

RES-
CUE
KITE

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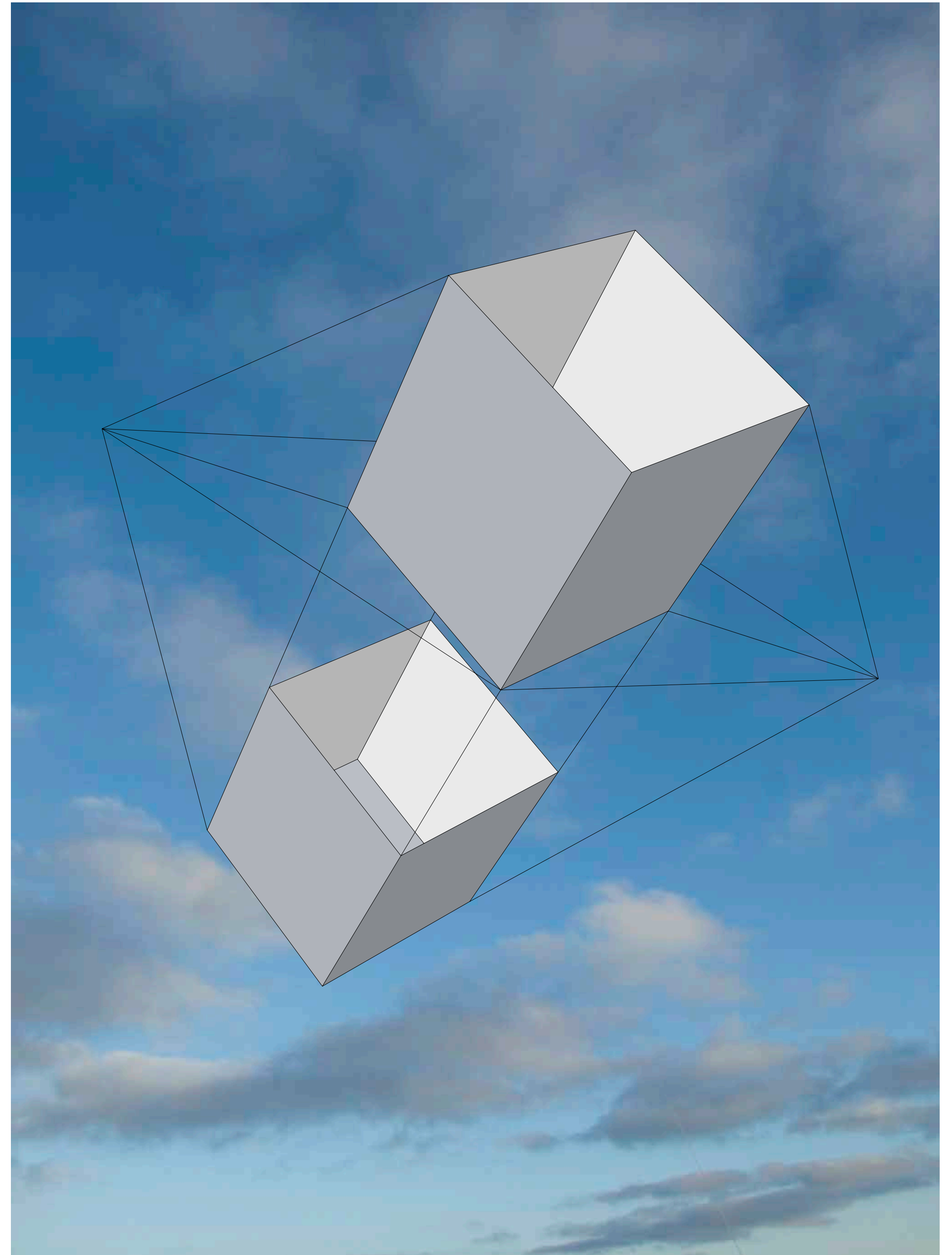
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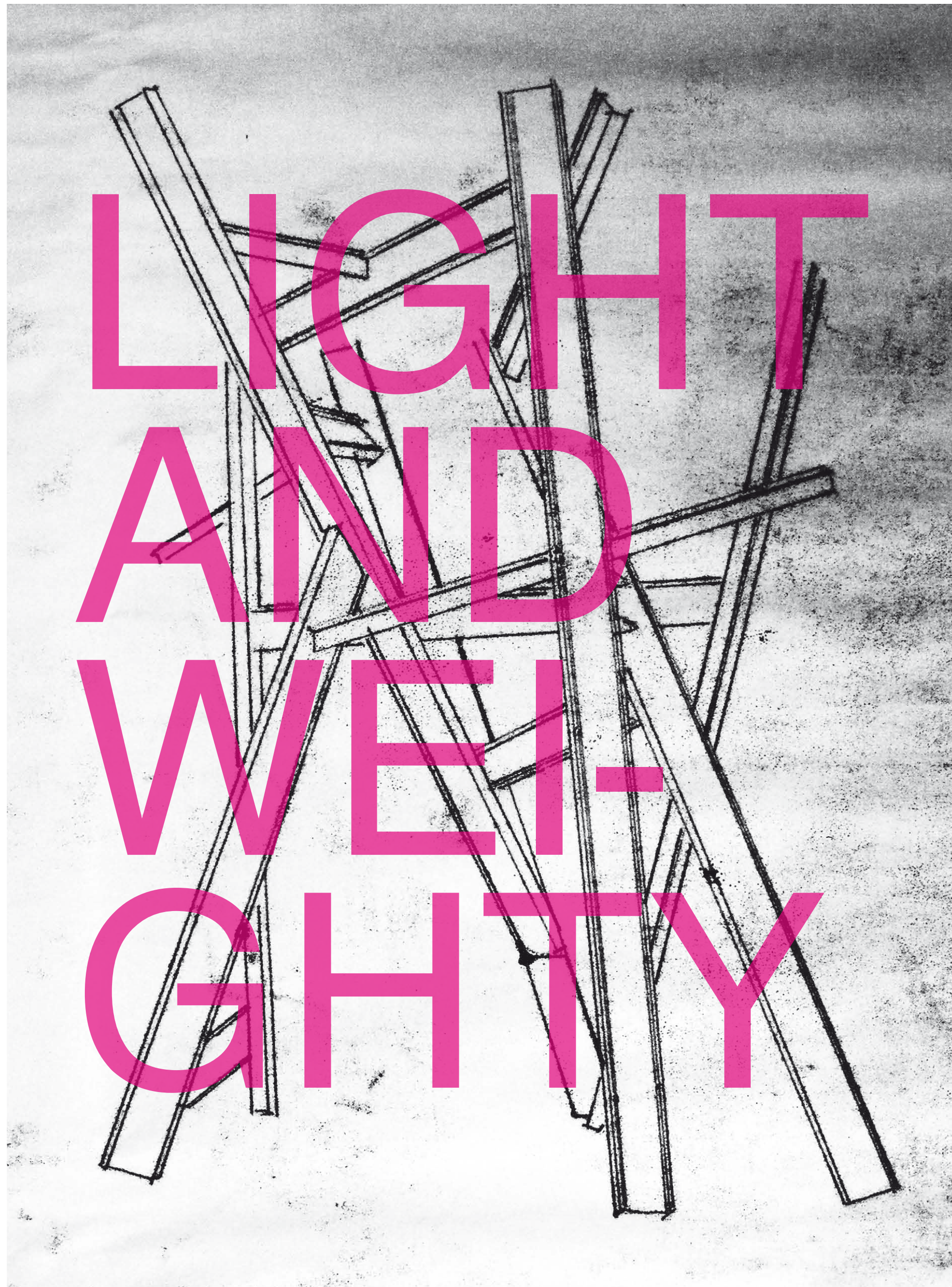
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What is the role of play in art? Maybe similar to the one of a 'rescue kite': connoting fun **and** danger – light, non-serious, marginal, or – quite serious, weighty as a metaphor and indispensable for contemporary artists to show up and to survive.

Art has been always conceptualised within the discourse of the essential and the marginal. Play acts as a *modus operandi* of so called marginal, *childish* practices that belong to the borderline between art and life. From the philosophical perspective this role can be compared to the notion of *parergon*, applied originally by Kant to describe an ornament, a drapery or a frame that supplements the work of art.¹ According to Derrida, the supplement is not simply external or marginal to the main body of work but in some sense its condition. Supplement shows the incompleteness of the central concept and exposes the fact that its identity is deficient without the supplementation.² *Play-parergon* emerges as, perhaps dangerous, but indispensable 'supplement'³ of the artistic ergon (work). Play must be then seen as vital element of the concept of art; it is 'playing' with the 'proper function' of objects, places, people and ideas through the displacement, challenge, parody, experiment or subversion.

Play as *parergon* can be also read after Derrida as 'undecidable'⁴; it cannot be reduced to just one interpretation according to the given rhetoric; it does not have a stable identity or a proper function, it operates 'in between' the opposites like: reality/ fiction, here/ there, presence/ absence, high/ low, serious/ non-serious, light/ weighty, and so on... *Play-parergon* is not only all-permeating and dynamic but also impossible to control and apply instrumentally – it immediately turns into a strategy, tactic, tool or a new convention. It is there; it is indispensable for art's identity (or non-identity) but it ossifies quickly when applied as a method.

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A kite is an ephemeral toy and unreliable carrier of heavyweight messages, driven by the conflicting forces, often changing direction, easily getting stuck. Play is...

Katarzyna Zimna

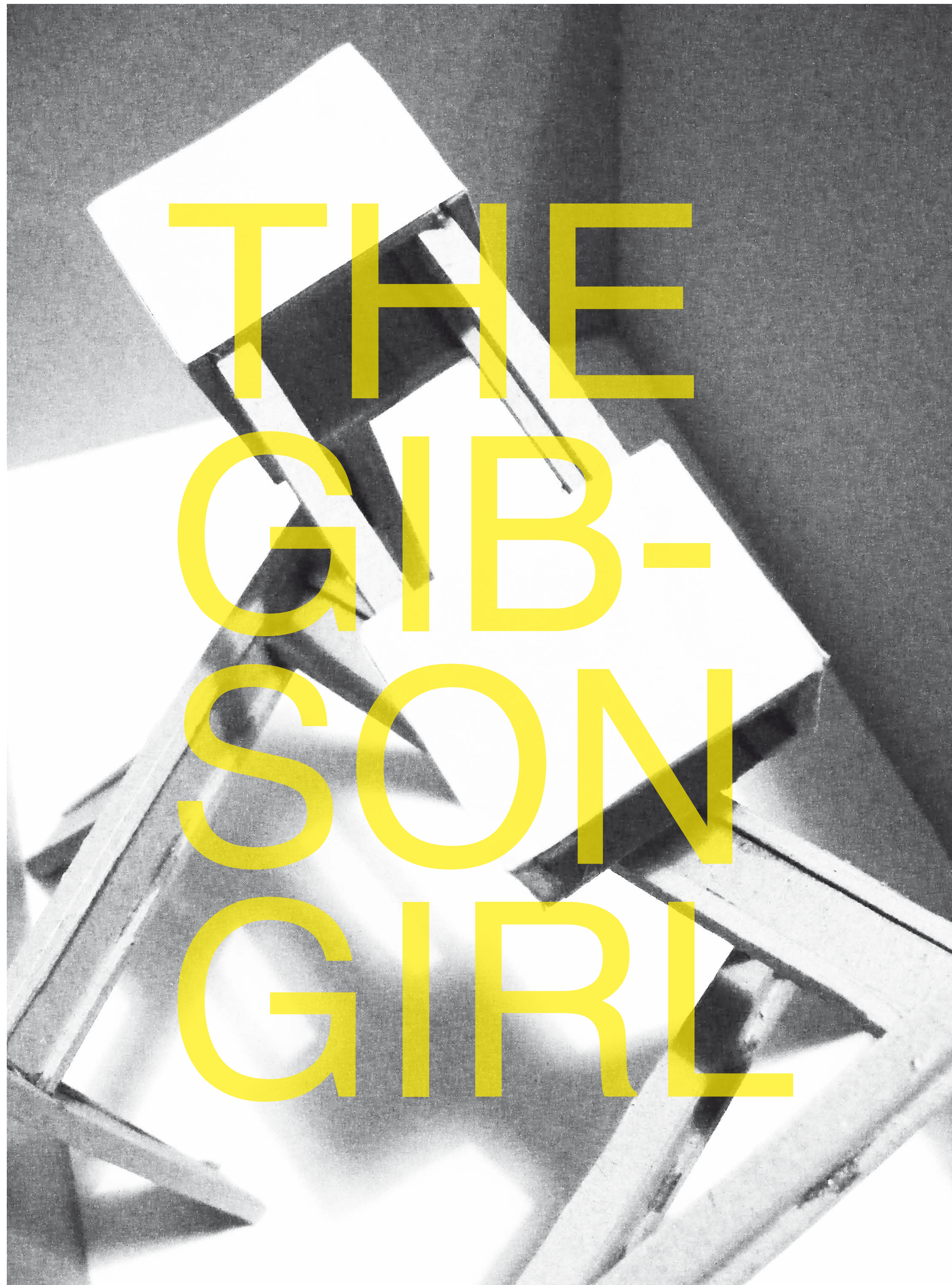
Dr Katarzyna Zimna is an artist and academic based in Lodz, Poland. Her Ph.D. research, completed in 2010 at Loughborough University School of Art and Design, explored the role of play in the theory and practice of art. In 2013 her book *Time to Play: Action and Interaction in Contemporary Art* will be published by I.B. Tauris, London. www.kasiazimna.net

¹ Kant I., *The Critique of Judgement*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 69

² Derrida J., *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 59

³ 'dangerous supplement' – term used by Rousseau and employed by Derrida in his analysis of the logic of supplementarity in *Of Grammatology*, 1967

⁴ The example of Derridean 'undecidable' – *pharmakon* – is discussed in: Derrida J., *Plato's Pharmacy*, in: *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, The Athlone Press, London, 1997, pp. 63-171



A summer spent in Norway - so it rained a little but the majority of the time the scenery was beyond my measly capability with words, it was nature in epic form. In the winter, I should imagine it is equally beautiful, the land covered in its white blanket while pale, blue skies stretch above the fjords. If you get stuck in the snow, one thing is for sure, help will more than likely arrive on skis. Joseph Beuys' work *'The Pack'* springs to mind, each of its wooden framed sledges carrying a roll of felt and a torch – a survival kit for the Norwegian winter.

Beuys had his own infamous story of rescue that starts with his plane crashing in the Crimea during WWII (around 1943). Badly injured, he claims to have been rescued by a group of Tartars; covering him in fat and wrapping him in felt they gave him protection and survival. It was only much later that the story has become identified as being misleading, even highly questionable - certainly Beuys was not the pilot of the plane as he claimed, but the radio operator. Now, you might think that this little elaboration in order to grandiose his narrative into myth would be called a lie, or you may think of it as being 'playful' with the truth. Beuys' practice certainly doesn't strike one as playful, a man whose work had (or at least intended to have) serious purpose i.e. social and political transformation.

During World War II many downed aircrew were left stranded and with poor equipment for survival, more so those requiring rescue at sea. In search of improvements, the German 'Luftwaffe' issued an ingenious emergency transmitter in 1941 (designed by Fieseke & Höpfner). The NSG2 consisted of a transmitter set with an aerial attached to the bow line of a yellow box kite; the aerial was therefore given maximum elevation to emit a signal while the kite doubled as a visual aid for any rescue party. In the same year, the British captured one of these sets and stole the design, producing the 'Dinghy Transmitter T-1333' that was carried in all RAF aircraft of Bomber and Coastal command. Similarly, a US built version, mechanically superior to both UK and German versions, was produced and in much wider numbers (the first order by the US government was for 11,600)¹. It was this version of the equipment that was given the name 'Gibson Girl'. The transmitter set was shaped with hourglass ergonomics, allowing its curves to be comfortably placed between the thighs of its American operator. The aesthetic similarity with Charles Gibson's 1890s fashion illustrations and the position of the set in use, certainly showed the American air force were a playful bunch, even with an object that signifies a serious purpose.

The kite, used as an object of purpose more than play, has been occurring since its inception in China roughly 2,300 years ago (then made for the transmitting of signals during battle). One of the kites more contemporary communication uses was to lift the antenna for the reception of Marconi's first transatlantic radio signal, the inspiration perhaps for the Gibson Girl in the first instance. Standing on Camber Sands recently with a small, hand-made paper kite bobbing and weaving in the sky, it is hard to believe it is nothing but an object of mesmerising play than functional communication device. It is the perfect dichotomy between control and freedom, play and restriction.

Taking out my camera to record its flight, I remembered Baldessari's *'Trying to photograph a ball so that is in the centre of the picture'* (1972-73). Exchanging ball for kite; I give it a go. I'd been thinking a lot about instructional artworks (as well as other protagonists of the strategy such as Vito Acconci, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson etc) since a recent project with a group of university students. Instructions were given to make them undertake repetitive and laborious actions in the production of artwork - covering a cardboard box in biro pen, drilling 1000 holes in the wall, painting a square with a one-haired brush - the usual cruelties of art school with a parody of production line aesthetics thrown in. I was hoping for a reaction but oddly the majority of students took to the

¹ Meulstee, L. (1998) *Saved by Radio, Evolution in Air-Sea Rescue Radio Communications*. In: *The Gibson Girl Transmitter and Kite*. The Kiteflier, Issue 93, p.19-23.

tasks with great enthusiasm, leaving me as the uncomfortable head of a tyrannical sweatshop. Not much evidence of anarchistic tendencies or any possible crisis of authority here. Perhaps I should have told them of Baldessari's *'I will not make any more boring art'* (1971) at the same time.

Ron Jones, a teacher in California during the 60s, showed how structured activities, perceived or said to be 'games' could easily transform behaviour. His 'Third Wave' experiment, a series of lesson plans that re-created the conditions necessary for indoctrination to fascist behaviour, changed students psyche rather inauspiciously fast...too fast. Within a week, a special salute was invented and members of project were providing themselves with ID cards – in the end, worried control was slipping, Jones showed a video documenting the rise of the Nazi regime to bring the project to a halt. I would definitely not describe myself as a pedagogical researcher, but the behavioural elements of teaching I see and hear about are fascinating, if not a little worrying. For me, art is playing with and subverting the set rules and structures, critiquing them and the institutions (social, cultural or political) that bind us to frameworks of behaviour. The inherent wit, humour, liberation and possible heuristic invention within acts of being playful should allow the testing of rules and boundaries.

The historical perspective of our cultural engagement with play as a behaviour, follows from Johan Huizinga's sociological study *'Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture'* (1938), defining play as primary for cultural development. This idea of a 'playful culture' saw some re-emergence by those making sense of the post-war context. From stories of tragedy and those less fortunate than Beuys, a new culture could be re-configured or understood. Look at the Dadaists and Surrealists use of irrationality set against the organised terror of war. Indeed, also look at Beuys. Play continues to be of interest in its possibility of critiquing ways of living and also understanding 'post-structural collapse' - offering itself as a critical lens.

*'In March of 2009, the Tiltfactor laboratory (US) released the causal game LAYOFF, reaching a million players within a week of the release. A look at the core mechanics of the game can reveal the transformative possibilities through 'critical' play. A darkly humorous game, players of LAYOFF engage with the game from the side of management - needing to cut jobs and increase workforce efficiency by matching targets of workers. Upon release of the game record numbers of workers had been laid off and financial institutions were receiving trillions of dollars to bolster the struggling economy. The changing state of economic affairs made more and more poignant the core point of LAYOFF.'*¹

Critical play occurs near moments of collapse, it says, 'perhaps now, there is some time to break free', to re-invent our cultural, political and social relations. It is a space to play with new ideas. Too easily do we indoctrinate ourselves into all sorts of social and cultural frameworks - the longer we can play instead, the better we will be. Working on a project a few years ago, one of the other artists involved said of the large, architectural installation works we were making, 'to be honest...we are just big kids building dens'. Perhaps though, the artist as a 'game-space designer' is more than just a way to re-live childhood, perhaps it is a way to understand how we communicate now.

Back on the beach and teasing out the line of my kite, I'm hoping Charlie Brown's nemesis, the kite eating tree, doesn't take it, or like Icarus, it doesn't get too close to the sun. I'm at the mercy of the strength of the wind and a thin piece of string. I'm a kid again.

Mark Selby

¹ Flanagan, M. (2010) *Creating Critical Play*. In: *Artists Re:Thinking Games*. Eds Carlow, R., Garrett, M. and Morgana, C. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press p.49-53



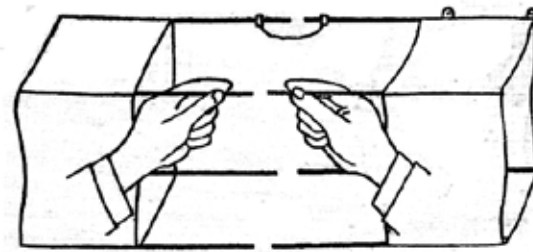


FIG. 1

KITE ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

FIRST (See Fig. 1).—Assemble the two halves of the kite by fitting the ends of the four longerons on the one half into their respective sockets on the other half. Be sure they are pressing tightly together.

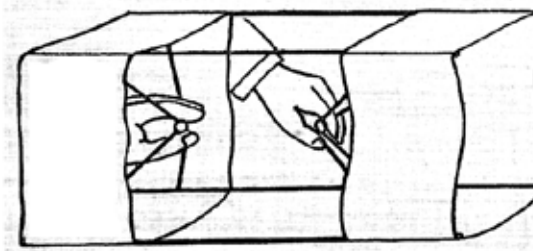


FIG. 2

SECOND (See Fig. 2).—Erect kite by grasping one longeron and shaking kite partially out. Press outward on the two spiders to which spreading members are attached (see illustration) until the members seat in their outward position which is slightly beyond dead center. They will snap into this position and require no keeper. The antenna swivel clasp should be put through outer bridling eye if breeze is strong or through the eye back from the end for lighter breeze. Toss kite into air to clear turbulent area to leeward of operator. Release cable slowly enough to avoid fouling in water.

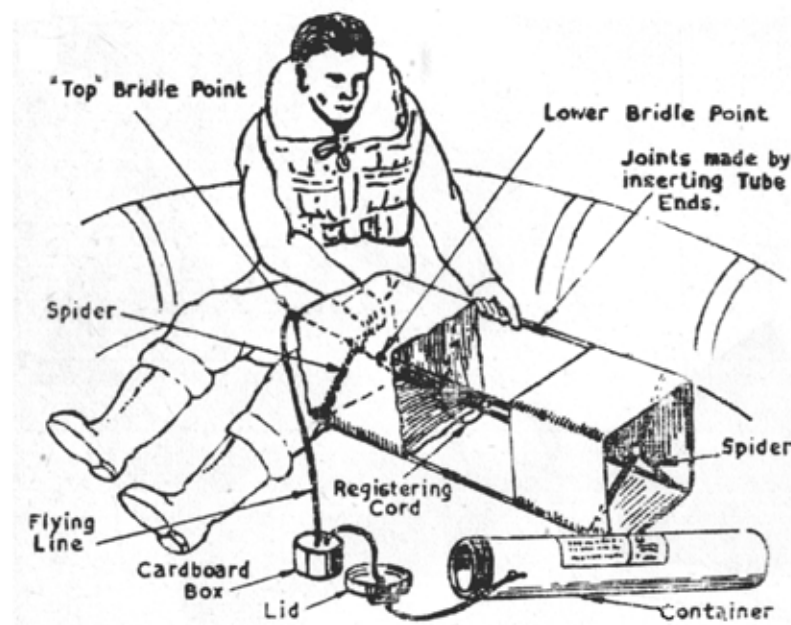


Fig. 12 — Attaching of Antenna to Kite M-277-A



Fig. 9 — Radio Transmitter BC-778-A in Operating Position



