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Sensory landscape experience: Stepping outside the visual landscape of the motorway in the Garden of Birds

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PROJECT NAME

Garden of Birds

LOCATION

Aire des Oiseaux, along the A837
between Saintes and Rochefort
in southwestern France

CLIENT

Société des Autoroutes du Sud
de la France (ASF)

DESIGNERS

Bernard Lassus, adapted by ASF

CONSTRUCTION PERIOD

MOTORWAY

1993-1998

CONSTRUCTION PERIOD

GARDEN

1995-1998

SURFACE AREA

22 ha

SURFACE GARDEN

1450 m² (diameter 43 m)

Abstract

Gardens and motorways represent inherently different ways of perceiving the landscape: while the motorway is a purely visual experience, seen through the windshield, distanced from the perceiver in his climatized cocoon, the small, tactile scale of a garden offers a multisensory experience. With motorways getting more and more separated from their landscapes, can a garden be the opportune resource to address the motorway landscape? A place that appears to be doing this is the Garden of Birds, a small circular space as the pivot point of a rest area along the A837 motorway in southwestern France. Fifteen years after implementation it now appears more like a garden than might have ever been intended, providing a sensory landscape experience. Drawing and describing this situation—including its intentional and unintentional changes resulting from manmade and natural interventions and processes—as if it were a designed composition, exposes a spatial elaboration that facilitates the multisensory perception of landscape. The garden experience entices the motorist to look at the surrounding landscape with fresh eyes.

*Experience of landscape / gardens / motorway /
Bernard Lassus / afterlife of gardens*



Figures 1 The Garden of Birds

The Garden of Birds does not exist; there is no sign along the road pointing towards a place with that name. Yet there is this small circular place, enclosed by a vine-covered arcade, nestled in a small forest along the motorway A837—the *Auto-route des Oiseaux*—in southwestern France (Fig. 1). This pivot point of the *Aire des Oiseaux* [rest area of birds] has all the attributes of a garden: a formal spatial definition, a reference to nature, an expression of landscape, a representation of garden culture. So, for the purpose of investigation, let us call this specific place the Garden of Birds.

I discovered this ‘garden’ by coincidence, having set out to investigate its better-known counterparts, two similar circular spaces in the *Aire de Crazannes*, the rest area dedicated to the dramatic experience of the adjoining *Crazannes Quarries*. But where the quarries are an intense experience, the rest area and its gardens appear lean and empty. The Garden of Birds, on the other hand, turned out to be rich in landscape experiences.

At present, a trend is visible to promote the experience of place as an essential aspect of design (e.g. Hunt 2004; Ward Thompson 2010). A leading thinker, who has been addressing this aspect for decades, is Bernard Lassus, the designer of both rest areas. His intention for these spaces—indeed for the whole motorway—was to disclose the experience of landscape. However, where out of necessity the rest area is dedicated to numerous programmatic requirements, the circular space is—like a garden, the most condensed representation of landscape—solely devoted to enjoying the landscape as a multisensory perception of place. As such it might be considered the critical detail of the larger ensemble of the rest area, which in turn was designed as part of the series of interventions to incorporate the newly built A837 into the surrounding landscape.

Reviewing the circular space as a garden does not mean viewing it as an autonomous design. It is part and parcel of the landscape. As Michel Corajoud says, any landscape intervention is in essence only bounded by the horizon. In the landscape we move from one space to another, continually exceeding limits. Thus a landscape design is not only determined by the quality of the place itself, but also by what is next to it and further away, a telescopic sequence to the horizon (Corajoud 2004). How is the sensory perception of landscape expressed in the composition of the garden? And how does this relate to the larger landscape?

Visiting the Garden of Birds (Figs. 2 & 3)

Coming from Rochefort, the A837—connecting Saintes and Rochefort—traverses a patchwork of fields, villages and groves, unified by an almost continuous low embankment along the road, restricting the view to the road itself and its near surroundings. One crosses the valley of the River Charente over an 860-metre-long viaduct, looking down onto the valley. The *Aire des Oiseaux* is positioned at the edge of valley and plateau, and exiting the motorway here, the slip road enters into the Bois Brossard, which protects the rest area from the noise and exhaust fumes of the motorway.

In the rest area the road is laid out as a curvy double loop, encircling the garden. Having left the car, a low wall leads to a path through the forest. Attracted by the sunlight on the other end, the garden comes as a surprise. A tall-grass meadow, constantly changing through wind and light, is surrounded by a mown path, leading to the arcade that frames the other side of the clearing, covered in honeysuckle and Russian vine. A fence, the path, and a series of information panels exhibiting the different local birds, formalize the enclosure. A row of zoetropes invites the visitor to leave

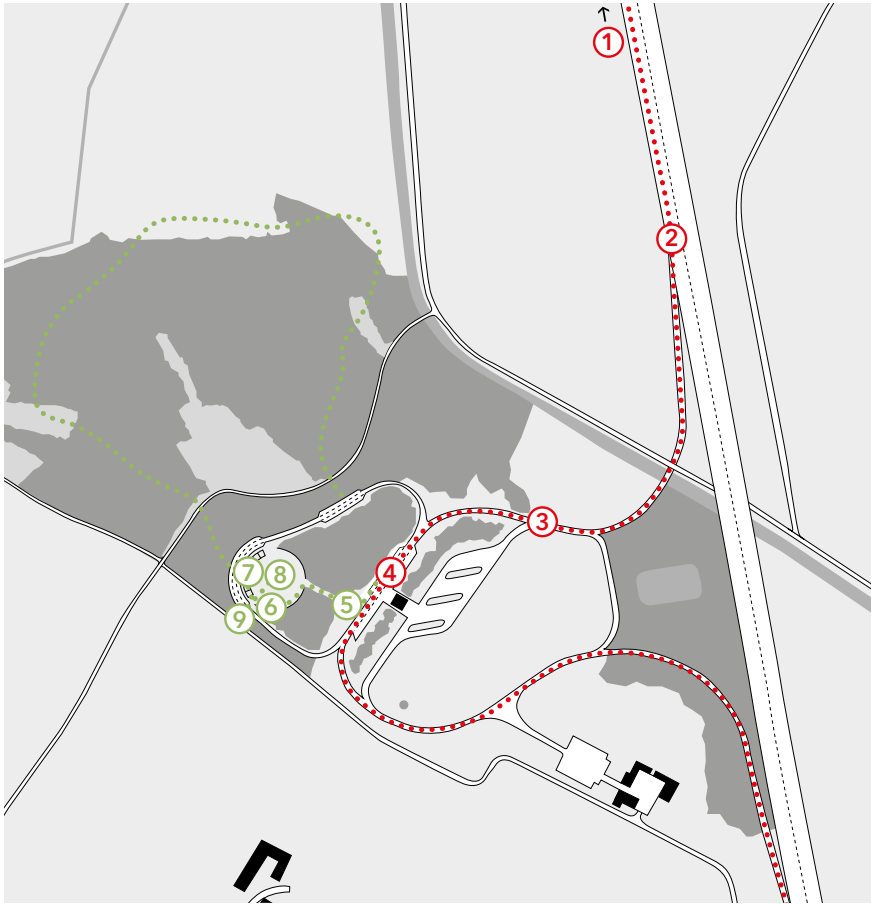


Figure 2 Routing

-①..... Car route
-⑤..... Pedestrian route



Figure 3

Serial vision from Rochefort to the Garden of Birds.

- 1 The A837, from Rochefort to Saintes, traverses the lowlands;
- 2 Exit to the Aire des Oiseaux;
- 3 Entering the rest area;
- 4 Leaving the car in a parking space;
- 5 A dark tunnel through the trees gives access to the sunlit space;
- 6 Around the circular space a path is mown, framed by a wooden railing;
- 7 Arcade at the opposite end of the garden;
- 8 Six zoetropes mark the centre of the space;
- 9 View into the cornfields.

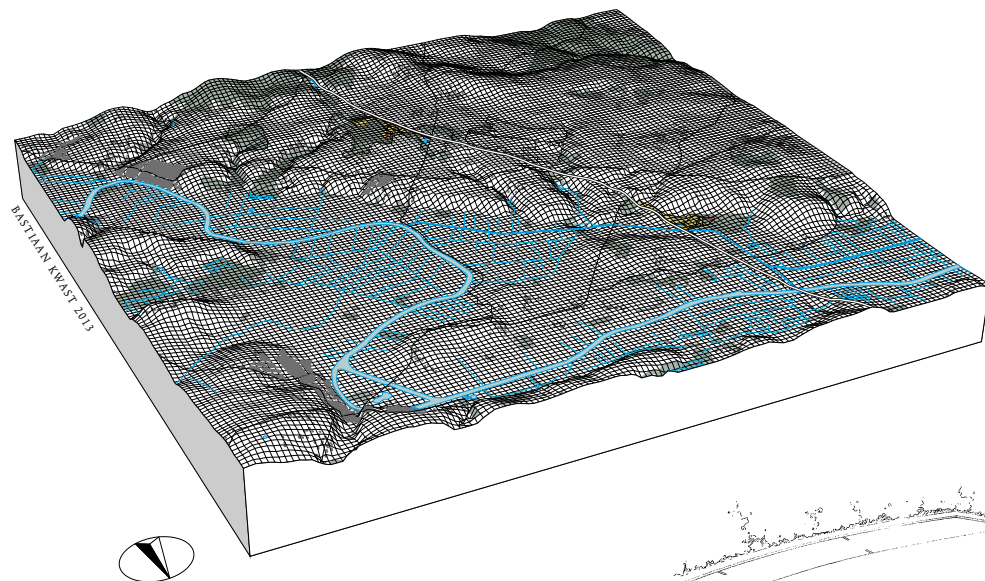


Figure 4 Connecting the city of Saintes to the coast, the A837 intersects different landscapes, like the Charente valley, and the plains and quarries of a limestone plateau. The Aire des Oiseaux is nested in an existing small forest, the Bois Brossard, at the edge of the plateau and the floodplain of the River Charente.

the mown paths and to wade through the tall grasses in the clearing, as they brush against the body.[1] Here one discovers that the forest is not as massive as it seemed before, providing glimpses of the surrounding cornfields, viewed at eye level, from close by. The absence of cars causes a perception of place that is different from that of the usual rest area, and the singing of the many birds demonstrates the unexpected quietness of the garden.

Refreshed, one follows the motorway towards Saintes, suddenly finding the road closely bracketed by outcrops of rocks, strange and mysterious as they flash past. Here again the view is restricted, no longer by embankments, but by these sculpted rocks, as an abstracted visual reference to the invisible quarries.

The design and what happened after

The A837, built by the Société des Autoroutes du Sud de la France (ASF), was equipped with an *aire de service* [toll station with service station facilities] and an *aire de repos* [rest area] for each direction: the Aire de Crazannes and the Aire des Oiseaux (Fig. 4). Bernard Lassus was appointed as consultant for the motorway, together with heritage advisor Jacques Houlet, and after they had selected the sites for these rest areas, Lassus was assigned to design both, as well as to landscape the entire central section of the motorway.

His major artistic intervention was creating this vast landscape of rocks, sculpting existing rocks and adding artificial ones to create a mysterious and ambiguous landscape. In that sense the Garden of Birds seems to be only a minor detail. But the landscape of rocks flashes by in an instant, while the visitor spends time in the garden. [2]

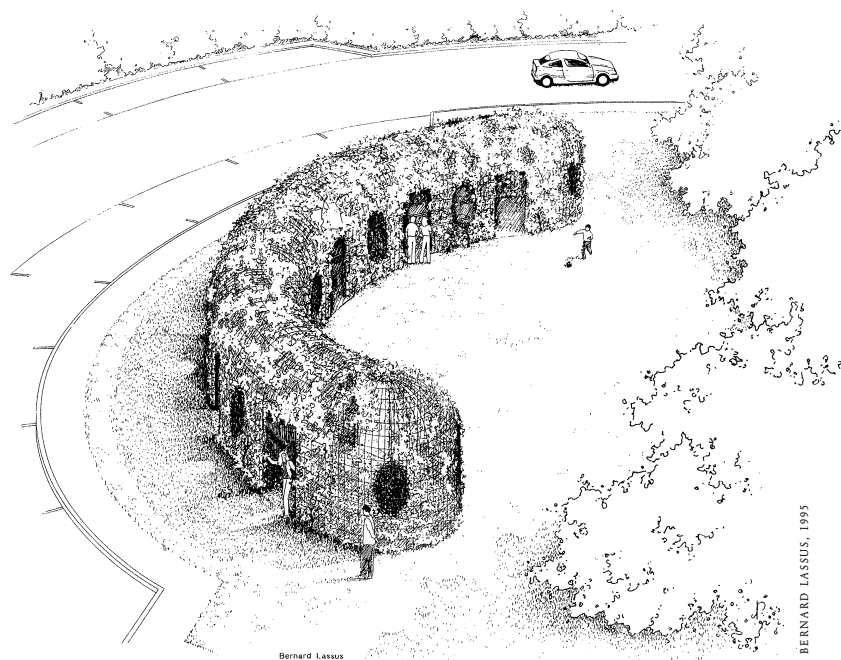
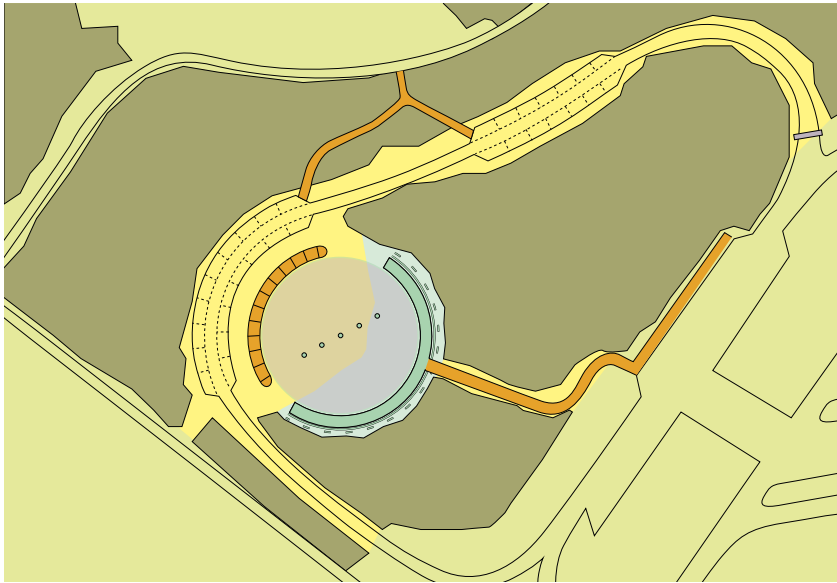


Figure 5 Sketch of the *salle à manger de verdure* of the Aire des Oiseaux

The rest areas were created as ‘a signal to detach from the obsessive experience of the highway. The purpose is to make possible an outing that is outside the universe of traffic, one that is at once functional and imaginary’ (Conan 2004: 12). To achieve this, Lassus conceived the Aire des Oiseaux as a wood where visitors could see birds. Its central space was a simple clearing in the forest, accentuated by arcade and road (Fig. 5). The cars would be parked outside the arcade, for their owners to easily see them (Conan 2004: 14). Despite the use of the explicitly gardenesque component of the arcade, and despite his many garden designs elsewhere, Lassus did not intend this place to be a garden. It grew into one by the accumulation of a series of events and processes, not all of which were made consciously. [3] One could break up this process in three stages: the design by Lassus, the adaptation by the ASF, and the gradual changes over time (Fig. 6).



Figures 6 The original design of the Garden of Birds, and the different additions, which lead to what the garden is at present. It was never intended as a garden, it became so by the accruing of layers.

In the drawing by Lassus, the arcade is a free-standing object in the seemingly natural clearing. However, before implementation the engineers of the ASF—apparently preferring a more architectural interpretation of the site—added elements to the design, incorporating the arcade in a formally defined, circular space in the forest, and completing the circular enclosure that was suggested by the crescent-shaped arcade. Some years after completion the loop of the road that encloses the circle was closed off for traffic by erecting a barricade on the road. Changing maintenance regimes in recent years—either intentionally, in order to create a richer, indigenous flora, or simply as an economical measure—have transformed the close-cropped lawn into a lush flowery meadow.

Bernard Lassus and the experience of landscape

Bernard Lassus had helped to develop the first national landscape policy for motorways in France, which made him the obvious choice as consultant for the A837, and for many other motorway projects. He had been consulted as a mediator in conflicts between motorway design and local opposition, extending his understanding of the political significance of landscape intervention at a time when the French rural population is shrinking, and the countryside is cherished more and more as a national heritage. In his early experiments with vision and optical experience, he had sought to involve viewers in what is viewed, leading them from visual (more distant) to tactile (close-up) experiences. (Conan 2004; Lassus 1998; Hunt 2004: 184) In his motorway designs, he expanded on these discoveries by exploring experiences of movement in different contexts and on different scales, which gives his work a consistent core: ‘Lassus has a concern for how intervention produces transformation in the landscape experience... To pursue this postulated core as the entry point into the Lassus oeuvre, one must begin where he does, with experience’ (Riley 1998: 9).

Perception as the entry to research

To begin with experience, as Riley states, for me means that evaluating Lassus’s intention of making the landscape sensorially accessible should start at my own perception *in situ*, at present, now that the project has matured, has been altered, and has ‘settled’. I consider this critique a ‘snapshot’, viewing the site through the lens of a specific experience at a given moment in time, taking all of the changes that have happened in the meantime as seriously as the original design. Focussing on a single moment in time will not, of course, exhaust the full potential of the place, but it will give a complementary view to a critique based on a singular focus on the design. A focus on the ‘afterlife’ of sites rather than on the processes of their design and implementation does not so much replace the well-established approach of design analysis, but offers a different perspective on design culture, as John Dixon Hunt argues (Hunt 2004: 7).

I visited the Autoroute des Oiseaux and its two rest areas on two consecutive days in July 2013, accompanied by the occasional French family, enjoying their break from a tiring car trip. As a researcher and landscape architect, my experience will differ from the accidental visitor. But the genuine accidental visitor, when asked about his perception, is also guided by the expectation that there should be something to see, smell, or hear. The question is not whether visitors consciously perceive what is there to be perceived—as an asset of the perceiver—but to unearth what it is that the place holds—an asset of the perceived: ‘A place is a location of experience. It evokes and organises memories, images, feelings, sentiments, meanings and the works of the imagination. The feelings of a place are indeed the mental projections of individuals, but they come from collective experience and they do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place’ (Walter 1988: 21).

These experiences were documented on site in measurements, photographs, notes of sounds and smells and other



Figures 7 The first rest area in Germany, Rasthaus am Chiemsee along the motorway from Munich to Berchtesgarden (Fritz Norkauer, 1938), was specifically designed to disclose the beauty of the German landscape.

sensory perceptions, notes of my own movements, first random, then deliberately, and of the other visitors. Addressing the existing situation rather than the original design, I had to redraw the site in interpretative drawings—reconstructed from the impressions gained and measurements taken during this visit, design drawings, topographic information, technical drawings by the ASF, and communications with both the ASF and Bernard Lassus—in order to objectify the experiential components, as attributes of the place. This information was supported by literature studies on the architecture of landscape experience, with the emphasis on writings by Lassus and by those writing about his designs and ideas, notably Hunt, Bann, Conan, and Riley.

The Garden of Birds is positioned in the context of motorway design and rest areas in general, and rest areas related to landscape specifically. Also, since Lassus designed the central ‘gardens’ for both rest areas of this motorway using the same design components, with the same function and the same design intention, a comparison of the two designs could be made.

The garden emerging from this research is a reconstruction of the idea of the garden, of which both its state at completion and its present state, as well as the unknown future, are only ‘imperfect’ versions, historical snapshots of the ‘trans-historical’ meaning of the garden. The garden was never designed as such, but redrawing the situation enables us to evaluate the garden as if it were a coherent design, as a perceptual unity.

Motorways and rest areas

If we consider gardens to be an expression of landscape, the specific landscapes this garden addresses are both the agricultural landscape of the Crazannes limestone massif and the motorway landscape intersecting it. Motorways are considered primarily as transportation means, providing efficient connections between destinations, whereas in their early days experiencing the landscape was similarly important for creating—and using—motorways. Although the very first motorway, built in Italy in 1924, was built with traffic-specific guidelines as its sole concern, soon the connection to the surrounding landscape had become inherent to their functioning and design, as can be witnessed in the scenic parkways in the United States, and the German *Autobahnen* in the 1930s (Zapatka 1995; Johannes and Wölki 2005).

As better roads allowed motorists to travel increased distances, it became apparent that stopping while en route would become an essential aspect of the travel experience. Rest areas provided a place to stop to read a map, to visit the lavatories, to refresh, play, eat, and walk. They were designed as places to view the surrounding landscape, as part of the motorway experience. The first rest area in Germany, the Rasthaus am Chiemsee along the motorway from Munich to Berchtesgarden (designed by Fritz Norkauer in 1938), was specifically designed to disclose the beauty of the German landscape. Not only was the rest area connected to an extensive recreation landscape, but its position and the sequence of its terraces and meadows was such that it profits in the best possible way from the curving lakeshore and its resulting dramatic views (Fig. 7).



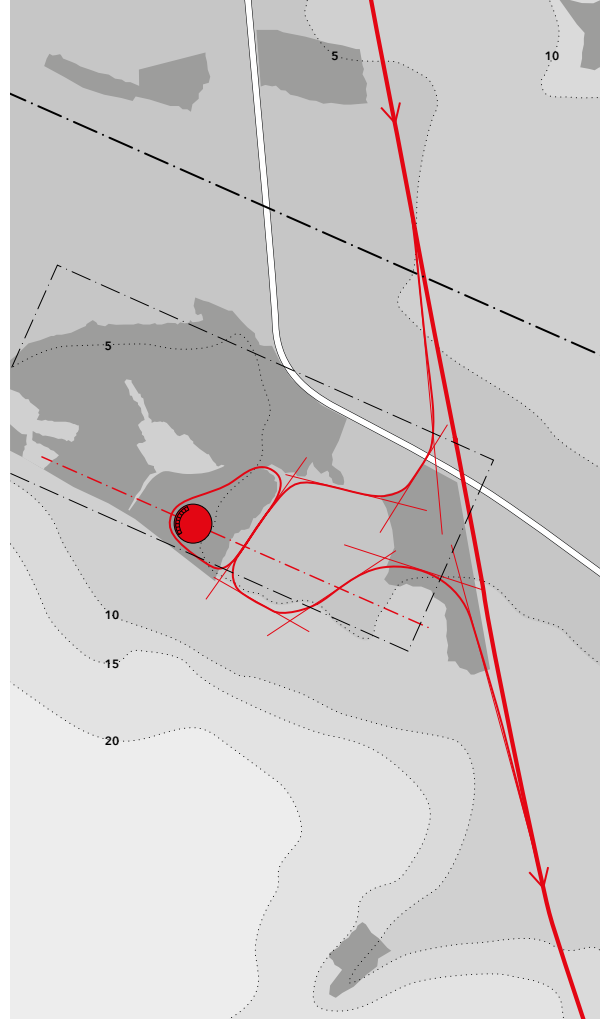
Figure 8 The Crazannes Garden, a close-cropped, circular lawn surrounded by a steel arcade

In France it has become customary to thematise rest areas, in a more or less elaborate way, so they may acquire their names from some particular attribute of the location, but their architecture is generic, with the specificity of the location reduced to a curiosity that is not spatially or visually integrated into the landscape. Both the Aires des Oiseaux and its twin, the Aire de Crazannes, are rare exceptions to this trend. Here Lassus reintroduced the connection between motorway and landscape that characterized the scenic rest areas. With the motorway hidden from eye and ear, the rest areas open up to the larger landscape of agricultural fields, forests, and quarries. But unlike the traditional rest areas, this reconnection to the landscape is not purely visual. They invite motorists to go for a walk and expose themselves to the sensory perception of the landscape, giving them the possibility of immersing themselves in the physical landscape, as a counterbalance to the experience of speed on the motorway. The two landscapes are connected by the garden, being part of both (Fig. 9 & 10).

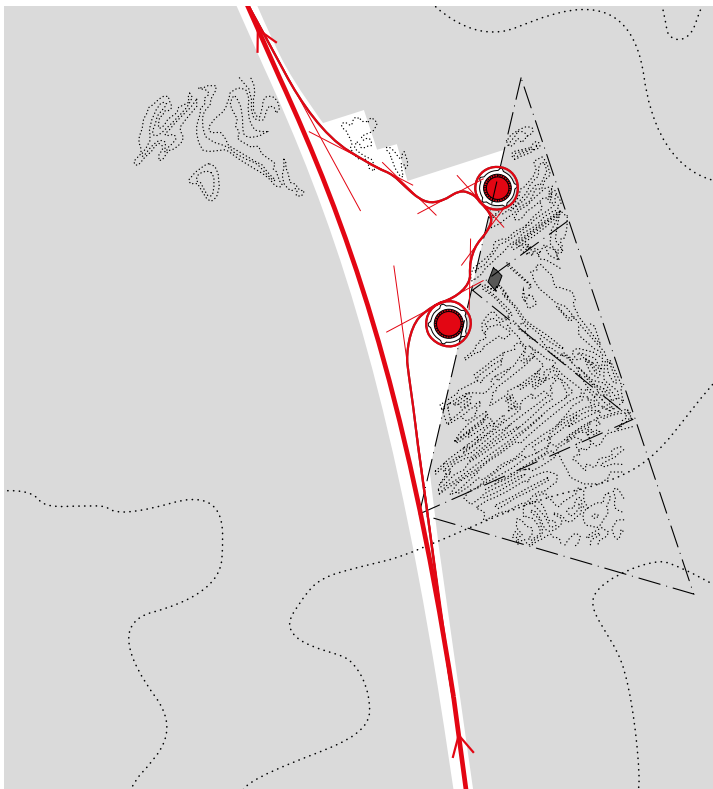
Comparing the Garden of Birds to the Crazannes Gardens

Whereas the Aire des Oiseaux was inserted into an existing forest, the Aire de Crazannes opens up to a newly rediscovered landscape, a series of old limestone quarries revealed when the motorway was being built (Conan 2004: 12). The rest area fills the triangular space between the motorway and the Crazannes Quarries, and two circular spaces, similar to the Garden of Birds, are positioned at the quarry edge. A guided tour gives access to the quarry, with its sensory abundance of limestone rocks in hues of yellow and grey, underground smell, stark contrasts of light and shadow, lavish plants, and rare animals.

Figure 9 The Bois Brossard forms a roughly rectangular strip parallel to the axis of the Charente valley, covering the steep slope between plateau and valley, where the motorway makes the transition to the plateau. The road is an elongated loop, parallel to the slope to minimize the height difference, following the basic form of the forest.



The gardens are unassuming spaces, with close-cropped and lean lawns—as opposed to the lively meadow in the Garden of Birds—with nothing in the form, colour, or material of the gardens referring to what is to come (Fig. 8). Nature, time, the experience of movement and history are addressed. However, not as the subject of design and not in the garden, but as aspects of the existing landscape, to be experienced in the quarry beyond the garden. Architecture (the gardens) and landscape (the quarry) are employed as opposites, in a confrontation of culture and nature. The two gardens function as airlocks between the distant, linear space of the motorway and the labyrinthine space of the underground world of the quarry. As such, the gardens do what Lassus intended: they open up to the existing landscape. However, when this landscape is only accessible through a guided tour, most visitors



Figures 10 The gardens in the Aire de Crazannes are positioned on the edge of the interstitial space (white) and the quarry, an aggregate of separate diggings consisting of a series of deep parallel cuts, grown into a roughly triangular area. The curves of the road, circling around to create a parking area, define the basic form and dimensions of the gardens.

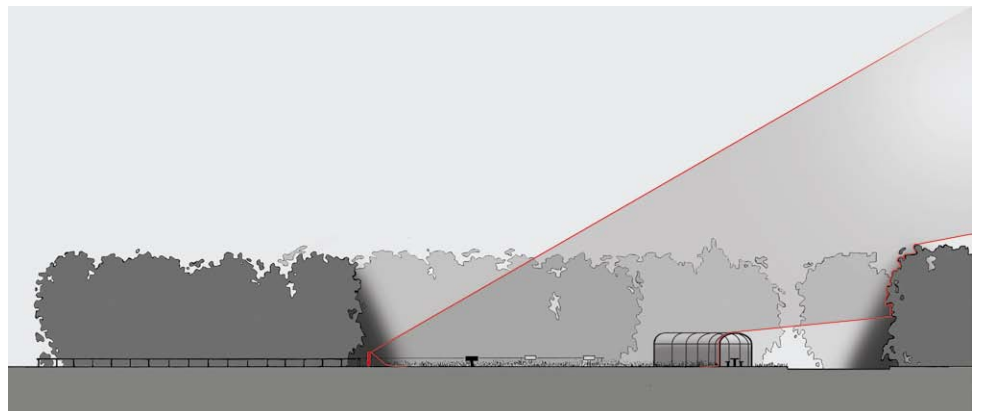


Figure 11 Section of the Garden of Birds, showing the role of the forest edge and light and shadow to define space

will remain in the rest area, passing by the quarry without even being aware of it. The gardens themselves do not offer much of a sensory experience, nothing but a barren field to air the kids, as any rest area does.

In both rest areas the same scheme of a circular, arcade-framed garden is employed as a tool to connect the motorway to the surrounding landscape. But whereas the two gardens in the Aire de Crazannes form the link between the visual experience of the motorway and the tactile experience of the quarry, without themselves betraying anything of what you are about to experience, in the Aire des Oiseaux, the landscape is introduced in the garden itself. How is that brought about?

The circular space as a garden

Lassus described the circular space as a *salle à manger de verdure* [green dining room]. Indeed, picnic tables are provided under the arcade that surrounds the space, sheltering them from the sun and enabling families to eat around the circular lawn, where children can safely play, giving them a break from the constant attention demanded by driving (Conan 2004: 14). But it has become more than a place to eat. Like a garden, the space is devoted to resting and enjoying the landscape as a place for multisensory perceptions.

The space is a luminous clearing in the forest, a condensed reference to both garden and nature, formally defined by arcade and trees, converting the functional relation between road and clearing into an architectural garden sequence. The dominant forest edge, the prairie-like grass and the references to birds make a visual, aural, and mental connection between garden and forest (Fig. 11).

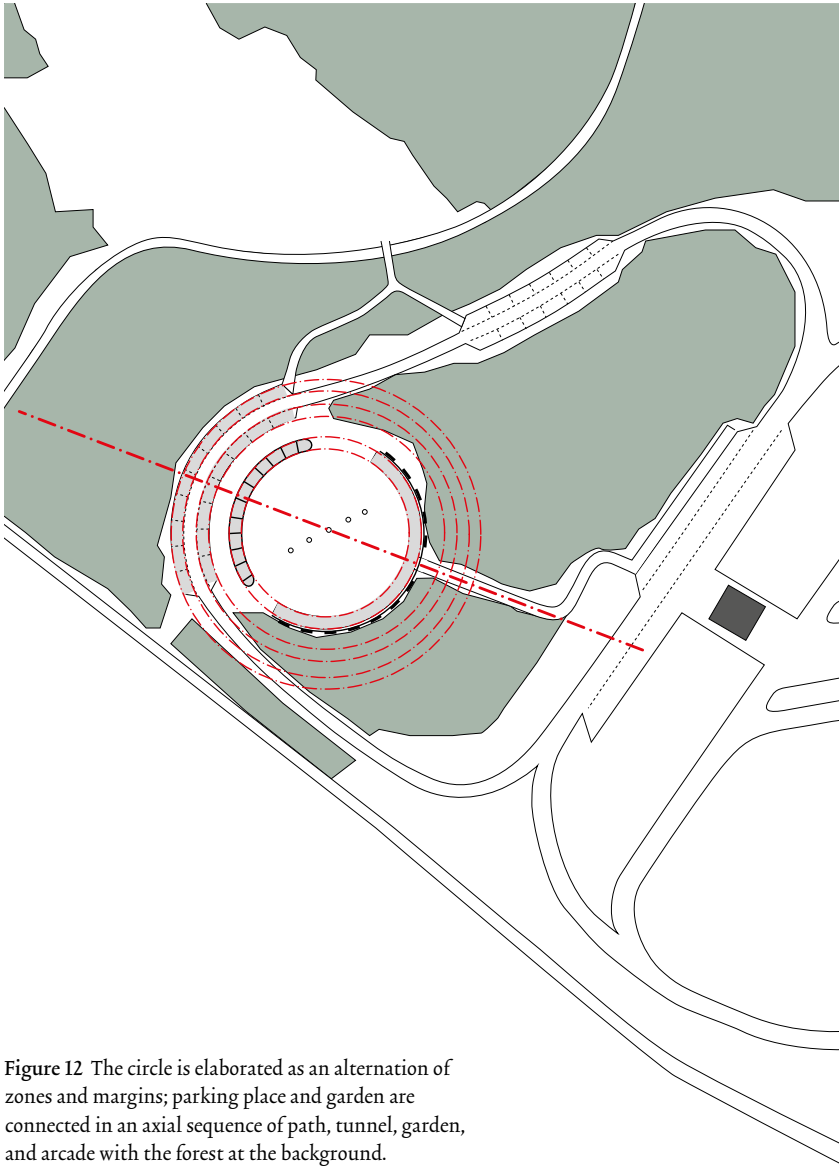


Figure 12 The circle is elaborated as an alternation of zones and margins; parking place and garden are connected in an axial sequence of path, tunnel, garden, and arcade with the forest at the background.

The image of a garden is evoked primarily by the arcade, an unmistakable reference to the Formal French tradition of garden-making. In Baroque gardens *cabinets de verdure* were used as essential elements of the composition, intimate forest rooms surrounded by *bosquets*, block-shaped clumps of trees, their natural character hidden behind screens of hedges and arcades. Similarly, the arcade in the Garden of Birds allows for a walk in the shade and articulates a specific place within a larger composition, by a differentiation within the vocabulary of symmetrical forms. Framing the central space, it is also a space in its own right. Its crescent shape makes it impossible to view the space in its entirety, and the picnic tables break up the longitudinal space into rooms, emphasizing the perpendicular relation between interior and exterior, garden and road.

Interpretation—contextuality and autonomy

The interaction between motorway and landscape plays out as a tension between contextuality and autonomy, between situational reality and a superimposed geometrical scheme. The position is derived from the natural and cultural landscape, the basic form—a circle—is an independent geometric figure, mediating between the landscape and the motorway.

In general, two modes of experiencing, two ‘scales’ of perception, can be defined. Part of our environment we experience mainly by vision—which Lassus defines as the visual scale—another part, in which we move and must locate ourselves with precision, we experience with all our senses—the tactile scale (Lassus 1998: 69). The linear space of the motorway is only perceived at great speed, whereby, as Sylvia Crowe observed, ‘the quick telescoping of views, the smooth, liquid lines made by a series of objects joining into one continuous image, add to the sense of speed’ (Crowe 1960: 33). Flowing lines, the avoidance of abrupt transitions, a limited variety of elements, powerful, simple gestures, and the sheer size contribute to the visual perception.

Likewise, the traditional scenic rest area (like the Rasthaus am Chiemsee) is informed by visual experience. The proximity of garden space, on the other hand, imposes a multisensory experience of landscape. As such, the garden elicits a transition from the car-oriented, cinematic perception of the motorway to the multisensory perception of being enveloped by the near surrounding landscape. The crops can almost be touched, but the open space of the fields, the view to the



Figures 13 The Garden of Birds has a layered structure of path, fence, flowery meadow, zoetropes, arcade, forest.

horizon, is consciously not addressed: like the motorway—where the surrounding landscape is shielded by continuous embankments—the garden is shielded from the landscape. The local landscape that is exposed is not the landscape space of the far horizon, but the near landscape of forest and fields, presented from close by. Connecting the world of speed and the world of ‘standstill’, the garden connects different realms of perception as well—the visual (distance) and the multi-sensory (proximity). While the garden is freed from the utilitarian constraints of the motorway, the latter is at the same time integral to the garden’s spatial and visual structure, in fact the garden is derived from its very form, like the eye of a hurricane.

The resulting basic form of the garden is a circle: a geometric abstraction, a single shape of Euclidian geometry that is the set of all points in a plane at a given distance from a given point—the centre. The centralized figure is stable and self-centring in its environment; placed in a field it creates a centrality that was not there before, and it divides the field into an interior and an exterior. In the plan of the Garden of Birds the diagram is elaborated as a mathematical alternation of zones and margins (Fig. 12).

The circular shape is informed by the alignment of the road, defined as a series of horizontal tangents and curves, reflecting the fluent lines of movement. The first segment of the exit is based on the speed of the motorway and its direction is a tangent of the motorway. Towards the garden,

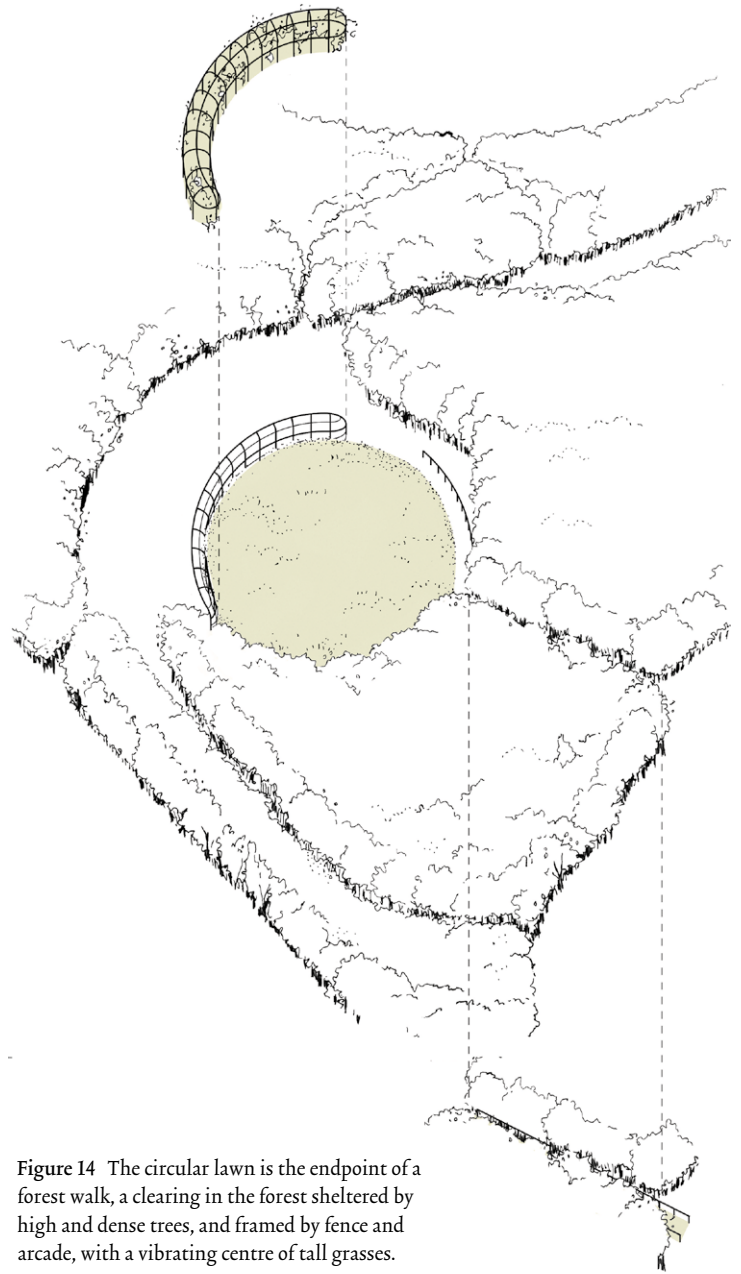


Figure 14 The circular lawn is the endpoint of a forest walk, a clearing in the forest sheltered by high and dense trees, and framed by fence and arcade, with a vibrating centre of tall grasses.

the curves become increasingly smaller and closer together, slowing down movement, so that by the time the cars meet pedestrians, they move at a safe, almost standstill speed (Fig. 8). Thus the circle is also simply a loop in the road: resulting from a central as well as a tangential force, creating a tension between the static diagram and the position in the landscape. The tangential component reflects the landscape of the motorway: the expression of movement. The central component expresses standstill, reflecting place.

The circle is perceived as a clearing, sheltered by forest, and framed by the fence and arcade, with its vibrating centre of tall grasses (Fig. 13 & 14). While the basic form of the circle demarcates a portion of the landscape, marking a place along the road, its positioning in the forest led to its elaboration as a spatial sequence: road, parking space, path, garden, and arcade with the forest in the background. The forest provides enclosure, and the architectural and natural components col-

laborate and enhance each other to define the garden: the mass and height of the forest define the space, the arcade as an architectural component adds decisiveness and legibility. Unlike in the two gardens at the Aire de Crazannes, the arcade is not executed as a full circle; its crescent-shape formalizes the endpoint of the spatial sequence.

Back on the road, the landscape is perceived differently than before. The designed section of the motorway, its dramatic outcrops excavated and remodelled for greater effect, does not—as various authors describing the Crazannes project claim (Bann 2003; Hunt 2004)—invite the motorist to turn off into one of the rest areas, as if these were the goal of the journey. On the contrary, the rest areas open our eyes to the surrounding landscape, which then turns out not to be the surrounding agricultural fields of the plateau, but an intimate landscape of rocks, suggesting a hidden history of the place.

A garden as the vehicle for experiencing the landscape

Motorway rest areas are usually places we see but barely register, not exactly the obvious spaces to write about. However, most of us spend large parts of our lives on motorways, largely unaware of the specific perceptive conditions that driving imposes, depending purely on vision, with the car interposing a filter between the relatively inactive driver and the world he is moving through, and the few sensory experiences (hands on the steering wheel, the smell of the car, music on the radio) disassociated from the distant visual experience of the surrounding landscape. The unusual situation of what turns out to be a garden in a rest area, disjointed from daily life, set off against the monosensory visual experience of the motorway, highlights the value of the multisensory landscape experience to be had in the small space of the garden.

Bernard Lassus never intended to design a garden here, but his introduction of the gardenesque element of the arcade was the launch of its gradual transformation into one. The arcade was employed as a free-standing object in space, almost as an *objet trouvé*, not as a defining element of a coherent composition. The crucial moment in the transformation was the anonymous action of the ASF engineers, when they gathered the separate components of Lassus's design into a comprehensive spatial composition. (One could wonder whether the engineers were ever aware of this.) The closed-off road, although it works for the landscape experience in the garden, looks sad and abandoned, and its beneficial effect would need a new design intervention to reconnect, which I fear will never happen.

Lassus's intention for the whole rest area was to make the landscape sensorially accessible, but it only happens here, in the 'eye of the hurricane'. We cannot know whether this would have happened in the original design, since it was never there to be perceived. However, the accumulation of the qualities of the site over time, as reconstructed in the drawings, provides us with the 'essential' version of this garden, and as such with clues for future designs. The Garden of Birds is not an entrance to, or a view to, the surrounding landscape, but in itself a representation of the sensory attributes of the landscape—smell, sound, texture. Its sensory attributes are introduced in the garden by means of the surrounding forest, the material of the central flowery meadow, and the sequential routing, to be experienced directly. Through its small size and intimacy, the garden allows for a bodily experience opposite to the distant and fleeting perception to be had from the motorway. Without visually opening up to the surrounding landscape, it makes it accessible inside its enclosure. The accentuated frame defines the place as a garden, not by isolating it, but by marking it as the core of a larger landscape, with ever-expanding boundaries—rest stop, motorway, plateau—as a point of standstill around which the rest area is organized, towards which motorists slow down, from which they gather speed again, but not before they have experienced the sounds and textures of the landscape, refreshing their view for the rest of the journey.

Rather than being a goal in itself, a rest area is an intermission in an otherwise continuous movement in time and space, stepping aside momentarily. The gradual genesis of a garden here provided more than was ever Lassus's intention for this space: it is a very effective way of offering a sensory experience, preparing the traveller, when following his journey, for the complementary experience of seeing the surrounding landscape with fresh eyes.

This garden, as it appeared when I visited it, also suggests an alternative approach to landscape architectural design. Whereas the surrounding designed landscape of the rest area had to be dedicated to its functional restrictions, the garden is devoted to the experience of landscape. As the landscape generated by the motorway did in this case, the metropolitan landscape provides many occasions for the disclosure of place. In the niches, the garden can escape from the conditions that created it, from the generic reality of the metropolitan condition, and reflect on the specificity of its situation. The task for the landscape architectural transformation of these locations is not to produce place, but to articulate and sublimate the characteristics of the landscape.

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NOTES

- 1 A zoetrope is a mechanical garden device invented by mathematician William George Horner (1786–1837) in 1834. It gives an illusion of action from a rapid succession of still images by viewing through a narrow slit, creating an illusion of the natural world.
- 2 The ambiguity of this intervention, which has been discussed in detail by Michel Conan, calls for interesting questions in itself. But since it does not address the multisensory perception of landscape, the subject of this critique, I will not discuss it any further here.
- 3 The name of the rest area was also changed. Lassus had called it Aire du Bois Brossard, after its location. Its current name refers to the moniker of the A837—Autoroute des Oiseaux—and to the bird theme that is elaborated here.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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