Europeanising spaces in Paris, ca. 1947-1962
McDonnell, H.M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 1. The Paris Café as a Europeanising Space

In his address on ‘The Idea of Europe’, George Steiner remarks on the power of Pierre Nora’s notion of *lieux de mémoire*. He then proceeds to invoke a handful of criteria of Europe. First among these is the café:

Europe is made up of coffee houses, of *cafés*. These extend from Pessoa’s favourite coffee houses in Lisbon to the Odessa *café* haunted by Isaac Babel’s gangsters. They stretch from the Copenhagen *café* which Kierkegaard passed on his concentrated walks to the counters of Palermo. No early or defining *café* in Moscow which is already a suburb of Asia. Very few in England after a brief fashion in the eighteenth century. None in North America outside the gallican outpost of New Orleans. Draw the coffee-house map and you have one of the essential markers of the ‘idea of Europe’.¹

Stimulating as Steiner’s observation is, his argument about the idea of Europe is in general problematic. If he allows that the definition of Europe’s frontiers is tricky and debatable, by the same token he suggests that there is an unproblematic and settled core of Europe. It is in this sense that his reference to Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* is instructive, since this reference to the café fits into a consensual, settled, and canonical idea of Europe in which internal conflict and contradiction are minimised. There is of course much in the history of the Paris café in this period which would not trouble this understanding of a European space: Rosemary Wakeman, for instance, refers to the central place of the café as a crucial site of recreation for Parisians, and to the masses of Parisian spectators who filled the city’s cafés like their co-Europeans across the continent to watch the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.²

¹ George Steiner, *The Idea of Europe* (Tilburg: Nexus Institute, 2004), 17.
Without dismissing the significance of such phenomena in post-war European social history, perhaps the Parisian café can be productively examined as a site of contestation of Europe, or as a place in which events unfolded which responded to European actuality, and shaped it in turn. An analysis of the Parisian café at this time as a site of disruption and insurrection in relation to Europe, is not to claim that this is what most typified this venerable institution. It is merely to suggest it has an alternative or additional history that avoids the any easy consensus and the inauthentic domestication of history. Steiner’s invocation of Walter Benjamin in his depiction of the café as a sort of European museum piece is symptomatic of this tendency.³

This chapter will first survey some of the café-frequenting individuals and groups that contributed to discourse of Europe in post-war Paris, and how the discourse of Europe was invoked in relation to the city’s cafés. Second, this Paris institution is examined as a space that, contrary to its purpose as a space of leisure, was implicated in the violence of politics that impacted on thinking about Europe; namely, imperial war and the Cold War. Third, the discussion moves to a more extended analysis of the café in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre – the archetypal café intellectual – and his substantial discourse about Europe.

Europe and the Cosmopolitanism of the Paris café

Walter Benjamin wrote that, ‘Paris is a counterpart in the social order to what Vesuvius is in the geographic order: a menacing hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution. But just as the slopes of Vesuvius, thanks to the layers of lava that cover them, have been transformed into paradisal orchards, so the lava of revolution provides uniquely fertile ground for

³ Steiner, The Idea of Europe, 18.
the blossoming of art, festivity, fashion." The radical Parisian spirit described here was historically strongly represented in the cafés. Andrew Hussey notes that ‘the cafés of Paris were, quite rightly, regarded with suspicion by all government authorities, who were all too aware of the role they had played, from 1789, as carriers of the virus of revolution.’ Benjamin’s comparison also captures the tone of Janet Flanner’s eulogy to the old Café Rotonde which was being razed after the city’s intellectual scene shifted in the post-war period from Montparnasse to Saint-Germain. She listed among its illustrious frequenters ‘Cocteau, Radiguet, Modigliani, Max Jacob, Foujita, Picasso, Braque, Honegger, Henry Miller, Bromfield, Utrillo, and in a class by themselves, Lenin and Trotsky, who used to sip their cafés-crèmes there in 1915, when in exile.’

The Paris café in these accounts was perhaps better understood as a forum for universal culture and politics with a heavy European element – an accurate reflection of how universalism was for the most part conceived in Paris and in Europe generally in this period. Elsewhere, though, the Paris café was a forum for more direct invocations of Europe.

The Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo traces part of his longstanding commitment to questioning and confronting the notion of a closed Europeanness to his experiences as the sole European in Algerian cafés in the Barbès quartier after his arrival in the French capital in 1956. Europe was also a fundamental term of reference in the circles of Parisian Surrealist intellectuals, for whom the experience of the First World War had instilled a militant, enduring disgust for

---

7 Maya Jaggi, ‘Scourge of the New Spain’, *The Guardian* (12 August, 2000), http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/aug/12/internationalwriting.books. Goytisolo’s important contribution to scrutinising the notion of a pure and orthodox Europe in terms of ethnicity, culture, and sexuality is examined in chapter 6 on ideas of Europe in the culture of Spanish exiles.
European civilisation. This was manifested in the group’s radical and early anticolonialism, and it is striking that in the course of the Algerian war their stance was formulated and clarified in a document entitled ‘Texte lu au café suite aux réunions suscitées par la Déclaration des 121’. This concerned the problem of negotiating an appropriate path between commitment to their rejection of a Europe of imperialism and unconditional support of the Algerian Fédération de libération nationale (FLN). Part of the issue at hand for the group in lending its support to the FLN was whether there was a clear enough distinction between anti-colonial nationalism and the bourgeois European nationalism that the group scorned.

The importance of the café in the group’s deliberations here should not be overstated. After all, the document was not disseminated, and the café in the title could be conceived as incidental. On the other hand, Wakeman argues that the urban spatial imagination of Parisian Surrealists was remarkably acute, open to the spatial undertones of ‘identity, meaning, and value’, and to the ‘“topography of subjectivity”’. That the invocation of the café in the Surrealists’ statement was meaningful, and that it was an appropriate forum in which to articulate their militant objections to Europe, thus seems an unforced argument once Wakeman’s point is taken into account.

Given the cosmopolitan nature of Paris, the café was of course also a forum for the political and cultural activity of non-European residents. Eric Hobsbawm remarks on the ‘Paris café Maoism’ of Pol Pot, while Benjamin Stora suggests that Algerian national consciousness

---

9 Carole Reynaud-Paligot, ‘Les surréalistes et la guerre d’Algérie’, French Cultural Studies 13(2002), 44 n. The declaration of the 121 was a highly important 1960 manifesto against France’s war in Algeria. This in part was framed with Europe as a key term of reference: ‘Need we remind you that 15 years after the destruction of Hitler’s regime, French militarism, in meeting the demands of this war, has re-established torture and made it once again a European institution?’ See ‘The Declaration in Support of Those who Refuse to Fight in Algeria’, New Left Review I/6 (November-December, 1960), 41.
10 Leclercq, La rançon du colonialisme, 337-338.
11 Wakeman, The Heroic City, 189.
was in fact largely formed in the city’s cafés.\textsuperscript{12} It is interesting, then, that if the Parisian café was a quintessentially European institution, it was also a forum in which strategies to overturn the Europe of imperialism were formulated. This did not go unnoticed by the French state. In September 1955 the new Minister of the Interior, Maurice Bourgès-Manoury, laid out the rationale for an extensive surveillance of North African cafés in Paris: ‘drinking establishments, restaurants, and canteens held by French Muslims have become one of the habitual centers of nationalist agitation. Anti-national slogans are peddled there, indeed made there… it is unacceptable that these public spaces, ruled strictly by legislation, and where the police have a permanent supervisory mission, should be the centers of a separatism that becomes more arrogant with each day.’\textsuperscript{13} Of course, in the café life of the Parisian intellectual set, these anti-colonial activists would find many sympathetic Europeans. Besides politics, the city’s cafés constituted a certain European-Oriental divide in the common refusal of service to Algerians. Amit Prakash notes that in the early 1950s, the police were asked by various private individuals and groups to enter the La Goutte d'Or area to keep North Africans out of ‘Parisian’ cafés.\textsuperscript{14}

The Paris café is also a much-noted aspect of the lifestyle of expatriate black Americans in this period, most famously in the case of figures like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Chester Himes, who frequented establishments like Café Tournon near the Luxemburg gardens and Café Monaco, also on the Left Bank. Indeed, black Americans congregated principally around the Latin Quarter and Saint-Germain-des-Prés.\textsuperscript{15} They were attracted to the French

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 135.
capital in the first place by its reputation for tolerance, in contrast to their formative experiences of racism back home.

One interesting aspect of this scene was its interconnection with contemporary Cold War politics and black internationalist politics. In her study of ‘Black Paris’, Bennetta Jules-Rosette outlines how the cafés that black Americans frequented buzzed with American journalists, correspondents and expatriate artists, whilst they were reputed to be a meeting place for American government agents and spies looking to finger suspected Communists in the expatriate community.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, the café functioned as a forum that facilitated the promotion of black internationalism, as contacts were fostered between black American intellectuals and African and Antillean writers.\textsuperscript{17} Of course, these are issues in themselves which impacted on discourse about Europe in this period, as its place in a decolonising world was increasingly questioned.

One striking and unsettling aspect of the black Americans’ experience in Paris, which became a point of discussion of in the café – the only place they could congregate – was their recognition of the maltreatment of Algerians, who occupied the lowest rank in the social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{18} In this sense, the Europe of equality that they had romanticised was shown to be in reality a variant configuration of the exclusionary society that they had left, but in which they occupied a higher position in the social order. This was part of a broader contradictoriness of their European refuge, upon which Richard Wright commented at the first International Conference of Black Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne in 1956: ‘The men of Europe seem prone in their actions to achieve results that contradict their motives. Europeans have a genius for calling things by wrong names; they seek to save souls and become involved with murder; they

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{18} See Stovall, ‘The Fire this Time’, passim.
attempt to enthrone God as an absolute thought and they thereby establish the prerequisites for science and atheistic thought.’

Moreover, in spite of the personal liberation that the esteem and interest of Parisians represented for the black American community, not only the Marxists among them would have understood well the unsatisfactoriness of any liberation that was not general. Guilty feelings about having abandoned fellow blacks in the United States were accentuated by their own prioritisation in Paris over Algerians. James Baldwin recalled being in Paris in 1956 to cover the same Sorbonne conference. Whilst walking along the Boulevard Saint-Germain he saw photographs at a news kiosk of fifteen-year old Dorothy Counts being spat upon by a mob as she made her way to school in North Carolina. He recounted that,

It made me furious, it filled me with both hatred and pity, and it made me ashamed. Some one of us should have been there with her! I dawdled in Europe for nearly another year, held my private life and my attempt to finish a novel, but it was on that bright afternoon that I knew I was leaving France. I could, simply, no longer sit around in Paris discussing the Algerian and the black American problem. Everyone was paying their dues, and it was time I went home and paid mine.

It is suggestive that the Algerian and black American problems are conjoined in his account of his Paris experience. One might then speculate that his decision to return to the United States was not due to a prior conviction that the injustices in his homeland took precedence over those of Europe, but that it was precisely those injustices that he had encountered in Europe which induced him to rethink his stand on the Civil Rights movement at home.

The black American expatriates’ unease about deferring politics at home was exacerbated by their recognition that their European base in Paris was not radically different from, to use

---

Jacques Rancière’s term, the ‘police order’ that they could not bear in America. Rather, it was a strikingly similar variant, in which they might have a part of sorts in the social polity, but others clearly did not.

The Paris Café, Violence, and Europe

In his review of several books about Parisian intellectual life, Christopher Prendergast writes of Peter Lennon’s Foreign Correspondent: Paris in the Sixties that ‘whole stretches… take us out of the café into the streets and the world of violent confrontation, first (and most seriously) in connection with the Algerian crisis.’ It is interesting that Prendergast makes such a sharp demarcation between Parisian café life and the arena of the Algerian war, for, in fact, the two were interconnected in certain ways. This in turn connected the café to questions of Europe and Europeanness, given the stake of the French-Algerian war in such issues. Here we will elaborate on this connection between the café, violence, and Europe not only in the case of wars of decolonisation but also in the context of the Cold War.

Olivier Todd recollects his work to help the Jeanson network, a group of leftist militants led by Francis Jeanson who helped the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in the metropole, notably by transporting money and papers. He noted that Francis Jeanson insisted they meet in ‘posh literary bars, in the middle of Saint-Germain, even when the police were after

---

21 Oliver Davis explains succinctly the significance of Rancière’s term. What is conventionally thought of as politics is termed by Rancière ‘the police’. Davis continues, ‘This includes the institutions and processes governing the organization and representation of communities, the exercise of power, the way social roles are distributed and the way that distribution is legitimated. See Oliver Davis, Jacques Rancière (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 76.
him. “They won’t look for me here,” he would say, “it’s too obvious.” Todd emphasised the recklessness of this, and suggested that Jeanson’s decision making in this regard might well have been fuelled by drink. A more charitable analysis might conceptualise this tactic along the lines of Michel de Certeau’s concept of détournement – if the Europe of imperialism deeply implicated the European bourgeoisie, he would appropriate the latter’s cherished public sphere and use it against the former. Naturally, the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive.

The place of the Parisian café in the Algerian war is also apparent in Hamon and Rotman’s classic study of the Jeanson network, Les Porteurs de valises. This network was itself a kind of practical objectivation of a militant European consciousness, in that its work necessitated continual back and forth trips between Paris and France and Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, and Spain. If Europe was a set of borders, the group aimed to appropriate this feature to turn it against the imperialism that defined it no less. According to Stora, they did so with notable success: ‘A handful of porteurs de valises awoke the French and European left, raised the question of state terrorism… and faced the problem of new relationships between the West and the Third World.’

Hamon and Rotman recount a police raid on the Tambour de la Bastille café on the Place de la Bastille, which was frequented by members of the network. The comparative restraint of these operations against the network did not compromise their effectiveness, as key members of the network were apprehended and brought to trial in 1960. This contrasted starkly with other Paris police operations against cafés frequented by immigrant Algerian communities during and

---

26 See Hamon & Rotman, Les Porteurs de valises, passim.
27 For a discussion of this conception of Europe see Joep Leerssen, ‘Europe as a Set of Borders’, Yearbook of European Studies 6 (1993), 1-14.
28 Quoted in Rod Kedward, La Vie en Bleu. France and the French since 1900 (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 348.
even before the war, and also with its negligence in the face of OAS attacks on those spaces.\textsuperscript{29} The discrepancy between the treatment of the French militants and the Algerians (militants and civilians) was a concretisation of demarcation according to what Judith Butler terms the distribution of human vulnerability.\textsuperscript{30} That is to say, the classifications French and non-French, European and non-European, were underscored in the perceived difference of appropriateness of the exposure of each group to violence, and indeed of enacting violence on the two groups.

It is also interesting how the connection between violence and Europe was manifested in the Parisian café, sometimes in quite inconspicuous ways. This emerges in relation to the hit film of 1958 \textit{Les Tricheurs}, which reflected and spawned much debate about youthful corruption and urban disintegration. Wakeman describes the film thus: ‘in it the optimism of \textit{Paris populaire} has been exchanged for the image of an unforgiving place where youth and the future are out of control.’\textsuperscript{31} The director Marcel Carné defended the film’s portrayal of youth against public outrage. Insisting on the authenticity of its depiction, he described his interactions with these types of young men and women, who were for the most part students who had abandoned their studies. They frequented the café Bonaparte in Saint-Germain, quite different from the regular student cafés in the Latin Quarter. Superficially, the café life of these young people seemed simply an expression of their ennui and apolitical cynicism. But Carné insisted that this needed to be understood in the context of the Cold War reality in which existence could be liquidated at any time.\textsuperscript{32} Here one thinks of Jean-Paul Sartre’s remarks in the context of his denunciation of French colonialism, which, as we will see, was intimately tied to his conception of Europe. In


\textsuperscript{31} Wakeman, \textit{The Heroic City}, 262.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 261.
September 1958 he wrote, ‘since Hiroshima, we have been threatened, angered and worried the whole time. I imagine that in every mind there is a scar which is nothing less than terror at rest. Many people today could repeat Hobbes’s words of three centuries ago: “The one and only passion of my life has been fear.”’ The image of Sartre himself is of course invariably intertwined with the Paris café, and at this juncture we will turn to a discussion of how this played into his discourse about Europe.

**Sartre, the Café, Europe**

It would be hard to name an intellectual who is more associated with the café than Jean-Paul Sartre. In keeping with this image, the front cover of Anna Boschetti’s study of Sartre and *Les Temps modernes* shows Sartre and his circle in discussion in a café. Sartre was also very much a European figure, not only in his intellectual importance and influence across the continent but also in terms of his direct engagement with the question of Europe. Yet, the rare commentary on these interventions belies their prominence. What, then, is the connection between the café and his Europeanism? In approaching this question, this account will first review Sartre’s ideas about Europe. Second, it will engage with Pierre Bourdieu’s argument about the structural determinants of Sartre’s dominant position in the Parisian intellectual field. It will be argued that each of Bourdieu’s arguments can be substantiated by locating the function of the café. Of course, the concomitant implication is that the conditions Bourdieu identifies, and the function of the café in these, facilitated the impact of what Sartre said and wrote about Europe. The café did not so much shape Sartre’s discourse about Europe as enhance its authority.

---

In the first place, it is worth reiterating the extent of Sartre’s intellectual presence throughout Europe in this post-war period. Mark Poster argues that he was probably the most popular writer in the continent, and figures as diverse as Juan Goytisolo, Alain Badiou, or Jürgen Habermas refer to him as an important influence in their youth. One also thinks of Sartre’s influence on Pier Paolo Pasolini in the context of Europe’s responsibility in struggles in the Third World. And if György Lukács was strongly critical of Sartre, it is significant in itself that he felt the need to prioritise a rigorous engagement with, and critique of, his work. In a much less positive emphasis on Sartre’s trans-European importance, Tony Judt indicts Sartre for making a real contribution to daily oppression in Eastern Europe. However, writing in 1963, George Lichtheim assessed that Sartre had ‘an enthusiastic following in Poland,’ a popularity which Poster notes increased after 1956. Janet Flanner’s report in her Paris journal on the 1949 Wroclaw trial also notes that the guilty were, according to the lawyers, led astray by Sartrism.

Europe was also a theme which continually resurfaced in Sartre’s own work, whether implicitly or directly. As for the former, Andrew Hussey points to the degree of interest in his famous 1945 lecture, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’, as symptomatic of ‘the defining mood of a generation of young people who had survived the war but who were deeply sceptical of the so-

---

36 See Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, 121-125
39 Flanner, *Paris Journal*, 114. The Wroclaw trial involved four French nationals, a German, and a Pole charged by the Polish authorities with espionage and sabotage.
called benefits of Western civilization."\footnote{Hussey, \textit{Paris}, 389.} If this was a mood instilled in large part by the recent experience of war, that experience in turn coloured Sartre’s own view of Europe. ‘The word “Europe”,’ he wrote in 1947, ‘formerly referred to the geographical, economic, and political unity of the Old Continent. Today, it preserves a musty smell of Germanism and servitude.’\footnote{Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{What is Literature?}, trans. Bernard Fechtman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 218.} But what is particularly striking in Sartre’s use of the term Europe was his juxtaposition of its (re)constitution in the new Cold War world with a Europe defined by its imperialism. These two contexts of Sartre’s work have tended to be artificially separated in discussions about him, or conjoined unsatisfactorily. It is telling that Sartre omitted mention of Nazism altogether as a motive for writing his 1959 play about torture, \textit{The Condemned of Altona}, despite the Nazi context of the plot. Instead he remarked that, ‘for me, \textit{Altona} is tied up with the whole evolution of Europe since 1945, as much with the Soviet concentration camps as with the war in Algeria.’\footnote{Quoted in Paige Arthur, \textit{Unfinished Projects: Decolonization and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre} (London & New York: Verso, 2010), 101.}

The Europe that is depicted in works like \textit{What is Literature?} and \textit{Black Orpheus} is one besmirched by its cooption by fascism in the recent past, and drastically undercut in the present by a decadent bourgeoisie bereft of ideas, confidence, and legitimacy. His preface to Frantz Fanon’s \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} argued that Europeans had to accept that ‘in the past we made history and now it is being made of us.’\footnote{Sartre, ‘The Wretched of the Earth’, 171.} Whether via the reconfiguration of the distribution of global political dominance to the benefit of the United States and the USSR, or in the context of the anti-colonial movements which were then gathering pace, Europe was now an object rather than a subject. It is quite striking that Sartre took such an interest in colonialism as a European phenomenon. This contrasted to many of his fellow Frenchmen and women who
conceptualised the Algerian conflict as a French national drama, even if critical of France’s actions in the war from 1954.\(^4\)

The stark reality of this global actuality left no place for indifference or disengagement – one was necessarily ‘situated’ in this new Europe. Sartre’s interventions through the 1950s and the early 1960s, particularly in relation to colonialism, reinforced the image of a moribund Europe on its last legs. Yet he refuted the obvious sentiment of resignation to this condition. The corollary of his tenets of commitment and engagement was that Europe could be remade, however noxious it might currently be. Hence his advice to European readers to heed Fanon’s irrefutable charges against Europe in *The Wretched of the Earth*, even if his book was not written for them.\(^5\)

In this sense, Sartre was less an advocate of Europe than of Europeanisation. If ‘existence precedes essence’, it followed that an account of Europe in terms of its historical pedigree or elemental characteristics was at best uninteresting, and at worst an alibi for indifference to what existed or was done in Europe’s name in the present. As such, in *What is Literature?*, Sartre emphasised that discourse about Europe took on its significance through active engagement in the present: ‘As for socialist Europe, there’s no “choosing” it since it doesn’t exist. It is *to be made*.\(^6\) This same work was a bridge between the theoretical and practical for Sartre – his unpublished notes in Simone de Beauvoir’s *La Force des choses* state that it led him to the *Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire* (RDR).\(^7\) A key aim of the short-lived RDR in

---

\(^4\) By the same reasoning, the historian of the idea of Europe, Denis de Rougemont, was scathing in his review of Sartre’s preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, arguing that Sartre projected onto ‘Europe’ the provincial concerns of French intellectuals with the Algerian war. See Denis de Rougemont, ‘Sartre contre l’Europe,’ *Arts: beaux arts, littérature, spectacles* (17 January, 1962).


1948-1949, in which Sartre invested both energy and money, was to advocate a socialist Europe standing apart from both the Soviet Union and the United States.48

Bourdieu on Sartre

In Postwar, Tony Judt laments the decline of the ‘venerable European institution, the public intellectual.’ He continues: ‘the previous fin-de-siècle had seen the first flowering of politically engaged intellectuals – in Vienna, in Berlin, in Budapest, but above all in Paris.’49 A fuller understanding of this European institution, however, would take into account how intensely guarded and contested was its role and status, and nowhere more than in the French capital. Anna Boschetti places Sartre squarely within the context of such battles dating back to at least the time of the Dreyfus affair. In her approach to Sartre’s work, Boschetti is heavily indebted to Pierre Bourdieu’s methodological and theoretical apparatus. Bourdieu’s own analysis of Sartre suggests the structural conditions which explain the latter’s success in the particular intellectual context of post-war Paris.

The case is made in the remainder of this chapter that the café played a specific function in the conditions that Bourdieu outlines. Of course, it is important to consider that the café had a symbolic as well as practical function. As such, Sartre could still be thought of as a café intellectual beyond the point when he had largely moved away from the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés by the late 1950s, when the area had become too touristy – the by-product of the implementation of a quite different vision of a Europe of tourism.

48 See ibid., passim.
We should also note that the label of the café was, and is, also sometimes used precisely to discredit figures like Sartre – the PCF in particular scorned café intellectualism, which was indicative of a petit-bourgeois lifestyle and the seedy Americanisation of Saint-Germain. André Malraux was no less disdainful of ‘ces gens du Café de Flore’.\(^{50}\) Likewise, today the café is often invoked in denunciations of Sartre: the title of Todd’s discussion of the Jeanson network is taken from an encounter with Sartre in a café in which he had ‘a glass of whisky in one hand and Lenin in the other.’\(^{51}\) This kind of intellectual café scene is thus condemned retrospectively as at once far too frivolous and much too serious, dismissed as self-indulgent irresponsibility conjoined with unacceptably radical political advocacy.

Bourdieu, of course, emphasises the relational and competitive aspects of intellectual production, conceiving its actors as operating in a common field. Consequently, Bourdieu is sceptical of the image of Sartre as a free-floating intellectual, self-fashioned and scornful of the institutional affiliations and responsibilities of his leading intellectual competitors that characterised, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Incidentally, Lévi-Strauss had much to say about Europeans and Europeaness, from a structuralist perspective, explicitly opposed to Sartre’s existentialist and phenomenological approach. Against the Sartrian notion of the total intellectual who could not be reduced to any determination, Bourdieu insists that we inquire into the conditions and structures which in fact made his dominance feasible and sustainable.\(^{52}\) However, it is vital to make the point that it is not necessary to implicate actors in self-conscious or deliberate strategising to sustain Bourdieu’s theory of a field defined by relations of force, and whose actors strive to accumulate more symbolic capital than their competitors. Hence Bourdieu


\(^{51}\) Todd, ‘A Glass of Whisky in One Hand and Lenin in the Other’.

Following on from this, we will attempt to locate the place of the café as a point of leverage within the competitive and relational Parisian intellectual field, without claiming that Sartre deliberately or knowingly utilised it as such. What is at stake here is not a comparative textual exegesis to evaluate the intrinsic strength of Sartre’s ideas (including his ideas about Europe), nor of those of his competitors. The preponderance of any actor’s discourse over that of his or her competitors does not derive from making his or her case particularly charismatically. The performative power of the speech act is integrally related to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘capital’ and, specifically, the kind of capital that an actor has within a particular field. So what is important in discourse, including discourse about Europe, is not some power inherent in the language or the force of the idea per se, but the kind of legitimacy with which it is backed. In his conception, certain competitors are better endowed with symbolic capital to make claims, to the extent that some can carry priest-like authority to do so; discourse here can be understood as

a religious act performed by the person invested with the highest authority, the rex, whose responsibility it is to regere sacra, to fix the rules which bring into existence what they decree, to speak with authority, to pre-dict in the sense of calling into being, by an enforceable saying, what one says, of making the future that one utters come into being… Even when he merely states with authority what is already the case, even when he contents himself with asserting what is, the auctor produces a change in what is: by virtue of the fact that he states things with authority.54

If, as according to Boschetti, Sartre held intellectual dominance in post-war Paris to an extent unparalleled since Voltaire, Bourdieu suggests why this was so by first posing these questions:

What if Sartre had been only the ideologist of the intellectuals, confident that they would recognise themselves in the image he reflected back to them, that of the total intellectual who cannot be reduced to any determination? What if Sartre, who reigned unchallenged over the whole intellectual universe, was totally dominated by what he dominated? What if the free intellectual were actually the most determinate of intellectuals, unaware as he is that the determinations attaching to his social position lie precisely in the illusion of the absence of determination? 55

There are three main points in Bourdieu’s account of Sartre’s dominance of the Parisian intellectual field at this time. Here we will review his arguments and in each case suggest how an analysis of the café as a forum for Sartre’s work, or at least in the image of Sartre, adds to the force of the Bourdieu’s case, and how in turn this helps us to understand Sartre’s interventions and ideas about Europe.

First, Bourdieu locates Sartre’s intellectual dominance necessarily within the specific historical conjuncture of post-war France: ‘To understand the ‘Sartre phenomenon’ more fully would require an analysis of the social demand for intellectual prophecy for intellectuals, and an account of the conditions at the time, the sense of breakdown, tragedy and anxiety associated with the collective and individual crises stemming from the war, the Resistance and the Liberation.’ 56 Boschetti, for her part, extends this time frame to encompass the breakdown of

56 Ibid.
European civilisation through economic crisis then war, through to the Cold War and colonial wars.  

If Sartre’s success and influence depended on this historically contingent moment, what role did the café play? The café connotes something quotidian, social, convivial, and free of institutional commitment and subordination. As such, it was an excellent forum in which to expound a philosophy which flourished precisely in the context of the kinds of issues that arose in the recent history and contemporaneity that Bourdieu and Boschetti point to: questions of freedom and domination, personal responsibility, political and social ties and engagement. When every gesture was a commitment, as Sartre argued on reflecting on the experience of German occupation, it was more appropriate that it be made or articulated publicly in such a social setting than, say, in an inaccessible, elitist dusty library or lecture hall. The relevance of this point becomes clearer when one is reminded of how contested was Sartre’s thought at this time, particularly in the context of French and European colonial wars. As Stora reminds us, a large majority of universitaires were supportive of the cause of maintaining Algérie française and remained so until near the end of the war. The statement of support for French Algeria signed by twenty-six Sorbonne professors that appeared in Le Monde in May 1956 was indicative of this now overlooked imperial consensus. The same goes for Le Figaro’s queasiness about the Sorbonne hosting the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in September 1956. ‘A tam-tam is lying about on a table in the hall of the Sorbonne’, it sniffily reported.

---

The café also perhaps played another role in the competitive and relational nature of intellectual production that Bourdieu points to, specifically as a counterpoint to Heidegger. Indeed, Bourdieu argues that other intellectual competitors would insist that Sartre’s work was merely derivative of Heidegger’s and so merited no attention in its own right. Furthermore, Heidegger’s name was commonly mobilised to denigrate Sartre’s work, as opponents issued polemical reminders of the similarities between their works to taint Sartre’s with the mark of Germanism or fascism. Sartre, then, in articulating his own ideas about Europe, needed not only to mobilise his intellectual credentials and make space for his ideas, but also needed to distance himself from the wrong kind of Europe. The latter was the Europe that enthused those right-wing French intellectuals in the 1930s that Sartre denounced in *What is Literature?* – a Europe that smacked of ‘Germanism’. The café facilitated this double movement: apart from the connotation of institutional freedom that we identified, the image of the café intellectual was a point of distinction from Heidegger. Here one could contrast an image of urban authenticity against the ruralness favoured by the German philosopher – a stifling environment suitable for the cultivation of provincial reactionaries and fascists, a prejudice confirmed by the successes of Pierre Poujade in the French province. Interestingly for our analysis here, this division between countryside and city is pertinent to the history of ideas about Europe. In these terms, Sartre as the archetypal café intellectual was predisposed to an image of a Europe of urban cosmopolitanism

---

63 Sartre, *What is Literature?*, 218.
65 Poujade was a right-wing populist politician who enjoyed significant if ephemeral electoral successes in France at the national level in the 1950s.
and sophistication, as opposed to a notion of Europe as a collection of introverted, provincial communities rooted in the land.66

Second, Bourdieu insists that, far from indeterminate, Sartre’s success cannot be separated from the Parisian institutional mechanisms of granting intellectual legitimacy. In this world, institutions like journals, coteries, publishers, academies, competitive exams, khâgnes, and the École normale supérieure policed authority and its reproduction. As such, ‘the demand for the prophetic intellectual, and the ‘masterly self-assurance’ needed in order to satisfy it, can be seen as springing from the heart of the educational system on which intellectual prophecy apparently declares war. That demand and self-assurance are rooted in the very places which produced Jean-Paul Sartre, with his attitudes of mind and his qualifications, i.e. with all the symbolic capital he was to invest in his early intellectual strategies.’67 The authority of what Sartre said about Europe, then, at once depended in large part on his education credentials and the dismissal of them. His clout was sustained by his contempt for authority, by his being able to hold authority in contempt. And when Bourdieu points to Sartre’s reference to himself as a mere petit-bourgeois intellectual, in strategic terms this is to be understood as self-deprecation and self-aggrandisement in a stroke, thereby according himself the authority that comes precisely from renouncing one’s own authority. Once more, the lack of institutional affiliation of the Paris café brought these points to the fore, and could only have been foregrounded as a forum for Sartre’s work by his professed disinclination to take a position at the Collège de France, and his refusal of the Nobel Prize in 1964.

66 The distinction between a rural and urban based Europe is discussed in Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Curious History of Europe’, in On History (London: Abacus, 1997), 295. One thinks also of Max Weber’s argument that the city as we know it is a product of Christian Europe.
Third, the most forcefully articulated part of Bourdieu’s analysis of Sartre is his critique of the latter as a ‘total intellectual’ – ‘active on every front, as philosopher, critic, novelist and dramatist.’ Bourdieu asks what the enabling conditions of this condition were, and it is a question both he and Boschetti tackle in their respective works. Both point to Sartre’s achievement in combining, and appropriating the prestige of, both the figure of philosopher and of writer. Boschetti substantiates this thesis by arguing that this manoeuvre was itself made possible by the shifting relations between the two vocations in the preceding years in Parisian intellectual life. In this reading, Sartre struck an effective balance between conformity to the rules of the intellectual field, and novelty as a total intellectual appropriating and combining the symbolic capital of both philosopher and writer, and it is argued here that the café was again an auspicious base from which to make this move. As Eric Hazan shows in his history of Paris, there was a certain marked division of labour in the history of the Paris café; the literary and political scenes tended to be each territorially confined to distinct cafés. One might say that the significance of Sartre’s combination of the disciplines of philosophy (which of course informed his politics) and literature was doubly underscored by their mergence in one forum in the Café de Flore or Les Deux Magots.

Furthermore, it is not just any Parisian café which is to be understood as a Europeanising space, but a particular kind. Indeed, Bourdieu argues that a precondition of the Sartrian total intellectual was left-wing commitment. As a point of contrast, the poet and writer Léon-Paul Fargue could write of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in 1939 that, ‘the place lives, breathes, throbs, and sleeps by virtue of the three cafés more famous today than the institutions of state: the Deux

---

68 Ibid.
71 Bourdieu, ‘Sartre’.
Magots, the Café de Flore, and the Brasserie Lipp.\textsuperscript{72} How different post-war Paris was: the attention paid to the intellectual scene around the Flore and Deux Magots contrasted utterly with the discredited and enfeebled right-wing intellectual stronghold of the Brasserie Lipp just across the street, tarnished as it was by the Europe of Germanism. The radical credentials of the Flore could only have been strengthened by the adage that Germans had not set foot in it,\textsuperscript{73} in contrast to cafés around the Champs-Élysées which, Eric Hazan argues, ‘was the major axis of Paris collaboration, following an established tradition.’\textsuperscript{74} As such, Steiner’s invocation of a generic café as a European space, whether in Paris, Vienna, Copenhagen or Palermo would have had little currency in this Parisian intellectual scene, which saw itself and was seen by others as the trailblazer of ideas in Europe, but in which clear distinctions were drawn between different kinds of Europeanism according to political affiliation, whether explicit or concomitant.

Conclusion

If the café was a marker of Europe, the history of the café in the French capital in this period invites the question: which Europe? It was a forum for the radical questioning of ideas of Europe just as much as their assertion, as exemplified by circles like the Surrealists and black American intellectuals, and by figures like Goytisolo and Sartre. Nor was the café merely a rarefied institution. The café was a certainly a forum of escapism and leisure, but it was not detachable from the pressing international issues in the context of which Europe was conceptualised, notably imperial conflicts and the Cold War. This examination of the café, particularly regarding Sartre’s questioning of Europe, also lends weight to the position that the

\textsuperscript{72} Cited in Wakeman, \textit{The Heroic City}, 246.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Hazan, \textit{The Invention of Paris}, 231.
strength of ideas, including ideas about Europe, must be examined in relation to the forums in which they were produced, the kinds of symbolic capital these lent, and the nature of the historical conjuncture in which that capital could be wielded.