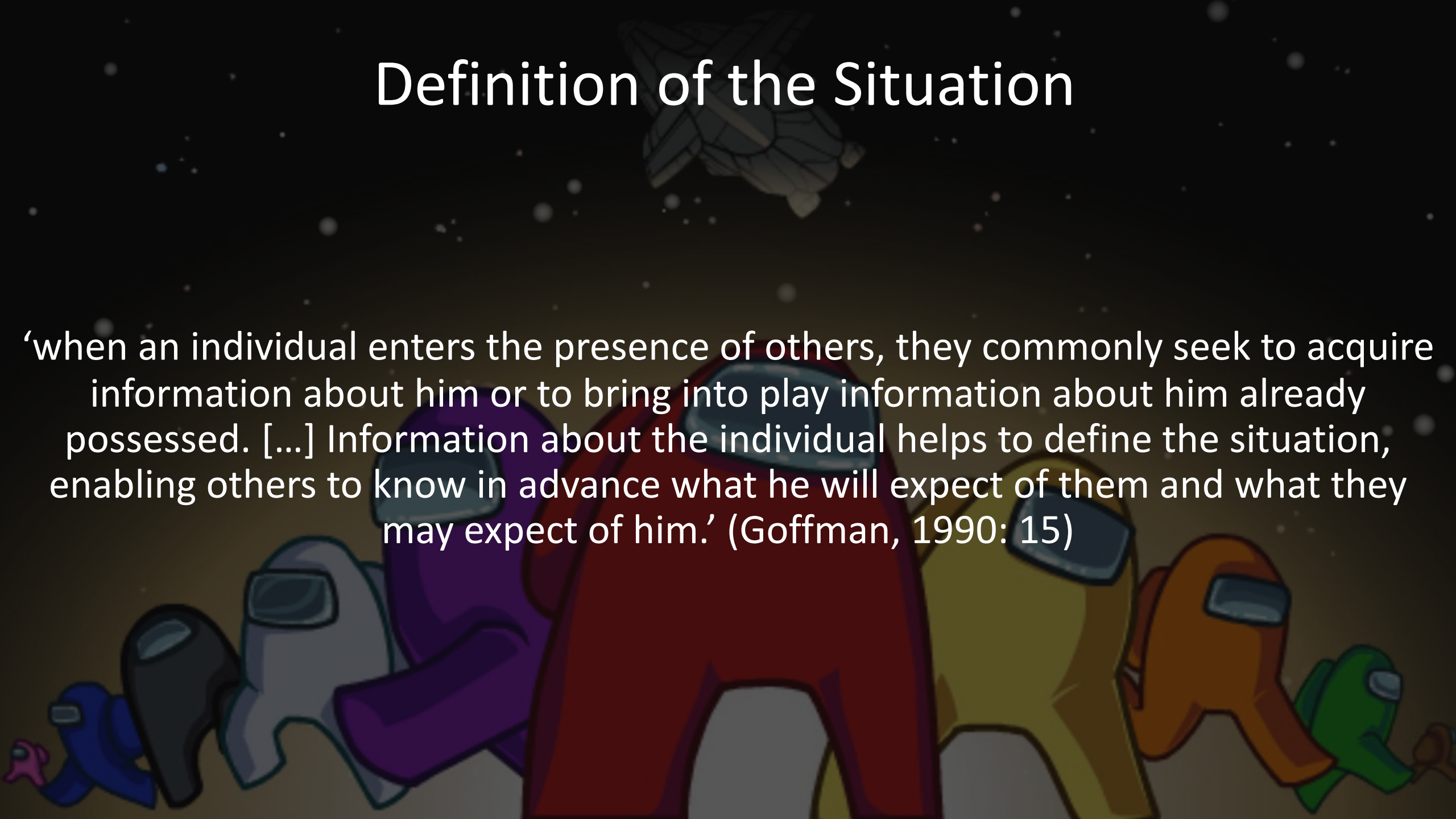
www.wearethemidnightflorists.org/research

Introduction

- An analysis of the game structure of *Among Us* through the lens of the pandemic.
- Asserting that new modes of connection are developed via gameplay, and players simultaneously process living in a pandemic drawing from:
    - Erving Goffman – *Definition of the Situation*
    - Benedict Anderson – *Imagined Community*
    - Giorgio Agamben – *State of Exception*
    - Erika Fisher-Lichte – *Autopoietic Feedback Loop*
    - Janet Murray – *Procedural Authorship*

Definition of the Situation

‘when an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. […] Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him.’ (Goffman, 1990: 15)



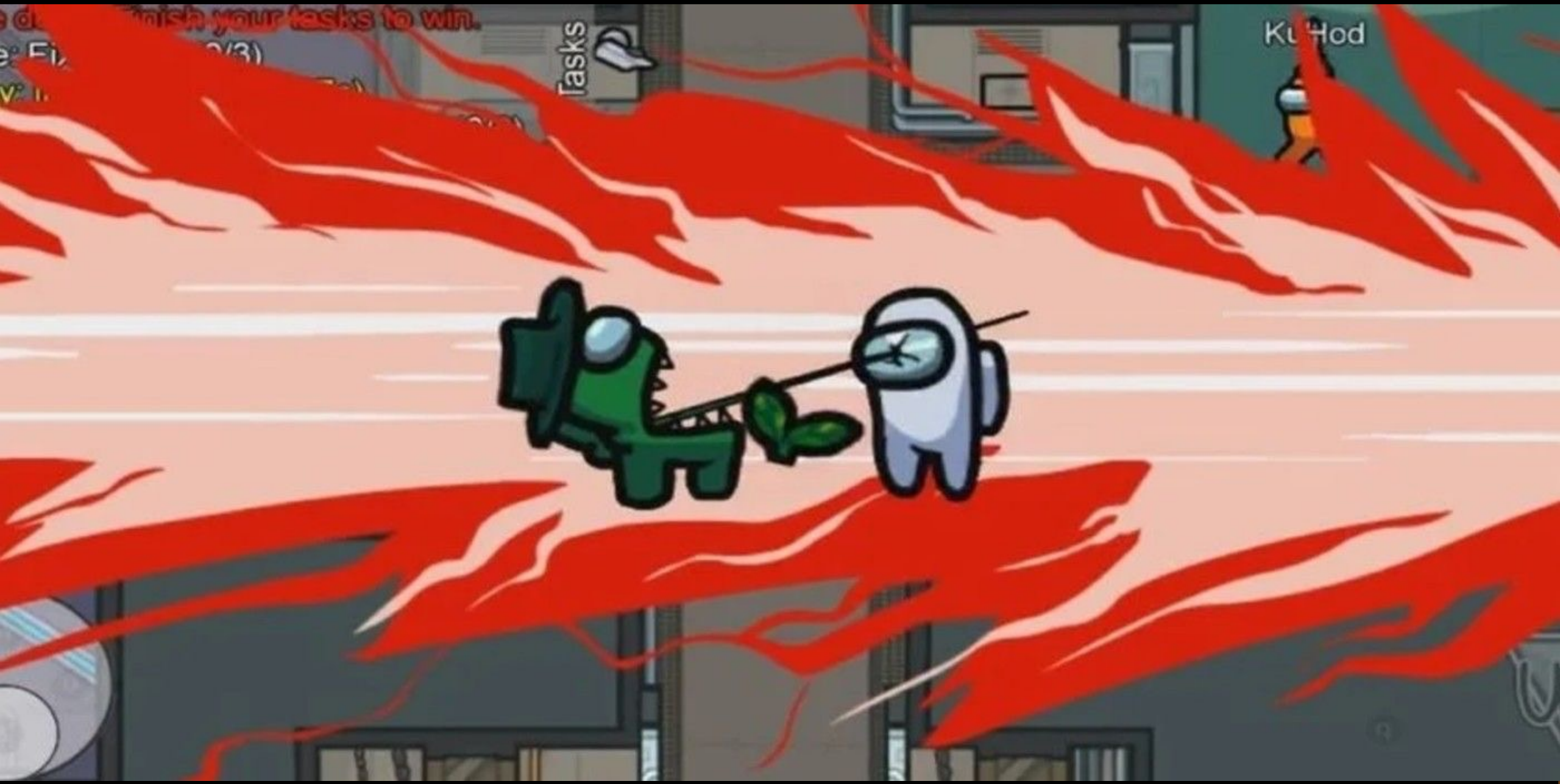
Definition of the Situation

Crewmates

- Can win by;
  - Completing a number of tasks in the form of minigames.
  - Or Voting out the Imposters at the Emergency Meeting.

Imposters

- Can win by;
  - Killing off the crewmates
  - Or Voting out the Crewmates at the Emergency Meeting.


Tasks

Definition of the Situation

In Among Us

- The gameplay establishes a need for distance. [Fear of Proximity]
- Failure to comply equates to an impermanent online death.
- Allows participants to roleplay proximity related fatality.
- Temporary reprieve from anxiety caused by real world definition of the situation.

In The Pandemic

- Masks, Mandates, & Enforcement establish a need for distance. [Fear of Proximity]
- Failure to comply equates to a permanent real death.
- Cannot allow for roleplay.
- Constant anxiety caused by the new definition of the situation

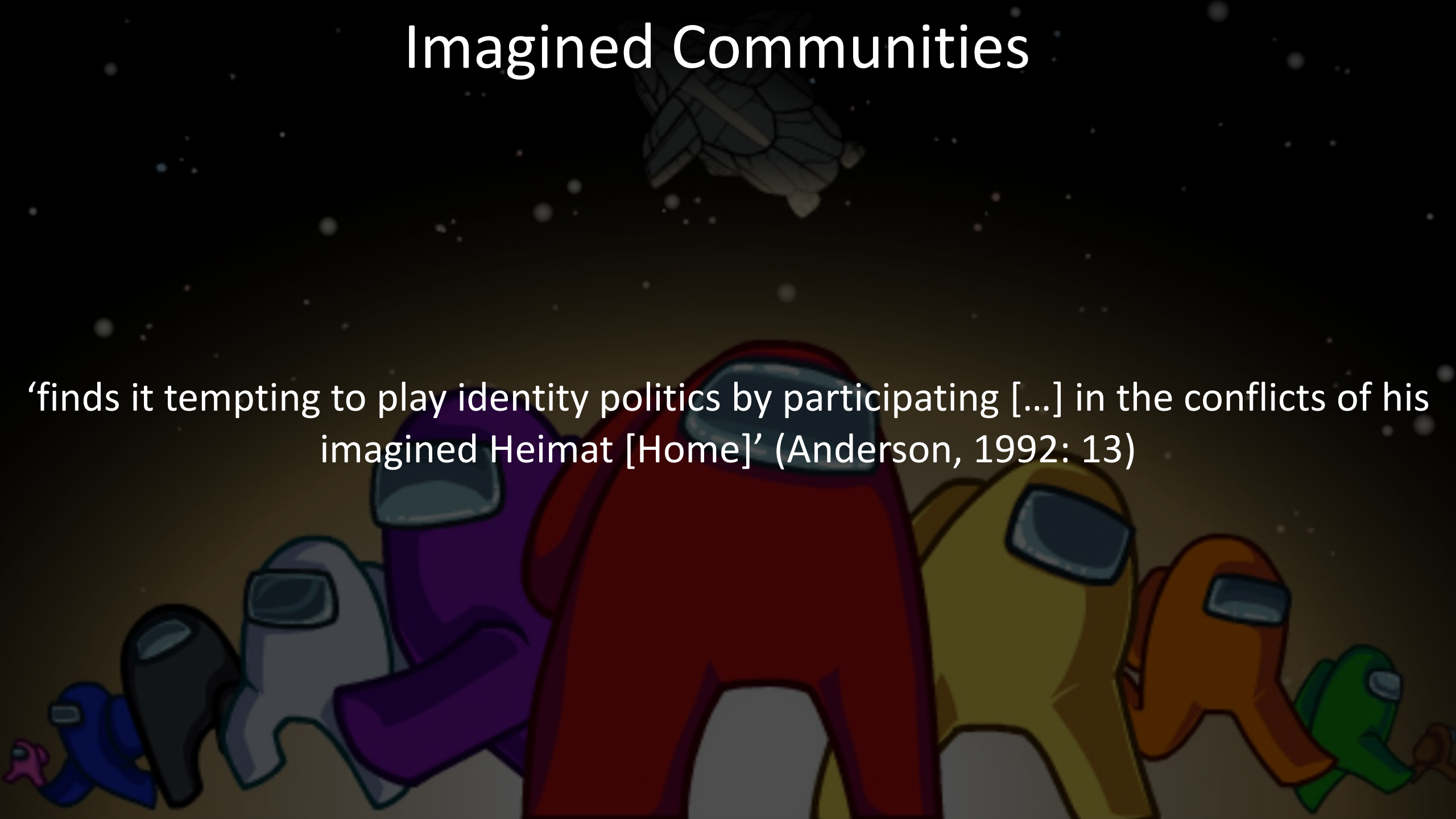
Imagined Communities

‘is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’ (Anderson, 1991: 6)

Imagined Communities

‘it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, […] not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings.’ (Anderson, 1991: 7)

Imagined Communities



‘finds it tempting to play identity politics by participating […] in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat [Home]’ (Anderson, 1992: 13)

Imagined Communities

- Customisation of Avatar creates investment in the character and as a result the game world.

- Limiting customisation choices to one per server breeds competition with players on the server before the game begins creating competitive kinmanship.

- Due to server strain server locations for the games server must be chosen, this conscious choice creates an unconscious connection to the imagined community of server location.

- An adaptive language arose connecting players through a shared language of short hand: ‘Sus’, to ‘Vent’, ‘Third Imposter’.

State of Exception

State of Exception

‘In [a] time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed’ (Article 4.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights)

State of Exception

"In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference" (Agamben, 2005: 40).

State of Exception

Autopoietic Feedback Loop

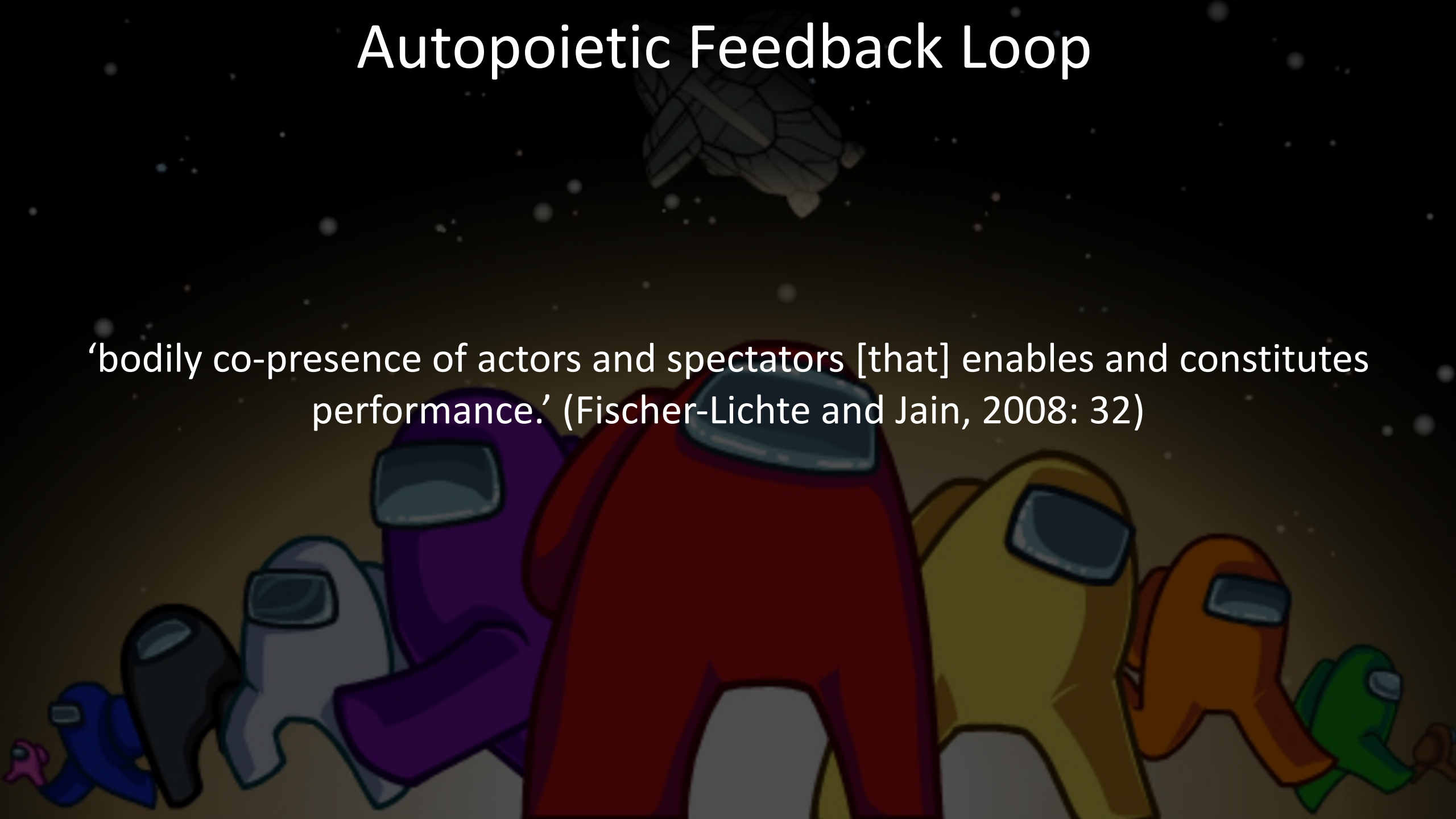
‘between the actors and spectators, and even between the spectators themselves.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 33).

Autopoietic Feedback Loop

‘while presence brings forth the human body in its materiality, as energetic body and living organism, technical and electronic media create the impression of human presence by dematerializing and disembodying it.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 100).

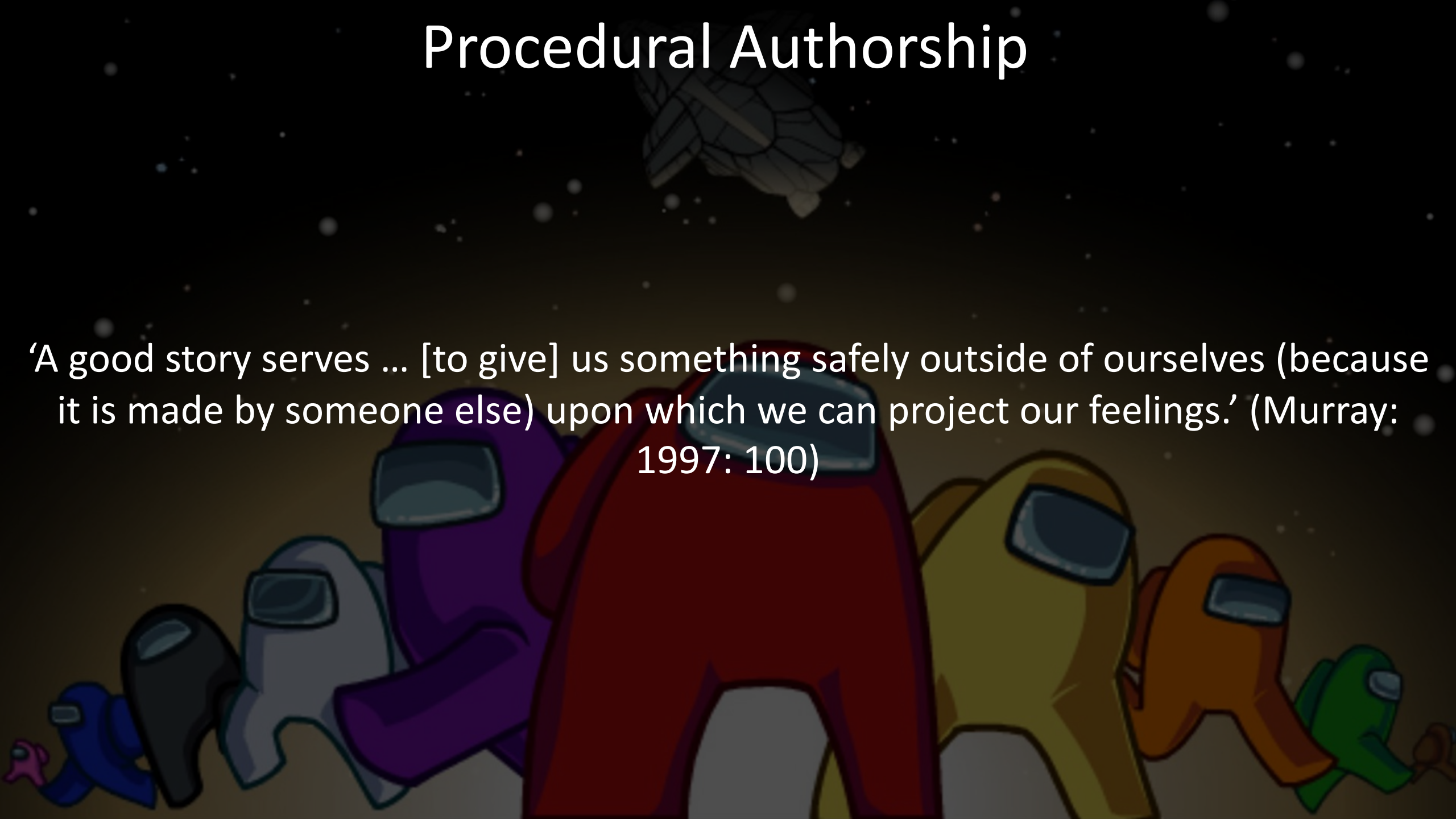
Autopoietic Feedback Loop

‘bodily co-presence of actors and spectators [that] enables and constitutes performance.’ (Fischer-Lichte and Jain, 2008: 32)



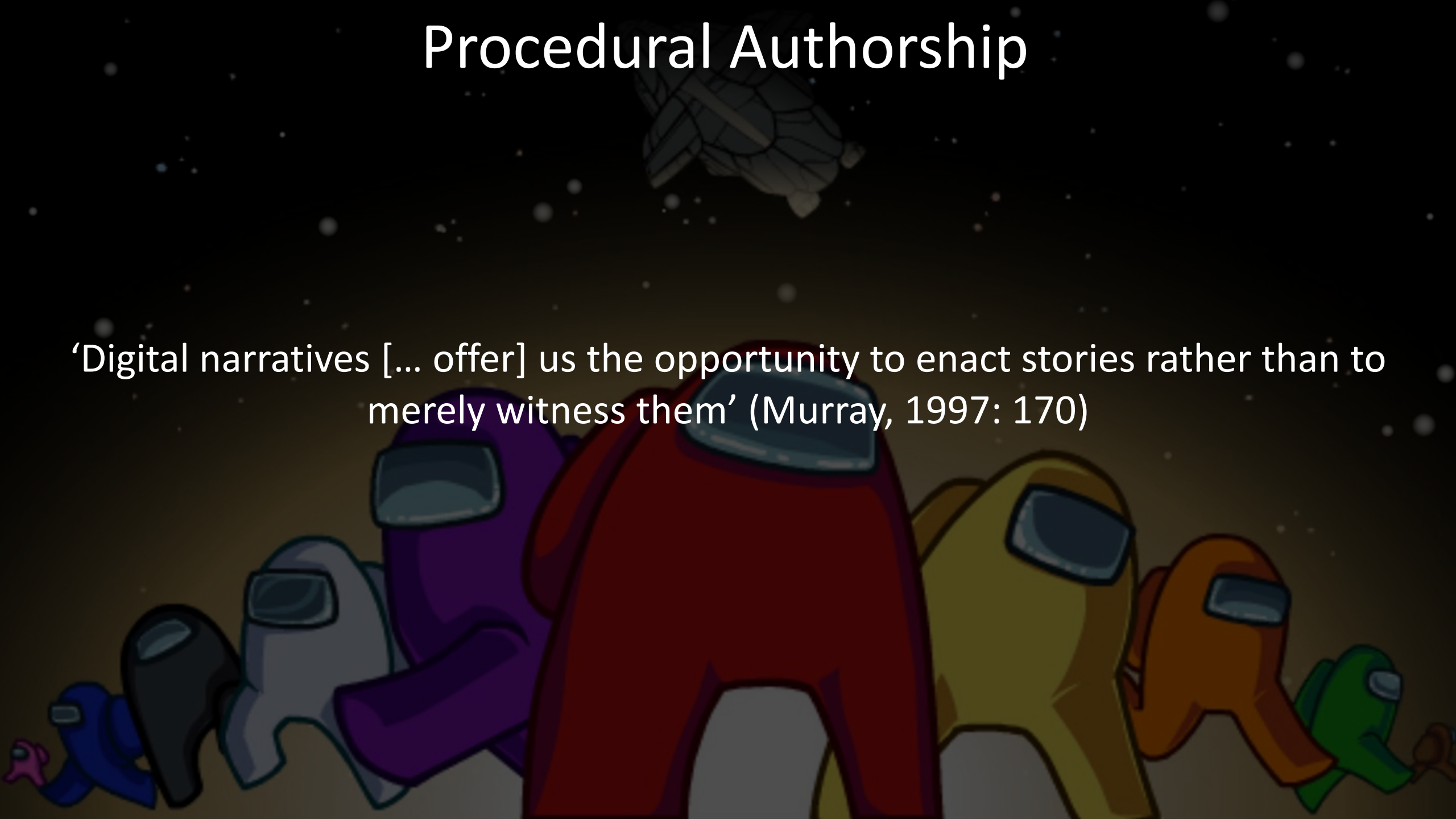
Procedural Authorship

‘A good story serves … [to give] us something safely outside of ourselves (because it is made by someone else) upon which we can project our feelings.’ (Murray: 1997: 100)



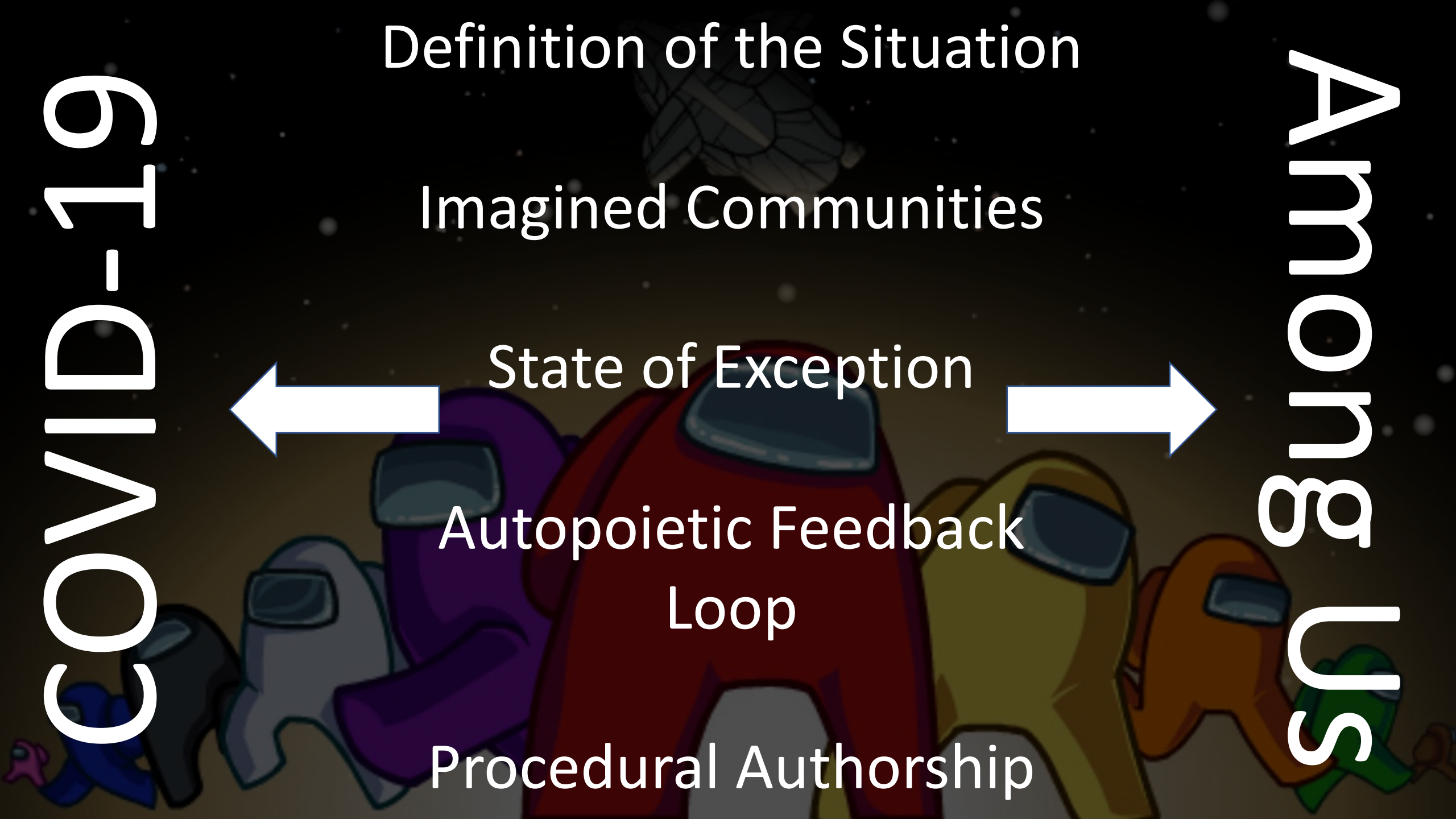
Procedural Authorship

‘Digital narratives [… offer] us the opportunity to enact stories rather than to merely witness them’ (Murray, 1997: 170)



Procedural Authorship

‘Enacted events have a transformative power that exceeds both the narrated and conventionally dramatized events because we assimilate them as personal experience. The emotional impact of enactment within an immersive environment is so strong that virtual reality installations have been found to be effective for psychotherapy.’ (Murray, 1997: 170)


COVID-19
Definition of the Situation
Imagined Communities
State of Exception
Autopoietic Feedback Loop
Procedural Authorship
Among Us

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