In seventeenth-century France, land took on new importance for the practice of politics and rituals of court life. As a sequestered aristocracy promenaded in great formal gardens, the French military moved across the landscape, marked the boundaries of the state with fortresses, and refigured the topography of the interior with canals and forests. In her major new book, Chandra Mukerji highlights the connection between the two seemingly disparate activities of engineering and garden design. She shows how, at Versailles in particular, the royal park showcased French skills in using nature and art to design a distinctively French landscape and create a naturalized political territoriality. She challenges the association of state power with social and legal structures alone, and demonstrates the importance for Louis XIV and his state of a controlled physical site and a demarcated French territory within the wider European geopolitical continent.
Territorial ambitions and the gardens of Versailles
Territorial ambitions and the gardens of Versailles

Chandra Mukerji

*University of California, San Diego*
To all those who have died because of territorial politics
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I began this work with the encouragement of Charles Saumarez-Smith and Mary Walshok. Mary, as the Dean of Summer Session, wanted Charles and me to teach a joint summer course at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and thought it exciting to focus on gardens. Charles’ casual optimism about the intellectual value of the project and Mary’s institutional support for designing the course stimulated my earliest efforts to formulate a sociological approach to gardens. Soon after, I received more encouragement from Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Moulin, both of whom saw possibilities in gardens as a topic in the sociology of art. Still, I was surprisingly settled into this project by a research assistant, Silvio Waisbord, who was interested in politics and culture, and who knew enough French to help me explore this topic. I became so immersed in the volumes of material he carted from the library that I could only get out by writing a book.

Once set in the project, I received the most help from Bruno Latour. To my delight, he thought studying French gardens was a beautiful project. He saw immediately that the sociology of art could meet the history of science and technology in the gardens, where land was made plastic and political through localized human effort. His generosity in making our stays in Paris easier and more pleasurable was impressive and essential to the project. His intellectual seriousness combined with his deep commitment to studies of technology and material culture made my work all the more interesting and important to me. Bruno’s colleague at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation, Antoine Hennion, in his turn, pushed me to think about why French music was so ubiquitous to noble gardens during the seventeenth century. I became convinced somehow that when I could explain the significance of Lully’s music wafting through the trees and over parterres at Versailles, I would better understand the
political life of that particular time and place. This exercise forced me to keep re-exam-
inng relations between two extra-linguistic forms of culture (music and gardens) to
think about how humans impress their will and social ambitions onto the world
through transforming nature. This was a crucial turn in the work.

I was socialized into doing work in France with the help of a research assistant from
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of bad soil, trying to rid me of unhealthy attributes of an awkward American as I fol-
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Glossary of French terms

allée: a garden walkway or alley
appartements, appartements: evenings of informal entertainment in the king’s chambers at Versailles
ballet de cour: dance performed by members of the court
bosquet: forest room, walled with trees and bushes and filled with statuary and waterworks
cabinet de curiosité: a room housing a collection of artworks, papers, and/or specimens from nature.
carrousel: a ritual event in which feudal military contests take place
cloche: a glass bell used in gardens to protect and provide heat for tender plants like melons and cucumbers
collation: a display of foods and the opportunity to consume them
colonnade: an array of columns, used both in the Louvre design by Perrault and in Mansart’s bosquet at Versailles
coquillage: displays of shells in gardens
courses de bague, courses de tête: the feudal contests most often used at French carrousels
demi-lune: a small outlying piece of a battlement wall system
diversités: parties for the nobility performed frequently in the garden'étoile: a star shape, used frequently in military architecture
étagé: a holding pond or reservoir
faïence: hand-painted and glazed pottery or tableware
faïenceries: manufacturing centers for faïence
fête: a party, usually organized around a narrative theme
fossé: a ditch used in battlement wall systems
fusil: a kind of gun used by infantry soldiers
grand couvert: the most formal of the king’s meals
grand habit: fine dress for noble ladies at court with tight lacing and low-cut necklines
honnête homme: the ideal for a French courtier, desiring to please and having the grace to do it well
xxiv  Glossary of French terms

intendants: the king’s representatives in the provinces, placed there permanently under Louis XIV

jardin potager: the kitchen garden, providing fruits and vegetables for the court
justaucorps, justaucorps, justaucorps à brevet: a costume for men with special embroidery on the sleeves to denote high social standing
lac, pièce d’eau: a large reflecting pond in the garden
levée: the rituals surrounding the king’s rising in the morning
manufacture royale, manufacture du roi: companies given special authority to manufacture goods for the court
mascarade: a court dance, at first denoting a dance in which narratives or symbols were enacted, but later referring only to a costume ball
mousquet: a gun for the infantry, a precursor to the fusil
opiat: soothing medicines given the king in the morning, presumably with opium in it, but mixed with a variety of herbs. Used after the king began to suffer from both pain and emotional strain.
orangerie: an indoor space, usually but not always with glass doors, used to house delicate palms, citruses, and other bushes or trees during the winter
parterre: low garden bed with complex designs made from cut bushes, flowers, colored gravel, water, or grass
petit académie: the group of secret advisors to Colbert on intellectual and cultural matters
petit couvert: the less formal ritual meal of the king and/or royal family
petit parc: the older and more highly decorated area of the garden of Versailles between the château and the canal
plans-relief: clay models of fortresses or towns used for military planning with highly accurate renderings of the plants and building materials as well as spatial relations of the site
points de France, points de France: French lace
politesse: good manners, refined style
pompe: a pumping system, often using river current to power the pump to raise water from the river for human use
potager: another name for the jardin potager or kitchen garden
pré carré: Vauban’s term for the France he wanted to engineer with fortresses to make it a great nearly-square feature of the European continent
précieuses: salon women of Paris
Roi Soleil: the Sun King
sape: a raised area of dirt along a trench to protect soldiers moving through the trench
serres: the glass covering garden areas, particularly hotbeds, for starting seedlings and protecting tender plants
tapis vert: a large area of plain green grass in the middle of the Allée Royale, running between the Latona fountain and the Apollo fountain