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Author Showcase of Scott Haine:
Cafes and Creativity
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Speaker



W. Scott Haine
Adjunct Associate Professor
Holy Names College
University of Maryland University College

Cafes and Creativity



Cafes and Creativity

- Creativity in the City
- Rise of Digital Revolution
- Dynamics of Urban Life
- Role of the Café in Intellectual Life
- Cafes as Essence of European Life
- History of Intellectual Cafes in France
- Cafes as Writing and Creative Space
- Creative Brooding in Cafes
- Sociability, Anonymity, & Creativity

Creativity in the City

Scholars today see the city as a place of creativity. Social interaction is a key component.



“Cities...have been engines of innovation since Plato and Socrates bickered in the Athenian market place. . . .

The great prosperity of contemporary London and Tokyo comes from their ability to produce new thinking.

Wandering those cities....is to study nothing less than human progress.”

-Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City* (London: Pan/Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2011), p, 1.

Rise of Digital Revolution

Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005)

notes:

“Leading scholars concur that urbanization economies are the decisive drivers of economic growth, more important even than technology and innovation . .

They capitalize on the often chaotic ecosystem that creates previously unforeseen financial, scientific, social, political, and other linkages to one another.” P. 258

Dynamics of Urban Life

Glaeser and Florida follow the lead of most economists, sociologists, historians and urbanists in sketching the broad statistical dynamics of urban life rather than providing detailed analyses of informal institutions such as the café that are key hubs in the social network of cities.



Rick Tulka's Café Le Sélect Portraits

Artist Rick Tulka has been drawing the clientele and habitus of a famous Parisian intellectual and artistic café for decades.

Noel Riley Fithc and Rick Tulka, *Paris Café: The Select Crowd* (Soft Skull Press 2007)



Rick Tulka's Portraits



Role of the Café in Intellectual Life



Role of the Café in Intellectual Life

Thomas Pynchon in his classic novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, wrote:

“. . . the Odeon, one of the great world cafés, whose specialty is not listed anywhere—indeed it has never been pinned down. Lenin, Trotsky, James Joyce, Dr. Einstein all sat out at these tables. Whatever it was they all had in common: whatever they'd come to this vantage to score . . .

Perhaps it had to do with the people somehow, with pedestrian mortality, restless crisscrossing of needs or desperations in one fateful piece of street . . . dialectics, matrices, archetypes all need to connect once in a while, back to some of that proletarian blood, to body odors and senseless screaming across a table, to cheating and last hopes, or else all is dusty. Dracularity, the West's ancient curse . . .”

-Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973), 262-263.

Cafes as Essence of European Identity



Cafes as Essence of European Identity

Literary critic George Steiner in an interview in the *Paris Review* “From western Portugal to St. Petersburg, you have cafés, places where you can come in the morning, order a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, spend the day reading the world's newspapers, playing chess and writing.

The bibliography of magnificent books written in cafés is enormous. There are people who have always worked that way and preferred to.

I'm at home everywhere in Europe because I go to a café the moment I arrive, either have a chess game, challenge somebody, or have them bring the papers for me on those wooden sticks, the old-fashioned ones where you roll them up ...and it's the most egalitarian society in the world because the price of one cup of coffee or glass of wine buys you the day at the table, and you can write, you can do anything.”

-Winter 1995 no 137

History of Intellectual Cafes in France and Vienna



Noel Riley Fitch: *Grand Literary Cafes of Europe*
(New Holland Publishers Uk Ltd, 2007)

History of Intellectual Cafes in France

*The series of books, *Lieu de Memoire (Realms of Memory)* suggests cafés were an “intellectual laboratory”:*

- **Café and the newspaper were born at roughly the same time and in the same places** (in the 17th century in both England and France).
- **Café as a space to “test”:** 19th Century French journalist, Auguste Lepage, observed in 1882 that writers went to cafes "to read newspapers, magazines, write letters, see fellow writers, receive greetings, but rarely for fun."
- **Café’s function like that of a talking magazine.**

Benoît Lecoq, “Le café”, in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, III, (Paris, Gallimard, 1992), p. 878.

Concrete Examples of Creativity in Cafes



By Rick Tulka: Café Le Sélect Portraits

Concrete Examples of Creativity in Cafes



The historian of the café quickly learns that nostalgia for a lost golden age of café life is a staple of all who write on the subject.

Let us skip this sentiment and focus on some concrete examples of artists and writers noting the role of the café in their own and others' creative lives.

There can be as many stories of cafes and creativity as there are of talented individuals because each café develops its own unique identity.

Claude Monet in the Café

Café Guerbois



www.museyon.com

- Gérard-Georges Lemaire - Pioneer in the study of literary and intellectual cafes
- Claude Monet's Reflection of Café Conversations:
 "We always left the café in good temper, with our wills stronger, and our thinking clearer and calmer."

Café as Writing Space



Nathalie Sarraute chose to write in cafes:

- “By doing so she avoided the temptations that face any writer at home...”
- “A café’s customers may be noisy but ‘your cocoon of interior silence as a writer protects you from such distraction.’”
- “ ‘In the cafe there are strangers and life is going on all around me and this makes me feel less anxious.’ She would speak of such moments as ‘delicious isolation.’ ”

Café as Writing & Creative Space



Key Lesson from Sarraute:

One can potentially have solitude as much as sociability in café.

Cafés allow writers and artists to show a wide range of private emotions in public either in solitude or among friends.

Creative Brooding in a Café

Rollo May, in his path-breaking study of creativity, discussed how James Lord found Alberto Giacometti in a cafe experiencing the anxiety that always arises, May asserts, when an artist tries to turn the ideal of her or her mind into an expression on paper, canvass, stone, bronze, or steel:

“And indeed, miserable was what he did seem to be. This, I thought, was the true Giacometti, sitting alone at the back of a cafe, oblivious to the admiration and recognition of the world, staring into a void from which no solace could come, tormented by the hopeless dichotomy of his ideal yet condemned by that helplessness to struggle as long as he lived to try to overcome it.”

-Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: Norton, 1975), 83-84.

Sociability, Anonymity, & Creativity



vs.



By Rick Tulka: Café Le Sélect Portraits

Sociability, Anonymity, & Creativity

- Steiner and Monet reveal the creativity of café sociability but Sarraute and Giacometti show that cafes can also be space of solitude.
- How can cafés be spaces of both sociability and anonymity?
- In my study of working class cafes in nineteenth-century Paris, I found that generally customers tried not to disturb each other. I coined the term “intimate anonymity” to describe this.

Appreciation of the Café

- In his conversations with the American professor of philosophy and his long time friend John Gerassi, Jean Paul Sartre said that he philosophized in café because:

“I always felt I had to stay in contact with the world, with my world.”
John Gerassi, Talking With Sartre, Conversations and Debates (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 178.

Cafes: Image of Creativity in a City



- The hold of the café on the intellectual imagination is attested in another quote from Florida's overview:
 Writing in 1965, urban economist Wilbur Thompson described how cities function as incubators on innovation: *"The metropolis, with its universities, museums, libraries, and research laboratories, becomes one big, spatially integrated 'coffee house' where bright minds out of diverse cultures clash and strike sparks that ignite the fires of new products and processes."*
 Florida, 160-161

Cafes and Creativity

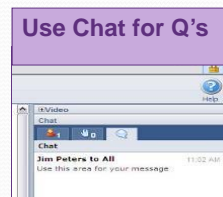
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Conclusion: The Sociable City

- Scholars of urban life see cities as at the very center of the new global creative culture.
- But the specific spaces of this creativity need to be explored much more fully and nurtured.
- High level academic abstraction can be frustrating for urban governments, police forces, hotel and hospitality entrepreneurs who want concrete examples of spaces and rituals that can help promote a more vibrant and creative environment in their cities.
- A study of the café shows that these spaces have been and will continue to be essential venues to connect people, places, and times within an urban setting.

Questions?

Submit Q's through the Chat Feature



Contact the Speaker:

Scott Haine: shaine@aol.com

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