

This article is part of the Special Issue "[New Directions in Neo-Impressionism](#)." The issue is guest-edited by Tania Woloshyn and Anne Dymond in cooperation with Regina Wenninger and Anne-Laure Brisac-Chraïbi from RIHA Journal. External peer reviewers for this Special Issue were Hollis Clayson, André Dombrowski, Chantal Georgel, Catherine Meneux, Robyn Roslak, and Michael Zimmermann.

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## Colonizing the Côte d'Azur: Neo-Impressionism, Anarcho-Communism and the Tropical *Terre Libre* of the Maures, c.1892-1908\*

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### Abstract

This article explores neo-impressionist representations of the Maures region (Hyères-St Raphaël) of the Côte d'Azur as an ideal space of anarcho-communist liberty or, to borrow from Jean Grave's *Terre Libre: Les Pionniers* (1908), a "free land." In doing so it questions art-historical literature of such images as utopian, with its implication of geographic non-specificity, through analyses of anarcho-communist and geographical texts and images. Tropical markers, especially palm trees, feature in Grave's vision of a "free land," corresponding to perceptions by contemporaneous artists, tourists and geographers of the exotic, island-like geography of the Maures. The article argues that, for Henri-Edmond Cross, Paul Signac and Théo van Rysselberghe, the Maures landscape was imaged and imagined as a sunlit *terre libre* on home soil, naturally suited to these self-styled pioneers.

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### Introduction

[1] In 1903 the neo-impressionist painter Théo van Rysselberghe (1862-1926) expressed in a letter to his friend, the writer André Gide (1869-1951), his desire to escape Paris for the south of France: "It's been foggy and dark for such a long time; I've wanted to escape Paris, towards the South, towards the light [*vers la lumière*], and paint [...]."<sup>1</sup> The same phrase, "*vers la lumière*," features as the caption of a frontispiece to a children's book by the anarcho-communist writer, Jean Grave (1854-1939). The book, *Terre Libre (Les pionniers)*, was written during 1904 and 1905, though not published until 1908, and illustrated by Mabel Holland Thomas, an Englishwoman who would later

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\* I wish to thank Dr Scott Zona of the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida International University, formerly of the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Miami, for his perceptive analyses of the palm species in the illustrations. I also would like to express my gratitude to Robyn Roslak, Anne Dymond, Keren Hammerschlag, Natasha Ruiz-Gómez, Regina Wenninger, Anne-Laure Brisac-Chraïbi and the anonymous peer reviewer for their excellent comments on earlier versions of this paper. – Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

<sup>1</sup> "Il fait brumeux et sombre depuis si longtemps; je voulais m'échapper de Paris, vers le Midi, vers la lumière, et peindre [...]." Letter from Théo van Rysselberghe to André Gide (28 December 1903), cited in Catherine Gide et al., *Théo van Rysselberghe intime*, Le Lavandou 2005, 56.

become Grave's second wife.<sup>2</sup> The image depicts an infant, its hands stretched out towards rays of sunshine, who is held in the hands of an adult (Fig. 1).



*Vers la lumière*

1 Mabel Holland Thomas, *Vers la lumière*, 1908, wood engraving, frontispiece in Jean Grave, *Terre Libre*, Paris 1908 (author's collection)



2 Detail of a Map, indicating the region known as "La Côte d'Azur," from Hyères to Menton, in P. Joanne, *Les Stations d'hiver de la Méditerranée*, Paris 1880 (author's collection)

<sup>2</sup> Grave and Thomas were married in England following a long courtship in June 1909; he was introduced to her through Kropotkin, while visiting the exiled writer in London. To date I have found no other information about Thomas. See Louis Patsouras, *The Anarchism of Jean Grave: Editor, Journalist and Militant*, Montréal 2003, 65, 79.

[2] What did it mean to go *vers la lumière*, to go physically towards the light, at this time? Contemporaneous travel posters in both England and France depicted the act of going south to the coastline stretching from Toulon to Menton, known as the Côte d'Azur (Fig. 2), as an almost mystical experience, a transformative act of entering a new land. Enormous rising or setting suns fill compositions, their powerful rays emanating to the edges of the frame (Fig. 3).



3 Anonymous [Bemrose], *Southwards in Search of the Sun*, undated [1905], in *The Connoisseur. An ill. magazine for collectors* Vol. XI., No. 41, January 1905 (image kindly provided by Augsburg University Library)

[3] By the turn of the 20th century, the Côte d'Azur was popularly known as the *pays du soleil*,<sup>3</sup> or land of sunshine, and even the *pays de la lumière*, geographically defined by its intense light.<sup>4</sup> In fact, France's Mediterranean shores were considered distinct from the rest of Europe, its light so luminous that it resembled the Sahara. As one guidebook, written by a Dr Onimus, put it in 1894:

<sup>3</sup> Note the title: Adrien Karl, *Le pays du soleil: arrondissement de Draguignan, Var: des Maures à l'Estérel: Hyères, Saint-Tropez, Fréjus, Saint-Raphaël, Agay, etc. Guide-album des Chemins de Fer du Sud de la France (France-Album N° 48)*, Paris 1898.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Robert Moriez, "Influence du climat méditerranéen sur le rhumatisme et les rhumatisants: rapport," in: *Ier Congrès français de climatothérapie et d'hygiène urbaine*, Nice and Monaco 1904, 37.

That which characterizes the Mediterranean coastal region is the light far more than the temperature. Already, before arriving at Marseilles, one enters into an environment so luminous that no other region of Europe can be compared to it. Not only the southern coasts of the Ocean, but even Madeira, do not enjoy this clear atmosphere, and one could say that, of all the seas, only the Mediterranean possesses these qualities, only it can pride itself on being, as it were, the mirror of the sun. Certain spots of the Mediterranean have a luminous intensity comparable to that of the Sahara.<sup>5</sup>

[4] That the neo-impressionists referred to themselves as *chromo-luminarists*, artists of color and light, and found themselves increasingly attracted to this azure landscape from the early 1890s onwards is not, I believe, mere coincidence. Van Rysselberghe visited frequently from the 1890s onwards, often staying in the homes of his fellow neo-impressionists, Henri-Edmond Cross (1856-1910) and Paul Signac (1863-1935). Cross moved to the region in 1891, settling in Le Lavandou-Saint-Clair in 1892, and that same year Signac chose Saint-Tropez as the base for his seasonal trips south. Indeed, Van Rysselberghe wrote so longingly of going south to Gide in December 1903, only a few months after his last visit (in September), and by early 1904 he would return, seduced by its call.<sup>6</sup>

[5] What did it mean to go metaphorically "towards the light," as depicted in Thomas's woodcut? In a specifically anarcho-communist context, its meanings were multiple, but it was especially a reference to the Dawn (*l'Aube*), to life after the complete overthrow of the government (in France, the Third Republic) and a new beginning of freedom. In fact, the rising sun was a symbol of anarchy itself.<sup>7</sup> An illustration by Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) of 1889 for the frontispiece of *Les Turpitudes sociales* depicts this quite literally: the figure of Father Time is shown in the foreground, while in the distance the word "ANARCHIE" is illuminated by the dawn. Van Rysselberghe had symbolized it as a fiery dawn for the cover of *La Morale anarchiste* (1898), by the prominent anarcho-communist, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921).<sup>8</sup> As with other reformists of the time, anarcho-

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<sup>5</sup> "Ce qui caractérise le littoral méditerranéen, c'est la lumière bien plus que la température. Déjà, avant d'arriver à Marseille, on entre dans un milieu tellement lumineux, qu'aucune autre région de l'Europe ne peut lui être comparée. Non seulement les côtes méridionales de l'Océan, mais encore Madère, ne jouissent pas de cette atmosphère limpide, et on peut dire que, de toutes les mers, la Méditerranée seule possède ces qualités, elle seule peut se vanter d'être pour ainsi dire le miroir du soleil. Certains points de la Méditerranée ont une intensité lumineuse comparable à celle du Sahara." Dr Ernest Onimus, *L'Hiver dans les Alpes-Maritimes et dans la Principauté de Monaco; climatologie et hygiène*, Paris 1894, 240.

<sup>6</sup> See the Biography listed in *Théo van Rysselberghe*, exh. cat., Brussels 2006, 199-200.

<sup>7</sup> Aline Dardel, *Les Temps nouveaux, 1895-1914: Un hebdomadaire anarchiste et la propagande par l'image*, Paris 1987, 34. In Thomas's image, the sunlight, we are to infer, here also takes on the meaning of "enlightenment." One of anarcho-communism's main interests was education, as an issue that fell to the responsibility of the present generation for the well-being of its children or, more aptly, the future race. Thomas's frontispiece also symbolizes that through education comes freedom: freedom of oppression from inadequate schooling, freedom of individual thought, and freedom of action.

<sup>8</sup> References to the light are multiple in Émile Verhaeren's play *Les Aubes*, written in 1896 and published in 1898. When published it included a cover illustration by Van Rysselberghe of a dawn amidst burning wreckage, and the play was dedicated to Signac. Indeed, historians have stated

communist writers frequently juxtaposed the darkness of oppressive manual labour, of poverty and illiteracy, and of the city itself with the open, sunlit spaces of the countryside, with personal freedom, and with individual development.<sup>9</sup>



4 Detail of a Map, region of the Maures, the western edge of the Côte d'Azur: bordered to the north by the Maures mountains, to the west by Hyères and to the east by Saint-Raphaël, in P. Joanne, *Les Stations d'hiver de la Méditerranée*, Paris 1880 (author's collection)

[6] This article explores neo-impressionist representations of the Côte d'Azur – the *pays du soleil* – and specifically of the Maures region (the coastline from Hyères to St Raphaël, see Fig. 4) where the neo-impressionists lived and worked, as an ideal space of anarcho-communist liberty or, to borrow from Grave's novel, of a *terre libre* or "free land." In this way, it questions art historians' frequent characterization of these neo-impressionist landscapes as "utopian," with its implication of geographic non-specificity, by focusing on tourist, medical and geographic primary texts about the Maures as a curious, hybrid landscape of both French and exotic, tropical character. Visually and textually it looks to Grave and Thomas's *Terre Libre* as a guide, in order to reread the anarcho-communist content of Maures landscapes by the neo-impressionists.

[7] In other words, this article brings the landscape of the Maures to the fore, discussing tourist and geographic sources as well as correspondences amongst the neo-impressionist circle that assigned the Maures region an exotic, even tropical character ripe for colonization. I therefore aspire to provide a more complex perspective of neo-impressionist representations of the region, arguing that the works are geographically specific and representative of an island-like "free land" within France itself. My research is indebted to the work of Anne Dymond and Robyn Roslak. Dymond has argued that

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that Verhaeren wrote the play while staying in Paris at Signac's apartment, where *Au temps d'harmonie* was being kept. See Véronique Jago-Antoine, "Théo van Rysselberghe and Émile Verhaeren: 'A Brotherhood of Art,'" in: *Théo van Rysselberghe*, 77-97, here 88.

<sup>9</sup> The Hausmannization of Paris, for example, involved engineering and architectural improvements to allow air and light into the city: see Bonnie L. Grad and Timothy A. Riggs, *Visions of City and Country: Prints and Photographs of Nineteenth-Century France*, Worcester and New York 1982.

Signac's anarcho-communist politics were communicated through the aesthetic language of the pastoral in his Côte d'Azur paintings, especially *Au temps d'harmonie* (Fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> Roslak has contextualized Signac's perception of Saint-Tropez within contemporaneous tourist sources that complemented Reclus's and Kropotkin's visions of an ideal lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> These scholars have laid essential foundations for a critically-engaged analysis of the political significance of the Maures region for the neo-impressionists, and I add another layer here, one that is particularly geographic in focus. This article approaches *Terre Libre* as a crucial literary and visual representation of the anarcho-communist ideal, in order to draw parallels between Grave and Thomas's conception of a land of liberty and those of the neo-impressionists. In doing so I situate the notion of the artists' colony as bound up with historically and geographically specific tourist and colonizing practices: in this way I perceive the neo-impressionist group in the Maures quite literally as a *colony*. This concept will be crucial to exploring perceptions of the Maures as tropical by the neo-impressionists and anarcho-communists, as well as tourists and physicians.

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### **In the Time of Harmony: The Neo-Impressionists in the Maures Region**

[8] By 1893, Signac began to envision an artistic project fundamentally connected to his life in the Maures. Signac first journeyed to this region in 1892, dropping anchor at the port of Saint-Tropez. Upon his return the following year he wrote to Cross, who had settled nearby from 1891, about the desire to paint large works in the manner of Georges Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grand Jatte* (*A Sunday on the Grande Jatte*, 1884-1886, The Art Institute of Chicago) and Puvis de Chavannes's *Doux pays* (*Pleasant Land*, c.1880-1882, Yale University Art Gallery). In that letter of April 1893, Signac declared, "We must become grand" ("Nous devons faire grand"), continuing:

Who will succeed the grand decorators Giotto and Delacroix? [...] As Seurat was closer to getting there, third, than Puvis [...]. Without daring to compare ourselves with such names, should we not try to search in this way [?] [...] Why, since we both like and know this land of the sun [*ce pays de soleil*], would we not together try to raise a decorative monument to it [...] [,] supporting [each other in] our mutual advice [...] [:] that would be quite a task [*un fort colis*]<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anne Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral: Paul Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France," in: *The Art Bulletin* 85 (June 2003), 353-370.

<sup>11</sup> See the chapter, "Anarchists and Tourists in Provence," in: Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape*, Aldershot 2007, 141-171.

<sup>12</sup> "Qui va succéder aux grands décorateurs Giotto et Delacroix? [...] Comme Seurat était plus près de venir là, troisième, que Puvis [...] Sans oser nous comparer à de tels noms, ne devons-nous pas essayer de chercher dans cette voie [?] [...] Pourquoi, puisque nous aimons et connaissons tous deux *ce pays de soleil*, ne tenterions-nous pas en commun de lui élever un monument décoratif [...] [,] nous soutenant de nos mutuels conseils [...] [:] ce serait là un fort colis!" Letter from Signac to Cross (April 1893), Signac Archives, cited by Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon in *Signac et Saint-Tropez, 1892-1913*, Saint-Tropez and Reims 1992, 52. Emphasis added.

[9] It is clear from these statements that Signac was formulating a new project, one specifically located in the *pays du soleil*. This was his mighty *Au temps d'harmonie* (*In the Time of Harmony*), of 1893-1895 (Fig. 5). Its subtitle, *L'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir* (*The Golden Age Is Not in the Past, It Is in the Future*), cited the words of the militant anarchist Charles Malato, from an article of 1893 in *La Revue anarchiste*.<sup>13</sup> Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon has indicated that the idea for the painting was generated during that first fateful arrival at Saint-Tropez in 1892.<sup>14</sup> Along with Cross's *L'Air du soir* (*Evening Song*, 1893-1894, Musée d'Orsay) (Fig. 7) and *Bords méditerranéens* (*Mediterranean Coast*, 1895, Walter F. Brown Collection, Texas) (Fig. 6), and Van Rysselberghe's *L'Heure embrasée* (*Sunset*, 1897, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Museen) (Fig. 9), Signac's grand painting was the realization of fraternal counsels and a lifestyle committed to his anarcho-communist beliefs. Together the works project an imagined world in the landscape of the Maures in which figures live out the ideal as extolled by the leading exponents of anarcho-communism, Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), Kropotkin and Grave.



5 Paul Signac, *Au temps d'harmonie: l'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir* (*In the Time of Harmony: The Golden Age Is Not in the Past, It Is in the Future*), 1893-1895, oil on canvas, 310 x 410 cm. Mairie de Montreuil, Montreuil (image kindly provided by the Mairie de Montreuil. © Photo: Jean-Luc Tabuteau)

[10] The prevailing idea of anarchy today, as a symbol of chaos and violence, should not be confused with the highly theoretical conception of anarcho-communism as laid out by Kropotkin and his activist colleagues in Geneva from the late 1870s onwards.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Charles Malato, *La Revue anarchiste* (1 November 1893), 78, cited in Dardel, "Les Temps nouveaux", 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ferretti-Bocquillon, in *Signac et Saint-Tropez*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> George Woodcock, "Introduction," in: Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel (Paroles d'un révolté)* [1885], trans. George Woodcock, Montréal and New York 1992, 8.

Kropotkin and Reclus defined it as a synthesis of communism's structure of freely-formed groups, or "communes," with the anarchist prerequisite that there would be no temporary government after the revolution. In his concluding chapter, Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (1902) described a world where manual labour would be balanced with pleasurable activities, including outdoor leisure and cultural pursuits. It would be a world of closely knit communes, where each member had his or her own voice. Its only "laws" those scientifically observed in nature, it would be a world without government of any kind, without oppressive class divisions, and without a wage system.

[11] The ideal society, as Kropotkin, Reclus and Grave described it, would allow for optimum individual development not in spite of but through mutual co-operation. In a society where "the first necessities of nourishment and shelter" were met with equal participation, individuals could lead a life with much more leisure time, allowing for the furthest progress of the arts and industry.<sup>16</sup> In Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie* (Fig. 5), groups are gathered in both leisure activities and work. A man sows seeds in the right-hand side of the work, and behind him women fold laundry together. In the foreground, a man has laid down his shovel in order to pick a fig off a tree. For the anarcho-communists, work and leisure time were carefully balanced daily practices which, in moderation, allowed for the development of the individual. As such, both work and leisure were considered necessary to one's health and personal well-being. As Kropotkin saw it, "Overwork is repulsive to human nature – not work [...]. Work is a physiological necessity, a necessity of spending accumulated bodily energy, a necessity which is health and life itself."<sup>17</sup>

[12] In the distant background of Signac's painting we can see modern farm equipment such as tractors. In *The Conquest of Bread* (1892), Kropotkin proclaimed that modern technology would play an essential role in aiding society by freeing workers from burdensome over-work.<sup>18</sup> Signac's figures do just that: engaged in a variety of leisure activities, individuals are depicted enjoying a life of liberty outdoors in the landscape of Saint-Tropez. Towards the left, a man sits and reads while beside him, in the central foreground, a mother plays with her child. Towards the right, two men engage in a game of *boules*, a popular pastime that Signac had observed and depicted in the Place des Lices in Saint-Tropez's town centre. Behind them, an embracing couple contemplates a flower. In the distance to the left, a painter is depicted at his easel, while nearby bathers jump into the sea. Furthest in the distance, a group dances the *farandole*, a native

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<sup>16</sup> See Peter Kropotkin, *L'Anarchie: sa philosophie, son idéal* [1896], Paris 2006, 47-48.

<sup>17</sup> Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles" [1887], reprinted in: *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Roger Baldwin, Mineola 2002, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. Marshall Shatz, Cambridge 1995, 186.



festive dance.<sup>19</sup> For art historians like John Hutton or Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, there is no doubt that *Au temps d'harmonie* is the visual manifestation of the anarcho-communist ideal. Hutton, for example, remarked of the work that,

Signac labored to combine in one image virtually every facet of the anarchist *âge d'or*: little or nothing was omitted from the writings of Kropotkin or Jean Grave on the subject, from *amour libre* to the universality of art, from the need for leisure to the call for decentralized industry no longer at war with nature.<sup>20</sup>

[13] Cross too recognized the political message of *Au temps d'harmonie* in a letter to Signac: "You are right on there. It is a perfect synthesis of the conception of the anarchist era."<sup>21</sup> Cross's *Bords méditerranéens* of 1895 (Fig. 6) shares common themes with Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie*. In Cross's painting, work and leisure are divided into two spaces on the canvas, performed by groups of men and women, respectively. There are local fishermen working together to pull in the line, while a group of women lounge in the foreground following a swim in the sea. One prepares a picnic with summer fruits such as watermelon, grapes and lemons – the latter a famous fruit of the Côte d'Azur.<sup>22</sup> As with the *boules* players in Signac's work, Cross's painting depicts a scene of locals typical in images of the region. Contemporary postcards of fishermen pulling in their loads, for example, indicate the popular interest in the sight (Cannes postcard, Fig. 8).<sup>23</sup> His chosen town, Saint-Clair, and its neighbouring town Le Lavandou, were also listed in tourist manuals as small and picturesque villages of fishermen.<sup>24</sup> Robert and Eugenia Herbert have stated that,

Agrarian subjects were welcomed by the anarchists for another reason: in spite of Kropotkin's efforts to overhaul earlier anarchist theory in a scientific way, through the incorporation of industrial technology into the ideal society, he and his French

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<sup>19</sup> Margaret Werth explained that the *farandole* is a "rustic dance, common in the Midi, with intimations of fertility in its alternation of male and female dancers and its celebration of the harvest," in *The Joy of Life: The Idyllic in French Art, circa 1900*, Berkeley and London 2002, 112.

<sup>20</sup> John G. Hutton, *Neo-Impressionism and the Search for Solid Ground: Art, Science, and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Baton Rouge and London 1994, 137. Similarly, Ferretti-Bocquillon indicated, "Car l'ambition de Signac est de laisser un manifeste de la société idéale, celle de l'avenir. [...] Il partage la vision optimiste de Kropotkine qui place ses espoirs dans la technologie moderne [...]," in *Signac et Saint-Tropez*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> "Vous y êtes en plein. C'est une synthèse parfaite de la conception de l'ère anarchiste." Undated letter from Cross to Signac, Archives Signac, cited in Sylvie Carlier, "Le contexte littéraire et anarchiste," in: Françoise Baligand et al., eds, *Henri-Edmond Cross, 1856-1910*, Paris and Douai 1998, 105-110, here 110, n. 33. Signac had also written to Cross, outlining the symbolic figures in the painting: see the letter from Signac to Cross (summer 1893), Archives Signac, cited by Ferretti-Bocquillon in *Signac et Saint-Tropez*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Menton in particular was famous for its lemon trees.

<sup>23</sup> See also an antique postcard of the same scene, of locals working together to haul in a fishing boat onto the shore, shot in Le Lavandou itself, entitled Anonymous, *Le Lavandou – nos pêcheurs amenant un bateau de pêche à terre*, undated postcard in: Raphaël Dupouy, *L'Histoire à travers la carte postale: Le Lavandou*, Le Lavandou 1998, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Jules Adenis's description of 1892 is exemplary: "Vient ensuite *le Lavandou*, riant village de pêcheurs, s'étalant au soleil sur le bord de la mer et à la base de pittoresque collines couvertes de lavandes sauvages, étymologie du nom de Lavandou," in *Les Étapes d'un touriste en France: de Marseille à Menton*, Paris 1892, 136.

followers could not shake a romantic love of the countryside. Their hatred of the manner in which the urban proletariat were oppressed led them to a hatred of industrial life and a glorification of the healthy life of the peasant.<sup>25</sup>



6 Henri-Edmond Cross, *Bords méditerranéens (Mediterranean Coast)*, 1895, oil on canvas, 65.4 x 92.2 cm. Walter F. Brown Collection, Texas (reprod. from: Françoise Baligand, *Henri Edmond Cross. 1856-1910*, Paris 1998, p. 58, Fig. 11)



7 Henri-Edmond Cross, *L'Air du soir (Evening Song)*, 1893-1894, oil on canvas, 116 x 166 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (reprod. from: Françoise Baligand, *Henri Edmond Cross. 1856-1910*, Paris 1998, p. 33, Fig. 6)

[14] Village communities were models dear to the hearts of anarcho-communists like Kropotkin. He viewed the village as the natural, fluid and cohesive organization of human

<sup>25</sup> Robert L. and Eugenia W. Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and others - I," in: *The Burlington Magazine* 102 (November 1960), 473-482, here 478.

evolution.<sup>26</sup> Kropotkin observed many examples of the ongoing contemporary presence of the village community around him, citing the shared use of ploughs and wine-presses among French peasants.<sup>27</sup> Dymond has shown that in their writings Reclus and Kropotkin had associated "Latin" or Mediterranean peoples specifically as living out more harmonious, freer lives in small rural communities based on mutual aid.<sup>28</sup> Such perceptions are exemplified in depictions of local workers by Cross from the early 1890s, such as in his *Les Vendanges (Var) (The Grape Harvest [Var])* of 1891-1892 (private collection). Signac, Cross and Van Rysselberghe produced many images of work and play in the countryside, and especially in the Maures region, but their "romantic view" (Herberts) should be further contextualized as both primitivizing and part of a rhetoric of health and wellness. Reclus's essay, "The Progress of Mankind" (1896), emphasized that anarcho-communism would provide a return to man's primitive, natural relationship with the earth, the chance for modern man to "reconquer the past of the savage."<sup>29</sup> Primitivized as native inhabitants and even products of the soil, country locals were attractive to Kropotkin and Reclus because they were perceived as living a natural and healthy life out of doors.<sup>30</sup> Reclus longed for such privileges to be accessible to everyone, asking:

Will the time ever come when all men, without exception, shall breathe fresh air in abundance, enjoy the light and sunshine, taste the coolness of the shade and the scent of roses, and feed their children without fear that the bread will run short in the bin?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* [1902], Mineola 2006, 100-101.

<sup>27</sup> Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 202.

<sup>28</sup> See Anne Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral: Signac and the Cultural Geography of Mediterranean France," in: *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean*, ed. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, Toronto 2007, 116-45.

<sup>29</sup> Élisée Reclus, "The Progress of Mankind," in: *The Contemporary Review* (1 December 1896), 782-83.

<sup>30</sup> See Tania Woloshyn, "Aesthetic and Therapeutic Imprints: Artists and Invalids on the Côte d'Azur, ca. 1890-1910," in: *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 11 (Spring 2012), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring12/aesthetic-and-therapeutic-imprints-artists-and-invalids-on-the-cote-dazur-c-18901910> (accessed 20 June 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Élisée Reclus, "The Evolution of Cities," in: *The Contemporary Review* (February 1895), 246-64, here 261.

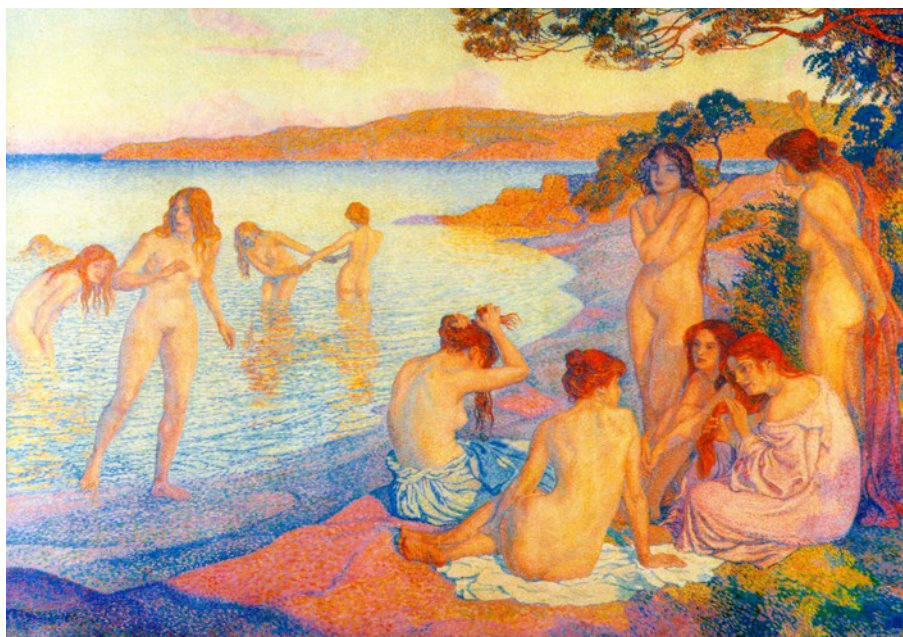


8 Anonymous, *Cannes – Les Pêcheurs sur la Plage* (Cannes – Fishermen on the Beach), undated, postcard (author's collection)

[15] These natural elements of fresh air, light, sunshine, and fragrant flowers were especially associated with the Côte d'Azur's perceived healthy climate and healthy locals.<sup>32</sup> In Cross's *L'Air du soir* (Fig. 7) this "romantic view" or idealization of healthy life in the Maures was recognized by critics as being particularly resonant through his depiction of the landscape and its figures. In an article of 1894 the critic Tiphéreth commented that in this work, "The Idealism of M. Cross is in no way unhealthy, and I will be very careful not to reproach him as the women[,] who breathe in his picture the soft air and vibrate from the light of a Mediterranean shore, are firmly built creatures [...]."<sup>33</sup> Peopled with healthy females on a Mediterranean shore illuminated by radiating light, Cross's image depicts an inviting and equally healthy landscape.

<sup>32</sup> See Tania Woloshyn, "La Côte d'Azur: the *terre privilégié* of invalids and artists, c.1860-1900," in: *French Cultural Studies* 20 (4) (November 2009), 383-402.

<sup>33</sup> "L'Idéalisme de M. Cross n'est pas du tout maladif, et je me garderai bien de lui faire le reproche que les femmes respirant dans son tableau l'air tamisé et vibrant de lumière d'une rive méditerranéenne, soient des créatures solidement bâties [...]." Tiphéreth, "Regard en arrière et simples réflexions sur l'art en 1894," in: *Le Coeur* (December 1894), 6, cited in Isabelle Compin, *H. E. Cross*, Paris 1964, 134.



9 Théo Van Rysselberghe, *L'Heure embrasée (Sunset)*, 1897, oil on canvas, 228 x 329 cm. Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Museen (reprod. from: Robert Hoozee, *Théo van Rysselberghe. Neo-impressionist*, exh. cat., Gent 1993, p. 131, Fig. 63)

[16] Van Rysselberghe would soon follow with a grand décor of his own entitled, *L'Heure embrasée*, again set in the Maures (Fig. 9).<sup>34</sup> This landscape has been traced to a view of the Chemin des douaniers, near Signac's home on the Plage des Graniers in Saint-Tropez.<sup>35</sup> The idea for *L'Heure embrasée* was born in 1895, at the same time that Signac and Cross were producing their grand paintings of the *pays du soleil*. Van Rysselberghe's work was not completed until 1897, and exhibited in 1898. Grouped together, lounging on the shore or playing in the sea, the nude female figures of *L'Heure embrasée* are immersed in the naturally isolated Maures landscape. One writer stated, in response to Van Rysselberghe's painting,

This art does not plunge the spectator into dream or ecstasy [...] but into a sort of chosen life, shown under the aspects of health and beauty. Fresh happiness circulates here without referring one to the idylls of the ancient poets, or the classical paradise. There is nothing literary about the subject. These are simply beautiful bodies, happy to wander naked and light-colored among the mingled caresses of water and sun. We are shown and offered an existence all ease and abandon, a supple, natural existence like a beautiful ripe fruit.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> As Ferretti-Bocquillon explained, "The idea for the painting which Van Rysselberghe first mentioned as representing 'Bathers' took shape before the summer in Saint-Tropez in 1896, as shown by a letter dated 25 August 1895 [Archives Signac] with a rapid sketch of the landscape and the figures. He went to Cadzand in Zeeland, not far from the Belgian border, to make his first studies of the bathing women 'which I shall certainly place in a maritime setting [...] I'm very keen to go to Tropez, I think the setting would suit me very well [...]" in "Théo van Rysselberghe and Paul Signac: The History of a Friendship, 1887-1907," in: *Théo van Rysselberghe*, 131-47, here 140.

<sup>35</sup> Ferretti-Bocquillon in *Théo van Rysselberghe*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous (Verhaeren?), *L'Art moderne* (13 March 1898) cited in Jago-Antoine in: *Théo van Rysselberghe*, 88.

[17] For this writer, happiness and healthiness permeate Van Rysselberghe's painting, and it is denied all reference to the categories of the utopian, Arcadian, Edenic, and the dreamscape.

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### **Rethinking the Utopian in Neo-Impressionist Images of the Maures**

[18] Anne Distel, Françoise Cachin, Robert and Eugenia Hebert, Anne Dymond, Margaret Werth, Kenneth Silver, and Robyn Roslak have all referred to the Maures landscapes of the neo-impressionists as "utopian."<sup>37</sup> Aline Dardel, reviewing the images of the anarcho-communist journal, *Les Temps nouveaux* (1895-1914), noted that "utopia" itself seems to resist visual representation.<sup>38</sup> Rather, I would suggest that "utopia" resists specific *definition*, particularly if we consider that historians today may be conceiving it differently than the anarcho-communists did themselves during the 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>39</sup> Glenn Negley and Patrick Max have explained that, "It is questionable whether there are in the English language two more ambiguous words than *utopia* and *utopian*. In both denotation and connotation, these words have acquired a latitude of usage which almost defies definition."<sup>40</sup> Yet usage of the word persists among art historians. *Why* the Maures specifically was perceived by Signac, Cross, and Van Rysselberghe as an appropriate and, according to Gustave Kahn, "accurate"<sup>41</sup> setting for their depictions of an anarcho-communist future society has been rarely discussed in art-historical analyses of their work. Dismissing the significance of the Côte d'Azur landscape in modern art is not peculiar to neo-impressionist scholars either. As Kenneth Silver once remarked,

How seriously can one take art made in a place devoted to pleasure and hedonistic pursuit? How do we reconcile the work of making art with the leisure that is the *raison d'être* of the French Riviera? Questions like these, usually

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<sup>37</sup> See Anne Distel, "Portrait de M. Paul Signac, yachtman pratiquant, homme de lettres, indépendant et révolutionnaire," in: *Signac, 1863-1935*, exh. cat., Paris 2001, 36-51, here 51; Françoise Cachin, "C'est l'éden retrouvé," in: *Méditerranée: De Courbet à Matisse*, Paris 2000, 17-108, here 74; Herbert and Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism I", 480; Dymond, "A Politicized Pastoral" in: Jirat-Wasiutyński, 127; Werth, *Idyllic*, 83-142; Kenneth E. Silver, *Making Paradise*, Cambridge and London 2001, 39; and Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 141-71.

<sup>38</sup> Dardel wrote, "L'épanouissement de cette aube sociale n'a pas donné lieu à beaucoup d'illustrations de la part des artistes et c'est bien regrettable. Cela tient plutôt du rêve, et même de l'utopie semble-t-il, difficile à mettre en images." Dardel, "*Les Temps nouveaux*", 34.

<sup>39</sup> The same can be said for the word "edenic." In their writings the anarcho-communists did not conceptualize their ideal as an Eden; they strongly denied the element of religion, perceiving it as another type of authoritarian control. Reclus wrote in the Preface to Kropotkin's 1885 *Paroles d'un révolté*: "Our salvation does not lie in the choice of new masters. As anarchists and enemies of Christianity, we must remind a whole society that pretends to be Christian of these words spoken by a man they made into a God: 'Say unto no man, Master, Master.' Let everyone remain his own master." Reclus in: Kropotkin, *Rebel*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick, *The Quest for Utopia: An Anthology of Imaginary Societies*, Garden City 1962, 1.

<sup>41</sup> In 1935 Gustave Kahn described Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie* as follows: "A large Arcadia, with hieratic figures, expresses his [Signac's] desire for brotherly love and human perfection [...]. The human figures are beautiful, the harmony pleasing and the setting accurate." Gustave Kahn [1935] cited in: *The Neo-Impressionists*, ed. Jean Sutter, trans. Chantal Deliss, London 1970, 62.

unstated, have long impeded the writing of the history of modern art on the Côte d'Azur [...].<sup>42</sup>

[19] Implicit in the word "utopian" are two concepts which I believe have significantly affected art-historical attitudes towards the radical political meaning of neo-impressionist landscapes of the Maures: the first, relating to Silver's comments, is that a utopian representation is fanciful, novel and thus, like the visual culture of the Côte d'Azur, apparently not to be taken seriously; the second is that, according to its literal definition, a utopia is not a real, specific location, but rather a dream of the future. It is, by its very character, "no place."

[20] Reclus's and Kropotkin's writings reveal a negative and self-defensive attitude towards the word "utopia," and this is perhaps not surprising when we consider that both theorists were eminent, renowned geographers. There are indications that, at least for Reclus and Kropotkin, "utopia" was a derogatory term suggesting the impractical, the unrealizable, and the fantastical. In an 1896 publication by Reclus, this is made clear:

The dream of worldwide freedom has ceased to be a pure philosophical and literary utopia [...] [It] has become the practical goal, actively searched, for the multitudes of united man, who collaborate resolutely on the birth of a society in which there will be no more masters, no more official conservatives of public morality, no more jailers nor hangmen, no more rich men nor poor people, but brothers all having their daily share of bread, equal in rights, and holding the peace and cordial union, not by obedience to laws, which always come with formidable threats, but by the mutual respect of interests and the scientific observation of natural laws.<sup>43</sup>

[21] In 1905, Kropotkin was explicit when he wrote that "anarchist writers consider, moreover, that their conception is not a Utopia [...]."<sup>44</sup> For them "utopia" was synonymous with "fiction," signifying an unrealizable, idle daydream. To my mind, the employment of the word to this day by art historians is not a matter of lazy vocabulary (and I will return to address this lack of clarity later on). It, consciously or not, has informed ongoing perceptions of the neo-impressionists' Maures landscapes as trivial attempts to play with fanciful political beliefs.

[22] For instance, Hutton has argued that the Maures is the setting of an unrealizable utopia. He described the *tropézian* setting of Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie* as a "lush

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<sup>42</sup> Silver, *Making Paradise*, 17. On 18 he explained, "If we prefer the analysis of art made in Paris, or New York, or Berlin, it is because we recognize them as sites of serious work; the idea that an artist might produce great art at a beach resort can result only in what has lately been called cognitive dissonance."

<sup>43</sup> "Le rêve de liberté mondiale a cessé d'être une pure utopie philosophique et littéraire [...] [II] est devenu le but pratique, activement recherché, pour des multitudes d'homme unis, qui collaborent résolument à la naissance d'une société dans laquelle il n'y aura plus de maîtres, plus de conservateurs officiels de la morale publique, plus de geôliers ni de bourreaux, plus de riches ni de pauvres, mais des frères ayant tous leur part quotidienne de pain, des égaux en droit, et se maintenant en paix et en cordiale union, non par l'obéissance à des lois, qu'accompagnent toujours des menaces redoutables, mais par le respect mutuel des intérêts et l'observation scientifique des lois naturelles." Élisée Reclus, *L'Anarchie*, Paris 1896, 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Kropotkin, "Anarchism" [1905], in Kropotkin, *Collection*, 285.

vacation resort."<sup>45</sup> By relegating Saint-Tropez to the status of a "vacation resort" – with its implications of leisure over "serious" work, holiday time, and escapism – Hutton denied the landscape's potential as a radical political space for Signac and his anarcho-communist colleagues. He concluded that *Au temps d'harmonie* fails to express a sincere representation of the ideal: "As a composition, it is notably lacking in the harmony to which the title refers. It devolves into disconnected clots of people, all passionately engaged in acting out Kropotkin's dreams of the golden age. It illustrates, but it lacks the force or unity to evoke the dream it represents."<sup>46</sup> In doing so, Hutton lapsed into the very same vocabulary of the anarcho-communists' critics, reducing the meaning of their writings, and thus Signac's interpretation of them, to mere "dreams." This is not to say that the neo-impressionists' perception of the Maures landscape was not problematic – indeed, I have argued it was bound up with regional tourism development<sup>47</sup> – but in order to critically analyze that perception it is pertinent to recognize their profound sincerity towards anarcho-communism and its social possibilities within places both real and imagined. One way of revealing this, I shall argue, is by taking into account the particular geographical significance the Maures region had for the neo-impressionists and their anarcho-communist comrades.

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### **The Geography and Nature of *Terre Libre***

[23] A prolific writer and close friend of the neo-impressionists, Jean Grave is a key figure in the history of anarcho-communist visual and textual publications, especially as editor of *Les Temps nouveaux* (1895-1914). From 1896 onwards, Grave would add images to the journal,<sup>48</sup> including a lithograph version of Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie*. Previously *Le Révolté* (1879-1887) – the creation of Kropotkin and Reclus – and then known as *La Révolte* (1887-1894), *Les Temps nouveaux* was a widely-distributed journal to which the neo-impressionists donated their work. It is clear from letters that they were avid readers of the journal as well as of the latest anarcho-communist books, particularly those written by Grave and Kropotkin.<sup>49</sup> A letter to Grave from Cross in early 1908 attests

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<sup>45</sup> Hutton, *Solid*, 177.

<sup>46</sup> Hutton, *Solid*, 141.

<sup>47</sup> See Tania Woloshyn, "Marking out the Maures: Henri-Edmond Cross on the Côte d'Azur," in: Tania Woloshyn and Nicholas Hewitt, eds., *L'Invention du Midi: The Rise of the South of France in the National and International Imagination* (*Nottingham French Studies* 50.1, Special Issue), Nottingham 2011, 57-71. In this article I focus on particular paintings by Cross and contemporaneous tourist references to the Maures region, arguing that they perceived and represented the region as remote and inaccessible but that, in fact, it was far from unknown.

<sup>48</sup> Herbert and Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism I," 477.

<sup>49</sup> Cross, for example, spoke of the journal in a letter to Maximilien Luce in 1893: "Jusqu'ici j'ai reçu très régulièrement *La Révolte*. Vous savez si j'en savoure la lecture. Quelle philosophie généreuse et puissante! Et dans le choix des articles, le directeur [Grave] montre une grande intelligence, n'est-ce pas? À quoi bon les commentaires, n'êtes-vous pas vous-même un fanatique de ces idées!" Cited in Hôtel Dassault, "Correspondance de Maximilien Luce," *Artcurial* (2-4 May 2007, sale no.1121), Paris 2007, 11.



to his awareness of *Terre Libre*; he thanks Grave for sending the book to his home in Saint-Clair and predicts the novel will be an "intellectual pleasure and a source of meditations."<sup>50</sup>

[24] *Terre Libre* is a little-known children's story about prisoners who, condemned for their anarchist convictions and demonstrations, are being deported on the ship, the *Aréthuse*, to New Caledonia, a French penal colony in the South Pacific. But on the way, a storm strikes and it is shipwrecked on an unknown, deserted island. The captain and his soldiers set up camp, maintaining control over their captives. Soon the prisoners form a plan and in the night, without unnecessary violence, they gain control of the soldiers' weapons and separate themselves to another part of the island, which they call "*Terre-Libre*" or "Free-Land." They build a life for themselves based on freely-formed groups, and agree on all decisions in an assembly, without any one person imposing leadership.

[25] In this system of mutual aid, manual labour is not onerous and soon the camp is thriving. Housing and sustenance become their first priority. One man also reveals he was trained as a geographer, and leads an expedition to chart the area, no doubt a homage to Kropotkin and Reclus. The children are given freedom as well: they run free, help where they can such as feeding the animals, and are not burdened by taxing studies. Under these circumstances, each individual is given the freedom to blossom, and later in the novel the group even publishes a newspaper.

[26] In the other camp, however, poor management under the captain's authority leaves the soldiers ill-fed and unhappy. Some even defect to the Terrelibriens' camp. The climax, however, takes place when an armed vessel arrives and, now joined by the captain and his loyal soldiers, opens fire on the Terrelibriens, who must defend themselves. In the end, they triumph: the vessel explodes, and a sailor who has survived tells them news of anarchist achievements all over Europe. *Terre Libre* closes with the following lines: "The secret of their refuge was at the bottom of the sea. They remained, until further notice, free to continue living, there, unknown to all, or to go back to the old world, as they understood it."<sup>51</sup>

[27] In the preface of *Terre Libre*, Grave made some significant remarks about his intentions for the novel, stating at the outset that this section was not to be read by the children ("*Que peuvent ne pas lire les petits*"). Here he stated that his comrade, Francisco Ferrer of the Modern School of Barcelona, had requested that Grave write a

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<sup>50</sup> "Mon cher Grave, Nous avons été très heureux de recevoir un livre de vous. J'ai d'avance la certitude que la lecture de 'Terre libre' sera pour moi un plaisir intellectuel et une source de méditations." Letter from Cross to Grave (February 2, 1908), cited in Robert L. and Eugenia W. Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and others – II," in: *The Burlington Magazine* 102 (December 1960), 517-22, here 521.

<sup>51</sup> "Le secret de leur refuge était au fond de la mer. Ils restaient, jusqu'à nouvel ordre, libres de continuer à vivre, là, ignorés de tous, ou de renouer avec le vieux monde, comme ils l'entendaient." Jean Grave, *Terre Libre (Les pionniers)*, Paris 1908, 321.

novel illustrating how he might envision the future anarcho-communist society, particularly the organization of labour.<sup>52</sup> Grave then explained why he wrote it in the form of a *conte*, or children's tale. Firstly, as an adventure tale, it would be easier and more interesting for young children to read and comprehend. Secondly, this form would ensure a "vague and hypothetical character" to the ideal anarcho-communist society. His reason was that the ideal, as understood by each individual, remained a personal vision.<sup>53</sup> Further into the preface, Grave stated,

I will also ask that we do not quibble too much over the position of Free-Land on a map. For works of the imagination one should not ask for absolute accuracy. I am not very well up on geography. And the journey where I want to take the reader is not a journey of geographic discoveries, but moral ones.<sup>54</sup>

[28] Directly inspired by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Johann David Wyss's *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812),<sup>55</sup> Grave created a tale of adventure and survival set on an exotic island. Grave's statement above seems at first to suggest conformity with its predecessors, works of the imagination, "no-places" with flora and fauna so varied, so disparate, as to be geographically impossible within one location. These are places not to be located on maps. So too apparently is the island of Terre-Libre: early in the novel one of the characters, a navigator on the ship, estimates their location upon crashing to be at 17 or 18 degrees latitude and 185 degrees longitude,<sup>56</sup> the latter a physical impossibility. Were it an error in the text (which is questionable), and the longitude 180°, Terre-Libre would be among a cluster of islands to the east of Fiji.

[29] Unlike Defoe and Wyss, Grave is vague in describing the specifics of vegetation in his book, writing generally of plants and fruits and trees, avoiding any details. The images by Mabel Holland Thomas, however, depict very specific flora, among them palm trees, banana trees, bamboo, banyan trees,<sup>57</sup> and rose bushes, and it is the inconsistencies between the vagueness of the text and the specificity of the images that are particularly fascinating. Grave speaks of none of these plants, with the sole exception of palm trees, and two sites for harvesting which the colonists call the Rosary and the Palmery. Despite Grave's attempts that Terre-Libre is not to be found on a map, that it is

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<sup>52</sup> Grave stated, "Le camarade Ferrer, de l'École Moderne' de Barcelone[, ] m'ayant demandé si je ne voudrais pas lui écrire un volume sur la façon dont j'envisageais l'organisation du travail dans la société future, j'acceptai avec plaisir, vu que le sujet m'intéresse. Et c'est cet essai que je présente aujourd'hui." Grave, *Terre Libre*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Grave, *Terre Libre*, 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> "Je demanderai également à ce que l'on ne me chicane pas trop sur la position de Terre-Libre sur la carte. Aux œuvres d'imagination il ne faut pas demander une exactitude absolue. Je ne suis pas très ferré sur la géographie. Et le voyage où je veux emmener le lecteur n'est pas un voyage de découvertes géographiques, mais morales." Grave, *Terre Libre*, 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> Grave, *Terre Libre*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Grave, *Terre Libre*, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Trees are described in the manner of banyan trees in Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Written by Himself* [1719], Ware 1995, 80-81.

a work of imaginative geography, Thomas's visual representations conform intriguingly to the specific tropical island topography of Melanesia, a region including New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji.



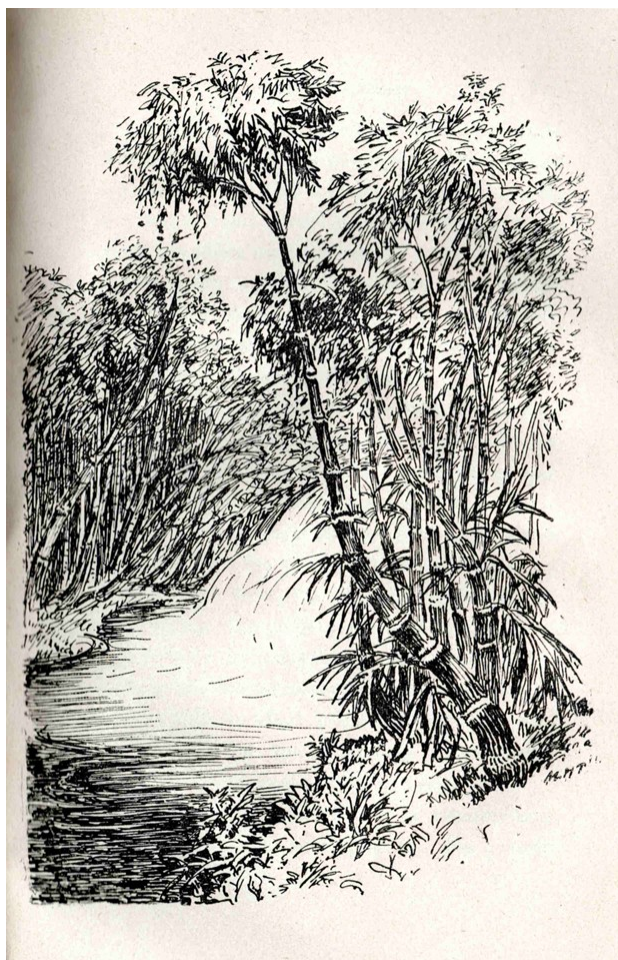
10 Mabel Holland Thomas, Cover illustration of Jean Grave, *Terre Libre*, Paris 1908, wood engraving (author's collection)



11 Mabel Holland Thomas, *Banana Tree*, in Jean Grave, *Terre Libre*, Paris 1908, 215 (author's collection)



12 Mabel Holland Thomas, *Banyan rees*, in Jean Grave, *Terre Libre*, Paris 1908, 265 (author's collection)



13 Mabel Holland Thomas, *Bamboo*, in Jean Grave, *Terre Libre*, Paris 1908, 143 (author's collection)

[30] In the fourteenth volume of Élisée Reclus's *La Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes* on Oceania (1889), bananas, coconut palms, date palms, bamboo, and banyan trees are all mentioned as being present in Melanesia.<sup>58</sup> So too are the exact same flora mentioned by his brother, Onésime Reclus, in the second volume of his *La France et ses colonies*, also published in 1889.<sup>59</sup> Thomas's illustrations of a palm (Fig. 10), a banana tree (Fig. 11), banyans (Fig. 12) and bamboo (Fig. 13) are naturalistic representations, dynamically rendered. The images correspond well to the Reclus's botanical descriptions of this area, suggesting that Thomas, if not Grave, must have been aware of the botany of the Melanesian islands. However, to my knowledge, neither Thomas nor Grave ever visited the area, and therefore their most likely point of

<sup>58</sup> The British Library has recently digitized almost all of Élisée Reclus's nineteen volumes from *La Nouvelle géographie universelle*, and thus made the books searchable by keyword (only accessible in the library). Banyan trees are mentioned very rarely throughout the series, and discussed the most in volume fourteen on Oceania. Otherwise it is mentioned in: *Zambia*, in volume 13 on *L'Afrique méridionale*, Paris 1888, 656; *Assam, north-east India*, where he mentioned a species of banyan that grew to enormous heights, in volume 8 on *L'Inde et l'Indo-Chine*, Paris 1885, 586; the *Maldives*, on Minicoy Island, also in volume 8, 621; and, beyond Melanesia, on Mindanao in the Philippines, in Reclus, *Australasia*, ed. A. H. Keane, London, n.d., 252.

<sup>59</sup> Onésime Reclus, *La France et ses colonies. Tome Second: Nos Colonies*, Paris 1889, 568 (on New Caledonia).

access to information on Melanesia was through geographical sources like the Reclus brothers, who, after all, were active anarcho-communists and close to Grave.<sup>60</sup>

[31] How does Thomas depict the landscape of Grave's novel as a "free land"? The cover image of *Terre Libre* shows a section of sinuous, sandy coastline, what is meant to be an island according to Grave's text (Fig. 10). Its deserted terrain awaits anarcho-communist colonization, as evident by the approach of a damaged ship from the right-hand corner. Its vegetation, notably the central palm tree in the foreground and those in the distant background, suggest a warm, if not tropical, exotic environment. In Figure 13 Thomas peoples her landscape with lounging anarcho-communists, nestled deep in the brush of the island's interior. The text and images of *Terre Libre* deserve academic discussion not only because this is an esoteric novel,<sup>61</sup> but also because its descriptions correspond intriguingly with the perceived tropical and island-like appearance of the Maures, where the neo-impressionists worked and lived.

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### **A "True Land of Promise" on French Soil: The Geography and Nature of the Maures**

[32] The Maures landscape was projected by the neo-impressionists as untouched by tourism, and its relative isolation from the rest of the Côte d'Azur seemed to appeal to both their artistic and (anti)tourist sensibilities.<sup>62</sup> Take Signac's first impressions of Saint-Tropez, upon arrival in May of 1892. He wrote to his mother in a letter that,

Since yesterday I have settled in, and am brimming with joy. Five minutes from the old city, lost in the pine trees and roses. I have discovered a lovely little cabanon ['La Ramade']. Overlooking the golden shores of the gulf, where the blue waves roll in and die on a tiny beach, my beach, and a perfect mooring for the Olympia [...]. In the background, the blue outline of the Maures and the Esterel – there is enough here to work on for the rest of my life – I have discovered happiness [...].<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas may have been well-travelled; little is known about her. Or she may have been familiar with tropical vegetation within London itself, from botanical gardens like Kew, which had a famous palmery that opened in 1849. Nancy Leys Stepan describes the Palm House at Kew as "one of the most important material and symbolic expressions of tropical nature in the nineteenth century," in *Picturing Tropical Nature*, Ithaca 2001, 33.

<sup>61</sup> To my knowledge, Raymond Trousson is the only scholar who has discussed *Terre Libre*, and there do not seem to be any sources that consider the accompanying illustrations by Thomas. See Raymond Trousson, Raymond, "L'Utopie anarchiste de Jean Grave," in: *D'Utopie et d'utopistes*, Paris and Montréal 1998, 221-232. Thomas may have even had significant input in the text of the book; Grave dedicated it to her, and added, "Ce livre que nous avons pensé tous deux, en le discutant." While Hutton, Werth, and Patsouras list Grave's *Terre Libre* in passing, its narrative and illustrations are not discussed.

<sup>62</sup> James Buzard described this as "anti-tourism": "Snobbish 'anti-tourism,' an element of modern tourism from the start, has offered an important, even exemplary way of regarding one's own cultural experiences as authentic and unique, setting them against a backdrop of always assumed tourist vulgarity, repetition, and ignorance." James Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, Oxford 2001, 5. For more on discussion of the neo-impressionists as tourists, see Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 141-171 and Woloshyn, "Marking out the Maures."

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Signac to his mother (May 1892), Archives Signac, cited in English in Ferretti Bocquillon, *Signac en Provence*, Avignon 2006, 53.

[33] Signac was not alone in associating Saint-Tropez with *bonheur*. As early as 1887, Stéphen Liégeard saw in Saint-Tropez a welcoming, joyful town, where "everything seems to laugh and smile."<sup>64</sup> Signac identified his experience in Saint-Tropez as intimate and private ("my beach," "lost in the pine trees and roses"), an untouched world of private immersion. In Saint-Tropez, Signac felt joyful, alone, and free. Its beauty would provide endless motifs for his painting, he stated, and its perceived remoteness the privacy to undertake it without interruption.

[34] In a letter of November 1899, Cross wrote to another of their circle, Charles Angrand (1854-1926), from Saint-Clair that,

We are here [...] right at the edge of the sea, two kilometers from a small village of fishermen: Le Lavandou, which is not to be found on maps [...]. Saint-Clair is a plain on which about twenty houses, bastides even, are scattered, occupied by peasants who cultivate grapes and early produce (flowers, vegetables).<sup>65</sup>

[35] In 1901 he would reassert that the region was unknown and remote, its beaches deserted. For Cross, "The elegance resides only in the pine trees that come out from the sand and in the delightful half-moon forming the shore. Oh, but it is eternally beautiful!"<sup>66</sup> Like Grave, Cross was adamant that Saint-Clair, his personal haven, was not to be found on maps. So too did tourist sources assert again and again the region's topographic isolation. In fact, for the tourist writer, Victor-Eugène Ardouin-Dumazet, the Maures was so geographically distinct and so remote from the rest of France that it was like an *island*:

The Maures forms a distinctly demarcated region as much by its solitude as by its geological constitution. No other land in France stands out with such intensity from its surrounding regions. It is quite truly an island, made of particular characters.<sup>67</sup>

[36] In 1904, Magali Faravel wrote an article about Bormes and Le Lavandou, Cross's immediate environs, describing the region as reminiscent of the tropics:

<sup>64</sup> "Déjà *Saint-Tropez* nous prépare la bienvenue. Gaiement il nous découvre ses pignons irisés de toutes nuances, sa citadelle en décor, ses rez-de-chaussée brise-lames opposant leurs portes pleines aux indiscretes visites de la vague, et son petit port aux tartanes pavoisées, et les vertes collines dont la ceinture l'enserme, et Sainte-Maxime, prompte à lui envoyer, d'en face, le salut affectueux d'une soeur qui lui fut chère. Ici, tout semble rire et sourire." Stéphen Liégeard, *La Côte d'Azur*, Paris 1887, 37.

<sup>65</sup> "Nous sommes ici [...] tout au bord de la mer, à deux kilomètres d'un petit village de pêcheurs: Le Lavandou, que l'on ne trouve pas sur les cartes [...]. Saint-Clair est une plaine, sur laquelle sont dispersées une vingtaine de maisons, bastides plutôt, habitées par des paysans qui font de la vigne et des primeurs (fleurs, légumes)." Letter from Cross to Charles Angrand (18 November 1899), cited in Compin, *H. E. Cross*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> The full excerpt is as follows: "En été [...] la lumière répandue à profusion sur toutes choses vous attire, vous ahurit, vous affole [...]. Ici nos plages sont désertes. L'élégance ne réside que dans les pins qui sortent du sable et dans la délicieuse demi-lune que forme le rivage. Mais que cela est éternellement beau!" Letter from Cross to Angrand (12 August 1901), cited in Compin, *H. E. Cross*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> "Aussi les Maures constituent-elles par leur solitude, comme par leur constitution géologique[,] une région nettement délimitée. Aucune autre contrée en France ne se détache avec tant de vigueur sur les régions environnantes. C'est bien véritablement une île, offrant des caractères particuliers." Victor-Eugène Ardouin-Dumazet, *Voyage en France. 55e série: la Provence maritime, II. La Côte d'Azur*, Paris and Nancy 1909, 20.

We go round the Hotel Bellevue, which justifies its name by the beauty of the landscape stretching at its feet, and we arrive at the place, which one clever town father had constructed with an Italian terrace. We are happy to stop here to admire the picturesque aspect of the village surrounding us. We ascend even more and arrive at the park of the Pavilion Hotel. There, we have in all its fullness, the illusion of the tropics. The rarest species encircle us. Eucalyptuses, mimosa, aloës, yucca, peppercorn trees, without counting the palm trees and ancient orange trees, amass as in a virgin forest, with a marvellous exuberance of vegetation. This is because Bormes is wonderfully sheltered against all winds and its exposure to the full heat of the middle of the day gives it the advantage of the hottest climate of the coastal region, including Hyères and Menton.<sup>68</sup>

[37] For Faravel, evidence of tourist amenities in place, namely hotels and roads, did not distract her from envisioning the Maures as a tropicalized tourist paradise.<sup>69</sup> The region's exotic vegetation was marked out in tourist and geographic texts of the 19th and early 20th centuries as its defining feature. Here difference resided in botanic evidence. So too did its heat, as Faravel implies, evoke the tropics for visitors. In the summer of 1905, Albert Marquet wrote to his friend and fellow fauve, Charles Camoin, of his summer experiences of Saint-Tropez, "dominated by luxuriance and brightness. Under these French tropics, we become tropical people."<sup>70</sup> For these "wild beasts," Saint-Tropez was envisioned as a primitive, exotic and tropicalized site with the ability to transform visitors into island natives, to physically and psychologically primitivize them. Indeed, Louis Vauxcelles described them in 1905 as a "spirited little colony of painters" in Saint-Tropez.<sup>71</sup> A year earlier, André Mellerio declared that "Saint-Tropez and Antibes are increasingly becoming the promised land for neo-impressionist painters."<sup>72</sup> To Signac,

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<sup>68</sup> "Nous contourons l'hotel Bellevue, qui justifie son nom par la beauté du paysage qui s'étend à ses pieds, et nous arrivons sur la place, qu'une édilité intelligente a fait construire en terrasse à l'italienne. Nous sommes heureux de nous y arrêter pour admirer l'aspect pittoresque du village qui s'étend autour de nous. Nous montons encore et nous arrivons au parc de l'hôtel du Pavillon. Là, nous avons dans toute sa plénitude, l'illusion des tropiques. Les essences les plus rares nous entourent. Les eucalyptus, les mimosa [sic], les aloës [sic], les yucca [sic], les faux poivriers, sans compter les palmiers et les orangers séculaires, s'entassent comme dans une forêt vierge, avec une admirable exubérance de végétation. C'est que Bormes est merveilleusement abrité contre tous les vents et son exposition en plein midi lui procure l'avantage du climat le plus chaud du littoral, y compris Hyères et Menton." Magali Faravel, "Paysages de la Côte d'Azur: Bormes et Le Lavandou," in: *Art et soleil: revue mensuelle illustré de la Côte d'Azur* 3 (January 1904), 52.

<sup>69</sup> By "tropicalized" I mean those markers of landscapes, particularly of a botanical nature (such as palm trees), recognized as "tropical," in itself a heavily-loaded construct. See Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*, Durham and London 2006. Thompson's book crucially dissects early images of the Caribbean as constitutive of a "tropical picturesque" identity that, even today, remains firmly in place in the minds of tourists and continues to drive its tourism industry.

<sup>70</sup> "[...] sous la domination de la luxuriance et de l'éclat. Sous ces tropiques françaises, nous devenons des gens tropicaux." Cited by Jean-Michel Couve in *Charles Camoin et Saint-Tropez*, Saint-Tropez 1991, 18. Also cited in *Albert Marquet: journal de bord en Méditerranée*, Saint-Tropez 2001, unpaginated.

<sup>71</sup> He wrote, "M. Camoin, lui aussi, s'en fut à Saint-Tropez. Ils y ont tous filé, semblables à une bande d'oiseaux migrateurs. Ce fut au printemps 1905, une vaillante petite colonie de peintres peignant et devisant en ce pays enchanté: Signac, Cross, Manguin, Camoin, Marquet; près d'eux, à Cagnes, d'Espagnat et le maître Renoir." Louis Vauxcelles, "Le Salon d'automne," in: *Gil Blas* (17 October 1905), 1-2

<sup>72</sup> André Mellerio, "Les Petites Expositions," in: *Revue universelle* 4 (15 April 1904), 215-216, here 215. The full quote, discussed further in Anne Dymond's article within this edited volume, is as follows: "Au reste, Saint-Tropez et Antibes deviennent de plus en plus la terre promise des peintres



Saint-Tropez was the "eighth wonder of the world."<sup>73</sup> His hero and fellow yachtsman, Guy de Maupassant, while exploring the hinterland around Sainte-Maxime, similarly proclaimed, "Didn't I tell you that here we are at the end of the world!"<sup>74</sup>

[38] In Thomas's cover illustration (Fig. 10), a palm tree occupies the central foreground, dominating the composition and signifying the island's climate as tropical and warm. According to Nancy Stepan, the palm was "the ubiquitous sign of the tropics, images of it instantly signalling less a botanical species than an imaginative submersion in hot places."<sup>75</sup> But as Kenneth Silver has remarked, the palm tree also was, and continues to be, an iconic feature of the Côte d'Azur,<sup>76</sup> its presence visual proof of the coast's year-round warm climate. On the French coast the palm tree denoted the exotic luxury and cultivated elegance associated with larger resort towns, especially Nice and Cannes. Yet there are also depictions of the palm in tourist images of the Maures, such as Hugo d'Alési's 1898 poster of Hyères (Fig. 14). In d'Alési's work, date palms spring from the background, over a wall covered with flowering vines; blooming agaves, cacti and spikes emerge from dramatic outcroppings of rocks and, along with large umbrella pines, close off and fill the composition, suggesting a wild, fertile and exotic environment.

[39] While only actively cultivated from the beginning of the 19th century, tourist writers would describe the date palm as one of exotic elements of vegetation in the Maures, complementary to the region's primitive and rugged geological features. In 1880, Charles Lenthéric described the gulf of Saint-Tropez as a "true promised land," its orange, lemon, and palm trees indicating a region of natural abundance and a peculiarly "Oriental" flavor, at once African and Middle Eastern.<sup>77</sup> For Lenthéric, the palms he observed in the Maures were not simply elegant with their splaying fronds; they were positively exotic, producing succulent dates as delicious as those from Africa and Syria.

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néo-impresionnistes, qui trouvent dans les oppositions du ciel et du sol, de la mer colorée, des arbres puissants, motifs à variations chromatiques et à belles arabesques linéaires."

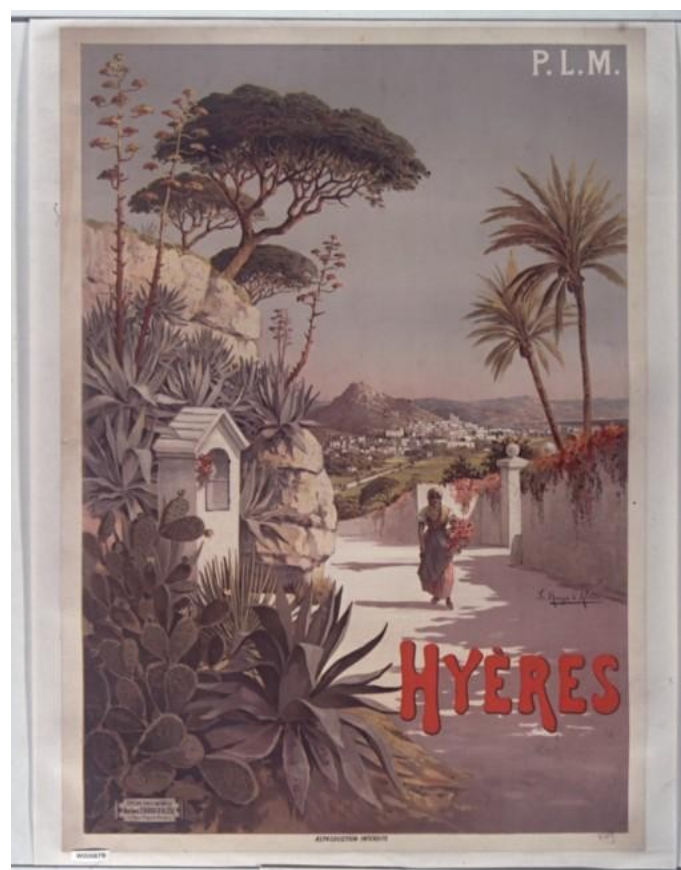
<sup>73</sup> Signac spoke of the moment of sailing to Saint-Tropez as follows: "Un vent singulier m'a poussé vers la huitième merveille de l'univers! Venez voir! L'ocre des murs fait pâlir celui des villas romaines. Et le ciel, donc! J'en prends plein les yeux!" Cited in Danièle Giraudy, *Charles Camoin et Saint-Tropez*, Saint-Tropez 1991, 18.

<sup>74</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "Petits voyages," *Gil Blas* (26 August 1884), Appendix in Maupassant, *Afloat (Sur l'eau)* [1888], trans. Marlo Johnston, London and Chester Springs 1995, 129-35, here 133.

<sup>75</sup> Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Silver, *Making Paradise*, 61.

<sup>77</sup> "Le golfe de Saint-Tropez, en particulier, qui s'enfonce profondément dans le cœur du massif des Maures, est à lui seul un pays complet avec ses montagnes primitives, ses masses plutoniques de serpentine, ses buttes volcaniques, son fleuve en miniature et sa plaine d'alluvions. C'est une véritable terre promise qui porte au plus haut degré le cachet de l'Orient; et les Arabes qui l'ont occupée au dixième et au onzième siècle [sic] ont pu réellement s'y croire dans leur pays d'origine. Comme dans certaines vallées fertiles et tempérées de l'Asie Mineure, les ruisseaux coulent entre deux haies de lauriers roses aussi serrés que les oseraies du grand Rhône; les orangers et les citronniers vivent en pleine terre; les arbres à cédrats y produisent des fruits d'un volume extraordinaire; les palmiers eux-mêmes ne se contentent pas de projeter leurs tiges élégantes et donnent quelquefois des dattes aussi savoureuses que celles des oasis de l'Afrique et de la Syrie." Charles Lenthéric, *La Provence maritime ancienne et moderne*, Paris 1880, 296-97.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

14 F. Hugo d'Alési, *P. L. M. Hyères*, 1898, poster, color lithograph, 106 x 75 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb39838343n>)

[40] Élisée Reclus, in fact, spoke of the whole of the Provençal coast as resembling "*une terre africaine*," its littoral topography closest to those of Tunisia and Algeria, and together forming "a distinct part of the world, an intermediary between Europe and Africa."<sup>78</sup> France's Mediterranean coast was promoted by physicians as an ideal point of transition for visitors between Europe and Africa.<sup>79</sup> Invalids or delicate travellers were advised to remain on the coast for several months upon returning from a tropical climate,

<sup>78</sup> "Les côtes de la Provence, semblent en maints endroits appartenir à une terre africaine. Elles rappellent le littoral de Tunis et d'Alger par le vigoureux profil de leurs promontoires de calcaire, de porphyre ou de granit, la forme rythmique de leurs anses dessinées en arc de cercle, leur végétation semi-tropicale, la blancheur de leurs bastides éparses entre les roches au milieu des oliviers, la splendeur du ciel rayonnant qui les éclaire [...]. Aussi des géologues et des naturalistes, frappés par la grande analogie des climats, des roches, de la faune et de la flore, ont-ils pu dire avec raison que le littoral du sud de la Provence et celui du nord de l'Atlas constituent, avec les côtes méridionales de l'Espagne, une partie du monde distincte, intermédiaire entre l'Europe et l'Afrique." Élisée Reclus, *La Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes. Part II: La France*, Paris 1877, 177-178. Reclus stated this even earlier, in fact, in his 1864 Joanne guide to the Mediterranean; see *Les Villes d'hiver de la Méditerranée et les Alpes Maritimes: itinéraire descriptif et historique*, Paris 1864), iii.

<sup>79</sup> For more on the identity of the Côte d'Azur as a "climate of transition," see Tania Woloshyn, "Zone of transition: visual culture and national regeneration on the French Riviera, c.1860-1900," forthcoming chapter in: *Art and Identity at the Water's Edge*, ed. Tricia Cusack, Ashgate 2012, 161-176. Cusack's edited volume considers the political, social and touristic contexts of liminal zones, especially coastlines; for more on this subject, see also Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. by Jocelyn Phelps, London 1995.

in order to acclimatize their bodies first to the region's warmth before heading further north. In 1894, Dr Francken explicitly referred to Menton as a "climate of transition between tropical regions and central Europe," encouraging travellers to remain there to re-establish their health before proceeding north.<sup>80</sup> The perceived dual identity of France's Mediterranean coast, belonging both to Europe and to Africa due to its climate, held ongoing fascination for tourists, physicians, artists and writers, who conceptualized the region as a mid-way point, "a gateway to the Orient," as Puvis de Chavannes entitled his famous mural of Marseille (1868, Musée des Beaux-Arts), yet still familiar European territory. Adolphe Smith made this abundantly clear, writing in 1880:

Most periods have had to travel hundreds of miles further South in order to experience a transition similar to that which the comparatively short journey to Hyères enables us to enjoy. It is difficult to believe that in France [...] while still within the pale of advanced Western civilization, we can live in a semi-tropical climate surrounded by all the marvels of vegetation which are generally associated with distant colonies and semi-barbaric southern countries.<sup>81</sup>

[41] Similar to d'Alési's poster of Hyères (Fig. 14), the cover of Smith's book features spikes (indicated as *Dracaena indivisa*, native to New Zealand), yucca (indicated as *Yucca fitifera*, native to Mexico), an aloe in bloom (actually an *Agave americana*, since aloes apparently do not bloom; also native to Mexico), and a sago cycad (indicated as *Cycas revoluta*, native to Japan) (Fig. 15). Smith notes that horticulturalists cultivated exotic species like this for sale, and that several large-scale gardens, such as the Jardin d'Acclimation, the Jardin Huber, and the Jardin Denis (the latter bought by the municipality), were open and free to the public.<sup>82</sup>

[42] Significantly, so too was North Africa understood as tropical and exotic by its unique vegetation,<sup>83</sup> corresponding to Thomas's representations of palms, banana trees and bamboo as markers of Melanesian tropical geography. In 1875, George Gaskell described Algeria as simultaneously Mediterranean and tropical:

The most remarkable feature [of the landscape] is the magnificent and novel vegetation. Trees and plants which are exotic with us surprise and delight the eye; the

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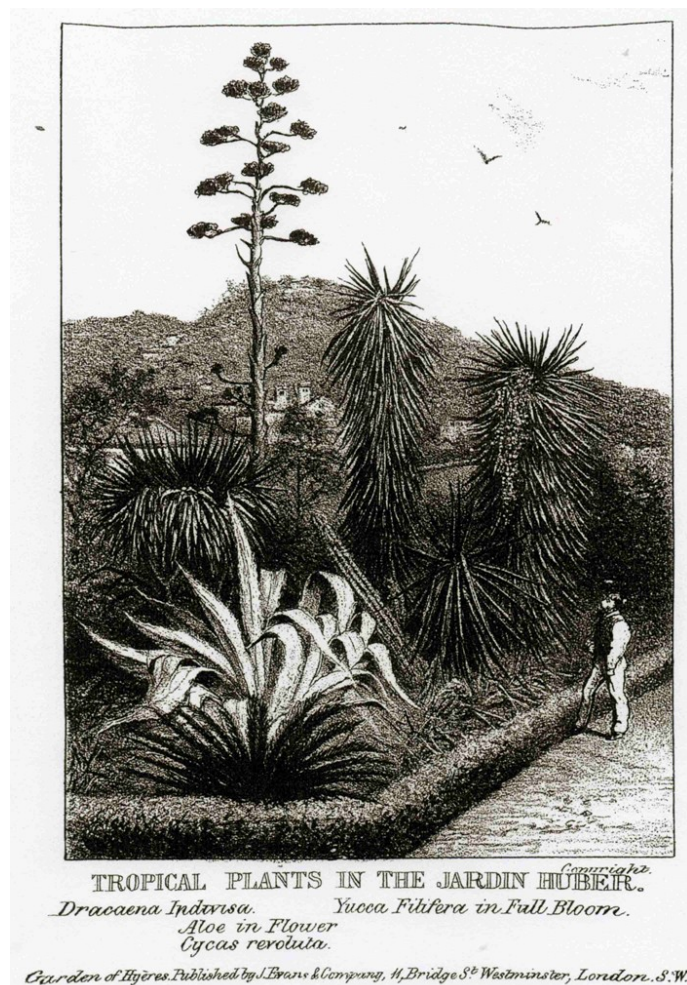
<sup>80</sup> Francken stated, "Nous ne saurions trop aussi recommander Menton comme *climat de transition entre les régions tropicales et l'Europe centrale*. Combien de familles viennent des Indes, débarquent à Marseille ou à Gênes et se hâtent de gagner le nord afin de revoir plus tôt leurs amis; cette hâte leur coûte souvent une maladie quelconque, quand c'est justement pour rétablir leur santé qu'ils revenaient en Europe." W. Francken, *Menton: station climatique d'hiver, sous le rapport médical & pittoresque*, Paris 1894, 110-11.

<sup>81</sup> Adolphe Smith, *The Garden of Hyères*, London 1881, 41. Smith's book is a detailed study of the specific flora cultivated in Hyères, noting that its existing palms were relatively recent examples (he dates them to seventy years old) although references to palms in the region occur in the 1500s, see especially 41-53. See also Michel Racine, Ernest J.-P. Boursier-Mougenot, and Françoise Binet, *The Gardens of Provence and the French Riviera*, trans. Alice Parte and Helen Agarathé, Cambridge and London 1987.

<sup>82</sup> Smith, *The Gardens of Hyères*, 49.

<sup>83</sup> See for example Anne Marie Moulin, "Tropical without the Tropics: The Turning-Point of Pastorian Medicine in North Africa," in: *Warm Climates and Western Medicine: The Emergence of Tropical Medicine, 1500-1900*, ed. David Arnold, Amsterdam and Atlanta 1996, 160-180.

tall and graceful palm, the slender bamboo, the banana, orange, lemon, eucalyptus, ficus, cypress, and the olive, grow in the wild profusion of a tropical region.<sup>84</sup>



15 Anonymous, *Tropical Plants in the Jardin Huber*, c.1880, illustration, in Adolphe Smith, *The Garden of Hyères*, London 1880, plate 3. British Library 10169.de.13

[43] As a mid-way point, the unique geographical terrain of France's Mediterranean coast, and particularly the Maures, was described as exotic and healthy simultaneously, strange yet safe. Here the tourist or the invalid could access a perceived space of the tropics but, as Smith noted, comfortingly based within France itself. In other words, while visitors were keen to immerse themselves in the visual spectacle of tropical abundance along the French coast, they were simultaneously aware, that it remained an *illusion*: "*l'illusion des tropiques*," in the words of Faravel. For those in search of health, as a "climate of transition" the Côte d'Azur was also clearly *not* the tropics; its heat was mild and dry, not oppressive and damp, and most especially this region was devoid of dangerous "tropical diseases."<sup>85</sup> No doubt it is for this reason that tourist writers and geographers perceived the Maures region as a "true land of promise," to quote Lenthéric. Tourist descriptions of the whole of the Côte d'Azur as a "New World" or "Promised Land"

<sup>84</sup> George Gaskell, *Algeria as It is*, London 1875, 11.

<sup>85</sup> See Arnold, *Warm Climates and Western Medicine*, and Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*.

on French soil are common during the 19th century.<sup>86</sup> Signac's proclamation that Saint-Tropez was the "eighth wonder of the World" (above) is therefore by no means unique. The English physician, Dr James Henry Bennet, through his influential books and personal experiences, turned Menton into a new colony of patients. One colleague, Thomas More Madden, accused Bennet of promoting Menton as "the Utopia for invalids."<sup>87</sup> While it was intended as harsh criticism of Bennet's unwavering faith in the miraculous natural powers of Menton's shores, Madden's comment also indicates that physicians like Bennet who promoted the region as naturally healing, or climatotherapeutic, were important contributors to the coast's famed reputation.<sup>88</sup>

[44] In this context, Thomas's visualizations of a generally tropical, and specifically Melanesian, "free land" offer significant correspondences with medical and tourist perceptions of the Côte d'Azur, and especially the Maures, as simultaneously French, Mediterranean *and* tropical; or rather, as a vehicle on French ground through which the tropics could be experienced. Though Grave and Thomas may not have based their conception of a *terre libre* directly on the model of the Maures, their topographical similarities are striking – aloes, pines, palms, serpentine coastline – in its literary and visual representations at this time. *Terre Libre* was not published until 1908, and for over fifteen years Grave would have observed many images of the Maures by his neo-impressionist friends. Grave had also spent time on the Côte d'Azur, convalescing from pneumonia in 1901, and it was here that he completed another children's novel, *Les Aventures de Nono*.<sup>89</sup> With this information in mind, the region would seem to have been an inevitable point of reference. For Thomas and Grave, Melanesian topography and the Côte d'Azur could have both been frames of reference, or complementary landscapes, for the representative "free land."

[45] In the essay, "On Not Seeing Provence: Van Gogh and the Landscape of Consolation," Griselda Pollock argued that Van Gogh's perception of Arles was informed

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<sup>86</sup> "Un cirque immense de montagnes l'enserme; on dirait deux bras prêts à se refermer. Le vent du large a seul accès dans cette oasis africaine. Qu'un établissement balnéaire ou un hôtel à l'usage des malades peu fortunés s'établisse dans ce Nouveau Monde, les quelques villas aujourd'hui clairsemées dans la campagne ne tarderont pas à se multiplier, et peut-être assistera-t-on à un miracle semblable à celui qui fit éclore Cannes sous la baguette de lord Brougham (Ces prévisions ont commencé à se réaliser)." J. Cauvière, "De Saint-Raphaël à Saint-Tropez et à Hyères, 11 octobre 1890," in: *La Provence et ses voies nouvelles*, Lille 1898, 21. Already by 1859, J. B. Girard enticed his readers to visit Cannes and become citizens of a new colony: "Aussi dirons-nous à ceux qui souffrent: Venez essayer de ce climat bienfaisant, venez respirer cet air si pur, ce soleil si chaudement vivifiant qui produit journellement de si grands miracles; à ceux qui pensent: Accourez, venez vous inspirer au près de cette nature grandiose qui séduit, qui ensorcelle, et vous ferez comme tant d'autres, vous deviendrez citoyens de la colonie nouvelle, vous voudrez avoir votre coin de terre à ce foyer qui réchauffe l'âme et le corps, et vous oublierez peut-être vos brumeuses patries." J. B. Girard, *Cannes et ses environs: guide historique et pittoresque*, Paris, Cannes and Nice 1859, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas More Madden, *On Change of Climate. A Guide for Travellers in Pursuit of Health*, London 1864, 310.

<sup>88</sup> See Woloshyn, "La Côte d'Azur."

<sup>89</sup> Patsouras, *Anarchism*, 92.

by his own memories of his Dutch homeland, his understanding of Dutch landscape painting, *and* his fascination with Japan.<sup>90</sup> As such, Pollock convincingly asserted that van Gogh arrived in Provence with aesthetic and touristic perceptions already firmly in place, imagining and imaging a Provençal landscape as both Dutch and Japanese. Such conflation of multiple locales within one landscape Pollock argued to be consolatory, a way of making sense of new places. As Roslak has discussed, for Élisée and Onésime Reclus global topographic correspondences were also part of their anarcho-communist view of world geography, of individual features that together made up a holistic and harmonious whole.<sup>91</sup> Throughout the *Nouvelle géographie universelle* series, Élisée Reclus made direct comparisons between geographically disparate places: for example, he compared the palms of Australia to those of South Africa; the contours of Africa reminded him of those of South America; the vegetation of Morocco corresponded best to that of Spain, and so forth.<sup>92</sup> For his brother, the Maures resembled Lebanon more than France; the warmth of Martinique comparable to the climates of Provence, Algeria, and Catalonia; and New Caledonia was most alike Corsica as an island – here a direct comparison between Melanesian and Mediterranean islands.<sup>93</sup>

[46] Nor was this unique to the Reclus or to the anarcho-communists. Just as tourist writers and physicians were to describe the Maures as a tropical promised land awaiting colonization, so too did they promote New Caledonia as an optimum, healthy landscape reminiscent of the Riviera, despite (or perhaps *because* of) its reputation as a French penal colony. In 1905, Dr Emile Vallet described New Caledonia's main island, L'Île des Pins, during the spring season as follows: "In this season, the island is a true earthly paradise; with its superb flowers, its luxuriant vegetation, one would think oneself transported to the middle of the Riviera."<sup>94</sup> He continued, claiming, "I could no better compare the climate and the hygienic conditions of this island than to Nice."<sup>95</sup> Geographic perceptions of Melanesia and of the Côte d'Azur here became mutually reinforcing.

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<sup>90</sup> Griselda Pollock, "On Not Seeing Provence: Van Gogh and the landscape of consolation," in: *Framing France: the Representation of Landscape in France, 1870-1914*, ed. Richard Thomson, Manchester 1998, 81-118.

<sup>91</sup> See the chapter, "Anarchist Geography and Landscape," in: Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 97-112.

<sup>92</sup> Élisée Reclus, *Australasia*, 372; *La Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes. Tome X: L'Afrique septentrionale (premier partie)*, Paris 1885, 3; and *La Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes. Tome XI: L'Afrique septentrionale (seconde partie)*, Paris 1886, 684, respectively.

<sup>93</sup> Onésime Reclus, *La France et ses colonies. Tome premier: En France*, Paris 1887, 391; *La France et ses colonies. Tome Second: Nos Colonies*, Paris 1889, 527 and 562, respectively.

<sup>94</sup> "À cette saison, l'île est un véritable paradis terrestre; avec ses fleurs superbes, sa végétation luxuriante, on se croirait transporté en pleine Riviera." Dr Émile Vallet, *La Colonisation française en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Paris 1905, 9. He introduced New Caledonia as "une des îles d'Océanie qui jouit du climat le plus régulier et le plus sain. Elle peut être comparée à Tahiti sous ce rapport," also 9.

<sup>95</sup> "Je ne puis mieux comparer le climat et les conditions d'hygiène de l'île qu'à Nice." Vallet, *La Colonisation française en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 10.

Vallet's book is also contemporaneous with Grave's novel, and is perhaps even more significant when we consider that New Caledonia ceased to be a penal colony in 1897. In light of this, is it not possible that these French authors, consciously or not, participated in a reimagining of New Caledonia – as a site of freedom rather than one of restriction and imprisonment?<sup>96</sup>

[47] But the memory of exile, voluntary or involuntary, was still fresh. Only a few years later, in an article of 1900 entitled, "Les colonies anarchistes," Reclus addressed critics who wished that all the anarchists could be shipped off to remote islands in Oceania, where they could enact their "utopias" in isolated colonies:

They encourage us to make new experiments in the land of Utopia, in the double hope of being rid of us and exposing us to the ridicule of new failures. The proposition was even made, rather seriously, to cart off all confessed anarchists for some island in Oceania, which they would give them as a gift, on the condition moreover that they would never attempt to leave it and that they would make do with the view of a war vessel pointing its cannons at their encampment.<sup>97</sup>

[48] Is a remote island in Oceania not the very location where Grave set his vision of the ideal in his novel, and one with a dramatic climax of a battle scene with warships firing canons at the Terrelibriens' encampment? Reclus continued, with wit and sarcasm,

Thank you very much, benevolent fellow citizens! We accept your "Prosperous Island" [*Ile Fortunée*] but on the condition of going there when it pleases us, and, in the meantime, we remain in the civilized world, and while avoiding your persecutions as best we can, we will continue our propaganda in your workshops, in your factories, on your estates, in your barracks and your schools; we will pursue our task there, where our field of work is the most vast, in large cities and the densely-populated countryside.<sup>98</sup>

[49] He concluded in that article: "In reality, those of our comrades who are still seduced by the idea of removing themselves from the world to some closed paradise continue to suffer from this illusion that anarchists constitute a part outside of society."<sup>99</sup> Reclus first witnessed failed attempts to establish voluntary anarchist colonies as early as

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<sup>96</sup> This intriguing observation was made by Robyn Roslak, in reading an earlier version of this paper and to whom I extend my thanks.

<sup>97</sup> "Ils nous encouragent à faire de nouvelles expériences en pays d'Utopie, dans le double espoir d'être débarrassés de nous et de nous exposer au ridicule de nouveaux insuccès. La proposition a même été faite assez sérieusement d'embarquer tous les anarchistes avoués pour une île quelconque de l'Océanie, dont on leur ferait cadeau, à condition du reste qu'ils ne tenteraient jamais d'en sortir et qu'ils s'accommoderaient de la vue d'un vaisseau de guerre braquant ses canons sur leur campement." Élisée Reclus, "Les colonies anarchistes," [extract in] *Les Temps nouveaux* (7-13 July 1900), unpaginated.

<sup>98</sup> "Grand merci, bienveillants concitoyens! Nous acceptons votre 'Ile Fortunée,' mais à la condition d'y aller quand il nous plaira, et, en attendant, nous restons dans le monde civilisé, et tout en évitant vos persécutions de notre mieux, nous continuerons notre propagande dans vos ateliers, dans vos usines, dans vos domaines, dans vos casernes et vos écoles; nous poursuivrons notre œuvre là où notre champ de travail est le plus vaste, dans les grandes cités et les campagnes peuplées." Reclus, "Les colonies anarchistes," unpaginated.

<sup>99</sup> He wrote, "En réalité, ceux de nos camarades qui sont encore séduits par l'idée de se retirer du monde dans quelque paradis fermé souffrent toujours de cette illusion que les anarchistes constituent un 'parti' en dehors de la société." Reclus, "Les colonies anarchistes," unpaginated.

the 1850s, in particular a case in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, during an extended voyage through the United States and South America.<sup>100</sup> He died in 1905, during the time Grave was writing *Terre Libre* as an imagined success story of an anarcho-communist colony and the neo-impressionists were happily settled in the Maures, full of anti-tourist sentiment – were these cases of "disillusionment," of comrades in imagined "closed paradises"?<sup>101</sup>

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### **Composing the *Terre Libre*: The Vision of the Maures in Neo-Impressionists' Paintings**

[50] The "free land" of the neo-impressionists is visualized in paintings featuring closed compositions by means of lush, encroaching foliage around the edges of the frame and traditional repoussage (Figs. 5-8), conveying private, personal spaces. There are very particular references to Signac's own experiences of the Saint-Tropez landscape in *Au temps d'harmonie* (Fig. 5). Ferretti-Bocquillon stated that two figures in the painting – the man in the left foreground reaching for a fig, and the man reading behind him – are none other than self-portraits, and the mother to their right modelled by his wife, Berthe Signac. Furthermore, Ferretti-Bocquillon argued that the painter and adjacent figure in the distance are again references to the couple.<sup>102</sup> Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie*, the visual narration of Kropotkin's ideal, is one in which he performs as a key participant. This was also noted by Roslak, and additionally she has stated that Cross's wife, Irma Cross née Clare, was the model for the figure in the dark dress in *L'Air du soir* (Fig. 6). Roslak concluded, "Both men thus associated their personal lives in coastal Provence with the anarchist ideals of social harmony, ample leisure and natural beauty."<sup>103</sup> In an undated letter from La Hune, his private villa in Saint-Tropez (therefore sometime after 1897, when he bought the property), Signac wrote to Grave, expressing his thanks after receiving the writer's latest work:

I have received your new book and thank you for this kind attention. I will read it in the shade of a pine tree, in front of the sea – and in the beauty of this decor, I naturally evoke the life of goodness and harmony for which you let us hope. One breathes freely in your book, as under this pine, by the breeze of the open sea.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Élisée Reclus*, Montreal and New York 1988, 39.

<sup>101</sup> If New Caledonia had ceased to be a penal colony in 1897, why write a novel based on a scenario that was no longer occurring? Was it simply for the narrative, a context for the children to enjoy, of adventures and distant lands, or an act of consolation for the author, an anarcho-communist who may have known comrades deported to Oceania during the 1890s and envisioned shipwrecks and new possibilities as alternatives for their intended fate? I continue to wrestle with these questions.

<sup>102</sup> Ferretti-Bocquillon in *Signac et Saint-Tropez, 1892-1913*, 56-57.

<sup>103</sup> Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 143.

<sup>104</sup> "J'ai reçu votre nouveau livre et vous remercie de cette gentille attention. Je vais le lire à l'ombre d'un pin, devant la mer - et dans la beauté de ce décor, j'évoque naturellement la vie de bonté et d'harmonie que vous nous laissez espérer. On respire librement dans votre livre, comme sous ce pin, par la brise du large." Undated letter from Signac to Grave, cited in Herbert and Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism II," 520-21. This letter, the Herberts indicate, was written from *La Hune*, and therefore the letter must date to 1897 or afterwards. In the future, I hope to discover



[51] Signac's letter is absolutely crucial for understanding the significance of the Maures as a site of political freedom. Signac informed Grave that the life he lives in Saint-Tropez is the present embodiment of the anarcho-communist ideal of good-will and harmony. Most importantly, he designated his immediate environment as *naturally* suited to this ideal. Its natural features – the pine, the sea, and its refreshing, stimulating breeze – are described as the perfect surroundings in which to read a work he predicted would be just as stimulating and refreshing. It is not surprising, then, that the Maures was envisioned and depicted as the perfect (or "accurate," as Kahn put it) setting for such a future society. In *Au temps d'harmonie*, the port of Saint-Tropez is visible to the left, and the massive pine tree around which people dance is a well-known feature of the region, the Bertaud pine. The sinuous coastline is none other than the Plage des Graniers, the small private beach where Signac lived. However, in *Au temps d'harmonie* geographical markers of the region have been removed or manipulated from their original setting and merged into one synthesized composition. The port, for example, would not have been visible from the Plage des Graniers, a physical impossibility from the layout of the town. This was not the first time Signac would make a composite of the Saint-Tropez landscape. Ferretti-Bocquillon has shown that Signac's *Femmes au puits* of 1893 (Musée d'Orsay) is not geographically accurate and combines into one image Saint-Tropez's Citadel, the hills of the Maures, and the port.<sup>105</sup> In this way, both *Au temps d'harmonie* and *Femmes au puits* make obvious references to the town and yet, by manipulating its local features into composite scenes, portray imagined landscapes much like Thomas's illustrations. Indeed, by fusing the town's most well-known features, I would suggest that Signac's paintings make Saint-Tropez *more* legible, *more* identifiable. In the same way that Thomas included botanical features specific to a tropical climate, so too has Signac included a fig tree and umbrella pines (*Pinus pinea*), both native to the Mediterranean.

[52] Significantly, in Thomas's cover illustration (Fig. 10), the central large palm is in fact neither strictly the typical date palm of the Mediterranean (*Phoenix dactylifera*) nor the coconut palm of the tropics: it is both, a composite, a hybrid. The curving base and location on sandy shores, specific to the coconut palm, and rough trunk, suggestive of a date palm, ascend to generalized fronds with no indication of either fruit.<sup>106</sup> Deliberate hybridization or an error based on ignorance of palm flora? Like Grave's perhaps-

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which book by Grave Signac was so keen to read.

<sup>105</sup> Ferretti-Bocquillon described *Femmes au puits*, opus 238 (1893) as follows: "Si le puits existe bel et bien, le point de vue adopté ici par Signac montre d'emblée les libertés qu'il prend vis-à-vis du motif. En réalité, la jetée est invisible de la colline et, pour les nécessités de la composition, l'artiste n'a pas hésité à l'inverser. À l'encontre de l'observation passionnée du paysage qui caractérise la démarche impressionniste, et de la précision minutieuse à laquelle Seurat soumet ses marines, Signac réalise ici pour la première fois une image synthétique du paysage tropézien: la colline et la Citadelle, la mer et la jetée du port, les collines des Maures et les contreforts de l'Esterel à l'horizon." *Signac et Saint-Tropez*, 32.

<sup>106</sup> I am indebted to the expertise of Dr Scott Zona of the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida International University, formerly of the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Miami, for his perceptive analyses of the palm species in the illustrations.

deliberate error in the island's longitude, Thomas's depiction serves as a useful way of making sense of anarcho-communist imaginings of a "free land," a hybrid space on sunny shores; her representation is a visual metaphor for how the whole of the geography of the Maures was conceptualized by geographers, tourists, physicians and modern artists.

[53] In relation to Reclus's concerns that "closed paradises" were unproductive and unsuccessful ventures conducted outside of social realities, I believe that the Maures landscape offered an optimum point of reconciliation for the neo-impressionists. It functioned as an imagined hybrid space that was widely promoted and represented in words and images as simultaneously French Mediterranean coastline and tropical island paradise. Quite simply, it could be both: an imagined "Ile Fortunée" on French soil. For Cross, Signac and van Rysselberghe, in this region everyone was a Terrelibrien and a French citizen.<sup>107</sup>

[54] I am not suggesting that the neo-impressionists' Maures landscapes are rendered directly as Melanesian, nor do they resemble the self-consciously "naïve" Tahitian paintings of Paul Gauguin or the tropicalized dreamscapes of Henri Rousseau. While Cross, Signac and van Rysselberghe certainly depicted, in their works and in their letters, the Maures as a site of isolation and cultivated elegance, they rarely painted it as a tropicalized landscape through overt references to botany – that is, with palm trees and other exotic flora as in Minot's or Smith's works (Figs. 14, 15) – and when they do such vegetation is usually confined to private, cultivated garden spaces (e.g. Cross, *Le Jardin du peintre à Saint-Clair [Garden of the Painter at Saint Clair]*, 1908, The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York). Intense luminosity, native vegetation (especially umbrella pines), serpentine coastlines and jagged outcroppings looking out to Mediterranean waters are more familiar sites of the Maures geography in their paintings. Above all, these are landscapes of light, of the intense and special light of the *pays du soleil* by chromo-luminarists. I argue therefore that the *light* is the link to the tropics, evoked through intense color harmonies and the sensation of heat. In the neo-impressionists' Maures landscapes (Figs. 5-8), sunlight and shade are conveyed predominantly by the juxtaposition of yellow and purple, which Silver has stated is the "chromatic signature of Côte d'Azur painting." He added,

[I]f one wants to convey the intense luminosity of the south, this pairing of colors provides the juxtaposition of lightest and darkest. Yet the violet-yellow contrast is first and foremost rhetorical: it is the device that tells us, instantly, that we are in the south (or in the tropics), if for no other reason than that it is by far the least common set of complementary colors.<sup>108</sup>

[55] Let us take the tropics out of its parentheses here. For contemporary critics, the unique rendering of light in these paintings produced blinding, exotic effects: Pierre

<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, as Fae Brauer discusses [in her article](#) in this Special Issue, this region was actually heavily militarized.

<sup>108</sup> Silver, *Making Paradise*, 37.

Valbranche, in a critique of the Salon des Indépendants of 1903, wrote scathingly of Cross:

Mr Cross shows better to what extent they [the scientific theories of neo-impressionism] prevent talent from developing. His pictures, enlarged excessively and executed as a mosaic [i.e. in large, squared touches of paint, resembling tesserae] would perhaps be well-placed on the exterior of a Negro mosque on the edges of Lake Chad, in the middle of central Africa. In an apartment or in an exhibition they tire the eyes too quickly, if they do not blind at the first stroke. Our French race, who conceives light not as a brutal sensation but as a harmony, could not appreciate this systematic violence.<sup>109</sup>

[56] As though in answer, Verhaeren would come to Cross's defence, writing in the preface of Cross's first solo exhibition in 1905: "They [Cross's landscapes] satisfy painters, thanks to their rich harmonies; they excite poets by the luxuriant and sumptuous vision they articulate. However, this abundance is not at all excessive. It remains light, charming and soft."<sup>110</sup> Verhaeren's emphasis on Cross's Maures landscapes as luxuriant, sumptuous, abundant and yet *not* overdone – not to the degree of "blinding" viewers or reminding them of distant African lands, as for Valbranche – suggests such paintings evoked to the contemporaneous viewer simultaneously French and foreign exotic lands, and ultimately mediated between them: imagined hybrids, like Thomas's palm.

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### Conclusion: The Artistic Colonization of the Maures

[57] Signac's project of creating grand paintings representing the *pays du soleil* was an ambitious one. His letter implied that he and Cross (and eventually Van Rysselberghe) could continue a revolutionary art begun by Giotto, Puvis, and Seurat. In 1905, Cross gave *L'Air du soir* to Signac, where it was hung in the dining room of La Hune.<sup>111</sup> Around the same time, Signac acquired Matisse's *Luxe, calme et volupté* (*Luxury, Calm and Pleasure*, 1904-1905, Musée d'Orsay) as well as a landscape of the Esterels by Louis Valtat, *Femmes au bord de la mer* (*Woman on the edge of the Sea*, c.1900, private collection) – all works of the Côte d'Azur.<sup>112</sup> *Au temps d'harmonie* itself would remain in

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<sup>109</sup> "M. Cross montre mieux à quel point elles empêchent le talent de se développer. Ses tableaux, agrandis démesurément et exécutés en mosaïque feraient peut-être bien à l'extérieur d'une mosquée nègre des bords du lac Tchad, en pleine Afrique centrale. Dans un appartement ou dans une exposition ils fatiguent trop vite les yeux qu'ils n'aveuglent pas du premier coup. Notre race française[,] qui conçoit la lumière non comme une sensation brutale mais comme une harmonie[,] ne saurait apprécier cette violence systématique." Pierre Valbranche, "Les Salons de 1903," in: *L'Occident* 33 (May 1903), 315-321, here 319. I am grateful to Anne Dymond for alerting me to this source.

<sup>110</sup> "Ils satisfont les peintres, grâce à leurs harmonies riches; ils exaltent les poètes par la vision luxuriante et somptueuse qu'il profèrent. Pourtant, cette abondance n'est nullement de la surcharge. Elle reste légère, charmante et douce." Émile Verhaeren, Letter-Preface in *Exposition Henri Edmond Cross*, Paris 1905, 7-8.

<sup>111</sup> Ferretti-Bocquillon in *Signac et Saint-Tropez*, 54.

<sup>112</sup> Cachin in *Méditerranée*, 63.

Signac's possession, lost to public view for decades. All of these works had been exhibited in Paris (and in some cases Brussels), ending up in Signac's private world of La Hune. To some this may appear a failure by the neo-impressionists to revolutionize society through their art, as Kropotkin advocated. To others it may indicate that the intentions of the images for a public forum gave way to privacy and insularity. I believe that, for Cross, Signac and Van Rysselberghe, the perceived exclusivity of the Maures region *enabled* their conception of their circle as an anarcho-communist colony. As a site imbued with the possibility of new beginnings, away from Paris,<sup>113</sup> the Maures' tropicity and remoteness as produced and promoted by tourist writers and geographers made it ripe for artistic colonization. The myth of the Maures as remote and island-like was a powerful one, but that myth was driven by a tourism that denied its own existence.<sup>114</sup>

[58] For these reasons I disagree with Hutton's reductive comments on the landscape of *Au temps d'harmonie*: "Even the environment has somehow sensed the new social harmony and transformed itself [...]. The utopians of the late 19th century were content also to eliminate gloom, storm, and natural disaster, so that the golden age appeared a world of green forests and eternal sunshine."<sup>115</sup> I would, in fact, argue that the environment depicted in Signac's painting, and all the meanings it resonated for him and his colleagues, did not follow but *predetermined* the expression of social harmony. As Signac asserted in his letter to Grave, his present lifestyle in Saint-Tropez *already* enacted the anarcho-communist ideal in his own mind. Similarly, just as Grave asserted in *Terre Libre*, Cross described his home as a place not to be found on maps, content to play the "*pionnier*" in Saint-Clair. Anti-tourist fantasies drove these perceptions, just as they affirmed and perpetuated their anarcho-communist beliefs, and recognizing them as such is not to undermine or dismiss the neo-impressionists' Maures works, the sincerity of their beliefs, or the Côte d'Azur generally as a site of "serious" work (Silver). Indeed they are vital to critically contextualizing all three.

[59] Yet we must also recognize that anti-tourist perceptions existed long before the 1890s when the neo-impressionists "discovered" the Maures and colonized its coastline. As early as the 1850s tourist writers conceived of this region as a "promised land" and new colony for those seeking rejuvenation, and such faith in the region was rooted in the genuine belief of the therapeutic properties of its natural amenities: its light, fresh air, sea water, and flora.<sup>116</sup> That Cross and Grave both came to this region for their health

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<sup>113</sup> For neo-impressionists' perceptions and experiences of Paris as a site of death, disease and poverty, particularly during the period of anarchist bombings and the subsequent trials, imprisonment and executions of the 1890s, see Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, and [Brauer's article](#) in this Special Issue.

<sup>114</sup> Woloshyn, "Marking out the Maures," 70.

<sup>115</sup> Hutton, *Solid*, 140.

<sup>116</sup> For more on the perceived natural health-giving properties of the Côte d'Azur see Woloshyn, "Aesthetic and Therapeutic Imprints" and "La Côte d'Azur."

indicates they too shared this belief, complementary – even intertwined – with tourist perceptions already in place.

[60] Viewed together, the individual works of the neo-impressionists in the Maures and Thomas's illustrations show the anarcho-communist ideal as a malleable, fluid projection of the free and the visionary, with a "vague and hypothetical character, which must always be kept in sight for the future society," according to Grave in his preface to the novel.<sup>117</sup> Quite simply, the anarcho-communist ideal future and its site of liberty, the *terre libre*, were in their very nature all-embracing. Grave explained his reasoning:

Because, when we explain how we understand its organization, we of course express predictions that we deduct from our comparative aspirations with criticism of what [already] exists; but these predictions are very personal to those who voice them; and their realization remains dependant upon the conditions of time, of milieu, of evolution, and above all, it has to harmonize with all the other personal conceptions arising each day.<sup>118</sup>

[61] Earlier in this article I stated that the over-reliance on the words "utopia" and "utopian" in analyses of neo-impressionist landscapes of the Maures is not a matter of lazy vocabulary; I would argue instead that it is due to the concept's slippery, indeterminate meaning. Left undefined, *deliberately*, by Grave and his anarcho-communist comrades, the "free land" was each to his own. Like the indeterminate and malleable identity of the landscape of the Maures, those of "utopia," of the "ideal," or of a "free land" have thrived on and invited multivalence, driving – rather than resisting (Dardel) – imaginative representations.

[62] In the case of *Terre Libre* Grave and Thomas chose to represent it through a specifically tropical lens. Landscape representations of the Maures, so unique to geographers, tourists and artists, bear striking resemblance to the tropicalized site of Thomas's and Grave's representations. It is, in fact, entirely possible that the Maures was the only location through which Grave and Thomas experienced the "tropics" (or in botanical gardens such as London's Kew Gardens or Paris's Jardin des Plantes<sup>119</sup>). In this sense, what denoted a "tropical landscape" and what denoted a "Côte d'Azur landscape" in visual and textual representations were equally loaded with cultural and conceptual

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<sup>117</sup> "[...] caractère vague et hypothétique, que doit toujours garder tout aperçu sur la société future." Grave, *Terre Libre*, 17.

<sup>118</sup> "Car, lorsque nous expliquons comment nous entendons son organisation, il est bien entendu que nous exprimons des prévisions que nous déduisons de nos aspirations comparées avec la critique de ce qui existe; mais que ces prévisions sont toutes personnelles à celui qui les émet; que leur réalisation reste subordonnée aux conditions de temps, de milieu, d'évolution, et par-dessus tout, il leur reste à s'harmoniser avec toutes les autres conceptions personnelles qui surgissent tous les jours." Grave, *Terre Libre*, 17-18.

<sup>119</sup> For an important discussion of the significance of Paris's Jardin des Plantes to the tropicalized paintings of Henri Rousseau, see Fae Brauer, "Wild Beasts and Tame Primates: 'Le Douanier' Rousseau's Dream of Darwin's Evolution," in: *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds. Barbara Lawson and Fae Brauer, Hanover 2009, 194-225.

baggage, and both perceived through a lens enabled by European colonialism.<sup>120</sup> Above all, the neo-impressionists' perception of the Maures and that of their political ideal entered into a complex dialogue, each informing and perpetuating the other through artistic production and lived experience, and as such solidifying the Maures' perceived *natural* suitability as a "free land" on French soil.

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<sup>120</sup> It is a further irony that Grave heavily criticized colonialism, as manifest in his *La Colonisation*, Paris 1912, which features a cover illustration that, although unsigned, is in keeping with Thomas's style. The cover, like that of *Terre Libre*, similarly features a large palm tree and a ship in the distance approaching an island. However, in this representation it is situated to the left-hand side, acting as a repoussoir device, and is foregrounded prominently by a large skull. *La Colonisation*, including cover illustration, has been fully digitized and is freely available through the Bibliothèque nationale's Gallica catalogue (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k81936b>).