

# *Hyperculture*



BYUNG-CHUL  
HAN

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Notes](#)

[Tourist in a Hawaiian Shirt](#)

[Notes](#)

[Culture as Home](#)

[Notes](#)

[Hypertext and Hyperculture](#)

[Notes](#)

[The Eros of Interconnectedness](#)

[Notes](#)

[Fusion Food](#)

[Notes](#)

[Hybrid Culture](#)

[Notes](#)

[The Hyphenization of Culture](#)

[Notes](#)

[The Age of Comparison](#)

[Notes](#)

[The De-Auratization of Culture](#)

[Notes](#)

[Pilgrims and Tourists](#)

[Notes](#)

[Windows and Monads](#)

[Notes](#)

[Odradek](#)

[Notes](#)

[Hypercultural Identity](#)

[Notes](#)

[Interculturality, Multiculturality and Transculturality](#)

[Notes](#)

[Appropriation](#)

[On Lasting Peace](#)

[Notes](#)

[Culture of Friendliness](#)

[Notes](#)

[Hyperlogue](#)

[Notes](#)

[The Wanderer](#)

[Notes](#)

[Threshold](#)

[Notes](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

# **Hyperculture**

## **Culture and Globalization**

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But the fear of the new is often as strong as the fear of the void, even when the new is the overcoming of the void. That explains why the many only see absurd chaos where a new meaning seeks to introduce its order. Indeed, the old *nomos* is fading away, dragging the whole system of redundant standards, norms, and traditions with it in its fall. But what is coming is not therefore devoid of standards, is not a pure nothingness, inimical to any *nomos*. Even in the fiercest struggle between old and new forces just standards emerge and meaningful proportions form.

Here, too, are gods that rule.

Ample are their bounds.

Carl Schmitt<sup>1</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, trans. Simona Draghici, Washington, DC: Plutarch Press, 1997, p. 59 (transl. amended).

# Tourist in a Hawaiian Shirt

Where do you want to go today?

Microsoft

The British ethnologist Nigel Barley once expressed the suspicion that 'the true key to the future' was 'that fundamental concepts such as culture will cease to exist'. We are all, Barley said, 'more or less tourists in Hawaiian shirts'.<sup>1</sup> After the end of culture, should the new human being simply be called 'tourist'? Or are we at long last living in a culture that affords us the freedom to spread into the wide open world? If we are, how might we describe this new culture?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>. See *Der Spiegel*, 44/2000.

# Culture as Home

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel offers the following remark on the genesis of Greek culture: 'We have just spoken of heterogeneity [*Fremdartigkeit*] as an element of the Greek Spirit, and it is well known that the rudiments of Greek civilization are connected with the advent of foreigners.' It was thus the 'advent of foreigners' that constituted Greek culture. With 'grateful recollection', he says, the Greeks preserved the arrival of the foreigners in their mythology.<sup>1</sup> Prometheus, for instance, originates from the Caucasus. The Greek people developed 'from a *colluvies*'.<sup>2</sup> The original meaning of 'colluvies' is mud, filth, hotchpotch, confusion, or muddle.

According to Hegel, it is 'a superficial and absurd idea that such a beautiful and truly free life can be produced by a process so incomplex as the development of a race keeping within the limits of blood-relationship and friendship'. Rather, the 'inherent heterogeneity [*Fremdartigkeit in sich selbst*]' of spirit is that 'through which alone it acquires the power of realizing itself as Spirit'.<sup>3</sup> Still, heterogeneity by itself does not produce the 'beautiful free Greek spirit'. For that, what is also required is the 'overcoming' of heterogeneity. The fact that it is necessary to overcome heterogeneity, however, does not imply that it is something purely negative that might as well have been absent, for heterogeneity is in itself part of the '*elementary character* of Greek spirit'.<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the presence of the foreign is necessary for the formation of one's own.

In his description of the historical development of the Greek world, Hegel obviously tries to do justice to the fact that the foreign, heterogeneity itself, has a constitutive

effect. With regard to the identity of *European* culture, however, he adopts an altogether different tone. Here, he emphatically invokes the idea of Europe as 'home'. The Europeans might have taken their religion from the East, but all that satisfies their 'spiritual life' [*geistiges Leben*] they received from Greece: 'The name of Greece evokes feelings of home in the educated men in Europe, especially in us Germans.'<sup>5</sup> There is no longer any talk about heterogeneity in itself. The foreign is now degraded and becomes pure 'matter'. Before, heterogeneity had been a *spiritual* element, a form. But once 'European humanity came to be at home with itself', the 'historical and that which is of foreign derivation' was shaken off for good.<sup>6</sup> This being-at-home-with-oneself is a happy state: 'In ordinary life we like best the men and families that are homely and contented in themselves, not desiring what is outside and above them, and so it is with the Greeks.'<sup>7</sup> Happiness is conceived as a phenomenon associated with the family, the homeland and household. It originates from a 'not outside, not beyond', from the site. In this sense, *site* is a synonym for 'spirit' [*Geist*].

Given his genealogical-historical realization that the formation of Greek culture was owed to the arrival of foreigners, or to heterogeneity in itself, Hegel's emphasis on the native home is disconcerting. It seems as though history does not coincide with that *historical moment* which produces one's own: the site in the proper sense. There is no longer any mention of the fact that 'blood-relationship' or 'friendship' leads to an impoverishment of spirit. Rather, Hegel evokes images of home, family and fatherland. What matters is being 'homely and contented' in oneself. As far as European culture is concerned, Hegel's 'spirit' has apparently rid itself of that 'heterogeneity in itself' which once provided it with 'the power of realizing itself as Spirit'. There is no longer any foreign culture, no 'arrival of