

2015

## Deconstruction and Aesthetics Extract from an Interview with Bernard Stiegler

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### Recommended Citation

O'Hara, Mick (2015) "Deconstruction and Aesthetics Extract from an Interview with Bernard Stiegler," *InPrint*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 5.

doi:10.21427/D7M42X

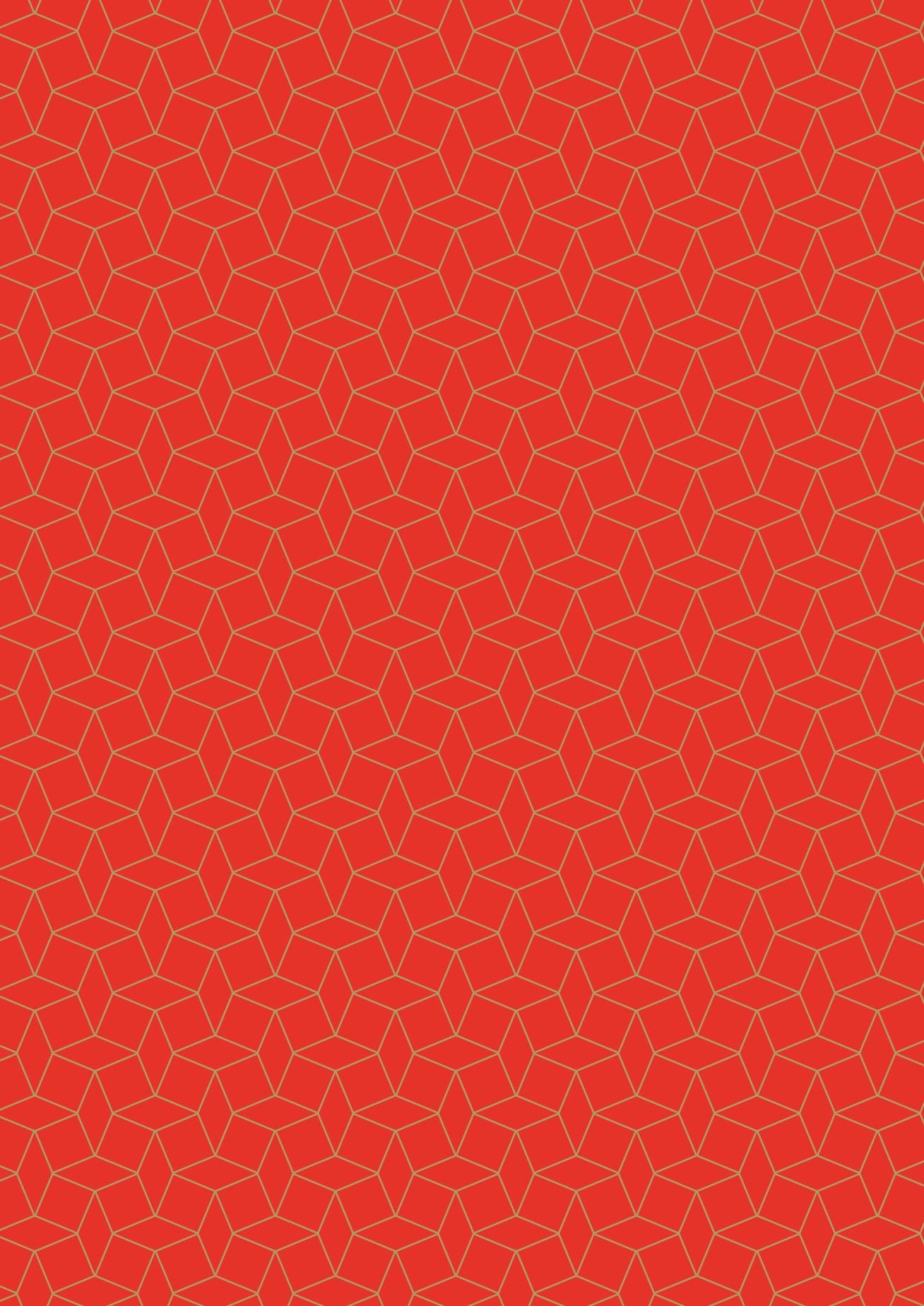
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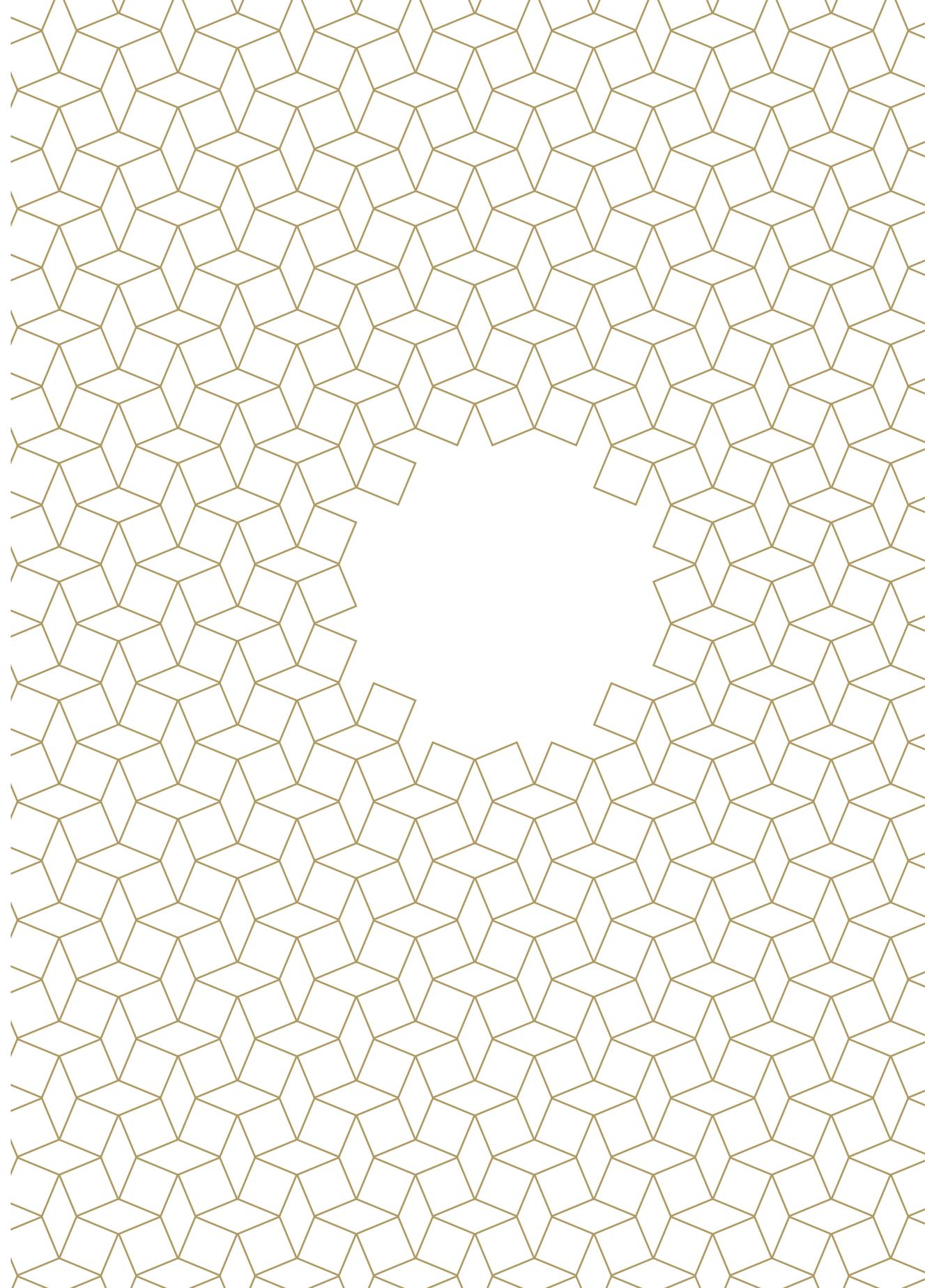


**Deconstruction and Aesthetics** Extract  
from an interview with Bernard Stiegler  
*Mick O'Hara*: Professor Stiegler, could you  
say a little about how the two concepts of  
deconstruction and aesthetics affect and  
operate within your own practice and if it is  
possible to think them together? What, for  
you, is the legacy of deconstruction? *Bernard  
Stiegler*: As it was already stated by Derrida,  
we need now to deconstruct deconstruction,  
because I believe that deconstruction has  
become a new construction. Not constructed  
by Derrida himself, yet maybe with Derrida,  
but mainly with 'Derridianism', there is a  
new kind of construction. It is not only  
the construction of deconstruction but the  
construction of what is called post-  
structuralism. It is a problem of, let's say, the  
sixties and seventies and the relationship  
between philosophy and politics, and

between politics and economy, or political economy. My own obsessive question with deconstruction and art is technics. And I personally believe that the question of the relationship between technics and aesthetics during the twentieth century is still not explicit or criticized. We have to criticize this question today, but this has not yet happened. So my relationship to the question of deconstruction and aesthetics is a political one, based on the question of the status of technics in arts and in deconstruction and, consequently, in politics.

Now to explain a little bit more about what I mean and to return to your questions. I believe that we have arrived at what I call the proletarianisation of sensibility and at the question of symbolic misery. To think this we need deconstruction. Yet deconstruction is not sufficient. We need to pass through deconstruction, which is a system of oppositions between form and matter, logos and techne, but for me there is a problem with technics and deconstruction. It was a complete misunderstanding between Derrida and me when we discussed 'What is technics?' Because when I said that technics is not only the supplement, because of this, because of that, etc., he replied that it is a supplement, because of this, because of that, etc. Behind this, in aesthetics, is the question of conceptual art, and materiality or immateriality, and performance. I believe that for aesthetics these questions are extremely important, particularly so for in what is called contemporary art. These questions are at the centre of the practices and the questions of art.

Now, there is another question, which is the question of market, the art market and speculation. How to avoid becoming speculative? We need to be speculative but also to avoid becoming speculative in the sense of the market. It is a problem for Derrida and for contemporary art too. I believe that this is a question of political economy, and I will develop this later this evening. But, for now, the question is one of proletarianisation. For example, the question of reproducibility, which is opened by Derrida at the beginning of his own work as the question of iterability. They are not the same question, but for Derrida [the question of] reproducibility is first and only that of iterability. In the sense of Husserl and phenomenology I believe that for Benjamin, for example, the question of reproducibility is not one of iterability. It is a question of proletarianisation—for the cinema

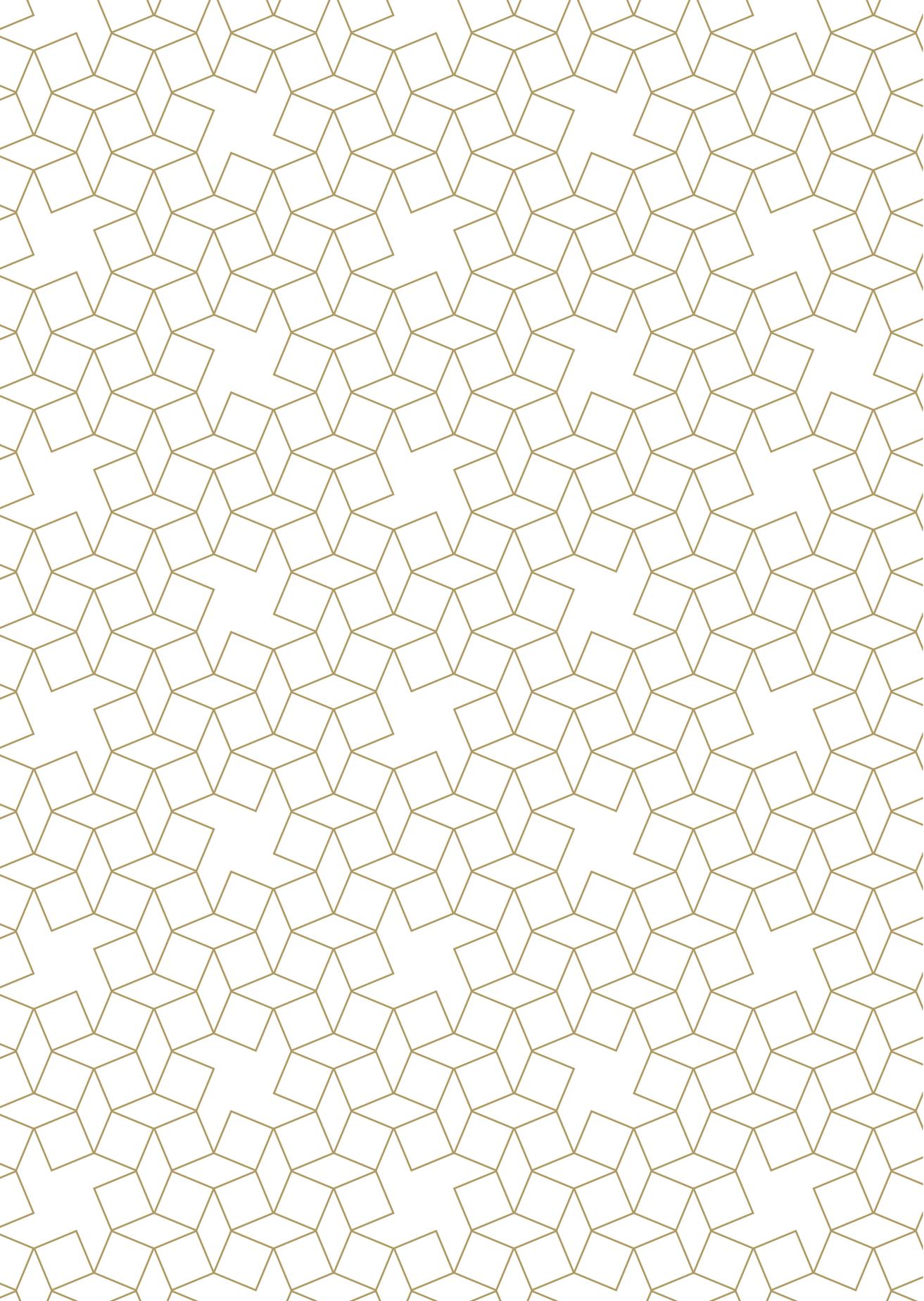


actor, for example—and it is, for Benjamin, a Marxist question that extends to the problem of perception, of symbols, and so on. For Derrida, however, this is not a material question. The *archi-trace* is not material and is not affected by the tradition of materialism in Derrida's work. For me this is a problem. I tried to show in my recent book *Etats de choc* (2012), I tried to read Marx's *Grundrisse* and the famous chapter dedicated to the question of automation. I tried to show that in this chapter the question is one of what I call grammatisation. It is extremely clear because you can see that for Marx [automation] is a process of abstraction, which is what I call grammatisation. The original act is one of abstraction. This is the case even for Derrida when, in *Of Grammatology*, he commented upon *Speech and Gesture* by [André] Leroi-Gourhan, where the latter showed that at the beginning of the high Palaeolithic period one finds the process of abstraction. And this is a process of grammatization. Derrida tried to show that what he called grammatology is based on what Leroi-Gourhan describes as the process of the exteriorization of life into artificial and inorganic memory. For me, this implies not a materialist question of grammatisation but what I call a hyper-materialist question of grammatisation. I say hyper-materialist in the sense, not with Derrida but with [Gilbert] Simondon, where we can overcome the opposition between form and matter. And to overcome this opposition between form and matter is also allowed by grammatology, but not in the same way.

But this hyper-materiality is a materiality. Why is it necessary to say that it is materiality? It is necessary to explain that we cannot stay only in the question of *archi-trace* or *archi-writing*. For me, these are artificial concepts. It is extremely surprising for somebody claiming to inherit Derrida's work to say this, but it is what I think today. I think that the *archi-trace* is like the transcendental in Deleuze. For me, it is a problem. You cannot say, for example, that you have transcendental empiricism. It is not possible. You are an empiricist or a transcendentalist, or you are something else but it is not possible to be a transcendental empiricist. Absolutely impossible. So for me this is typical of the problem of post-structuralism: with Derrida, with the *archi-trace*; with Deleuze, with transcendental empiricism; and it is also the problem, for example, between Lyotard and Heidegger and

phenomenology, when Lyotard repeats the critique of writing coming from Heidegger. So I would say, to answer your question about the relationship between deconstruction and aesthetics today, we need to rethink the relationship between form and matter and to overcome these concepts. But for that, personally, I need to transform the question of grammatology into the question of grammatisation. Grammatology is a quasi-transcendental structure, as explained by Derrida in his late work. Grammatization is not a structure. It is a process. So it is much closer to Hegel or Simondon than to Husserl or Kant. It is a historical process, which is an empirical process. Personally I define myself as an empiricist, but [it is not], let's say, a vulgar empiricism, because I believe that we need redefine completely the relationship between "empiricity" and passing through *epimethea*. Which is to transform the problem of empiricity into the question of experience. But the experience of what? Of the artefact, of the accident, that which is not just matter.

Perhaps I am now closer to Deleuze than to Derrida on this question, because behind this question of *epimethea* there is the question of what Deleuze calls quasi-causality, that is, the Stoic consideration of the accident, of chance, of, let's say, contingency. And the question of technics is one of contingency, of the accident, of the artificial, of the artefact. So now coming back to your question, I believe that today we must articulate aesthetics and deconstruction into a critique of aesthetics and deconstruction in the political point of view and in an economical point of view. I believe that we have the same problem with deconstruction and arts, which is the articulation to politics, [and] a bad articulation to economy. I say a bad one, because we don't have a good critique of speculation. I say critique of speculation in the sense of Kant saying we must criticize the speculative point of view of Leibniz, we must limit the status of philosophy. But it is also a question for aesthetics and critique. Personally, I believe that it is impossible to have something like aesthetics as a discipline on art without a critique. But as you know this concept of critique is destroyed by Deleuze and Derrida and all those people when they say judgement is not a question today and deconstruction is not a total critique. I believe that we cannot abandon the concept of critique. In *Etats de choc*, I wrote that it is not only



a pure coincidence that makes Lyotard speak of the end of grand narratives [at the same time that] Thatcher explains that 'there is no alternative'. It is the same statement, ultimately, and it is not at all a coincidence. It is a failure of thinking, a failure of critical thought.

So I believe we have to re-invent critique and not[...] For Derrida, critique was necessarily critique based on the privilege of the subject. For me, critique is produced by the process of grammatization because critique is firstly produced by the process of "discretisation". To critique, or to criticise, as you say, is necessarily to distinguish, that is to "discretise", and you have a lot of kinds of discretisation. You have a discretisation by mathematics, of arithmetic, etc. But the sorcerer, for example, in a shamanic society also produces a process of discretisation. It is not the same, but it is what is at stake in the introduction *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* by Durkheim. In the introduction, Durkheim writes "The totem is a process of categorization", that is, of discretisation. So, I say that the totemic organisation of society is a process or stage of grammatization and such stages of grammatization are produced by what I call tertiary retention. The totem is a tertiary retention. And when Derrida says that archi-writing is instantiated by alphabetic writing in Greek society and it produces this and that, etc., I believe that we must apprehend this question not only according to the point of view of what Derrida calls a logic of the supplement but according to the point of view of what I might call the history of the supplement and what Derrida himself calls the history of the supplement. But this history of the supplement is not only a grammatology, it is a grammatization. Grammatology is logic that is logocentric. Grammatization is not logic, it is a process. It is technical. It is "techno-logic". Even if it is not based on the subject, grammatology remains within logic. It is not a techno-logic.

So, here, there is a problem. Generally, Derridean scholars say that I misinterpret Derrida by using grammatization as the real and efficient development of grammatology, because what I call grammatization is produced through the process of the exteriorization of life into hominisation, into human life, and they make the objection that, for Derrida, archi-writing is not at all anthropological. It concerns the whole

of life, all walks of life. I agree with this, but I believe it is not possible to have, this grammatological view of life without passing through the process of grammatisation. To access, for example, the concepts of molecular structures of life you need the microscope. You need all the concepts of biology, and this is produced precisely by grammatisation. So, to access grammatology you need to pass through grammatisation. It is exactly the same situation that one finds in *Zein und Zeit* by Heidegger, who says that you cannot access the question of Being without passing through the *Dasein*. When he says that he has a phenomenological method for accessing the question of Being, he says: I must start from the 'there' (*Da*). And what is the 'there'? It is an artefact of the historical, the *Geschichte*, the period in which I am. So, you cannot begin with grammatology. You must begin with grammatisation. In this sense, there is, for me, a kind of regression at the end of the work of Derrida, which goes back to where Husserl says he needs a quasi-transcendental. It is a kind of regression to Husserl. So, this is the reason for which I said that we need to continue to think those questions with deconstruction, but we also need to 'deconstruct' deconstruction. For this deconstruction of deconstruction, we need a new concept of critique that is not at all a grammatological critique but a grammatised critique and a critique of grammatisation. A historical critique. This is the reason why I say I am closer to Hegel and to Simondon but also to Nietzsche, because I believe that this is what is at stake in Nietzsche. For example, the second dissertation of the *Genealogy of Morals* is this question for me. Now, in point of view of the relationship between aesthetics and deconstruction, this means that we need to, that I need personally, to develop an organology of aesthetics.

*This interview was conducted on Thursday 19th January 2014 at the Dublin Institute of Technology.*