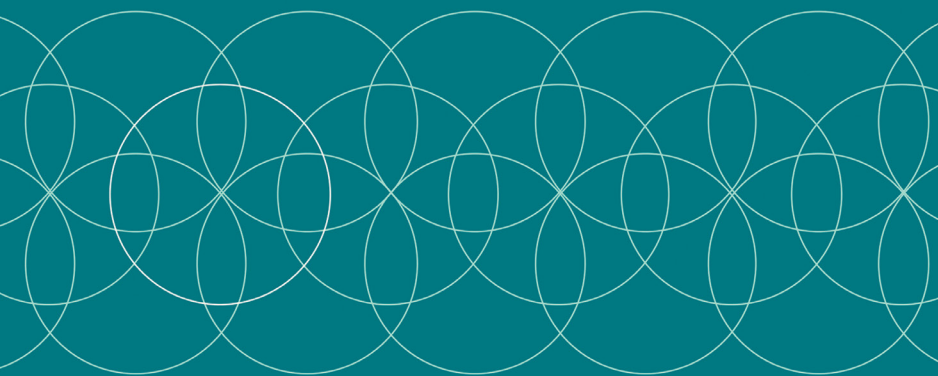


FRANÇOIS JULLIEN



THERE IS  
NO SUCH THING AS  
CULTURAL IDENTITY



There Is No Such Thing as Cultural Identity



# There Is No Such Thing as Cultural Identity

François Jullien

Translated by Pedro Rodriguez

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## Preface

France's next election campaign,<sup>1</sup> they tell us, will come down to "cultural identity."

It will turn on such questions as: Shouldn't we defend France's "cultural identity" against the self-segregation of various communities?<sup>2</sup> and Where do we draw the line between tolerance and assimilation, acceptance of differences and identitarian demands?

This is a debate that is occurring throughout Europe and, more generally, concerns the relationship between cultures within the schema of globalization.

But I think it starts with a conceptual error. It cannot be a matter of culture-isolating "differences" but of divides [*écarts*] that keep cultures



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apart but also face to face, in tension, and thereby promote a common [*du commun*] between them. This is a matter not of identity, as cultures by their nature shift and transform, but of fecundities, or what I will call resources.

Rather than defend any French cultural identity, as anything of the sort would be impossible to identify, I will defend French (European) cultural resources – “defend” meaning not so much protect as exploit. Resources arise in a language just as they do within a tradition, in a certain milieu and landscape. Once we understand this such resources become available to all and no longer belong [*n'appartiennent pas*]. Resources are not exclusive, in the manner of “values”; they are not to be “extolled” or “preached.” We deploy them or do not, activate them or let them fall into escheat. For this each of us bears responsibility.

A conceptual shift of this kind requires us to head upstream and redefine three rival terms – the universal, the uniform, the common – to draw them out of their equivocality. In like manner, it will behoove us to head downstream and rethink the “dia-logue” of cultures: *dia* from divide [*écart*] and progress [*cheminement*],<sup>3</sup> *logos* from the common of the intelligible. For it is the

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common of the intelligible that yields the human.

Should we confuse our concepts we will bog down in a false debate, head straight away for an impasse.