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1 / California: The Beautiful and the Damned

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After abandoning their farm in Oklahoma and joining the exodus across the desert to California, after seeing their family torn apart by the forced mobility of modernity, the Joads reach the top of Tehachapi Pass and gaze out over California's San Joaquin Valley. All of a sudden, the power and promise of the California landscape reveal themselves in a startling vista of color and pattern, instantly erasing the disillusionment that had accompanied the family all along their journey. In *The Grapes of Wrath,* John Steinbeck reduces this view to a list of characteristics, as if describing a painting: "The vineyard, the orchards, the great flat valley green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses." The Joads have at last reached the American apotheosis. "Pa sighed, 'I never knowed they was anything like her.' The peach trees and walnut groves, the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns—rich barns . . ." The beauty and the wonder of the scene before them overwhelm the Joads: "And then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley. The distance was thinned with the haze, and the land grew softer in the distance. A windmill flashed in the sun, and its turning blades were like heliograph, far away. Ruthie and Winfield looked at it, and Ruthie whispered, 'It's California.'"[1]

This is a complex scene in which all the standard characteristics of landscape painting are present—a constructed, formal beauty, perspective represented by the thinning haze, a sense of proprietorship in the embarrassed gaze, a near complete absence of visible labor. It serves to represent California as dream, as spectacle, as a view to behold and perhaps to own. It shows California as a cul-

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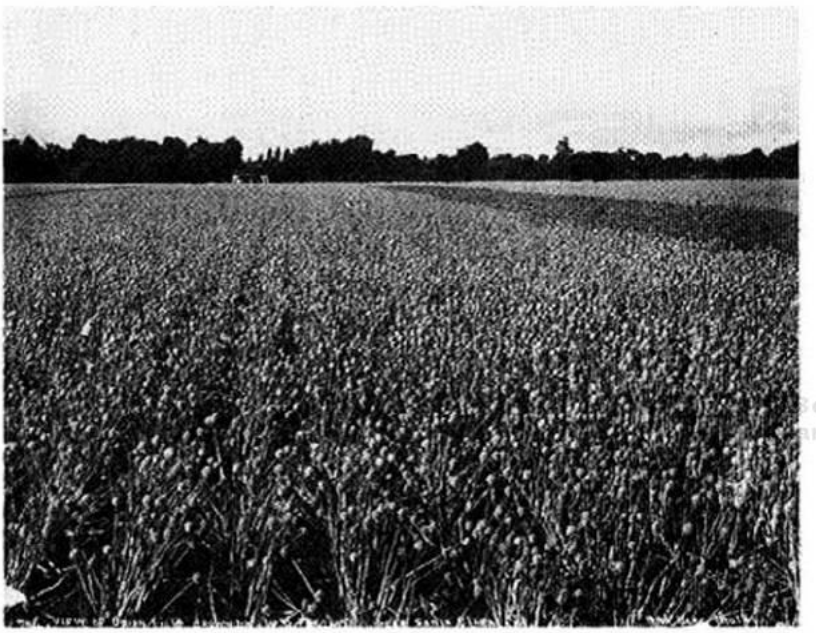

Figure 1. California agriculture seen as landscape. The hazy hills in the background and the fields converging on the farmhouse (providing perspective) give a sense of pastoral beauty and calm. Scenes like these comprise the California landscape image that drove the Joads and many like them to come to California. Significantly, a sense of visible work is nearly completely absent in this view. Photo circa 1900. (Courtesy, Bancroft Library.)

mination of the American Dream—perhaps not a shining city of a hill, but a prosperous, rural, Jeffersonian, yeoman, countryside ideal (Figure 1). But Steinbeck is a wise writer, and he knows that to show this landscape as America, one must truly show it as an image, as a dream. All that has led the Joads to the top of this hill tells us that the perspective from there hides something, that the beauty of the place can only be an image constructed by hiding what makes it. The California Dream, the American Apotheosis that is California, can only be seen from afar. The dream itself is impossible without a certain haze that closes off perspective, that hides the struggle that goes into making landscape. Steinbeck thus has the Joads come down off the mountain, and he thereby opens up the view to show how it is constructed.[2]

Hidden in the bushes along the creeks and irrigation ditches is the other side of the California Dream, a side that has been there all along, but that is easy to overlook from atop the hill: the invisible army of migrant workers who *make* the landscape of beauty and abundance that awed the Joads. Supposedly quiet,

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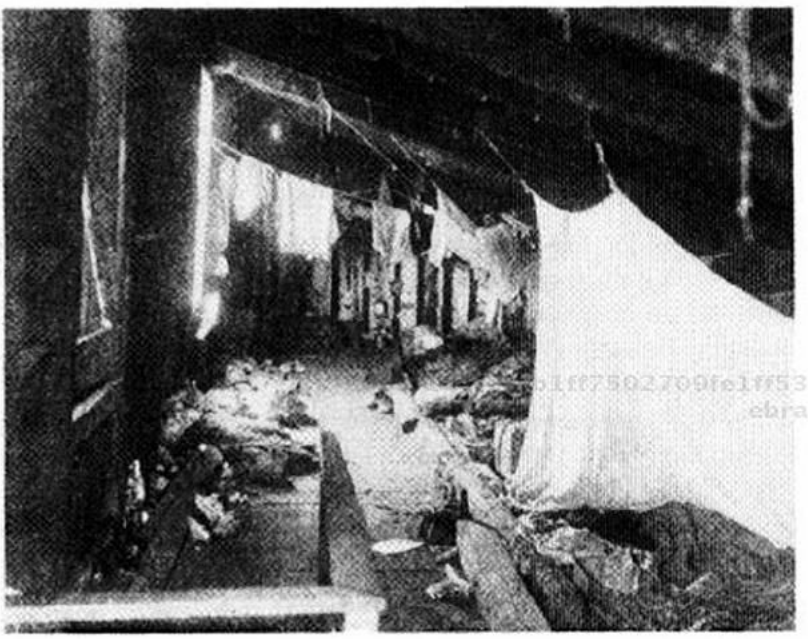

Figure 2. The other side of the landscape. This photograph, from the 1920s, was typical of conditions found by the California Commission of Immigration in 1913 and by migrants like the Joads in 1939. Without interiors like these, exteriors like that shown in Figure 1 are impossible. (Photo: California Commission of Immigration and Housing.)

pliable, unorganized, they exist and reproduce themselves in landscapes of the most appalling deprivation. "There was no order in the camp; little grey tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random." The first house the Joads see in the camp they stumble upon is not the craftsman bungalow that historian Kevin Starr has argued represents a pinnacle of rural civility only possible in California, but is simply "nondescript."[3] Another shelter is simply "a huge tent, ragged, torn in strips." Without camps such as these (Figure 2), however, the view from the top of Tehachapi Pass would be impossible. The pattern and color of the California landscape are mortgaged on the backs of an endless stream of workers:

> The young man squatted on his heels. "I'll tell ya," he said quietly. "They's a big-son-of-a-bitch peach orchard I worked in. Takes nine men all the year roun'. . . . Takes three thousan' men for two weeks when them peaches is ripe. Got to have 'em or the peaches'll rot. So what do they do? They send out handbills all over hell. They need three thousan' and they get six thousan'. They get men for what they wanta pay. If ya don't wanta take what they pay, goddamn it they's a thousan'

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> men waitin' for your job. So ya pick an' ya pick, an' then she's done. . . . When ya get 'em picked, ever' goddamn one is picked. There ain't another damn thing in that part a the country to do. An' them owners don't want you there no more. Three thousan' of you. The work's done. You might steal, you might get drunk, you might jus' raise hell. An' besides, you don' look nice, livin' in ol' tents; an' it's pretty country, but you stink it up. They don' want you aroun'. So they kick you out, they move you along. That's how it is."[4]

Both indispensable as a class and completely expendable as individuals, it is quite clear that it is farmworkers who actively make what is visible as a landscape. The two landscapes—the broad, perspectival, aesthetic view from atop the hill, and the ugly, violent, dirty landscape of workers' everyday lives—are intimately linked.

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Steinbeck's enduring value, as George Henderson has shown, was his ability to juxtapose these two aspects of landscape in such a way that their interdependence becomes obvious. In so doing Steinbeck was able to illustrate clearly the costs of capitalist agricultural development both in terms of the violence done to workers' lives and the violence done to cherished American ideals of yeomanry and the good life.[5] In this book, I suggest that such violence has in fact been *necessary*, not just to the construction of American Dreams, but to the workings of the economic system itself. Moreover, such violence has been mediated through the landscape itself: in all its complexity the landscape, as both more general view and more local, constructed environment, is an important player in the drama of capitalist development in California. Steinbeck had it right in two essential aspects. First, landscape must be understood as an interconnected relationship between view and production, between the aesthetic pleasure the Joads find on Tehachapi Pass and the reality of hobo jungles, Hoovervilles, labor camps, and skid rows they find down below. Second, in some very fundamental senses, it is the workers themselves who, in their struggle to make lives for themselves within and against a ruthless political economy, make the landscape—and it is they who are the glue that binds its two aspects.

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For making these connections, for exposing the underbelly of the California Dream, Steinbeck saw his book banned and burned in Bakersfield (where the Joads buried Granma after they came down off the hill), and he was roundly denounced by agribusiness and industrial concerns throughout the state as un-American. But these are precisely the connections that need to be explored if we are to understand both how the agricultural economy is continually reproduced despite its obvious unjustness and why the landscape looks the way it does. As we will see in the pages that follow, these are hardly separate questions.

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The look of the land plays a key role in determining the shape that a political economy takes.[6]

Imagining the American Apotheosis

Members of the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in the first decades of the twentieth century liked to talk of "California, the Beautiful—and the Damned" precisely because they were continually forced to make the sorts of connections between landscape imagery and landscape reality that Steinbeck has the Joads make. Their phrase catches precisely the bloody irony of the California landscape. It is beautiful *because* it is damned. As Agnes Benedict wrote in *Survey* in 1927,

> To see country life as it really is means blotting out of the picture many of the cherished associations of beauty and glamour which we have put there as visitors going to the country on a vacation or as grown-ups looking back at our childhood on the "dear old farm" of another and simpler time. It will mean substituting for the rosy picture a less colorful one—a picture that includes the grayness as well as the sunshine of country life.[7]

Most commentators on the California landscape, however, have been little interested in showing the connection between both sides of the landscape, and how these sides are dependent on each other. To be sure, there is a significant strain of dystopianism in California literature that seeks to counteract the typically rosy hype of most landscape accounts, but even now it remains a minority tradition, confined as often as not to fictionalized accounts. Until recently, ignoring the blood and turmoil, the split heads and ruined lives, that allow the landscape to look as it does is an honored tradition in social-scientific, historical, and literary discourse on the California landscape. This discourse seems to imply, in the words of geographer James Parsons, that the landscape "is morally neutral." As neutral, both people and landscape may be transformed in their mutual encounters, but the moral content of the landscape remains fixed and imperturbable. It just is. The landscape is thus often understood in two interrelated ways: it is a relict rather than an ongoing construction; and it is organic, natural, and aesthetic. In the first case, the landscape is understood to be immutable at least in terms of the normal human life span. Rather than being molded directly by people, the landscape's immutability allows it to shape humans. In the second case, the landscape is something to be passed through and admired along the way.[8]

Parsons typifies these ways of understanding the California landscape. His strategy is one of description: "Even in the barrios of Mexican and Filipino

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farm workers, a transient population whose economic status and system of values are reflected in the untidy but honest and lived in appearance of the houses and yards, the spirit of the place is somehow evoked." The paternalism implicit in seeing space as landscape here becomes explicit, and the lives Parsons seeks to describe become mere representations of the "honest" diversity of the place. Mexican and Filipino workers become curiosities to be gawked at, simply an adjunct of "the visual, aesthetic dimensions of the built environment or cultural landscape and the magnificent diversity of crops yielding the bumper harvests of food and fiber that make California agriculture one of the wonders of the world." Missing in Parson's account is precisely the connection between what he calls "the valley . . . as a symbol of capitalism gone rampant," and the aesthetic view he so highly values. Rather, he suggests that "the valley is [not] any less interesting, or its color and geometry any less worthy of attention, because some of its harvests enrich soulless corporations, [and] its landscapes are the creations of the producers of nonunion table grapes or boycotted wines." The landscape is purely a place of aesthetic wonder. How it got that way is of little concern.[9]

Workers lose even their symbolic status as a cipher for the uninhibited capitalist exploitation of the agricultural valleys of California in William Preston's account of landscape evolution in the Tulare Basin area of the San Joaquin Valley. Even as late as the Depression, while the Joads were making their way over the pass and into the Central Valley, Preston claims that migratory workers, though "vital to the success of intensive farming," had "participated only marginally in the growth and development of basin communities." Two of the key moments in the construction of the California agricultural landscape of which Tulare Basin is a part—the Mussel Slough incident memorialized in Frank Norris's *The Octopus,* and the 1933 Corcoran cotton strike (see Chapter 6)—are dismissed in a few sentences. If Preston's goal is to explore "land and life in the Tulare Basin," it is hard to see how this dismissal can hold. Labor historians and geographers concerned with patterns of landholding (and thus with the material context of life) argue that these incidents are absolutely central to understanding the construction of California landscape patterns. The connection that workers lives and their labor make between landscape-as-view and landscape-as-form, between the land and life Preston wants to examine, fades in his account so that he can focus instead on the making of Visalia, Porterville, Tulare, and Hanford as towns of middle-class respectability, as pinnacles of American rural culture.[10]

Kevin Starr, the chronicler of the "California Dream" from statehood to the end of the Depression, shares this concern with uncovering California as an

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Eden of middle-class respectability (and to a lesser extent, showing where that Edenic goal has fallen short or been corrupted).[11] "In the beginning and always, was the land," he writes. The land itself "was the first and last premise of the California experience." The early years of Anglo-American farming, the time when land monopolies were created at a ruthless pace, represent to Starr an aberration rather than an apotheosis of the American political economy. They were an accident of the gold economy run amok. Land and landscape merely became resources waiting to be exploited by rapacious wheat barons intent on mining the fields as the hills had been mined. But the bust of bonanza wheat farming ushered in an age of bourgeois California enlightenment in the guise of what Starr calls "fruit culture." Fruits and vegetables became, by the 1890s, their own advertisements of the California Dream as reality:

> In the color of a plum or an apricot, in the luxuriance of a bowl of grapes set out in ritual display, in a bottle of wine, the soil and sunshine of California reached millions of Americans for whom the distant place would henceforth be envisioned as a sun graced land resplendent with the goodness of the fruitful earth.

Harking back to ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and seeing in fruit cultivation a certain biblical respectability, Starr claims for California a lineage of agricultural integrity and promise reached perhaps nowhere else in America:

> Fruit culture nurtured the values of responsible land use, prudent capitalization, cooperation among growers in the matter of packing, shipping and marketing. Above all else, fruit culture encouraged a rural civility in the care of homes, the founding of schools, churches and libraries, the nurturing of social and recreational amenities which stood in complete contrast to the Wild West attitude of wheat.

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Starr's analysis makes invisible the material conditions—the army of pauperized, temporary laborers that picked and canned the fruit, the monopoly conditions (rather than simple cooperation) that packing and marketing cooperatives reinforced, the dismissal of workers when the season ended—that make possible this "fruit culture," this flowering of rural civility.[12]

The beauty of pastoralism California-style blinds Starr to the damned lives that workers in the fruit industry led. An undercover agent for the California Commission of Immigration and Housing spent part of the 1914 packing season lugging crates of oranges in the Tulare Basin town of Lindsay. Responding to calls broadcast around the state for more than five hundred men to work in the Lindsay packing houses, Frederick Mills found that far fewer were needed; many of the "men had been brought to town to lie idle around the tracks." Mills himself found occasional work in a small packing house that employed "about 24 packers, women and girls. About one-half are local people, farmer's

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wives [*sic*] and daughters, country type. Rest come up from the South for the orange crop." For "rustlers" like Mills, the work was grueling, and not particularly well paid:

> Friday night I was about as tired as one could be. . . . I had arisen at 5:15 after sleeping some six hours by the road. Walked seven and one half miles along a R.R. track before breakfast. Started work as a "rustler" at 8:30; "Rustling" is admittedly the hardest job in a packing house. This place—Drakes—has been unable to keep any "rustler" more than 3-4 days. There are 2 rustlers here, each attending to about a dozen packers; When a packer wishes a box, she yells sharply, "box." The rustler punches her card and carries the box to a bench from twenty to thirty yards away, where a top is put on. Each box weighs 70 lbs. From 500 to 700 are carried in a day. I worked at this till 9 P.M. Friday night with two hours off for meals. By the time I was finished, my feet were blistered, my hands were torn, my arms almost numb, my back aching, and each of my thighs with a red hot sear across it where the edges of the box rubbed. I no longer wonder why there are so many I.W.W.s. Why are there not more anarchists?

When he finished, Mills was able to find lodging on a ditch bank next to the orange groves. After working an even longer shift on Saturday, Mills asked the owner "for some money due me. . . . Instead of money I am given a meal ticket—'Good for five dollars in meals' at one George's Place."[13]

Kevin Starr presents the packing scene differently. It is the fulfillment of the pastoral promise (Figure 3):

> Today, a half century since citrus culture passed its peak, surviving evidence—old photographs especially—come forward to justify that . . . pastoralism: the groves themselves . . . extending from seashore to mountain range, and the great packing sheds adjacent to them, sweeping, open structures, forcefully aesthetic in their utility, banked by stands of eucalyptus trees which channelled breezes to an advantageous angle . . . and within these sheds, the work of sorting, washing, wrapping each fruit . . . tasks performed in the main by young women who regard us today from the pages of old magazines, their hands folded atop white aprons in a moment's repose as the photographer asked them to cease work so that he may record the scene.[14]

Similar images have been repeatedly called up to valorize and celebrate the "way of life" that California agriculture had become by the turn of the century. *Only* by erasing—or completely aestheticizing—the workers who made that way of life is its celebration possible. *Only* by seeing California purely as a landscape view can we see beauty without understanding the lives of the damned who are an integral part of that beauty. And that move, erasing the traces of work and struggle, is precisely what landscape imagery is all about.[15]

Such a reckless erasure of the lives of ordinary people in order to celebrate

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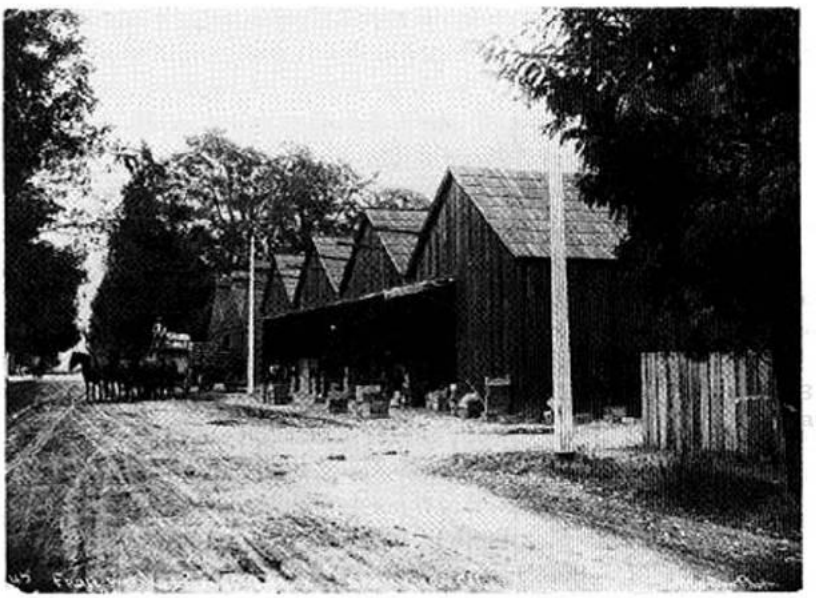

Figure 3. A turn-of-the-century fruit-packing house in Santa Clara, California, similar to the packing houses Frederick Mills investigated in the San Joaquin orange district. The scale and the intensity of the work that Mills noted are only hinted at in the sense of pastoral calm the photograph achieves. (Courtesy, Bancroft Library.)

California as visual spectacle reaches something of a climax in Jean Baudrillard's postmodern tour of the state during the 1980s. Celebrating the hypermobile, decentered character of California "culture," Baudrillard can only see the working classes when they mimic the mobility of the dominant classes. Baudrillard spends a night at Porterville, just up the road from Lindsay, and in the heart of the interior orange district,

> a driveway lined by fifty palm trees, all the same height and absolutely symmetrical, leads up to a planter's house that is minuscule by comparison. It could be a colonial scene. . . . The road down to the town that is not really a town is as straight as the rows of orange trees and is peopled by Mexican slaves who have bought up their masters' old 1950s Chevrolets. . . . All the cars drive up and down the main thoroughfare in slow or animated procession, a collective parade. . . . It is the same ceremony, on a smaller scale, as the slow nocturnal cruising on the Strip in Las Vegas, or the procession of cars on the Los Angeles freeways simply transformed into a Saturday night provincial extravaganza. The only element of culture, the only mobile element: the car.

This mobility is the defining experience for the California landscape, according to Baudrillard. "Speed creates pure objects. It is itself a pure object, since it

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cancels out the ground and territorial reference points, since it runs ahead of time to annul time itself. . . . Driving like this produces a kind of invisibility, transparency, or transversality in things simply by emptying them out." Hypermobility, by emptying all objects of content, creates an ahistorical society, one that is pure image. "History and Marxism are like fine wines and haute cuisine," Baudrillard asserts (in an analogy telling for its exclusive focus in the desires of the francophile bourgeoisie). "They do not really cross the ocean in spite of the many impressive attempts that have been made to adapt them to new surroundings." There is no point in struggling to critique and understand capitalism, he goes on to say, because "it always stays a length ahead" of those who would fight against it. Without history, and with an ever-changing capital calling the shots, "things fade into the distance faster and faster in the rear-view mirror of memory." Hypermobility and the speed of time make the lives of the people who make Baudrillard's images—his pure objects, his simulacrum—quite invisible in the landscape, if not entirely irrelevent to it.[16]

Baudrillard's emphasis on hypermobility ignores the rather different mobility of the army of California migratory farmworkers whose lives are grounded not in an empty immense space, but in a ruthless, severe landscape that Baudrillard is incapable of understanding. At times, as many as 200,000 workers have tramped up and down the state in search of agricultural work, passing through, and making possible Parson's "color and geometry," Starr's "pastoralism," and Baudrillard's orange groves "laid out neatly on wild hillsides that are carpeted with undulating grasses like animal fur and resemble the hills of Tuscany." Their movement makes it impossible to accept such bourgeois fantasies of a purely aesthetic California. The mobility that attracts Baudrillard and Parsons and Starr thus becomes a lot like the image of the landscape they carry in their heads: California is represented purely as a playground of beauty in which the damned remain quite invisible. For historian Starr, the Pan-Pacific expositions in San Francisco and San Diego in 1915 represent the apotheosis of this ideal of aesthetic mobility. California writers, artists, bohemians, and politicians succeeded at these expositions in placing before the eyes of the nation a California at once solid and ethereal. In both expositions mobility was celebrated as a metaphor for the California experience. But it was a mobility not of labor working the fields and orchards, mines and forests of the state, but one that rather spoke of the unity of culture and nature that Californians had somehow managed to construct. John Muir's lonely treks in the Sierras and the peripatetic wanderings of literary bohemians were both celebrated at the fairs. For such mobility to be emblematic of the California experience, space itself had to be made into landscape—it had to be seen as immutable, as the contentless

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vast desert that Baudrillard celebrates, devoid of all affective life, existing only as a symbol of human desire.[17]

Literary critic David Wyatt has sought to explicate how the immutability and desirability of landscape has structured California literature. For him, landscape is something we live in, pass through, and respond to, and in this way the landscape defines us. Wyatt illustrates this point by examining Frank Norris's *The Octopus,* the story of the Mussel Slough incident in which the Southern Pacific Railroad forced squatting small farmers off the land. Norris's character Presely exemplifies the California landscape experience, according to Wyatt: "Presely moves through a space distinctive in its very vacancy. . . . It is a space at once vulnerable and immune to impress." Wyatt's analysis of space as absolute and immutable is complex, and he shows that as the weight of white European history gathers on the land, individual experiences of landscape become inextricable from the scene that produces them. Writers in California do not merely stand upon the hill and gaze, but actively experience the scene that is before them. Nature (for Wyatt, landscape is natural) is complexly intertwined with history. But for Wyatt, this is a history of decline: as history advances, the California landscape works not to create heroic individuals, but rather to wear them down.[18]

Wyatt sees two central eras of California writing that define for the rest of the world the nature and meaning of the California landscape. In both eras, the landscape stands as separate and autonomous, as a view to behold, as an externalized shaper of human emotion and action:

> The early naturalists see landscape as validating human behavior, the later novelists see landscape as controlling or restraining it. John Muir, Mary Austin and Clarence King each celebrate the spiritual liberation conferred by a particular California region. Norris, Steinbeck and Chandler map the advance of human hopes against the steady encroachments of space.

Despite the long history of human habitation in and transformation of California, despite the ugly anti-Chinese riots, the vigilante movements, the ruthless consolidation of land monopolies, the steady army of migratory workers, and the already sprawling cities of the early twentieth century, Wyatt posits the purely "natural" landscape as the true meaning of the California experience. "California acts as a site for such discoveries [of self] because her landscapes are beautiful, looming and austere, a dominant fact in the experience of her culture." Even more, "California intensifies the natural myth that America has been set apart from the beginning by its freedom to test itself against the unmediated." Nature, and the view, is everything. And it is determinate.[19]

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In Kevin Starr's hands, this narrative of decline begins with a detailed rendering of landscape and social evolution in California—an evolution wrought through the enslavement of Indians, and the proletarianization of Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians. As white European influence deepens in the land, however, his focus shifts from the interplay of capital and labor with the land to a series of personality sketches aimed at showing the ultimate depravity of both the artistic community and the political elite in California. Starr shows this depravity to be entirely *personal,* borne of Californians' inability to come to terms with the natural abundance around them. The social relations of production that make that abundance possible fade quickly from Starr's view.[20]

By the end of his analysis, Wyatt (unlike Starr) begins to have misgivings, worrying that history inscribed on the land does seem to matter, that nature is not all. To explore these misgivings, Wyatt turns to the geographer Carl Sauer for guidance, but finds there that "the facts of geography emerge as fiction—a momentary stay against confusion—dependent for its stability on a suspension of historical perspective." The making of this fiction puts Sauer right in the thick of modernism, according to Wyatt: "'Modernism' can in fact be read as the triumph of the fiction of space: Certainly its major adepts strive for a form that denies or ignores the pressures of an ongoing and irrepressible time." Space—which for Wyatt is the same as landscape—is held steady so that the movement of people can be seen against it, so that we can see how people, not landscape, are formed in the encounter. Wyatt gives Sauer the credit for this way of seeing:

> Place (the "morphology of landscape") is the stopped frame in the continuous film of change. In his scholarly and unassuming way, California's most eminent geographer joins the company of imagineers who brood on the dimensions in which we live.[21]

Representing Landscape

Carl Sauer published "The Morphology of Landscape" in 1925 both as an epitaph for the environmental determinism that had ruled American geography for the preceding generation and as a programmatic statement of an emerging geography closely aligned with morphological sciences. The landscape for Sauer was the sum of its morphological components—the totality of buildings, infrastructure, population (density and mobility), production, communication, and so forth. It was an entity that could be mapped to show "the impress of the works of man upon an area." The landscape was thus a material, physical form that wedded Nature to Culture, and which could then be read to divine

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the values, needs, desires, and levels of development of a people. Therefore, landscape study had to be an exercise in historical reconstruction that sought to show how a particular culture, working on and through the natural landscape, created a cultural landscape.[22]

Geographers, according to Sauer, should engage in a search for the genesis of landscape form, and trace the ways in which this form becomes the basis for alteration as subsequent culture groups move into an area. The focus, therefore, was not on individuals, but on larger cultures as they reworked natural or preexisting landscapes: "Human geography . . . unlike psychology and history, is a science that has nothing to do with individuals but only with human institutions or cultures." To uncover the significance of a particular culture (or a trait of that culture), the geographer turned to the morphology of the cultural-natural landscape complex. "Area or landscape is the field of geography because it is a naïvely given, important section of reality, not a sophisticated thesis." The landscape was thus unproblematic: it was the visual data upon which historical reconstruction of past cultures was built. Sauer's concern was with the examination of culture as it was worked out "on the ground" in particular places. The goal of Sauerian landscape studies, however, was (and is) not purely ideographic. Rather, such studies seek through morphological analysis to detect the *generic* traits of landscape types. Their goal is to take a unique assemblage of material items and to represent them as a *typical* landscape that expresses the nature of a culture—and in this their goal closely parallels the goal of representing landscape as an artistic type and an ideological form.[23]

Sauer's programmatic statements on landscape have proved enormously influential, spawning both elaborate studies of local landscapes and heated debates about the usefulness of these studies. James Duncan has asserted that Sauer and his students have "exerted such influence over how cultural geographers have thought about landscapes that they have shaped a corpus of scholarship that has shown remarkedly little variation over the years." There is good reason for this. A focus on the processes by which landscapes come to be made, and what they thereby represent, is of great importance for what it tells us about how societies function, and because, in our everyday lives, we engage continually in precisely this exercise of reading landscapes for their meaning, in hopes that they will guide us in our actions. But as Duncan and a growing chorus of others have pointed out, Sauerian landscape studies are deeply flawed by their inability (or unwillingness) to theorize and problematize any of their key terms: *nature, culture, landscape.* Everything is always obvious. "Culture" is largely superorganic, a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Nature is clearly

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what is not "culture." And landscape is purely visible, always open and naked to the eye that chooses to look.[24]

Partially in response to these shortcomings, geographers in recent years have turned to exploring the landscape not so much as morphological evidence, but as "ideology." In these studies, as Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove note, "landscape is a cultural *image*, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings" (emphasis added). The focus is thus shifted from the determinants of form and toward the way that ideology-laden landscape images are constructed. For geographers such as Cosgrove and Daniels, two who pioneered much of this shift in focus, landscape study has meant a study of the making of landscape representations—paintings, parklands, gardens, photographs—and their role in systems of meaning. Cosgrove, for example, has shown that the very idea of landscape as a "way of seeing," as a particular kind of view rendered through a rationalization and mathematical ordering of perspective, has a history that is inextricably bound to the hypercommodification of land that came with the capitalist transformation in Europe. The development of perspectival views, in gardens and parklands and on canvases and maps, allowed ownership to become explicit and abstract; and it rendered peasants and other workers invisible or relegated them to part of the "natural" scene. Landscape represented as perspectival view, as Raymond Williams and John Barrell have explained, lends the countryside the appearance of being *unworked*, a part of the order of nature, precisely at a time when the *social* relationships of human labor and life were remade in the image of an incipient capitalism. This erasure of work and workers is no less evident in traditional geographical studies of landscape. The assumption that landscape is "simply" a product of culture has the effect of erasing the work that makes landscape. Landscapes appear not so much as the solidification of the work of people in society, but more as an unconscious outcome of a "culture" that is larger than any individuals. As Peirce Lewis has put it, landscape "is our unwitting autobiography."[25]

"Landscape," analysts such as Cosgrove and Daniels tell us, signals a certain kind of representation of place and social life that seeks to order social relations by making all that is uncomfortable or unaesthetic to the owners of property (or more generally to the bourgeoisie) invisible or "natural," especially at times of great social change. As Cosgrove suggests, landed classes in Renaissance Europe learned to possess, or at least deepen possession of, the land *by* ordering it and viewing it as a landscape. Similarly, in contemporary American geographical accounts, such as that by Lewis, the unspecified "we" of American culture can better possess the landscape to the degree that "we" learn to look at it as a land-

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scape: as unwitting, unconscious, naturalized. In both these senses, landscape-as-ownership and landscape-as-unwitting-autobiography of a "culture," representations of landscape "dissolve and conceal" tangible relations of power; they are duplicitous.[26]

Much of the work in geography on landscape-as-ideology and -representation has developed as a reaction, and thus in partial opposition, to the older landscape-as-morphology school. If a clear fault with the older landscape school in geography was its inability and unwillingness to adequately theorize its objects of study, to take them too much for granted, the primary fault of the newer landscape-as-ideology school has been to move too far away from the study of morphological production. Cosgrove's work in the mid-1980s explored in great detail the relationship between representation and material form, but his more recent work, like much of what gets called the "new cultural geography," has moved rather to a nearly exclusive study of (seemingly) disconnected images. And the most extreme forms of the "new cultural geography" have abandoned all interest in the world outside language and symbolic structure, outside representation. This has led to some theoretical positions that are hardly supportable. For example, Cosgrove has correctly shown that landscape as an object of knowledge is always an "outsider's" way of knowing. That is, while the term connotes at one level a shaping of the land, to see and understand a place *as* a landscape requires distance both from the place and from the labor that makes it. Landscape is thus not just ideology, it is *visual* ideology. "Landscape" is not so much experienced as *seen.* If landscape is thus a way of seeing, Peter Jackson has therefore concluded, "then there are potentially as many ways of seeing as there are eyes to see." Potentially, perhaps. But this ignores the fact that "landscape" is a relation of power, an *ideological* rendering of spatial relations. Landscapes transform the facts of place into a *controlled* representation, an imposition of order in which one (or perhaps a few) dominant ways of seeing are substituted for all ways of seeing and experiencing. "Landscape" developed from a "bourgeois, rationalist conception of the world," as Cosgrove has argued, and thus certainly does not and *cannot,* "reflect a plurality of cultures." That would defeat its ideological function.[27]

Trevor Barnes and James Duncan, the editors of a recent collection of papers on the politics of landscape representation, even go so far as to deny the existence of any prediscursive material world. While their larger point—that we must attend to how landscapes materialize in discourse—is well taken, the abandonment of the material world as an object of study in order to focus exclusively on the politics of reading, language, and iconography represents a dangerous politics. As we will see in great detail in the pages that follow,

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the workings of an unjust political economy in no way make a similar abandonment. Connections between representations of landscape and "brute reality" (to use Barnes and Duncan's term) are continually made in social practice, as Frederick Mills showed, and as Steinbeck made the Joads eventually understand.[28]

Cosgrove has argued that Sauer's methodology was inadequate, because

> despite the genetic treatment of individual forms . . . the process of development and change in the whole are arrested at [a] particular historical moment so that the areal synthesis can be established and a timeless unity of form composed. Under the morphological method landscape becomes a static determinant of scientific enquiry.[29]

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What has been less recognized in newer studies of landscape-as-representation is that this is precisely how landscape *functions*. Wyatt in this instance was correct: Sauer was reflecting the move made in *all* representations of landscape. The constant motion of social relations and social struggle is suspended both in a picture of landscape and in the material landscape itself. Newer landscape geographies have not yet adequately theorized how this process works, how it is that, on the ground, landscapes solidify social relations, making them seem natural and enduring. Rather than seeking to improve on the insights of Sauer and his students, which seemed to take this process of solidification as given, newer theorists of landscape have sought to examine the intricacies of pictures. This is an important endeavor, but it is only half the landscape story.[30]

Despite the shortcomings of both "new" and "old" cultural geographies, geographers should be able to build on the tools of both traditions to begin to explicate the nature of the connections between representations and materiality. "Landscapes" are produced in two ways. On one hand, there is labor—the work of shaping the land. This labor, of course, is organized not just locally but within a spatial division that cuts across myriad scales. On the other hand, the re-presentation of the products of labor *as* a landscape represents an attempt to naturalize and harmonize the appropriation of that labor and to impose a system of domination, consent, control, and order within the view. Contestatory readings of landscapes are certainly possible, and they are ongoing (this book is certainly one), and these contestatory readings work to reshape both the morphology and the view that is landscape. Landscape is thus a unity of materiality and representation, constructed out of the contest between various social groups possessing varying amounts of social, economic, and political power. Meanings are both posited in and developed out of the landscape's morphology. There is, as "new cultural geographers" insist, an iconography of land-

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scape, but that iconography must be constructed within the context of the form that landscape takes. Moreover, the morphological landscape is usually not produced in order to be read; rather it develops as both a product of and a means for guiding the social and spatial practices of production and reproduction in an area. In Henri Lefebvre's words, landscapes are made not "in order to be read and grasped, but rather to be *lived* by people with bodies and lives in their own particular . . . context."[31] Yet landscapes *are* read and grasped; that is part of the process of transforming spatiality into landscape. Landscapes, and landscape representations, are therefore very much a product of social struggle, whether engaged over form or over how to grasp and read that form. And these struggles, of course, are fully recursive.

John Steinbeck knew that to understand the lives and political economy of places, to understand the landscape, to understand how and why it is made as it is and why it functions in social relations as it does, to understand why it looks as it does, one must explore not just landscape morphology or landscape representation, but the interdependence of the two. Local morphological productions—landscape in the first sense outlined above—are *generalized* in landscape views—landscape-as-ideology—even as ideological ways of seeing social relations *as* landscape structure the social relations that produce landscape morphology. The passive voice here is convenient but misleading. The questions that always arise when such grand statements are made are: *Who* generalizes? Who else is involved? Under what conditions do these people interact? What processes govern their ideas and productions? At what scale do people and processes operate to create landscapes? How can we theorize the connections between production and representation that Steinbeck hinted at?

Producing Landscape

For Steinbeck, the answers to the above questions start with the work of common people, and they proceed with an evaluation of how that work is organized (as the "interchapters" of *The Grapes of Wrath* show with their evocation of great, nearly immutable systems of finance, mechanized production, and mobile armies of the dispossessed). The connection between local morphology and the representations through which those morphologies are ordered and sent into circulation is, simply, labor. This is neither far-fetched nor overreductionist. In a fascinating essay Kenneth Olwig reminds us that the "various uses of the term landscape . . . suggest that the landscape is an area carved out by axe and plough, which belongs to the people who have carved it out. It carries suggestion of being an area of cultural identity based, however loosely, on tribal and/or blood ties." Under capitalism, however, the fruits of labor are

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alienated from those who make them. The shape of the land is the product of people, but it is not necessarily owned or controlled by them. While the appropriation process that structures landscape is certainly one of legal ownership of the land, it is also one of advancing and appropriating meanings in a way that tries to make the alienation of labor from the landscape seem at once natural and incontestable.[32]

Landscape is thus quite a complex concept. A theory that seeks to explore the connections between landscape production and representation, it seems to me, must fulfill three basic requirements (which, while analytically separable, are so highly connected that their separate exposition is always artificial). First, a theory of landscape representation and production must tell us what landscape *is* (how we understand "landscape" and what its relations are to the material world). Second, it must explain how "landscape" is *produced* as part of socially organized systems of production and reproduction (for landscapes in no way exist external to the functioning of society). Finally, landscape theory must specify the processes by which material landscapes and their representations *function* in society (which is a different question than the second).

What Landscape Is

We have already spent a good deal of time discussing what landscape is, at least as far as geographers of differing perspectives have understood it. We can now go a step further. "Landscape may first be seen," in the words of Sharon Zukin, as a "contentious compromised product of society," shaped by "power, coercion and collective resistance." Social struggle makes the landscape, and the landscape is always in a state of becoming: it is never *entirely* stable. Yet landscape is also a totality. That is, powerful social actors, as we have already suggested, are continually trying to represent the landscape as a fixed, total, and naturalized entity—as a unitary thing. Landscape is thus best understood as a kind of produced, lived, and represented space constructed out of the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing and cooperating social actors: it is both a thing (or suite of things), as Sauer would have it, and a social process, at once solidly material and ever changing. As a produced object, landscape is like a commodity in which evident, temporarily stable, form masks the facts of its production, and its status as a social relation. As both form and symbol, landscape is expected by those who attempt to define its meanings to speak unambiguously for itself.[33]

In this sense, landscape "is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions. Landscape thus has a double role with respect to something like

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ideology." In W. J. T. Mitchell's terms, "It naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site." As Zukin has put it, the landscape "represents the architecture of social class, gender and race relations imposed by powerful social institutions." And to a degree it does, but, as Zukin's earlier words indicate, the landscape is no simple reflection of the needs and desires of the domineering classes. Rather, it represents an important social contradiction within a unity of form: the reproduction of inequality and supposed powerlessness that is codified and naturalized in the landscape carries with it the seeds of revolt. Subordinate social actors can and do develop contestatory readings of landscape and can and do continually seek to impose a different, perhaps more equitable, suite of spaces and landscape forms in the place of the imposed architecture of social class. Yet if *productive* landscapes are to be maintained under the conditions of inequality that make capitalism possible, then revolt must be minimized, and threatening social groups must be neutralized. Powerful social actors thus seek to build elements of landscape as a means of mediation, as a means of insuring neutralization—either by subverting subversion itself through cooptational blandishments (substituting better housing for the unjust social and economic conditions that make bad housing "acceptable," for example), or by seeking to reinforce the landscape as a representation of what is "natural."[34]

The very *form* of the landscape incorporates the give-and-take of this process, now becoming solidified one way, now another, depending on the array of power at any given moment. The landscape itself, as a compromised unity, is therefore even more of a contradiction, held in an uneasy truce as ongoing and everyday social struggle forms and reforms it. In the midst of (as well as before and after) these struggles, social actors of all types continually seek to represent the landscape to themselves and to others in order to make sense of the struggles in which they are engaged. Landscape is thus a fragmentation of space *and* a totalization of it. People make sense of their fractured world by seeing it as a whole, by seeking to impose meanings and connections. But since social struggle is strategic, compromises often gain the appearance of stability: landscapes become naturalized; they become quite unremarkable.[35]

How Landscape Is Produced

Landscape, as a material object mediated through all manner of representations, is a social production. But how can we systematically understand and describe the social processes that go into its making? Recent work in the sociol-

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ogy of science provides a useful analogy for seeing landscape as a compromised incorporation of social struggle. Bruno Latour has shown that many of the "things" we take for granted—protein and morphine are two of his examples—were in the past no more than unstable lists of activities and processes; they were not yet *formed.* They had "*no other shape than this list*" (all emphases in this paragraph are in the original). Not until the struggles over these processes had been settled, not until a settled shape had been given to the list—the list had been stabilized—through a process of contest against opponents who would represent the list in other ways, did the activities and processes come to be embodied as a thing or a definable object with a set morphology, "with limits or edges." At this point, according to Latour, the set of processes "is literally *reified.*" In science, laboratories and other institutions have developed and been accorded the social power to determine these morphologies; largely, they are "powerful enough to define *reality.*" And "reality, as the Latin word *res* indicates, is what resists. What does it resist? *Trials of strength.* If, in a given situation, no dissenter is able to modify the shape of the new object, then that's it, it *is* reality." Hence, reality is a product of struggle; morphology arises out of social contest. "The minute contest stops, the minute I write the word 'true,' a new formidable ally appears in the winner's camp, an ally invisible until then, but behaving now as if it has been there all along: Nature." Nature is socially produced.[36]

An embodied set of processes that gains shape through struggle and contest (and is represented as self-evidently true), the landscape is akin to Latour's scientific objects: it is a social product that becomes naturalized through the very struggles engaged over its form and meaning. It is *enacted* in the process of struggle. And as with morphine or protein, the shape of the landscape gives rise to new (social) realities. New battles are begun as soon as one shape is settled. The look of the land becomes at least partially determinate in the struggles that are to follow.

Latour's more recent archaeology of the morphology of technical artifacts allows us to extend this analogy even further. Concerned with the "symmetrical" relationship between social actors and the things they produce (that is, treating objects as agents), Latour suggests that technological artifacts develop out of a continual process of negotiation between competing social interests *and the objects themselves.* Latour develops the example of a new high-tech public transit system in France, and shows how the form of the system developed out of attempts to compromise the competing interests of the local mayor, a trade union worried about job loss, a carriage manufacturer concerned with profitable production, the transit company, and commuters who might use the sys-

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tem. But so too was the shape of the system a player. Engineers began by both developing and departing radically from the form of existing systems. Each competing interest reviewed the engineers' proposal, and in the next round the system was recreated—*reformed*—to account for and settle disputes between parties, while retaining the need to make sure the system would function. Thus the form of the second prototype did not just reflect but actively incorporated: (1) previous form; (2) alterations to ensure jobs for train operators; (3) prestige for the mayor; (4) profit for the manufacturer. Again the plans were reviewed, and again struggle ensued that was incorporated in the artifact's morphology. The very look of the artifact, and also the meanings associated with that look, was created through these processes of negotiation and social struggle. Form and meaning were settled out of—created by—social struggle.[37]

Latour contends that the historical development of an artifact is *dependent* upon these struggles, that the production of artifacts is impossible without them. This is the process of an artifact's production: morphology guiding conflict, conflict reforming morphology. He calls the resulting artifacts *quasi-objects* to suggest that they are not only material reality, but also an embodiment of the relations that went into building them. Similarly, a landscape may be seen as a *quasi-object,* embodying all the multifarious relations, struggles, arguments, representations, and conclusions that went into its making—even if it often appears as only an inert, or "natural," thing. As a *quasi-object,* and like a commodity, landscape structures social reality; it represents to us our relationships to the land and to social formations. But it does so in an obfuscatory way. Apart from knowing the struggles that went into its making (along with the struggles to which it gives rise), one cannot know a landscape except at some ideal level, which has the effect of reproducing, rather than analyzing or challenging, the relations of power that work to mask its function.[38]

How Landscape Functions

Landscapes are produced and represented within specific historical conditions. While the development of a generalized theory of landscape production has been necessary, it is just as necessary to recall that agricultural California developed as (and remains) a part of an expanding capitalist economy. The promise of Eden that the Joads saw from Tehachapi Pass, and the reality of the Hoovervilles and unemployment that awaited them down below, were both part of a general process of capitalist development and of the local conditions within which that development occurred. Hence it is necessary to understand both how landscapes in general and the particular landscapes of rural California function within capitalism. We need now to examine the role that landscape

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plays in reproducing capitalist agriculture, and the social relations that allow the agricultural system to work. As will be developed in the following chapters, by defining reified "natural" or rational relations of place through struggle over morphology and meaning, the production of landscape materially affects the equation for the extraction of surplus value within a region. To the degree that labor unrest, demands, or moves toward self-development and autonomy (Latour's trials of strength) within a region can be stilled by the imposition of naturalized forms of reproduction (when labor or other social groups give up the battle, when trials of strength are abandoned), surplus value can be expanded; reproduction is not threatened. Landscape production, therefore, is a moment in overall processes of uneven development. The "seesaw" motion of capital, restlessly searching out new opportunities for the production of surplus value, seeks differentials not just in land rent or locational advantage, but also in the "natural"—reified—needs and tendencies of labor. Both labor quality and labor quantity can be locally or regionally conditioned by the efforts of capitalist and state institutions (which may or may not have similar goals or values).[39]

David Harvey has argued that "labor qualities, once acquired, do not, unlike many other forms of investment, necessarily run down over time. The productivity of labor (like that of the soil to use an analogy that Marx invokes to great effect) can build up over time, provided proper care is taken." But given "proper care," just the opposite can also be the case. Labor qualities can be devalued or labor surpluses created (so that quantity substitutes for quality). The real wages of laborers can be driven down by lessening social needs, provided, of course, that labor is in no condition to press demands for its own improvement. The production of landscape, by objectifying, rationalizing, and naturalizing the social, has often had just this effect. If, as Harvey has also argued, the landscape of capitalism is often a barrier to further accumulation and has to be creatively destroyed or otherwise overcome, then it is just as true that the landscape is often a great facilitator to capital (by helping to determine the "nature" of labor in a particular place). As this happens, workers must overcome not just conditions of inequality and the oppressive work of power, but the stabilized landscape itself. They must destabilize not just the relations of place, but the very ground upon and within which those relations are situated and structured.[40]

Landscape is thus an uneasy truce between the needs and desires of the people who live in it, and the desire of powerful social actors to represent the world as they assume it should be. Landscape is always both a material form that results from and structures social interaction, and an ideological representation dripping with power. In both ways, landscapes are acts of contested discipline,

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channeling spatial practices into certain patterns and presenting to the world *images of how the world (presumably) works and who it works for.*

It helps, therefore, to understand "landscape" as a complex moment in a system of social reproduction. In this book, my focus on social reproduction will revolve around the reproduction of labor power on the industrialized farms of California, but the theory I develop should by no means be limited to that realm, especially since, as feminist scholarship has so clearly shown, the separation of production from reproduction is untenable. My concerns with California labor relations, with the kinds of lives represented by the Joads, are many, not least that I would like to show the importance of "landscape" to the economic development of the state. And in this goal, a focus on *re*production is essential. For as Marx wrote in the first volume of *Capital,* the "maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and ever must be, a necessary condition of the reproduction of capital." The reproduction of labor power (and thus of society) proceeds in historically specific ways; it (like landscape) is the site of constant struggle. Marx was surely wrong, however, when he argued that the social reproduction of labor power could be left "safely to the labourer's instinct for self-preservation." Rather, his point earlier in *Capital* is closer to the mark: reproduction (specifically in its relationship to the production of surplus value) possesses a "historical and moral element," which may often *appear* as a set of "natural" or "necessary wants," but which, of course, has been socially constructed.[41]

Landscape production and representation play an important role, materially and ideologically, in the development of Marx's historical and moral element, and it is the goal of the pages that follow to spell out in empirical detail the processes by which this occurred in California during the period between the Wheatland riot of 1913 and the Bracero Program of 1942. These pages will show that no matter how beautiful, no matter how seemingly immutable, no matter how much it appears as a simulacrum, landscape is certainly not neutral. Nor are aesthetics ever free of the blood that goes into their making. In California, at least, there can be no beauty without a simultaneous damning.

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