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Petanque in New York

BY VALÉRIE FESCHET



Alfred Levitt playing petanque in Central Park, c. 1970s. Photo: Private collection (photographer unknown)

First practiced in New York City in the 1930s (Pilate 2005, 109–10), the bowling game *petanque* has become visible in the public spaces of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, next to frisbee, badminton, volleyball, and tai chi. Today, this urban game is played by players of French origin (binational and expatriate), French-speaking immigrants of African origin, and increasingly numerous English-speaking players. This article uses ethnographic data I collected in 2009 and 2011 to describe petanque play in New York City, including different playing areas, the history of local petanque clubs, the hot moments of the annual calendar, ordinary practice, and the personal journeys and motivations of the players.

The History of Petanque

Since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, outdoor bowling has been extremely popular in France, as in the other countries of Western Europe. There were and still are many regional variations of the game. In Provence, the traditional game was called *la longue provençale*, or simply *la jeu provençale*, a game very similar to the Italian game of bocce. *La longue provençale* was very popular, but very difficult. Players needed to be agile and muscular, with a good sense of balance. Over time, certain players of the “long game” began playing the “small game”—as one said, taking no notice of the contempt in which they were held.



Lucien Rakotojaona in the semifinals of the Cercle Rouge Bastille Day tournament, July 14, 2009. Photo: Valérie Feschet

Petanque was thus invented at the beginning of the twentieth century in the south of France by players who revolted against the difficulty and elitism of *la longue provençale* and decided to play *ped tanco* (“feet fixed” in Provençal). The new game was called *piédtanque*, which finally became *pétanque*. The “round,” the circle from which the players have to throw their balls, became sacred. Touching it, or moving out of it, became a serious offense. The playing distance was reduced. The rules were simplified—in short, a revolution! The game of bowling, played only by fit men, became accessible to everyone, including women, children, and the aged.

Although the first competition was held in 1910 in La Ciotat, a little town near Marseille,

it took almost fifty years for petanque to be officially accepted. The Fédération Française de Pétanque et de Jeu Provençal (FFPJP) was born in July 1945; the international federation, Fédération Internationale de Pétanque et Jeu Provençal (FIPJP), was founded in 1958. Fifty years later, more than eighty-eight countries and more than a half a million individuals are members of the international federation. In France and in many others countries, there are countless recreational players.

The introduction of petanque into the United States as a competitive sport has been slow. In 2009, there were only 1,456 registered players in the whole of the United States, compared with 313,985 federation members in France and 29,787 in Spain. Nevertheless,

my observations in New York show that petanque is becoming increasingly popular in this country.

The Game and Rules

Several American web sites focus on petanque. They all teach the pronunciation of the game’s name, point out the simplicity of play, and outline the rules:

Petanque, pronounced “pay-tonk,” [is] one of Europe’s most popular outdoor games. . . . The aim is to toss or roll a number of hollow steel balls (“boules”) as close as possible to a small wooden target ball, called the “but” or “cochonnet” (French for “piglet”). Players take turns, and the team that ends up near-

est to the target ball when all balls are played wins. Petanque can be played on most outdoor surfaces, without any set-up. Nothing is decided until the last player plays the very last boule. (www.petanqueamerica.com)

The rules are posted in front of the courts in Bryant Park, in the following form:

The game is played by teams of one, two, or three players on any small area of bare ground or crushed stone gravel, but never on grass or pavement. A coin toss determines the first team to play. A player on the first team selects a starting place and draws a circle 14–20" in diameter on the ground. A player on the first team then tosses the jack a distance of 20–33'. The player's feet must remain within the circle until the ball touches the ground. Standing in the circle, a player on the first team then throws a ball to place it as close as possible to the jack.

The opposing team then throws its balls, attempting to get closer to the jack than the opponent.

A team continues to throw until one of its balls is closer to the jack. Should the jack be hit, the game is played from the new location of the jack. . . . The winning team [in each round] is the one with the closest ball to the jack. . . . A team receives one point for each ball nearer to the jack than the opponent's closest ball. The game continues until one team reaches 13 points.

It is still impossible to find petanque balls in New York stores. Players have to buy them online—but new players still manage to show up with their own equipment before long. Experienced players sometimes offer their old balls to newer players.

Passersby in American parks often confuse petanque with the Italian game of bocce, which was popular in New York before

petanque appeared on the scene. While the games share a common ancestor, they differ considerably. Bocce balls are large and made of colored wood, while petanque balls are smaller and made of metal. Bocce players shoot their balls after a three-step run, while petanque is played with feet fixed. Bocce courts are smooth, sandy, and groomed, but petanque courts are stony and ungroomed.

Most New Yorkers still know next to nothing about petanque. Very curious and intrigued, they will often ask players for information when they come across a game. They are quite surprised to discover that this game, which seems only recreational, is actually an international competitive sport. The exchanges between players and the New York audience are always warm and lighthearted. Some players even have fans. One Wednesday afternoon in April 2009, a group of young people stopped around the



Pierre Le Goff (right) plays with a friend on the petanque courts at Bryant Park, April 2009. Photo: Valérie Feschet

Bryant Park courts to watch some games. They didn't hesitate to cheer and comment on the players' feats from the sidelines. I have never had so much support aiming the cochonnet! Petanque play in New York is far more open, cool, and shared than it is in France these days, where petanque courts are often inaccessible to casual visitors, and the games are serious and solemn.

Bastille Day Petanque Tournaments

The remarkable spread of petanque in New York in the last thirty years is certainly linked to the success of popular contests organized to celebrate Bastille Day on July 14. These annual competitions existed by the 1960s, but took place outside the city, in New Jersey, during picnics hosted by New York's Breton community. Later, during the 1980s, a Bastille Day tournament was organized by a Manhattan restaurant called Provence. It took place on McDougall Street in Soho and was sponsored by Veuve Cliquot champagne. But according to petanque players, the competition wasn't serious enough, and it eventually ran out of steam. In 2001, the annual competition moved to Smith Street in Brooklyn and is now organized by Bar Tabac and Robin des Bois restaurants. It has become a festive event anticipated by players and fans. Encouraged by the success of the Smith Street event, Cercle Rouge restaurant on West Broadway in Tribeca held its own Bastille Day competition in 2009.

These events require considerable preparation. Tons of sand are poured; the streets are blocked, traffic stopped—and a French village on a feast day emerges. The exuberant clothing and behavior recall Pagnolesque scenes. More than ten thousand people often attend the Brooklyn competition, despite the heat. A guillotine sits in the middle of the street. Some people snap photos of friends with their heads under the blade. Others don't seem to understand what the object means; the link between the fall of the Bastille and petanque isn't clear.

The French themselves simply know that there can't be a July 14 without a game of petanque. Petanque appropriates the moment, the history.



Lorissa Rinehart plays at Bryant Park, April 2009. Photo: Valérie Feschet

Bryant Park

The Bastille Day competition is an annual event that has become an enormous success. Petanque is also played on a daily basis, however, within the urban space of the city. Since 1992, Bryant Park has become the principal spot. Situated just behind the New York Public Library at 42nd Street between 5th and 6th Avenues, one could say that Bryant Park is the heart of the town. Jerome Barth, vice president of business affairs for the Bryant Park Corporation, granted me an interview that proved instructive for understanding the evolution of petanque in New York City. During the 1970s, the park was a symbol of the city's decline: a "no-go zone," it was called Needle Park by locals, because of the heroin dealers. In 1980, Dan Biederman, a town planner working for the city, founded the Bryant Park Corporation

(BPC). Its aim was to improve this public space with the help of private funds. Work began in 1988, and the park was closed to the public for four years. When it reopened in 1992, petanque was among the free activities made available to the public. The BPC took inspiration from French villages, where the *place* (central square) plays an important role in town life. BPC wished to adapt this model while keeping the natural aspect of a park, with a large grassy space open to all, as Americans like.

Petanque was a prudent choice. The urban planners of the BPC wanted popular, convivial outdoor games that are relatively easy to set up. Petanque boasts an international federation, with millions of players throughout the world; the game can be played anywhere and doesn't require complex or expensive equipment. Two petanque playing areas were



Preparation of courts for the Bar Tabac Bastille Day in South Brooklyn, July 18, 2010. Photo: Valérie Feschet

built at the northwest angle of the park. New York's oldest petanque club, La Boule New Yorkaise, was invited to use the petanque courts. In exchange, the Bryant Park Corporation asked the club to welcome amateurs, giving free lessons and lending equipment. The instructors are now paid by the corporation, but for seven years, they took turns working for nothing and progressively increased the number of club members.

The ambience of the Bryant Park playing areas is pretty extraordinary. There are a lot of people, especially between midday and two o'clock. A more surprising discovery is the "Old" Bretons—*les anciens*, as they are called. Most of these Breton petanque players immigrated in the 1950s and '60s. Working mainly in the restaurant business, they still form a tight-knit community, with many living relatively close to the park. Some of these

players came from Ariège and the vicinity of Nice. For all of them, petanque is an opportunity for sociability, getting them out to meet and spend time with their compatriots, which is very similar to the way petanque is played in France.

Central Park

Before Bryant Park reopened, many Bretons and other French played in Central Park. I believe they already played there in the 1930s. Some players practiced petanque in France before coming to the United States, but many of them discovered the game during the 1960s in New York—in the alleys of Central Park, where games went on every weekday, or during Le Stade Breton's annual picnics. Some Breton restaurants on the West Side, like *Tout Va Bien* and *Sans Culottes Sports*, were actually dedicated to petanque (and soccer).

There is no specific area for petanque in Central Park, but players are generally tolerated by the authorities. They play on free ground, as petanque enthusiasts love to do. Sometimes they have to move to a new place. According to Pierre LeGoff, a player born in New York of Breton parents, players used to gather in the 1960s and '70s near 106th Street on the West Side, where in 1974 the first big La Boule New Yorkaise contest was held, attracting ninety players from Quebec (*New York Times*). Over the intervening decades, the games migrated to at least three other locations in the park, before settling at the current location on the horse-riding alley just behind Tavern on the Green. This area in the southwest of Central Park is close to a former French residential neighborhood. Before the 1990s, many in the French community (particularly Breton) lived on the West Side.

Most of the French restaurants were situated there, as well, although the restaurants have now moved to Brooklyn or Soho, Tribeca, and the East Village.

The practice of petanque in Central Park, however, does not belong exclusively to the French. There is also a playing area behind Bow Bridge, one of the park's seven original cast-iron bridges, which is a meeting place for players from the East Side.

The Old Washington Square Courts

Some other petanque players met in Washington Square Park, on the other side of Manhattan. Washington Square Park is a crucial area in the history of petanque in New York City. Joe Bettro remembers the site's early history. Joe was born in 1927 in Calabria, Italy. He arrived in New York at the age of nine. As a child, he lived in Brooklyn, before moving to the West Village in Manhattan, not far from Washington Square Park. Although he is Italian, Joe had never played bocce, which is not a traditional game in Calabria. He never saw a game of petanque until the 1970s, when he met a multinational group of petanque players practicing near the Arc de Triomphe at the bottom of 5th Avenue. Joe was quickly invited to join them, and he hasn't stopped playing ever since. During my research in 2009, he was enjoying his retirement by visiting all of the petanque areas of Manhattan daily, beginning with Central Park around midday, then Bryant Park, and finishing the afternoon in Washington Square.

I learned from Joe and his friends Hans Jepson and James Barr that Alfred Levitt, the founder of La Boule New Yorkaise, started the magnificent petanque areas in Washington Square Park in 1983. The story of the old courts of Washington Square shows how motivated the early players were to practice their favorite game in the best conditions. When New York University expanded in Greenwich Village in the 1970s and '80s, the Italian quarter that surrounded Washington Square was destroyed. Alfred Levitt took the opportunity to convince the park commissioner to build a petanque court in Washington Square. Levitt and his friends used to play near the triumphal

arch, but dreamed about a real *boulo-drome*, like in provençal villages: well demarcated, with fine earth and gravel—and above all, for players only, undisturbed by passersby. Levitt finally obtained two courts for the exclusive use of members of La Boule New Yorkaise on Saturdays and Sundays.

Unfortunately, the petanque area was destroyed in 2009 when the park was renovated—a sad day! But two new areas have been promised by the municipality and will soon be ready for play. No doubt the history of petanque at this place and the Bryant Park model helped to convince the urban planners.

Petanque Online

<http://labouley.com>

[http://newyorkpetanque.com/
NewYorkPetanque/Our_Club.
html](http://newyorkpetanque.com/NewYorkPetanque/Our_Club.html)

[http://brooklyn-boule.blogspot.
com](http://brooklyn-boule.blogspot.com)

[http://www.petanqueamerica.
com](http://www.petanqueamerica.com)

<http://www.usapetanque.org>

Francophone Players of African Origin

Let's head back to Bryant Park, where French-speaking players of African origin—a group becoming more important both in numbers and in sporting performance—often gather. Some of these players arrived in New York about twenty years ago, such as Lucien Rakotojoana, originally from Madagascar. When through an invitation from another Madagascan he discovered members of La Boule New Yorkaise playing in Washington Square Park, he was so happy that he went there every evening after work. Thiam Amadou is from Senegal. He is in charge of the technical team at Bryant Park and became a member of La Boule New Yorkaise in 1999. Like Lucien, he also plays regularly in Flushing Meadow Park, with the Bretons and Madagascans who live in Queens. They play there all year round—under a bridge if it rains.

Others arrived in New York more recently and were already very good players. Keita Bangali, from Guinea-Conakry, has lived in Manhattan for five years. He returned to his old passion for petanque and now plays every day. Youssef Hass comes from Morocco. After playing while visiting his family two years ago, he wondered if there was anywhere he could play in New York and discovered the Boule New Yorkaise web site. Emile Boujeke just arrived in New York in 2009. He learned petanque in 1999 in Bafoussam, Cameroon, and worked as an instructor and referee before arriving in this country. In New York, he searched online for information on petanque and came across the Boule New Yorkaise site. I also learned that Wolof players from Senegal used to meet in a park between the New School library and Columbia University.

The symbolic usages of petanque for these French-speaking players are specific to the former French colonies. Africans could not participate in competitions organized by the federation until quite recently. The African countries have now appropriated petanque. Through it, they can affirm a national—or sometimes an ethnic or communal—identity. Their collective and individual histories are quite distinct, and their social and cultural references are different, but petanque gives these players a common bond and an opportunity to express themselves in the urban space and meet one another.

Binational Players

With one foot in France and one foot in the United States, petanque is for binational players an expression of their double nationality. Those I met have taken up petanque with great enthusiasm. Thierry Julliard is a young French man whose mother is American. He grew up in Saint Rémy de Provence and completed his studies in London and New York. Thierry discovered petanque when he was a child. For his tenth birthday, his mother gave him his first set of recreational balls, then later an old man offered him “real brand new balls,” usable in competition. He began playing in local contests in his village. He would practice each Wednesday evening with his friends, and after coming home and

putting his bag down, he would head out again to play with older players. In New York in 2008, after long years without petanque, he discovered the courts in Washington Square. It was a big surprise and a great joy.

Christophe Chambers, head of a design agency in Manhattan, is also a passionate player. His mother was French, from Poitiers. His taste for petanque comes from his childhood, although his family did not practice the game. He played during his adolescence and became a member of La Boule New Yorkaise in 1994 when he discovered the players at Washington Square Park. At present he moves between homes in New York and

Austin, Texas, where he just founded a new petanque club.

Robert Dunn doesn't live in New York City, but in Syracuse. His mother was also French. He grew up in France in Saint-Benoit-la-Forêt near Poitiers, which is where he learned to play petanque, and came to United States in 1984 at the age of twenty-four. He had played petanque as a child in France with his mother's family and his friends, but when in April 2009, he discovered by chance La Boule New Yorkaise members playing in Bryant Park, he had not practiced for a long time. Nevertheless, his comeback to the courts was so serious that, after only a few months of regular play, he

won the Cercle Rouge Bastille Day Tournament in July 2009. He visits the city once or twice a month to play petanque—a four-hour drive.

English-Speaking Players

Petanque by no means appeals only to French, binationals, or French-speaking Africans. Not at all—there are also plenty of English-speaking players from all parts of the world. Yngve Biltsted, an architect, was born in Denmark in 1943. While traveling by Volkswagen van through France in 1974, he saw a petanque game for the first time in a little village. “I fell in love immediately,” he said. He started playing petanque in Copenhagen in 1984, before settling in New York in 1986. During a walk in Washington Square, he found himself face to face with petanque players Joe Bettro and Hans Jepson. “What the hell! They're playing here!” he says he thought. He became a member of La Boule New Yorkaise in 1988, then vice president, and served as president from 1992 to 2005. He has regularly competed at the local, national, and international levels.

Ernesto Santos works in information technology. He was born in Cuba of a Cuban father and Chinese mother. He arrived in New York at the age of eleven and began playing petanque in 2003. He had never heard anything about the game before that. He says he likes “the calm of petanque games, the concentration the sport requires, and the tactical creativity of the game.” He takes part in all the competitions he can. He has been president of La Boule New Yorkaise since 2007.

Richard Meas has been playing petanque for twenty years. He lives in Westchester County, thirty minutes by train from Manhattan, where he works. Nicknamed Te, Richard had to leave Cambodia because of the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s. After living briefly in Thailand, Indonesia, and France—where he learned petanque—he arrived in New York in 1983. He found the Manhattan petanque courts during his walks in the town. He practices twice a week. An excellent player, very motivated and competitive, he has participated in many national and international competitions and often wins the tournaments he attends.



La Boule New Yorkaise's open in Bryant Park, October 9, 2010. Photo: Valérie Feschet

Generally, the members of La Boule New Yorkaise live or work close to Washington Square Park or Bryant Park. They discovered petanque during their daily routine—generally during a lunch break or in the evening after work. Such was the case for Chris Artis, a native New Yorker and the current vice president of the club, who was working at a Manhattan publisher by Bryant Park when he came across the petanque players by chance. The same goes for Lorissa Rinehart, who was doing research in the public library when she saw the players for the first time. She lives in Brooklyn and, like Chris, practices two or three times a week in Bryant Park and occasionally on the edge of the baseball pitches in Prospect Park.

These English-speaking players appreciate the fraternal, relaxed atmosphere of petanque, but generally see petanque as a serious competitive sport like golf or tennis. Alec Stone Sweet spends several months a year practicing in France and competes each year at major international competitions La Marseillaise à Pétanque and Mondial de Millau. Hans Hepson's approach is also essentially competitive. His first contact with petanque was in Washington Square Park, where he saw players practicing. Fascinated, he returned the following weekend, and the players invited him to join them. He says he is now “retired” from petanque, but between 1985 and 2007, he took part in seven world championships and won numerous U.S. tournaments. He also helped to unify the Federation of Petanque USA (FPUSA), the official governing body of petanque in the United States, of which he was first president. Hans stopped playing a few years ago, when he decided to devote more time to his wife and to practicing his religion. He felt that he had played at his best in the 2007 world championship and wanted to go out “on top.”

Prospect Park and the New York Petanque Club

Until 2009, a group of excellent players from Provence played in Bryant Park and Washington Square Park. These *Marseillais*, as the southern French are called, immigrated more recently than the Bretons—mostly in



Petanque courts of the Pit Stop Cafe (now closed) in Brooklyn, July 2009. Photo: Valérie Feschet

the 1980s. Many of them work in restaurants, but others are computer specialists or work in import-export, perfumery, or other businesses. They were already confirmed players before coming to New York, playing top-level petanque in numerous international championships. Jean-Pierre Subrenat (the New York Petanque Club's president), along with Eric Bertin, Xavier Thibaud, and Americans Joe Martin and Steve Ginsberg, represented the United States during the 2010 petanque world championship in Izmir, Turkey. They competed against players from forty-eight nations and five continents. The U.S. team finished eighteenth, a very respectable showing considering the level of competition and the absence of a widespread petanque culture in the States. The French team carried the day, in a victory over the Malagasy.

When these players discovered that petanque existed in New York, during Provence restaurant's Bastille Day tournaments in 1997 and 1998, they enthusiastically joined La Boule New Yorkaise. The playing courts available in Manhattan did not prove adequate for competitive petanque, so they joined with several American players in 2009 to create another club, develop a more energetic competition policy, and build their own petanque court.

The New York Petanque Club's web site explains that “for unconditional love of the game,” they obtained a concession at the parade ground in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. The club has laid out petanque courts, which allow members to train and organize important competitions without being at the mercy of the public activity program at Bryant Park.

Since the New York Petanque Club's founding, the New York petanque scene is split into two camps that now confront each other in competitions under different banners. On one side—La Boule New Yorkaise, founded by a Ukrainian and more recently run by English-speaking players with no direct links with France. Paradoxically, the logo of the club is composed of French symbols: the Triumphal Arch and the Statue of Liberty. And on the other side—the New York Petanque Club, founded at the initiative of French players. The new club has an English name and an American symbol: the Brooklyn Bridge.

MacCarren Park and Brooklyn Boule

Despite this competitive approach, some Americans do view petanque through a romantic and aesthetic lens. (These are

compatible—not competing—visions of the game, in my opinion.) Peaceful, democratic, unselfish representations are sometimes at the heart of players' motivations, as is the case for Bruce Janovski, who reached the final of the Smith Street Bastille Day in 2010. Bruce was born in Brooklyn. He has never been to France, but he read Peter Mayle's 1993 book *A Year in Provence*, which mentions the importance of petanque in the region. Bruce liked what he read and was immediately won over when he saw the Bryant Park players.

This ideological aspect, represented by literature and films as well as objects, attracted Tristram Drew, an artist living in Brooklyn in the Williamsburg area. Several years ago, Tristram set up an informal club called Brooklyn Boule, so that fans of petanque can meet in the shade of the very old oak trees in Mac-Carren Park.

The club's web site offers a creative, fresh vision of petanque. Tristram creates photo-montages highlighting petanque in the Brooklyn area. The montages superimpose different dimensions and fantasies: for example, there is a petanque ball next to Pikachu in the Brooklyn Parade and the logo of his club superimposed on a rooftop water reservoir. This is a playful view of petanque, freed from popular French and Provençal folklore.

Pit Stop and the French Restaurants

Until the summer of 2009, Brooklyn players also had another place to meet: the Pit Stop restaurant on Columbia Street. This small and charming restaurant opened in 2004, but finally went out of business. From April to October, the restaurant maintained two small petanque playing areas in the rear courtyard. The manager aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere, using an aesthetic based on reclaimed urban objects (signposts, tires, metal bars) and incorporating many allusions to petanque in France.

New York has a whole network of French restaurants linked by professional or friendly ties. The “petanque connection” structures bonds of friendship based on shared memories. A former manager of Pit Stop explained, “Monday evening, it's an aperitif at Bernard's

place [Robin des Bois on Smith Street in Brooklyn]; Wednesday, it's at Pit Stop; Friday, at Harween and Gilles's place, Flea Market [in the East Village].” These restaurants, to which should be added the Bar Tabac in Brooklyn and the Cercle Rouge in Manhattan, all display objects belonging to French popular culture—the sporting and social universe of petanque.

Men, Women, and Young People

Traditionally, petanque has been practiced by men—but women's petanque is currently taking off all around the world. For a little more than a decade, women have been allowed to compete in specific competitions, and they have their own competitions at major international championships. On recent visits, I saw a number of women playing on different fields in New York, and dozens of women players participate in Bastille Day tournaments. Among the licensed players in France, 15 percent are now women; my impression is that the proportion is similar in the U.S., although I am still gathering data on that question.

Young players are very rare in New York. I have observed only two young players in Bryant Park and at competitions, both playing with their fathers. This is probably linked to the changing uses of urban space in the town center. Children and teenagers spent their free time playing in the street in the 1970s and '80s (Dargan and Zeitlin 1990), but young people today are much less visible. Children instead play sports and active games, including football, soccer, baseball, and skateboarding, in equipped and fenced squares or in larger natural spaces, away from the urban space itself. But given the interest of young people as they pass the grounds in Bryant Park with their parents or teachers, I expect that there will soon be municipal youth petanque or high school clubs, as already exist in Oregon.

Petanque for All

The playing areas in New York are now numerous, located in public parks, at petanque clubs and restaurant courtyards, and on private grounds (some players who live in New Jersey and Long Island have petanque

areas on their properties). Players come from many different places and backgrounds. Some players are CEOs of big companies, managers, entrepreneurs, or foremen. Other players work in restaurants or are students, teachers, writers, shopkeepers, craftspeople, or artists, while others sell bus tickets or even fruit. Each player projects specific values onto petanque. For some, petanque is a way of retaining the best of what they have lost, especially a certain masculine sociability. For others, it is a sort of historical reappropriation, a new competitive space to conquer, or a new space for social reverie.

Alfred Levitt once said that “this French game *piédanque* [petanque] is freedom, imagination, fraternity, and even health” (Pilate 2005, 111). The New York players generally appreciate the democratic character of the game and the fact that this sport is directly in touch with urban spaces. To play in the heart of Manhattan, in the middle of the urban tumult, isn't seen as a handicap, but as a use of space and time that symbolizes productivity, speed, and reactivity. In New York—perhaps more than elsewhere—petanque is a sort of sport counterculture. Everyone can compete, which is not the case for other sports. Players don't need to be young, nor athletic. Men and women, the young and the old, can play together. In most games, there's no money at stake, no mediation. For an hour or two at lunchtime or in the evening after work, the only aim is to get as close as possible to the little cochonnet. ▼

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Valérie Feschet teaches anthropology at the Université de Provence in Aix-en-Provence, France. Intrigued by the expanding success of petanque—an emblematic game of Provençal identity—in the United States, she did fieldwork in New York's petanque community in 2009 and 2011.

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