**Hypercultural types: archaeological objects in fast times.**

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**Abstract**

Although artifact typologies still play a big role in archaeology, they have certainly lost some repute in recent decades. More than just a collection of items with similar attributes, typologies are a reflection of cultural behaviour and practices, and as the world changed to involve ever more complex behaviours and practices, it has also become considerably more complicated to recognize typologies.

The aim of this article is to discuss the relationship between typologies and culture, and how the concept of culture has changed in the academic setting. Part of these changes come from transformations in the real world, in particular, processes of decolonization and restructuring of global market relations during the postwar period. The world we live in is marked by hyperculture, a fast and denaturalized form of culture that exists in transit. Hyperculture is not a new definition of culture that aims to supplant previous definitions, but rather, a new culture altogether, one that exists alongside other forms of culture. Instead of simply restructuring the idea of culture, it is necessary to understand that throughout history, people have changed their ways of engaging with culture, and relying on only one definition of culture will not suffice anymore. Consequently, multiple conceptions of culture would allow us to think of typologies in multiples ways as well.

**Keywords**

Culture, hyperculture, postmodern, capitalism, consumer, network.

1. **Introduction**

One of the key characteristics of our current postmodern times is the breakdown of boundaries. From an economic perspective, we now live in an age of global capitalism, termed Late Capitalism by some (Mandel 1975), marked by a much more flexible yet distilled economy (Harvey 1990). In the classic Marxist sense, this have given us a new global culture marked by a diversified range of styles and consumer experiences (Jameson 1991, Jeffries 2021).

This new way of approaching the world has shone a light on the very boundaries that make sense of archaeology, whether it is chronological boundaries separating the Palaeolithic from the Neolithic (e.g. Graeber & Wengrow 2021, Harris & Cipolla 2017), or the geographical boundaries separating Europe from Asia and Africa (Hodos 2017, Mac Sweeney 2023, Wolf 1982) or even the boundaries that underlie artifact classifications and typologies.

Despite the development of archaeology into a global enterprise (Kerr 2020, Mizoguchi 2015, Mizoguchi & Smith 2019), a large extent of archaeology remains a local practice, something that is conceived as manifesting local characteristics and existing within some boundaries. Furthermore, barring some funding opportunities and ambitious projects that operate at a global or quasi-global scale, most archaeology still operates under the auspices of nation-states and oftentimes is still used as part of nation-building discourse (Diaz-Andreu & Champion 1996, Greenberg & Hamilakis 2022). What this means is that archaeological entities still have some degree of discreteness to them. This is important as it is this discreteness that lends credibility to archaeological types.

Archaeological types refer to observed resemblances between different artifacts, regularities of attributes in material culture that give them a sense of “sameness”. In the early twentieth century, typologies proliferated but with little regard for what a “type” actually meant (Kluckhohn 1939). At the time, the assumption sustaining the type-concept was that artifacts produced in a similar manner are representative of “cultural traits”. These types then, form some sort of cultural unit – it allows us to assume that a group of people were in agreement as to how to produce these artifacts in the ways they did. Thus, artifact-types represent cultural behaviours (Krieger 1944, Spaulding 1953). This is why one of the terms that has come to replace “culture” in more recent years has been “community of practice”. According to Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, a community of practice is a group of people who share concerns on how to do something and through interaction learn how to do something better (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). Given that objects are socially produced, relying on shared practices and group interaction, with makers learning from each other, it makes sense that there is a certain sameness to how artifacts are created among a community.

The sameness of artifacts within a type, are based on certain attributes of the artifacts. These attributes can be the use of the same raw material, but even of more importance are those attributes that are caused by human action upon the raw material. For David Clarke, the regularity of attributes of artifacts is what gives them coherence – archaeological entities are built from attributes, which are part of artifacts, which then form artifact-types, coalescing into archaeological assemblages, creating a culture, and from there a culture group (Clarke 2015 [1968]: 15).

The connection between artifact typologies and archaeological cultures remains a crucial one, yet one that was quite contentious at times (Ford 1954, Spaulding 1953). In archaeology today, the rise of scientific methods and large-scale funding (Kristiansen 2014) has made the reliance on artifact typology almost obsolete. More than trying to date sites and associate people to cultures, it is simply easier to date contexts and bones directly and obtain absolute chronologies. But while this is true in relation to those regions of the world with large-scale funding and strong archaeological science departments, many regions of the world still rely heavily on artifact typologies to date burials, layers, sites, or even entire regions. For instance, my own education in archaeology in Portugal was built upon the idea of a “fóssil director”, that is to say, an index fossil. In geology, an index fossil is usually a species that was relatively short-lived but were very geographically widespread, allowing one to identify geological periods. Similarly, in archaeology, there are artifacts that are very precisely dated, meaning when one is found within a grave or a layer, one can safely assume that the grave or layer belongs sensibly to the same period and culture of said artifact. In short, an index fossil in archaeology allows one to quickly place a site (or layer, burial, etc.) within a cultural group.

Nevertheless, archaeology relies on a strange balance between discrete culture groups and between a more global perspective where everything is intertwined. Even though they have been critiqued, culture groups endure, and references to Bronze Age El Argar culture (Spain), Corded Ware culture (Northern Europe), Clovis culture (North America), are still fairly prevalent to this day. Part of the issue is the monothetic notion of culture, a notion of culture that recognizes one unique set of characteristics, which in archaeology is usually based on artifact characteristics (Clarke 2015 [1968]: 35).

Despite the obvious limitations of index fossils and of artifact typologies, and the fact that they refer to an outdated view of culture change as sequences of static cultural periods (Lucas, this volume), what are we truly looking at when we recognize similarities between artifacts? In fact, what makes a collection of artifact-types into an assemblage, and from there into a culture? As stated in the beginning, we live in times where boundaries have been shaken up and what we initially assumed were clear-cut differences between cultures and periods no longer exist. Culture-groups, expressed in chronological diagrams, such as those found in the work of Gordon Childe (1958), or maps denoting the “spread” of cultures, tend to leave a bad taste in many archaeologists’ mouths nowadays. But what is the alternative? To do away with the idea of “culture” altogether, and with it, typologies as well?

The aim of this paper is to address this issue, not with the aim of solving any real or imagined problem with regards to culture and artifact typologies, but rather, to gain a better understanding of them. It is easy to simply dismiss the concept of culture and associated typologies because they belong to the previous *Zeitgeist*, that inherited from modernity; it is much harder to understand the current *Zeitgeist* and how it affects how we think and do archaeology, but this will be what this paper will attempt to do.

1. **The death of culture**

In 2003, in the spirit of our times, Immanuel Wallerstein pointed out the arbitrariness in how we separate disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences. As he pointed out, one of the criteria of separating disciplines was chronological, with the past studied by history and archaeology, with the present studied by sociology, political science, and economics. Another separation was geographical, with sociology studying the West, and anthropology studying the non-West. In addition to these separations, the world of social sciences was also broken down with regards to the market, which is studied by economics, the state, studied by political science, and civil society, studied by sociology (Wallerstein 2003: 454).

These comments were published in the journal *Current Anthropology*, in a period of growing discontent with where the discipline of anthropology was going (Comaroff 2010, Jebens 2010, Kohl 2010). A big element that sustained anthropology as a disciplinary practice was the idea of culture and the differences separating cultures. In the early days of anthropology, even before it was a fully-fledged discipline, people had a clear idea what culture was. The word “culture” was not associated first with people, but rather with processes of cultivation (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952). By the 1800s the word “culture” (*Kultur*) was used in German in its ethnographic sense and books referring to culture-history (*Culturgeschichte*) or culture-science (*Culturewissenschaft*). It was from German that the concept of culture was introduced into English, and the first definition of human culture was put forward by Edward Tylor, “[c]ulture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1871: 1). Throughout the early twentieth century, several definitions were put forward and most of them retained the general ideas expressed in the definition established by Tylor (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 43ff.).

Towards the end of the twentieth century however, the culture concept seems to have attracted some animosity and discredit, yet still retains some staying-power (Sahlins 1999). Nonetheless, with an enfeebled concept of culture, anthropology was largely thrown in disarray. Postmodernism, and all its intricate economic and social processes, has forced us to rethink the concept of culture. The end of World War II marked the reconfiguration of national powers around the world, coupled with the process of decolonization. At first, this meant a division of the world into three levels – the first world, constituted by countries belonging to NATO, the second world, constituted by the large communist powers, and the third world, which were those countries that neither belonged to NATO nor were part of the communist project (Sauvy 1986 [1952]). As the decades after the war went on, the three-world system gave way to a two-world system, largely because of the failure of soviet communist project. This new world was and continues to operate on a strange paradox – it is one that emphasizes difference and discreteness, such as the difference of western culture to that of the rest of the world, while simultaneously denying that such difference truly exists, and that what truly exists is a global network (Hardt & Negri 2000, Jeffries 2021). As Marshall Sahlins points out, culturalism was a big phenomenon in the postwar period; peoples from New Guinea to Wisconsin were referring to their “culture” in a proud and respectful manner, and as a defence against the domineering force of Western cultural expansion (Sahlins 1995: 13). However, this culturalism, which manifested locally, was always imbricated with more than just western expansionism, but also with transnational flows of goods, people, and customs. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the idea of local cultures, with their own cultural objects, that form their own coherent types and assemblages, were gradually disappearing leading to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have considered a flattening of the world (2000: 339), and what Sahlins considered the twilight of the anthropological discipline (1995: 14).

From a methodological standpoint, the prime method of anthropology, the ethnographic interview, stopped being associated exclusively to anthropology, with many other disciplines, archaeology included, making use of it. The idea of fieldwork, which was often associated to anthropology and archaeology, are now part and parcel of countless disciplines, such as film studies and experimental psychology (Silverman 2005). Whereas sociology engages in the study of western economies, barring some exceptions, anthropology devoted itself largely to non-western parts of the world (Carrier 1992: 195). This, however, has changed in the last decades, not because the West has suddenly become more interesting to anthropologists, but primarily because the West has become more diffuse and mixed with everything else.

Thus, the world we live in today is one that is simultaneously monistic and pluralistic. It is monistic in the sense that it has been flattened by global capitalism (Ribeiro 2023), by powers that do not have any local presence, powers that are freed from soil and blood, a situation in which one cannot even talk about western dominance anymore. But it is also pluralistic in the sense that it is a world marked by radical difference, by constant processes that differentiate things from one another (Jameson 2007: xii). The flattening of the world through global capitalism is the great contributor to the dismissal of the culture concept, as it was understood by the likes of Edward Tylor. This flattening has led to the collapse of horizons, and contexts that provide meaning and identity to things have gradually disappeared (Han 2022: 50).

In archaeology, there have been debates concerning typologies and their associated cultures (e.g. Ford 1954, Spaulding 1953), but throughout decades there has also been an assurance that regardless of where those debates lead us, types and cultures exist to some extent. Under a flattened world, types and cultures have lost most of their importance. Why? Take the following example: samurai swords, or katanas, are curved single-edged swords used by a warrior class in Japan during the feudal period. Although they are not used as an index fossil in the traditional geological or archaeological sense, they are nevertheless artifacts of a certain period, indicative of a certain culture, and referring to a specific time and place. One does not find samurai swords in ancient periods, such as the Neolithic or Bronze Age, for obvious reasons, but one should also not find them in modern western contexts either. If we are to take chronology and historical progression at face value, in the way we are traditionally supposed to assume they work, finding the use of say hand-made pottery similar to that of the Neolithic is unlikely in the Roman period, primarily because of the invention of the potter’s wheel. Similarly, it is unlikely to find the use of lithic objects during the Roman period, because of the use of metal objects. Following this logic, samurai swords were also replaced by more advanced technology, such as rifles. However, we nevertheless find samurai swords everywhere today – they are incredibly easy to buy and are used in martial arts or displayed in homes. They are certainly not ubiquitous, but to consider them an artifact of a bygone era is wrong. Whether it is a samurai sword from the seventeenth century, one from World War II, or one that has been made in recent years, samurai swords are something that are also popular today, to some extent.

When discussing a culture and the types of artifacts associated to it, we quickly realize how inadequate past definitions and conceptions have become when confronted with objects such as samurai swords. On one hand, there is still some truth to the fact that samurai swords belong to Japanese culture and were used by a specific group of people for a specific period time – the boundaries around such an artifact type continue to exist, however, those same boundaries fall apart when we notice the presence and use of samurai swords today. What this means is that we live in a twofold cultural world – one where Japanese culture and its material culture are still representations of a specific period and/or place (e.g. feudal Japan), and another where Japanese culture represents global consumption; products that have an abstract and interchangeable monetary value in the contemporary world of today.

How has this happened? As Byung-Chul Han documents, we are living in a period of time where the Other has disappeared, where we are pressured to be the Same (Han 2018). Bear in mind that Han is not saying that everything is equal, but rather that everything can be put on the same level, in the same way that Hardt and Negri state that the world has been flattened. In a world of the Same, samurai swords stop being an object of past mystery, to become just another object of contemporary consumption – a samurai sword stops being an object that belonged to the Other, that is, of Japanese samurais; it has become an object that can belong to anyone today. As any object that can be consumed, the samurai sword enters into the market of commodities, and thus it becomes interchangeable – a price can be attached to it. When one tires of the samurai sword on their mantelpiece, one can simply sell it, and proceed to buy another object of similar value, such as an Arab sword – a scimitar. For the collector, the samurai sword is unique and irreplaceable, but for the consumer, the samurai sword is replaceable with something of similar value. Sometimes the collector and the consumer can be very different people, other times, they can be the same individual. Samurai swords and scimitars are this very different, but they can also be the Same.

Underlying the suppression of the Other is the idea that nothing can be hidden from view, everything can be known. If everything is known, they are not part of the Other. For instance, love and hatred are based on the Other. It is precisely because of what is unknown that leads us to fear and hate the Other, such as a foreigner. But through education one can learn what the Other is, what the foreigner has experienced, one can relate to them and share their experience, and they soon lose their status as the Other, and become Us. Love is similarly about the unknown; it is about the mystery of the *Eros*, of not knowing the feelings and emotions of the Other. But in today’s world the Other as *Eros* has been uncovered; emotions and feelings have been reduced to biological and psychological responses, which has made love lose its enigma. We have gone from a society of seduction to a society of pornography, one that is transparent, and where everything can be seen (Han 2015, 2018).

In a world where everything can be seen, boundaries as we traditionally recognize them stop making sense. In archaeology, geographical and chronological boundaries have always been crucial but when past material culture stops being an artifact of the past, those boundaries lose their importance. More than chronological periodization, the current *Zeitgeist* is one that views reality as everything, everywhere, all at once, to use the title of a recent film. In the process, it stops making sense to view time in terms of a distinct past, present, and future, but as one continuous whole (Han 2017, 2022). Archaeological types and cultures are not things of the past, but local empirical manifestations in the tapestry that is the monistic whole. Better than thinking of things as past, modern, or contemporary, the archaeology of today is one that is temporally holistic.

In such a world, it comes as unsurprising that there is a crisis of identity in anthropology, and surprising that archaeology is not having one right now. This is not to say that both anthropology and archaeology are failing, much on the contrary, despite claims of the end of anthropology, it remains a discipline that is taken seriously and produces fantastic work (Comaroff 2010). The same goes for archaeology, which one would assume would identify itself quite strongly with distinct cultures of the past but has shown incredible resilience and adaptation in the last decades, especially in commanding funding and making use of scientific techniques (Kristiansen 2014). But the culture concept and typologies have nevertheless been challenged, so what are we to do with our conventional ideas concerning culture and typologies?

1. **Hyperculture and typologies of objects**

It seems undeniable that in certain regions and during certain times there were artifacts that shared similarities in how they were produced, used, and even discarded. It is not that this phenomenon did not happen in the past, but how we understand these similarities that are causing concern. Depending on the location and time period, some societies did in fact have rather restricted contacts with other societies, leading to very limited spread of cultural traits; in other cases, there were societies with considerable mobility and active trade networks leading to situations where there was considerable spread of cultural traits. More often than not, what you will end up having are societies that have some cultural traits that remain local and are not shared, while simultaneously having other traits that are shared across different societies.

The artifacts that have a very distinct geographical and chronological context are fairly easy to recognize and understand – they are the material culture of a distinct group of people. Palaeolithic lithic industries, Greek red-figure pottery, and Northwestern American totem poles are good examples of material cultures that can be associated fairly well to specific cultural groups. Architectural styles of the ancient world and ancient scripts are also forms of materiality that can often be associated to specific cultures. All these elements of material culture can still be associated, within reason, to classic concepts of culture, such as the one conceived by Tylor (1871:1). But then there are other forms of material culture that do not fit the classic concept of culture at all.

For instance, early large-scale genetic models performed in Europe (e.g. Haak et al. 2015, Olalde et al. 2018) presupposed that material culture, such as Corded Ware and Beaker Pottery, were part of an internally cohesive culture with strict boundaries, and that these corresponded to distinct human groups. However, these presuppositions are a misrepresentation of the variety and complexity of the extant material culture of Europe during the period analysed (Furholt 2018). Part of the problem is that these genetic models replicate an outdated cultural-historical diffusionist spread of cultural traits, one which is based on a monothetic conception of culture. As Martin Furholt argues, a much more promising avenue of research is to employ Clarke’s polythetic conception of culture (Clarke 2015 [1968] cited in Furholt 2020).

The monothetic view of culture assumes that cultural traits cluster together to form groups. Archaeology has had the habit of focusing on those traits that repeat themselves and form a homogenous whole, while ignoring other traits that tend to not repeat or appear in other cultures. For instance, Neolithic cultural groups are often based on pottery types, yet they ignore other cultural traits that do not appear particularly homogenous. As Clarke pointed out, there are virtually no instances in which all traits of a culture group appear consistently in an individual (Clarke 2015 [1968]: 36, Furholt 2020: 3). The polythetic view of culture, as the name suggests, is one where an individual site of occupation contains various cultural traits, some of which are shared while others are not. No single attribute of material culture or trait are sufficient or necessary for group membership (Clarke 2015 [1968]: 37). At face value, the polythetic view of culture is not remotely as simple, and consequently, as attractive as the monothetic view of culture. In fact, the polythetic view of culture appears quite confusing, since it is then quite difficult to denote where and when cultures begin and end.

On a similar note, focusing on the first millennium BCE, we have a period of intensified trade and connectivity throughout the world, but in particular, throughout Southern Europe. This is a period of coalescing cultural groups, leading in the final centuries of this millennium to a veritable “global” context, built around the Mediterranean. For some, globalization is a post-sixteenth century phenomenon, since it was only during this period that we first see trade and connectivity at a global scale, nonetheless, the idea of globalization has made its mark in archaeology of Southern Europe during the late Iron Age and the rise of the Roman Empire (Hodos 2017, Pitts & Versluys 2014). Just as some Neolithic specialists have come to recognize the limitations of traditional conceptions of culture and cultural interaction, Iron Age specialists and classicists have come to recognize the limits of traditional conceptions of cultural diffusion.

For instance, while there have been several advances in uncovering the Mediterranean world west of Rome and the Aegean, these westerly regions are still very much seen in a colonizer-colony type of way, with the Graeco-Roman world recognized as the colonizer (Foxhall 2014). This view has been challenged in recent years. First, one must recognize that there has always been heavier investment in the archaeology of the Graeco-Roman world, in detriment to the western side of the Mediterranean. Second, the idea of a Graeco-Roman world as the birth of “Western Civilization” has really been toned down in recent years, with archaeologists considering the contributions from Africa and Asia in the formation of European cultures (Mac Sweeney 2023). More than a process of “spread” of Graeco-Roman culture throughout Europe, there is a process of globalization, where the world becomes increasingly compressed and seen as a single place (Sloterdijk 2013, Robertson 1992: 8).

Much like in the case of culture from a polythetic perspective, the idea of local monolithic cultures becomes suppressed, and in its extreme cases, culture is seen as becoming more homogenous and standardized across the world (Giddens 1990, Ritzer 2004). Whereas the monothetic perspective of culture is inadequate for focusing exclusively on those cultural traits that are homogenous and patterned within a bounded group, globalization theory is also inadequate when it views global culture only through the material culture that manifests at a global scale. Take Coca-Cola for instance - it seems undeniable that Coca-Cola is an American consumer beverage that has spread around the world; it is in fact a product with global presence. However, as Daniel Miller has shown, Coca-Cola can also manifest very specific local varieties and characteristics, forcing the brand “Coca-Cola” to adapt to local consumer desires and market preferences (Miller 1998). This is what has been called “glocalization” (Robertson 1995).

Thus, in recent decades, culture has become something considerably more complex, taking a postmodern form, by becoming fluid, flexible, and hybrid. This in turn has made the very concept of a “type”, whether it is archaeological objects or modern consumer products, harder to classify and assign into a type. Bear in mind that the issue is not the fact that “types” have disappeared, since patterns of attributes in objects still exist in both ancient and contemporary objects; the issue is a connection emphasized in the beginning of this article, that between a type and cultural behaviour. Conventional wisdom assumes that a group of people, who lived together in a given geographical and chronological space will follow similar behaviours and therefore produce and use similar objects, but this conventional wisdom is not that clear anymore.

As explained earlier, postwar capitalist globalization has contributed immensely to this state of affairs. As Eric Wolf (1982) pointed out, there is no such thing as a European history, but rather an interconnected global history, with some past periods having had more intense connectivity than others. However, our current times have seen globalization take unprecedented intensity, especially since the advent of the internet. For instance, chopsticks are not just eating utensils in Asia, they are eating utensils all over the world. Thus, while we nonetheless associate chopsticks to Asia and Asian cuisine, or in other words, to a specific territory of the world, they are also *deterritorialized* objects. Chopsticks are simultaneously Asian and non-Asian today. Then there are those objects that never had territory in the first place – products of nowhere and everywhere at the same time, such as mobile phones. Without a territory, a discrete group of people one can associate the mobile phone to, how do we define it as a culture?

While the changes to the concept of culture have worked wonders in helping us understand the complexities of the archaeological past, part of the problem is that despite these changes, the culture concept remains remarkably monolithic. One can change its definitions and features, to adapt to whatever issue arises in our interpretations, but *the problem is that we still rely on one single concept of culture, when we should have multiple*. Consequently, with more than one concept of culture, one can have more than one set of cultural behaviours, and in the process, more ways of thinking of typologies and groupings of objects.

Byung-Chul Han has recently described something called hyperculture (2022). According to Han, hyperculture is not an oversized global and homogenous form of culture, but rather, *a form of fast culture, one that is not linked to any group of people, place, or time, that is to say, one that is denaturalized and disconnected from blood and soil* (Han 2022: 9, 15, emphasis mine). At face value, hyperculture might appear to be a combination of different cultures or a more advanced version of local cultures. Take fusion food for instance - at first, fusion food might just appear the combination of two distinct food cultures, for instance, Mexican and Japanese, but a better perspective is viewing the very process of creating, serving, and consuming fusion food as a hypercultural practice. Once it becomes fused, the food is no longer of Mexican and Japanese origin, but something else entirely.

Hyperculture is also not an impoverished version of local culture, one that has simply entered the global network of capitalist consumer practices. In both Japan and the West, there are sushi restaurants, where one can go and consume sushi as it has been done in Japan since the mid-1800s. But at trains stations, shopping malls, etc. one can also find chain conveyor-belt sushi restaurants, such as Yo! Sushi, in the UK, which constitute a culture of their own. The difference between a traditional sushi restaurant in Tokyo and a Yo! Sushi in London is not just the quality, but also the price, how it is served, but above all, where these restaurants are located. Whereas traditional sushi places are found in local contexts, such as small alleyways throughout Japan, sometimes quite hidden from view, Yo! Sushi restaurants are found in what Marc Augé calls non-places (2023 [1995]).

Byung-Chul Han describes culture, in traditional sense, as a home (2022). What he means by this is that there is a certain contentedness in being-at home-with-oneself, that is, knowing one’s own culture, where it is located. Then there is the outside-of-one’s-home, the foreignness, the Other. Hyperculture does not take place in another culture, it is not foreign, but it is not one’s own culture either, but something altogether different, something that takes both one’s own culture as home and foreign culture and denaturalizes them (Han 2022: 9). Where hyperculture has its strongest foothold is precisely on those places that are not home nor foreign, such as airports, supermarkets, train stations. As Augé states, if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then non-places cannot (2023 [1995]): 63). This makes sense if we are only thinking of culture in the traditional Tylorian sense, but not in the hypercultural sense. Non-places can be associated to identity, but not with the identities related to family or nationality, but with the lifestyle identities associated to hyperculture itself. Someone who is part of the hyperculture is someone that is considerably more mobile, someone who has lived in multiple countries, and thus, the way they dress, consume media, and eat are how they define themselves. Given their mobility, airports are where one can find many hypercultural people, and one can witness their use of hypercultural material culture.

The polythetic way of thinking culture can be understood in Augé’s terms as something that is never complete (2023 [1995]: 18), as something that has objects that only make sense when viewed in reference to other objects, as a flexible assemblage, a rhizome that does not have beginning nor end (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, Jeffries 2021: 16). Hypercultural objects are precisely those objects that do not fit typologies in the way we are used to thinking of them, because what connects them is hard to capture. For example, if one were to create a typology of beds, one would naturally put other beds with similar attributes in the same type, however, in the case of IKEA for instance, the beds are grouped not only with other similar beds, but also with wardrobes, nightstands, and desks. IKEA groups these under a collection, such as MALM, and in their showroom, IKEA displays these collections together. Apple does the same thing with their items, their phones, computers, laptops, and watches, by grouping them under an ecosystem, which are all seamlessly digitally connected.

Despite the apparent randomness of how hyperculture works, it nevertheless has a Marxist basis, that is to say, hyperculture remains very much the *status quo* of global late-capitalism. This hypercultural diversity of styles and material culture has been studied by Marxist scholars, such as Fredric Jameson (1991). Furthermore, the complexities in how hypercultural objects associate with one another is only possible through what David Harvey calls “flexible modes of accumulation” (1990). The combination of objects, such as those of Apple are a form of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 2007 [1899]). The products offered by Apple are perhaps the best example of this – the idea behind these products is not just to show that one can afford Apple products, but to denote connectivity, to consciously or unconsciously show that one is part of the hyperculture. Flying from New York to Paris and from there to Shanghai, working on laptops while flying, taking Ubers to meetings, all of these activities denote membership in a certain class. Only well-paying jobs can afford this amount of travel and mobility, and concomitantly, the material culture of these hypercultural people must reflect their economic status.

There is much to be learned from consumer society, in particular, the global order of production and consumption (Baudrillard 1996, 1998). It does not seem a coincidence that the critiques of traditional conceptions of culture arose shortly after the postwar establishment of late-capitalist consumer society. In his studies of consumption, Grant McCracken talks of something called the Diderot Effect (1988), where the philosopher Denis Diderot, upon being gifted a dress gown from a rich friend, decides to upgrade all his clothes and the items of his apartment to match the richness and the quality of the dressing gown he received. This leaves Diderot bankrupt, and he curses the rich dressing gown he received, since it was that gift that launched him into a shopping spree (McCracken 1988: 118-119). The underlying message of this story is that, when it comes to modern consumption, one does not simply acquire what one needs; one acquires based on their perceived lifestyle and what the objects represent in terms of their lifestyle. IKEA and Apple group their objects precisely with this principle in mind, instilling the idea that their products make more sense as a collection or ecosystem rather than as individual items.

But this idea can be taken to further extremes, leading to even stranger combinations of items. For instance, on sites like X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and Reddit, there are pages dedicated to photos with collections of items that people use on an everyday basis, also known as Everyday Carry (EDC). Despite its name, EDCs rarely show all the items one makes use of on a daily basis. For instance, one usually needs a bag or backpack to carry things, one usually also carries a bottle of water, one usually has house keys, a wallet, etc. however these items never feature in pictures of EDCs. The aim is not to show what one actually uses of on a daily basis, but rather, the items that make up a person’s identity. On reddit for instance, the EDCs tend to be focused primarily on pocketknives and small tools, which is to denote masculine traits and blue-collar professions, such as construction, plumbing, electrician, etc. In some instances, the EDC is to denote mobile travel and the digital nomad lifestyle, such as the objects shown in figure 1.

A computer keyboard and a camera

Description automatically generated

Figure 1 - An example of an Everyday Carry (EDC) collection, containing a HP ENVY laptop in the top left, a gel ink ballpoint pen and notebook both from MUJI in the top right, an Anne Pro 2 wireless mechanical keyboard in the bottom left, and a Fujfilm x100v camera in the bottom right. Photo by Artur Ribeiro.

The EDCs containing cameras are of particular interest, since the cameras shown tend to be compact but very expensive ones, such as Leica rangefinders. Oftentimes, one will also see analog cameras, or in the case of figure 1, the Fujifilm x100v, a digital camera that is based on the design of an old analog Leica camera. Here we see the collapse of temporality – the Fujifilm x100v is a camera launched in 2020, with modern features, such as face auto-detect autofocus and an inbuilt ND filter, however, in its style, it copies the Leica M3, an analog camera launched in 1954. The Fujifilm x100v is a modern camera designed to look old-fashioned, and like many hypercultural objects, it is more about its appearance than what it actually does (Debord 2005 [1967]).

The appearance that is aimed in the case of figure 1 is that of labour mobility, not unlike that of digital nomads. The laptop and wireless keyboard indicate a profession that entails work while travelling; the pen and notebook indicate meetings and networking; and the camera is to denote some leisure time, spent sightseeing for instance, which in turn can be interpreted as cultural capital. The Fujifilm camera, in particular, is a compact one with an inbuilt lens and an APS-C sensor (crop sensor), meaning that is not as powerful as DSLR or mirrorless cameras, which allow for interchangeable lenses and contain a full-frame sensors. These more powerful cameras, such as those produced today by Nikon, Canon, or Sony are professional grade cameras, for shooting sports, portraits, or fashion. The idea behind compact cameras is precisely to show that they are not professional grade, but rather, specifically designed for travel and/or street photography.

Naturally, while there are some patterns in EDCs, part of their purpose is to denote some degree of individuality in terms of consumer agency. This leads to some rather arbitrary combinations of objects at times, one that cannot be reduced to a specific local culture. Tracing the production of these objects can allow us to glean into the global network of production, supply, and consumption, but their place of production or consumption does not tell us much about the lifestyles of the people who post EDCs on social media. For example, the Fujifilm x100v looks like a Leica rangefinder camera, however, the former is produced in Japan whereas the latter is produced in Germany.

EDCs is just one of many forms of hyperculture. It is easy to reduce such a phenomenon to a subculture, that is, an offshoot of consumer practices during late-stage global capitalism, but there is a logic to EDCs and similar practices. In EDCs we witness the changes the world has undergone since the postwar period, a world where time and place, chronology and geography, have given way to nowhere and all the time – a world that has become metaphysically flat, since everything can now be connected and exchanged.

But EDCs are also interesting because of how extreme they are – they are the paradigmatic example of non-home culture and deterritorialized objects. Whereas a culture produced by a given community of practice coheres in its attributes, and of course, because said culture belongs to a specific community of a given time and place, EDCs are a form of culture that does not cohere at all. EDCs are the objects of hyperindividuals – the culture of those who desire no affiliation in any specific group. Whereas a person who collects Samurai swords, Apple products, or Nikon cameras wish to be associated to those specific objects and brands, those who show off EDCs aim deny any brand loyalty. The identity of those with EDCs is precisely to not have any identity at all (Lordon 2022).

1. **Discussion**

Naturally, the idea is not to observe hypercultural phenomena and objects and project them into the past. It is tempting to see EDCs as assemblages similar to those of the archaeological past, as toolkits that perhaps the Neolithic or Bronze Age agent could have had. This, however, would be anachronism. As Karl Polanyi argued, modern society operates on a logic built on market society, an invention that did not exist prior to industrialisation (2001 [1944]). Although we cannot push hyperculture into the archaeological past, there are nonetheless elements of it in ancient times. During the Iron Age in Southern Europe, there were non-places as well, such as ports and there was trade between the West and Eastern Mediterranean. There were local cultures, as well as forms of global hyperculture.

In the academic world, there is a paradoxical tendency to simultaneously want to abolish the concept of culture as it was traditional understood but at the same time continue to rely on it. This has led to the strange situation where scholars will use the term “society” or “communities of practice” in place of culture. As the genomic histories have shown, genetic signatures correspond to *something*, but archaeologists are not fully comfortable with recognizing what this something is supposed to be.

Typologies, in particular, have suffered immensely under the weight of the hypercultural world. When we think of the first attempts at typologies, they resembled the traditional narrative structure of a tree, with the roots as the origins of an object and the branches as their final iteration, but as the world became more hypercultural, the narrative tree metaphor became too limited, and thus the rhizome metaphor came to substitute it (Boltanski & Chiapello 2018, Jeffries 2021: 16). More than typologies, what mattered was the rhizomatic network, how everything has become connected to everything else. Does this mean that the world has always been like this? No. In the same way that there are multiple forms of culture, one has to think of typologies in multiple ways, sometimes in a linear way, since that is how some artifacts of the past should be grouped and understood, and sometimes in a network manner.

It is important to remember that hyperculture remains nevertheless a recent phenomenon, even though we can see some of its aspects in the past. Hyperculture is just one of many ways in which culture manifests. Even large urban hubs where hyperculture dominates, in places such as Hong Kong or London, there are little pockets of local culture that resist suppression, cultures such as accents and colloquialisms, cuisines that have evolved within family traditions and refuse to become hyper, and material culture such as carved stamps in Hong Kong or pineapple sculptures on railings, weather vanes, and spires, throughout the city of London. In light of such a complicated world, even a flexible way of conceiving culture, such as the polythetic conception of culture, will always be limited. More than changing the definition of culture, one has to imagine the history of humanity as involving different forms of culture, sometimes simultaneously, where the traditional Tylorian culture concept can still apply, as well as Clarke’s polythetic notion of culture, and Byung-Chul Han’s hyperculture.

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None declared.

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Not Applicable.

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