

**Beauty  
or,  
modernism and play**

**miguel sicart  
Playable Media**

**WARNING: THIS WILL BE LONG**

# Today

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- An aesthetics of play**
- Contemporary art and play design**



EMERGENCY DOOR

TO OPEN PULL UP HANDLE

IT'S *NOT* THAT  
YOU DON'T *CARE*  
FOR ME...

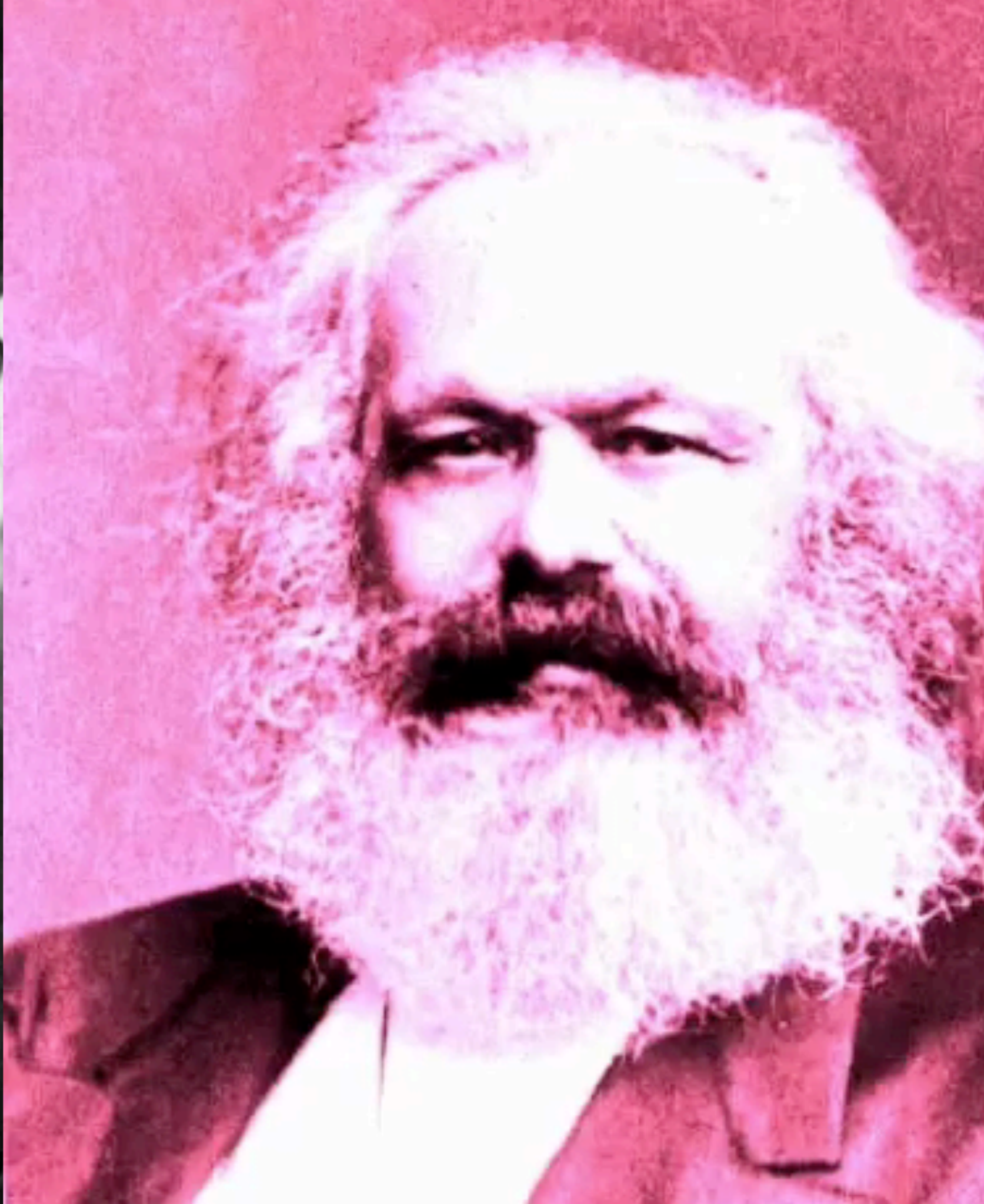
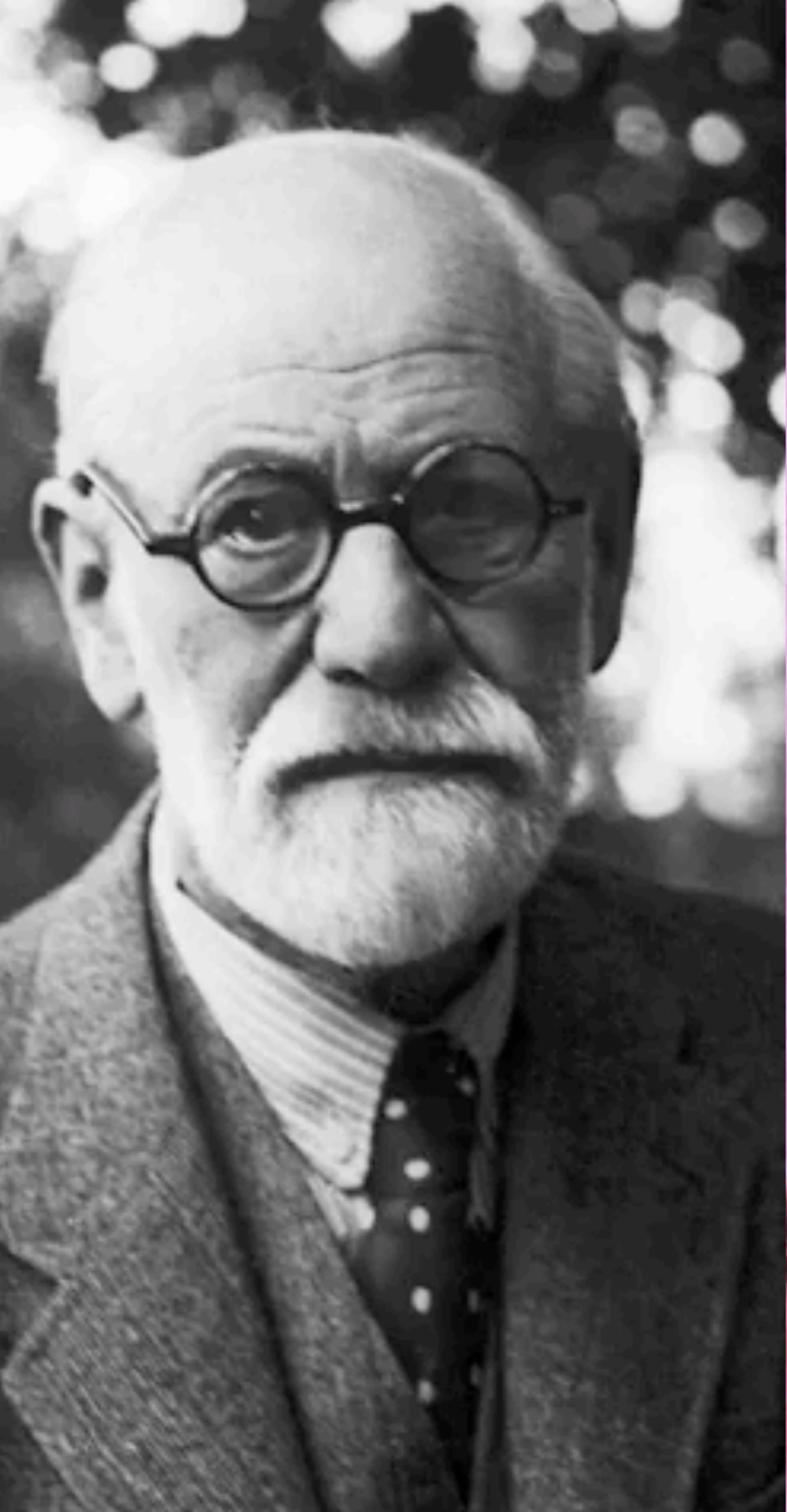
... IT'S JUST  
THAT I CAN'T  
*COMPETE..*  
WITH ANY  
OF *THIS!*





***Kant, via the categorical imperative,  
is holding that, ontologically, it exists  
only in the imagination.***

- Disinterested activities**
- Not rational (pursue of knowledge) or sensual (carnal needs): activities with their own purpose**
- Art and play are both “just pretending”**
- Disinterest, indeterminacy, illusion**







Bell Telephone  
Mfg. Co.







A black and white photograph of two people dressed as bunnies sitting on a porch. The person on the left is wearing a dark bunny costume and holding a cane. The person on the right is wearing a light-colored bunny costume. Both have their mouths open in a wide, happy expression. The background shows a window and a door.

**Videogame arts/ Art videogames**





journey

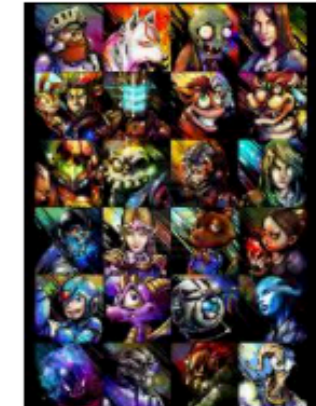
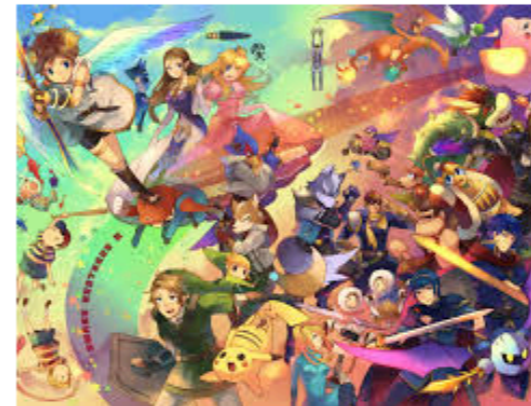
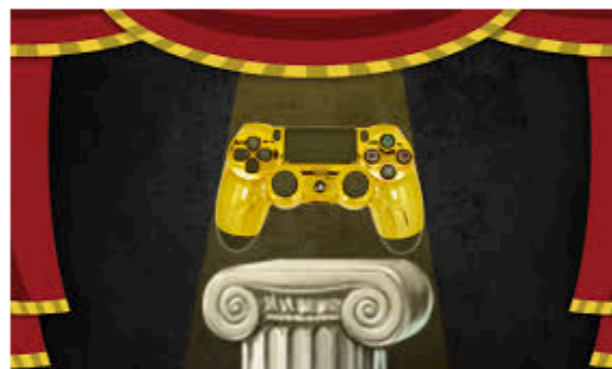
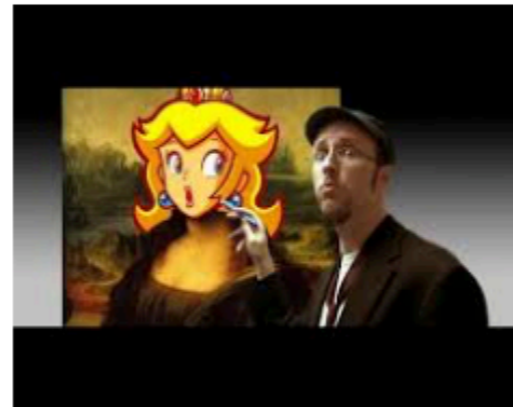
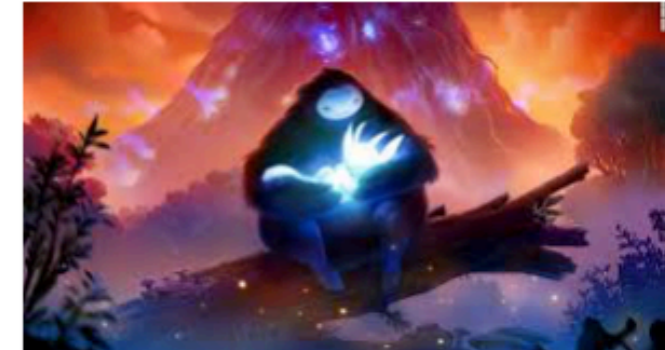
pixel

pixel art

wallpaper

war

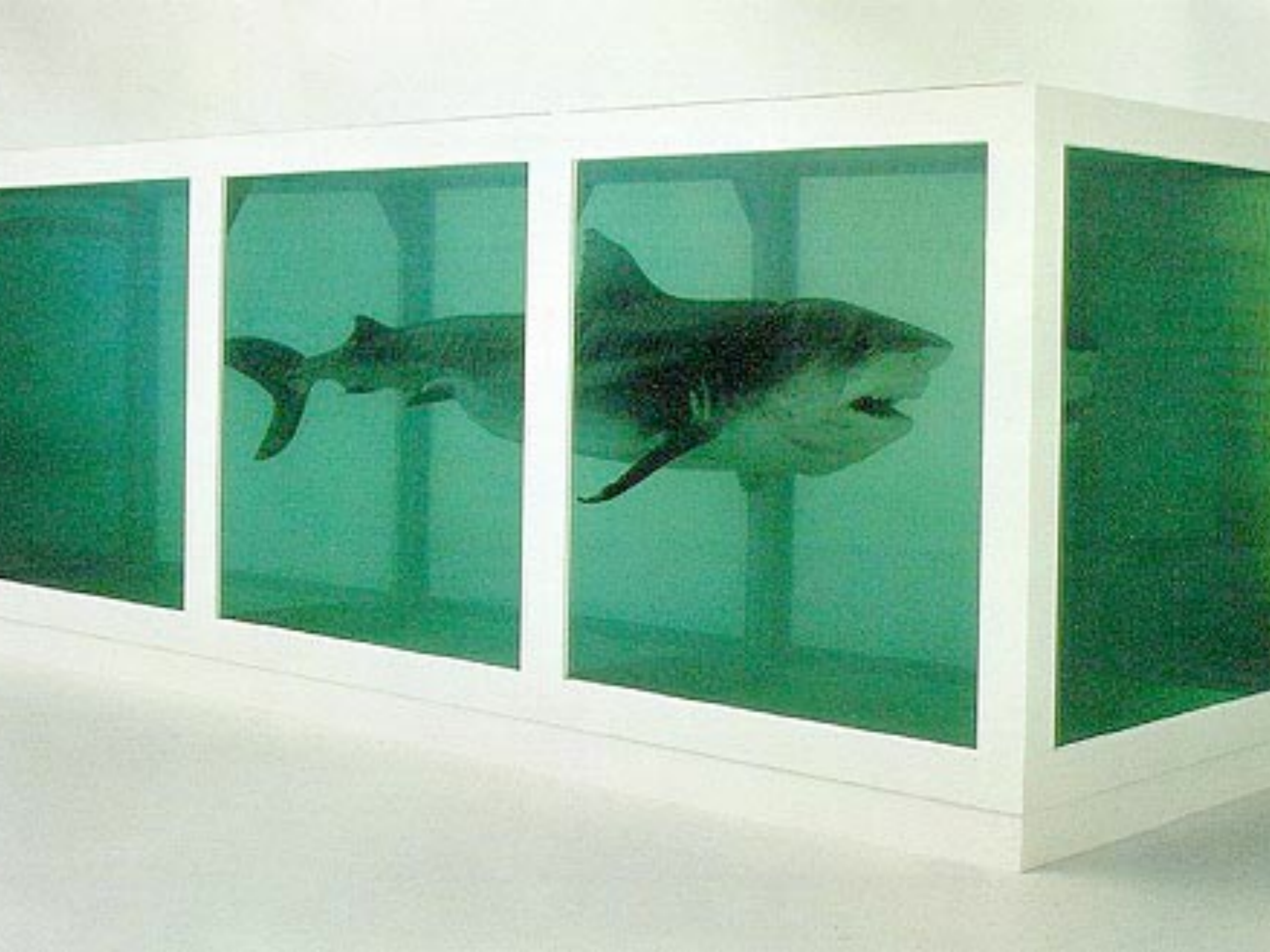
battle





- Flawed discussion: still a modernist paradigm (also, deeply Romantic too)**
- The object is central to the question of aesthetic value**
- Videogames as an audiovisual art form**







**And now, for something completely different**

# Participatory Aesthetics

Works of art that create a space for  
conversation/action



OPENING OF THE  
«GRAMSCI-MONUMENT»  
July 1st 10am-7pm  
FREE ALL WELCOME  
OPEN EVERY DAY July 1-Sept 15

GRAMSCI MONUMENT WEEKLY EVENTS

MONDAY: GRAMSCI THEATER  
TUESDAY: RUNNING EVENT  
WEDNESDAY: POETRY SESSION  
THURSDAY: Fieldtrips  
FRIDAY: ART SCHOOL  
SATURDAY: GRAMSCI SEMINAR  
SUNDAY: OPEN AIR THEATER

THIS WEEK JULY 3rd 4pm  
«FASHION-STYLE From the Bottom to the Top» By Joe Budda

THIS WEEK JULY 3rd 4pm  
Nina S. Headen

THIS WEEK JULY 4th  
Visit to Die-Bear

THIS WEEK JULY 4th  
SIMON CUTCHER  
2pm

THIS WEEK JULY 6th  
6pm

Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument*



Rirkrit Tiravanija & Superflex, Social Pudding, 2003





# Artificial Hells

Claire Bishop

“To put it simply: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant”

Play studies has already made that argument



*ceci n'est pas un  
gif of cat taken from the Internet*

But where can we take it for aesthetics?

# New spaces of play

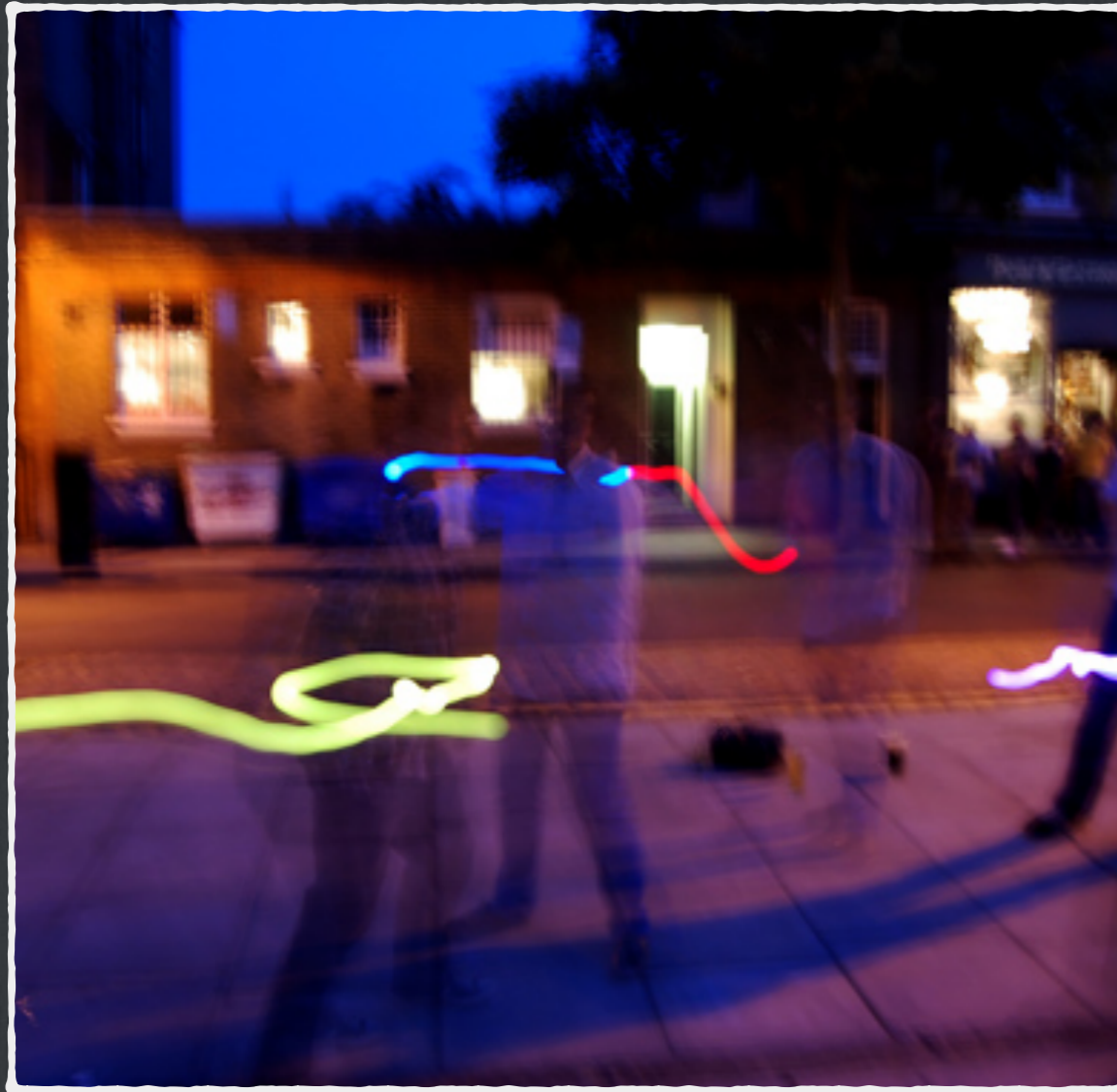
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- Pop-up arcades
- JS Joust
- Babycastles
- Silent Barn

# JS Joust

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- community-driven, event driven game
- popularity = the community it creates by being played
- Joust aspires to this participatory aesthetic, but ...

# Ideology?

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- Participatory aesthetics are political
- What are the politics of the new spaces of play?

**Participatory art is not a privileged political medium, nor a ready-made solution to a society of the spectacle, but is as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself (Bishop)**

# The participatory aesthetics of play



- Designers are not authors
- Things are not important
- Designers propose spaces of intervention
- The conversations matter

# occupying the possibility space

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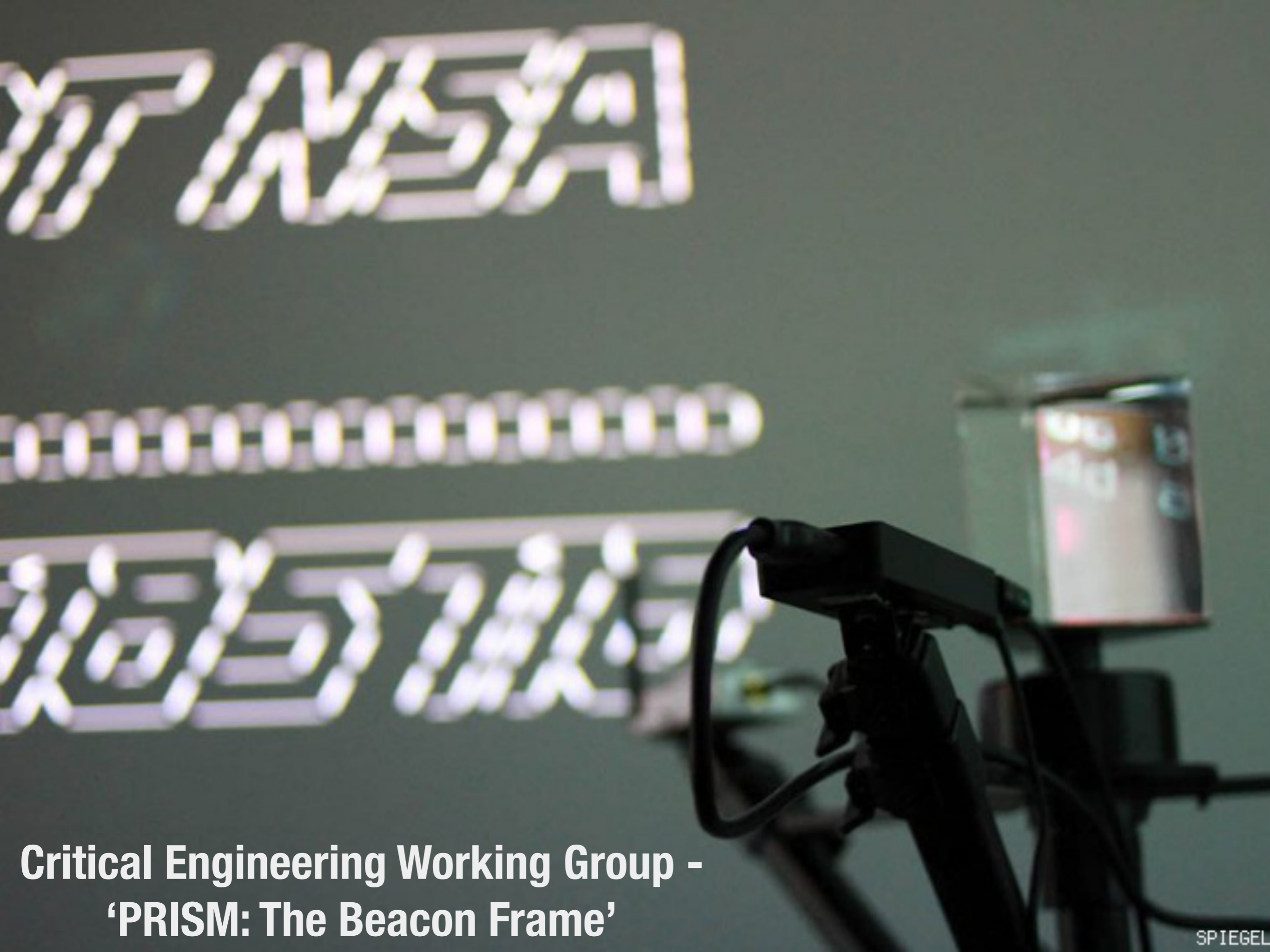
- Play creates possibility spaces
- Participatory aesthetics gives us a way to reclaim those spaces for artistic practices
- but we should do away with the classic, romantic, banking model of art



- “the artist delegates power to the performer (entrusting them with agency while also affirming hierarchy), delegation is not just a one-way, downward gesture. In turn, the performers also delegate something to the artist: a guarantee of authenticity, through their proximity to everyday social reality, conventionally denied to the artist who deals merely in representations”. Bishop

**ALTERNATIVES?**

# **PLAYFUL EXPLORATIONS OF TECHNOCULTURE**

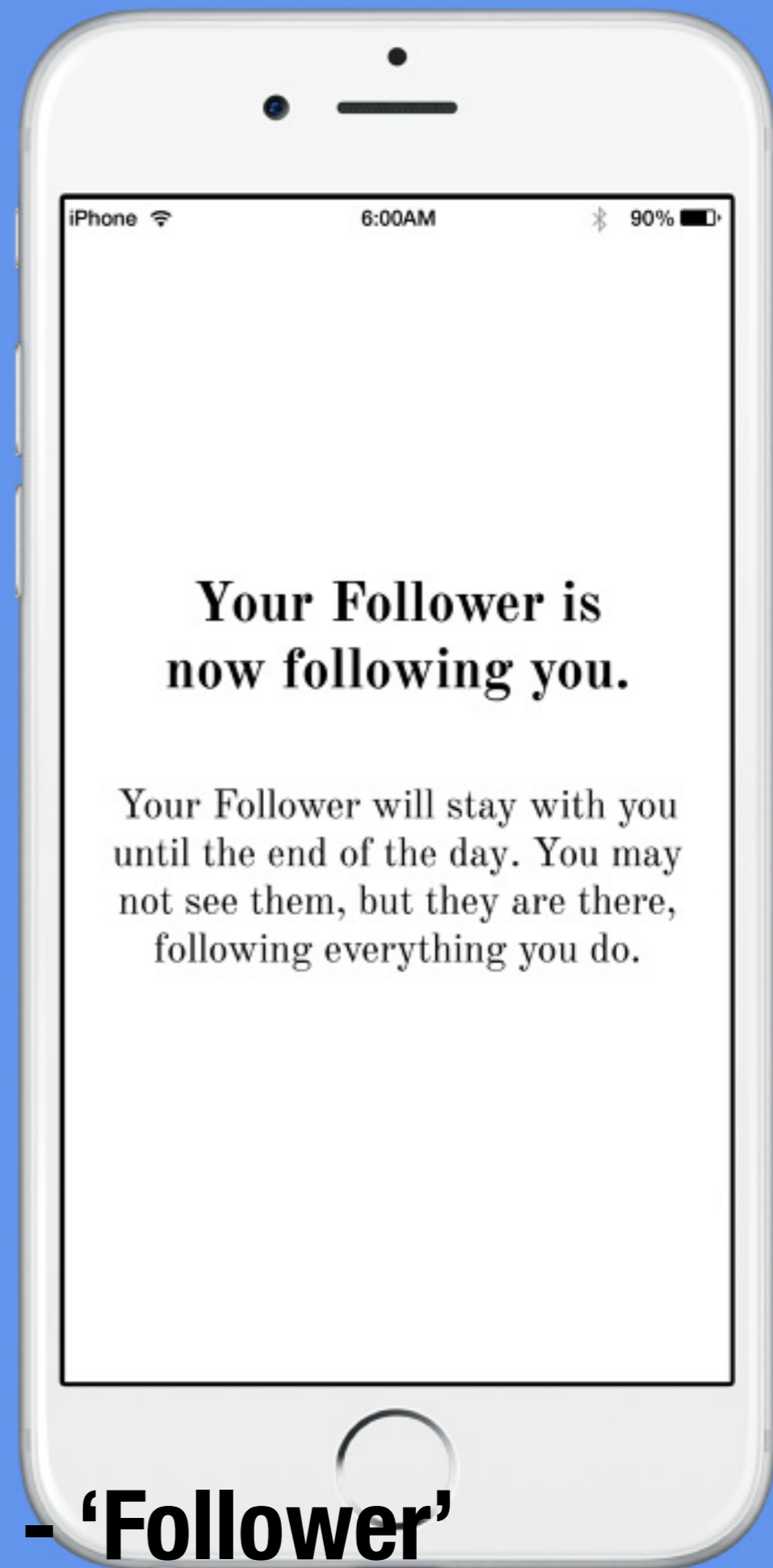
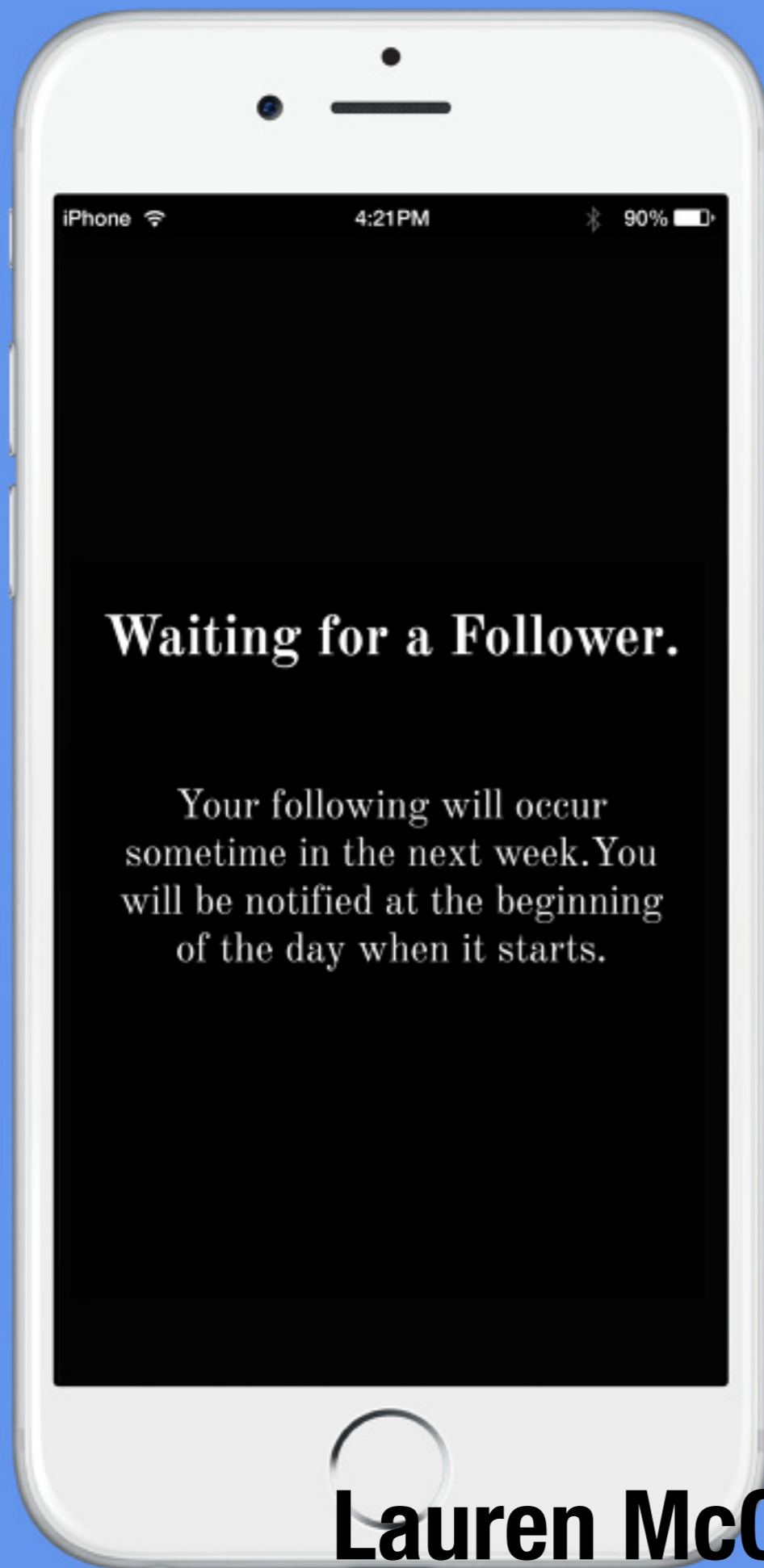


**Critical Engineering Working Group -  
'PRISM: The Beacon Frame'**



**!Mediengruppe Bitnik - 'Random Darknet Shopper'**

- Appropriation of technological platforms for subversion**
- Connected to 1990s-2000s netart, hacker art, and new media arts (Nam June Paik)**
- Why play? Not explicit in manifestos/discourses**
- Yet:**



**Lauren McCarthy - 'Follower'**





**Play as aesthetic strategy**

All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art.

dan graham