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Heritage Spaces and River Imageries: The Case of the *Guinguette*

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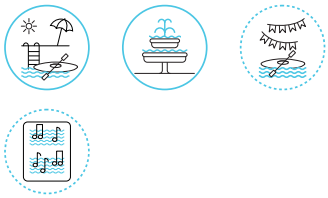
Abstract
This article explores the "*guinguette*", a river heritage that is both rich and discreet. The *guinguette* has a long history of cultural practices associated with its peculiar location. In collective memory, the *guinguette* is a lively place of leisure, entertainment and popular conviviality. The history of the *guinguette* is tied to the varied trajectories shaping the cultural and economic development of urban river spaces. Numerous stakeholders in riverine culture have exploited this cultural imagery of an *art de vivre* by the water and have contributed in re-enchanting it in order to create new brands and new sites.

Policy Recommendations
- Public authorities at all levels (departments, regions, municipalities) should promote a rich cultural and popular heritage that remains undervalued in current cultural and public policies — namely the river heritage, in particular the ways of life associated with historical riverside practices such as open-air cafés and *guinguettes*.
- New forms of mediation, events, and cultural venues should be developed in order to revive these activities at accessible prices, reintegrating them into spaces that are increasingly shaped by contemporary and future environmental and social contexts.

KEYWORDS
guinguette
heritage
remediation
art de vivre
hospitality

WATER ICONS



< Fig. 1 The Flow disco and the Rosa Bonheur sur Seine guinguette on the Port des Invalides (Source: Bretwa, 2022. CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons).

Introduction

The French language makes a logical distinction between the two terms "*rivière*" and "*fleuve*", rooted in geographical rhetoric: a "*rivière*" flows into another watercourse, which may be a "*fleuve*"; a "*fleuve*" flows into the sea. The images associated with the terms are very different, the words themselves tracing their origins back to two symbolic sources: "*fleuve*" comes from "flow" and "flood" ("*flumen*" in Latin), while "*rivière*" includes its banks and surroundings ("*ripa*" in Latin). Consequently, the meaning of "*fleuve*" is more abstract. The French poets have widely designated the abstract connotation of the term "*fleuve*" as the Rimbaldian principle of "impassibility," which the French poet Victor Segalen expands to the "lyrical quality *par excellence*, which is the voluble expression of oneself," in the sense that the "*fleuve*" is the "only one of the great natural elements that is never opposed or fought by its brothers" (Equipée 1915). In French, the adjective "fluvial" applies to both "*rivière*" and "*fleuve*", and thus seems to neutralize the opposition between these two types of watercourses. This blurring of boundaries between the flow and the banks opens up the imaginative possibilities in the discourse, toward a generally "enchanted" topography. The description of new urban development projects will borrow extensively from such discourses, according to Fanny Romain (2014).

Fluvial Imaginaries and Cultural Heritage

In the framework of this article, it seems possible to understand the meanderings of this imaginary world from the perspective of the heritage of the "*guinguette*", specifically the activities which have become associated with it in collective and cultural memory since the nineteenth century. Whether on the banks of the Seine, the Marne or the Oise, the *fleuve*/*rivière* difference has lost its relevance. What rather matters is a set of artistic and expressive productions linked together by values associated with the peaceful time spent next to the water and the leisure activities allowed by its proximity. From the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, the river experience became a recurrent motif in painting, music, and subsequently in film, in forms that are both classical (the *locus amoenus*) and popular (the ball, the song, white wine, swimming, etc.). A metonymic expansion of practices, objects and discourses further reinforces the imagery associated with the *guinguette*: the waltz-musette and its accordions, the little white wine and its songs, swimming and its pontoons.

But a contemporary examination of the trajectories, circulations and evolutions of this fluvial imagery offers a more surprising and perhaps even more complex history of its ongoing appropriation. The *guinguette* as a "way of life" constitutes a truly paradigmatic case for the cultural and heritage theory of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1998).

First, although intimately associated with the idea of a "*fleuve*" or "*rivière*", the *guinguette* was an establishment that came from a different urban legacy: that of the city's border. Directly linked to the expansion of Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, the *guinguette* was a space of opposition that defined itself as "other," or rather "against" the norm that the city represented. Rebelling against the requirement of the "*octroi*" – a municipal tax on the passage of goods within the metropolis – which weighed heavily on the circulation of wine, the *guinguette* was above all a cabaret built against the boundaries of the city, the official economic

borders erected to control the proper payment of this tax. Askew and makeshift, the early *guinguette* attached itself to the city almost on the sly, allowing the population to drink the cheaper wine that had escaped the municipal tax. Then, the expansion of railways and new modes of travel to the suburbs gradually relocated the *guinguettes* to other suburban spaces, before choosing the banks of the Seine and the Marne, thanks to the activities these two rivers allowed, starting with the joys of boating (Csergo 2004). Pre-existing boats, called "*coches d'eau*," were used to transport drinkers and dancegoers to these riverside water houses. The rise of the Popular Front, paid holidays and leisure activities only consolidated and expanded this practice of Sunday travels to the waterfront.

Thus, social, economic and cultural determinants forcefully intersected to construct a new landscape where the river symbolically replaced the barrier as the limits against which popular leisure spaces were erected. These determinations operated as mediations that, in Walter Benjamin's terms, "expressed themselves" (Benjamin 1989), by producing representations and imaginaries that take root in the remembrance of cultural practices.

During the 1960s, however, when the Marne and the Seine stopped being possible spaces for swimming and frolicking, the era of the *guinguettes* seemed to come to an end and to sink into the silts of the past. Small lost dance halls and now-closed or ghostly establishments are evoked as memories or walked through like so many ruins.

Fast forward to today, the time of remediations. And it is above all the riverine imagery of the *guinguette* that is revived as part of a local and touristic strategy of territorial development. Since the 1980s, the Marne in particular has been remembering the time of its "little white wine" and its musette balls. Cities are naming their promenades and squares after figures from this past, recast as cultural heritage. Nogent-sur-Marne, Joinville Le Pont, Champigny-sur-Marne establish strategies of revalorization of their Marne banks. Establishments are reborn in the form of a simple remediation, a restoration, or a renewal under a new guise. Since the 2000s, an acceleration of this process of remediation has been observed on the Seine, with a number of restaurants occupying new strategic locations near the river. These are mainly barges that have adopted the name "*guinguette*" so that they can open in the hearts of cities now that the municipal tax system of the *octroi* is no longer in place. This is the case with the restaurant Rosa Bonheur, which opened in 2008 in Paris in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont, then in Asnières-sur-Seine and Vincennes. These are "four joyful and modern *guinguettes*" that claim to be "worthy heirs to the Marne riverside *guinguettes* with their *Déjeuner sur l'herbe atmosphere*" in order to "modernize this tradition."

The imaginary unfolds, reinvents itself, and takes new shape as the water — and time — continue to flow. The "*guinguette*" is symbolically reinvented and becomes part of a "labelling effect," a common occurrence in today's cultural industries devoted to the *art de vivre*. This means that new unfoldings take place, away from rivers and streams, and back to the traces of the first barriers. The aim is to restore Parisian cafés to the transmuted value of popular culture. But the movement is not only centripetal. The name "*guinguette*" and its fluvial imagery are leaving the banks of Parisian suburban towns to invest in other metropolises. More surprisingly, the *guinguette* and its remediated imagery are gaining new territorial

spaces: the citadel of Ajaccio in the heart of the capital of Corsica, the vineyards of Bordeaux, the small villages of France.

Conclusion

Territories are not only geographical, but also commercial: highly rated department stores such as Le Bon Marché are acquiring their own *guinguettes*, while the food industry displays *guinguette* iconography on the labels of new sparkling drinks. The *guinguette* itself is thus becoming a symbolic territory likely to be captured by retailers and brands. Returning to the initial semantic approach, one could say that the *guinguette* carries a heritage imagery that is not simply remediated but constantly undergoes derivations, in the grammatical sense, drifting from one symbolic bank to another.

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