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# ANGLO-AMERICAN MODERNITY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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NEGOTIATING WITH GAUGUIN'S 'SOLAR MYTH':  
ART, ECONOMY AND IDEOLOGY  
IN FORD MADDOX FORD'S PROVENCE

*Laura Colombino*

*Two contemporary readings*

A few months ago, I happened on "The Life of Paul Gauguin", a review which Geoff Dyer wrote in 1995 for *Modern Painters* and republished in his 1999 collection *Anglo-English Attitudes*. I realised with amazement that, after a century, the story of Gauguin going off to Tahiti could still linger undiminished in late twentieth-century imagination. Two points in Dyer's piece caught my attention. Firstly, the image of Gauguin's journey "to the ends of the earth", which "gives such literal expression to the idea of someone going to the edge, pushing himself as far as possible" and, through this "massive gamble" claiming his "right to dare all". Secondly, Gauguin's search for the primitivist myth, "something", in his own words quoted by Dyer, "indescribably ancient, august, religious in the rhythm of their gestures, in their extraordinary immobility" (1999: 123, 127). An experience which is best expressed by D.H. Lawrence in a letter recounting a similar response to the Pacific coast of Mexico, and which certainly evokes Gauguin's art:

It's very like the South Seas Isles in quality [...] a queer bay with tropical huts and natives very like islanders, soft, dark, some almost black, and handsome. That Pacific blue-black in the eyes and hair, fathomless, timeless. They don't know the meaning of time. And they *can't* care. All the walls and nooks of our time-enclosure are down for them. Their eternity is vast, they can't care at all. Their blue-black eyes... I have learnt

something from them. The vastness of Pacific time, unhistoried, undivided. (Dyer 1999: 128)

Insofar as coming across Dyer's review was for me a somehow reassuring experience, involving the excitement produced by a passion for the modernist myth of originality<sup>1</sup> which I shared – but which, as a living philosophy, I had thought of as long over and done with in contemporary culture, it was for me just as disquieting to bump into another recent, but this time much more disenchanted, reading of Gauguin's myth by J.G. Ballard:

I often think that the most radical thing one can do is to *deliberately* choose the bourgeois life – *get* that house in the suburbs, the job with the insurance company or the bank, wear a blue suit and a white shirt and a tie and have one's hair cut short, buy the right fabrics and furnishings, and pick one's friends according to the degree to which they fit into all the bourgeois standards. Actually *go for* the complete bourgeois life – do it without ever smiling; do it without ever winking. In a way, that may be the late 20th century's equivalent of Gauguin going off to Tahiti – it's possible! (1984: 9)

There is no way out of our globalised and 'bourgeoisified' world, Ballard contends, no trajectory in space and time which can make a difference between here and there, before and after. "Travel is the last fantasy the 20th century left us", he writes in *Millennium People*, "the delusion that going somewhere helps you reinvent yourself". "All the upgrades in existence" he adds, "lead to the same airports and resort hotels, the same pina colada bullshit". "There's nowhere to go. The planet is full. You might as well stay at home" (2004: 54-55). Ballard's philosophy is that if you cannot beat the market system, your only option is to join it, even to the extreme of compliance. But the chance of a rebellion to the capitalist system is still open for him, because there is an extant place where defiance might be cultivated and where truth escapes the massive fiction we live in: that place is inside our heads.

<sup>1</sup> Of course one should also investigate the extent to which Gauguin's encounter with the South Seas was affected by his cultural biases and imperial adventurism. But this will not be discussed here, inasmuch as my attention will be focused only on others' interpretations of his myth.

Commenting on the fate of the modernist myth of originality, Hal Foster contends that in our global economy the postulation of a pure outside is almost impossible. This does not imply a premature totalization of our world system, but recognises the need to conceive both identity and otherness “as immanent relations rather than transcendental events”. In other words, as implying a constant work of negotiation between opposing categories: “Only recently”, he argues, “have postcolonial artists and critics pushed practice and theory from binary structures of otherness to relational models of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones” (1999: 177). And here I finally come to Ford, for, as I will argue, his *Provence*, especially as it is described in his novels *The Rash Act* (1933) and *Henry for Hugh* (1934) but also in *Provence. From Minstrels to the Machine* (1935), is precisely this sort of threshold zone, somehow at the crossroads between Dyer and Ballard’s divergent perspectives, in that it shares on the one hand the search for full humanity and Gauguin’s myth of primitive authenticity and on the other hand the unifying and standardising ideology of the capitalist world.

*Utopia versus contemporary history and mass society*

In *Provence* Ford contends that the French region is essentially a frame of mind rather than a geographically well-defined place. This is not just because you might find some of the qualities it stands for also in other parts of the world – from “New York” to “London” (1938: 80) – or because, according to a typically impressionist displacement of perception, one may better focus *Provence* at a great distance while, for example, “writing in the garret of a gloomy, fog-filled, undignified old London House” (1938: 79). What makes it a mental place is, first and foremost, the fact that its virtues – traditional food and means of production,<sup>2</sup> the crafts, the continuum between technique and art, the peaceful *joie de vivre* – have to be carefully sought on the miscellaneous ground of the region, by tracing a network of virtuous gastronomic, aesthetic and economic

<sup>2</sup> On Ford’s proposal for the return to self-sufficient farming as opposed to modern mass production see Neilson (2002).

itineraries, which the traveller is asked to mentally abstract from the wider map of a Provence already tainted by mass culture and tourism. And this by tracking, as the case may be, the hidden strongholds of the native, authentic *cuisine* with *foie gras* (besieged by the evil Northern butter and pork-fat invaders!) or by leaving out of this ideal map “the parasitic bathing towns of the *Cote d’Azur*”, which, though “historically and geographically” located in Provence, are alien to its true nature: “To say that these little cities of rather mechanical and monotonous pleasure are not true Provence would be as unjust to them as it would be unjust to Provence to include them” (94).

Intermittently in *Provence*, more consistently in *The Rash Act* and *Henry for Hugh*, this region is represented as a “Solar Myth” (1934: 21) with its Mediterranean landscape closely evoking the South Seas. The tropical version of this ideal had been “a widespread imaginative possession of all in the trenches who were cold, tired and terrified” (Fussell 1980: 5), prompting Henry Major Tomlinson to sail off to the South Seas in 1923 (an event he records the following year in his travel book *Tidemarks*) and Edward Marsh to juxtapose, in his *Rupert Brooke: A Memoir* (1918), the image of the poet swimming in the warm Tahiti waters and that of his death on a hospital ship off Gallipoli (Fussell 1980: 7-8). Along the same lines, after the war the Mediterranean too was drawn into this new heliophilia. This solar myth included, and sometimes mixed, aesthetic practices (such as the hedonistic fashion of nude sunbathing) and therapeutic concerns (the sun being prescribed at the time as a remedy for both tuberculosis and children’s vitamin-deficiency).<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, the *provençal* sunshine which literally fills Ford’s two novels of the thirties is associated with artistic and pictorial features as well as (but perhaps more loosely) with the hero’s convalescence.

Ford, however, senses that history has partly breached and contaminated this prevalent myth of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed this ideal, as it emerges from *Provence*, is a thing of bits and pieces scattered over the map of Southern France and beyond, picked here and there to weave a web of itineraries which make up a guided tour as well as a safety net – alas how fragile! – for a world precipitating towards the apocalypse of the

<sup>3</sup> In 1923 the Swiss physician Auguste Rollier devoted his influential treatise *Heliotherapy* to this subject. See Fussell (1980: 138).

imminent Second World War.<sup>4</sup> It is no accident that, as a guidebook, *Provence* is first and foremost an attempt at directing the tourists to the production of correct impressions – both those which leave an imprint on their minds and those which they themselves are bound to produce on the locals. And by ‘correct’ I mean fostering mutual comprehension and respect. For example, advising on the amount of gratuities a waiter should be given, Ford suggests the following:

And above all, give your tip with the air that you are the one that accepts favours. Remember that he has as much right as you to be there – and more. Remember that he is as honest a man as you, with as engaging a family to support and that, the human cosmogony being what it is, he has as much right to his tip as you to the emoluments that by force or guile you extract from the universe – and then more. And remember above all that, whilst you are a mere transitory nuisance, he is carrying on for his town the great work of civilization since for you, and how many others, he can and, if decently treated, will infinitely soothe your way through life and his town. (1938: 38)

Inspired by Ford the writer-“ambassador”, the tourist will turn into a sort of amateur diplomat “influenc[ing] the policy of his home country towards the country he is visiting” (1938: 59) at a time of harsh international confrontations. Impressions, which have always been a malleable instrument for Ford, now come to represent the flimsy, hypersensitive, almost touchy surface between domestic and foreign.

Another significant aspect of *Provence* is that, as in a truly modern tourist guide where, in Roland Barthes’s words, “the number of bathrooms and forks indicating good restaurants vies with that of ‘artistic curiosities’” (2000: 76) – cafés feature as equal to ateliers and recipes compete with paintings by Cézanne. Yet Ford’s cultural mixture is not con-

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the solar myth Ford shares with other contemporary writers may be included in the more general “desperate” “search for a mythology that could somehow straighten society out in such troubled times”: Ezra Pound and William Carlos William propounded the ideal of machine rationality and efficiency; the Bauhaus advocated “rational order” “for socially useful goals”; surrealism, constructivism and socialist realism mythologized the proletariat; Picasso plundered the universe of the African primitive (Harvey 1989: 34, 31).

ceived in the anything-goes logic of Postmodern culture but more in tune with the historical materialism Walter Benjamin describes in his 1937 essay entitled “Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian” (2002: 261). In spite of the apparent differences between the two, for Ford as for Benjamin artistic production at all levels belongs to a cultural continuum where art is part and parcel of social and economic life:

The point is that in Provence the arts live, if hidden from Missouri then in the hearts of people. And you cannot call it either a proletariat art nor one induced from above, since it is the product of peasant proprietors – and not of peasant proprietors only. The sons of not too rich newspaper proprietors paint pictures; those of millionaire tanners write epics; naval officers paint water-colours from Cap Sète to Annam...and proud of it!...That’s the point.

I do not say that the production of masterpieces is enormous; but the presence of the celluloid doll before the three-thousand-year descended *saintons* is a proof of how intimately the native arts enter into the real life of the people even to-day. They are a part of life as unnoticed as the daily bread, the prayers, the games of boules, the furniture and the Sunday bull-fights. (Ford 1938: 237)

High and low are not regarded as separate, symptomatic of different social strata and ideologies. They belong to the same homogeneous cultural reality, the small-proprietor model implying no harsh severance between spiritless manual work and algid intellectual products, technique and art. But also, and most interestingly, no class distinction between workers and capitalists with all the social tensions such separation entails. The philosophy of the small agricultural producer somehow counteracts the idea, so paramount in 1930s Marxist theories, of history and society as a dialectic reality of groups in conflict, with deriving waves of thought overtaking each other. Ford’s *provençal* myth, therefore, becomes the antidote both to this class model propounded by the contemporary philosophy of evolutionary historicism and to the reality of a decade which, in Frederic Jameson’s words, “projected a tangible model of the antagonism of the various classes toward each other, both within the individual nation-states and on the international scene as well – a model as stark as the Popular Front or the Spanish Civil War” (1971: xvii).

*From eternity to impotent suspension*

Now, let us focus on *The Rash Act* and *Henry for Hugh*. If Henry's *provençal* Villa Niké is perceived as an appendix to Gauguin's<sup>5</sup> South Seas it is because it represents a spatio-temporal dimension where history, which is rapidly moving towards the inevitable war, seems, at best, suspended and, at worst, slowed down. But there is a major difference between the Tahitian original myth and its *provençal* offspring. The solar hopes of ripeness and full humanity exemplified, for example, by Lawrence's short story *Sun* (1926) are partly negated, for Ford, by the imminent catastrophe. This is why Henry's *provençal* reign involves not so much Lawrence's idea of eternity as that of impotent suspension. Let me just remind you that the story recounted in these novels is that of Henry, a bankrupt aspiring suicide, who adopts the new identity – forced on him by converging circumstances – of the rich, crossed-in-love suicidal Hugh. But in the other's shoes, he finds his experiences and encounters unexpectedly and uncannily analogous to those of his previous life. And this includes the fact that, if Hugh was unable to reach the South Seas, Henry himself, for the repetition automatism by which his life seems to be governed, is faced with the same impossibility.

It is almost superfluous to recall how this resembles the well-known dream experience of 'moving immobility': in spite of all our frenetic activity we are stuck in the same place. What this Sisyphus-like condemnation to stasis through the infinite repetition of the same act adds up to, metaphorically, is Ford's perception of the 1930s as an age characterised essentially by economic and ethical impotence. Henry Martin incarnates a period whose "chief characteristic is want of courage – physical and moral", incapable, as he is, to resolve "either to spend money, commit suicide or" do "anything else" (Ford 1965: 210) which may represent a final solution to his problems. No Gauguin-like massive gamble is any longer conceivable for him, no decision, however momentous, is "enough to carry him through to the end of his destiny" (Dyer 1999: 122).

This idea of impotent suspension is also evident in the image of the women characters revolving around Henry. They may well remind us, in some respects, of the statuesque stillness and the dark but often radiant

<sup>5</sup> The painter is mentioned twice in *Henry for Hugh* (71, 119).

complexion of Gauguin's natives – take the instance of Eudoxie whose “mahogany” “skin” is like a “transparent surface contain[ing] luminous blood” (1982: 307) – as well as, in general, the exoticism of Gauguin's Tahiti, but they deliberately share none of the profound significations of his paintings. Consider, in this respect, how the image of Becquerel, as it emerges from the following highly pictorial description, is, in a way, the very reverse of Gauguin's *Te Tamari No Atua* or *Nativity* (1896):

Jeanne Becquerel was sleeping, uncovered, on her bed that was bluish because of the dim light of the dawn and the moon. Her left hand was across her chest and her right was extended above her head. She was moaning a little in her sleep. She lay flat in bed, her hair spread over the pillow above her – like a South Sea island fan of perfumed fibre [...]. Nevertheless, until that moment Jeanne Becquerel had seemed to him as being entirely “static,” as the phrase is. And even at that moment he stood looking down at her asleep and could not believe that anything went on inside her – as if she had been of marble – warm and soft but still marble that neither grew nor felt. She seemed to him most typical in the hours after lunch, as if she were really fitted to be a denizon [*sic*] of a land where it was always afternoon. (1934: 105)

The details of the exact position of each hand and the representation of the sleeping and dreaming (as “moaning” suggests) figure, lying static in the dim light evoke the foreground of the canvas (with the reference to the South Seas working as proof positive of this association with Gauguin). Yet, the references to the absence of thought and oneiric content, and, for that matter, to the insensitiveness of that marble body unable to feel and, particularly, “grow” (and here the allusion to conception and pregnancy is a perfectly legitimate inference) appear as references, in reverse, to the painting's background theme of the nativity; a reversal which deprives Ford's image of the dimensions of mystery and sacredness present in the canvas and, at the same time, points to the issue of sterility or impotence which, as we have seen, is so paramount in Ford's vision of the 1930s.

Now, let me return to Dyer's analysis: Gauguin's women, he contends, “gaze out of the paintings as if they were staring into them, like ideal all-comprehending spectators who”, in a “self-circling movement”, “see them exactly as Gauguin intended” – namely, in the painter's own words, as “Animal figures rigid as statues” with their “dreaming eyes” like “the blurred surface of some unfathomable enigma” (1999: 126-127). But in

Ford's novels, the exotic timelessness of Henry's women does not entail the stratification of meaning pointed out by Dyer. In their all-knowing gaze, Henry grasps not so much the enigma of comprehending women spectators whose perception reflects his own, as the shallower "secret" of the lesbianism of these "beautiful, always gay, young women" (1934: 250). The homosexuality of Henry's harem girls cannot but unman his male and, in a broad sense, 'colonial'<sup>6</sup> gaze, revealing his sexual impotence, and, in so doing, somehow suggesting, by analogy, his moral, political and economic powerlessness as well.

So, the *virtuous circle* of reciprocity described by Dyer, whereby the woman sees herself seeing herself through the mediation of the painter's eye – the two subjects being in perfect agreement and both "all-knowing" – has given way to a bewildering *short circuit* of gazes which fails to convey any shared knowledge whatsoever. But then again, *Provence* itself is represented in these novels as an entrapping catoptric theatre, where we are captured in the baffling kaleidoscope of Henry's memories and experiences.

#### *Myth as delusion*

Interestingly, through this prismatic vision, Ford also questions the modernist myth of the uniqueness and purity of avant-garde vision, testifying to the broad cultural – rather than merely aesthetic – concerns already seen in operation in *Provence*. The way he conveys this idea is by presenting art and mass society as being, in *Provence*'s 'border zone', like reflections of a purely optical device:

To them he must have been like a God... He seemed still to stand astride his fabulous grip that was a bursting purse of Fortunatus. He stood there chucking largesse to everyone who came in sight – eight thousand francs to a weeping *poule*; a Pheidias Venus to the British Museum; a fifty pound

<sup>6</sup> That is, to the extent this *provençal* microcosm of which Henry is, in a way, the king, resonates with allusions to imperial domains and vaguely exotic women: from the oriental "Cochin-Saigon", "the colony" which Jeanne Becquerel "had once decorated" (1934: 118), through the representation of Villa Niké as a sort of harem, to the insistent associations with, precisely, the South Seas.

note to the waiter; two Simone Martinis, an El Greco, and a Van Gogh to the National Gallery; twenty thousand-pound notes to him, Henry Martin; the three remaining best second folios to the British Museum Reading Room; an infinite number of magnums of Perrier Jouet to Gloria Malström's husband, Mr. Bumblecumpspumpje Bumblepuppy; — the scissors of Cleopatra, the tiara of the Empress Eugénie, two Rolls Royce's, a Monckton de luxe, a private travelling orchestra, and a yacht to Gloria Malmström — and fabulous collections that were to bear her name in the great museums of the world [...] He stood astride his grip and threw miraculous objects to whoever would catch them [...] Chucked them, he would have said... (1934: 22)

Let us consider how, in this passage, Ford makes the two polarities of art and consumerism react: firstly, he reproduces them in an endless series of items; then he piles them up and packs them into the spring of the *écriture*, so that, when pressure is carried to the limit, the text may release them in a sort of Catherine wheel. Perceived at a great distance, the overall effect radiating from the text is that of a prism refracting light in all directions and, in so doing, suitably rendering, on the iconic level, the idea of the Solar Myth incarnated by Hugh. But if the text is examined at very close range, there emerge in relief the innumerable folds of the page where an indefatigable tension is at work: that between the “permanent things” — namely the collector's items intended, according to a Jamesian motif, for the eternity of the museum — and the transitory, “fugitive” (1982: 144) consumer pleasures which seem to taint that aesthetic ideal.

But the most significant aspect of the negotiation between utopia and consumerism lies in that illusive visuality Ford detects not just within the myth's confines but also in the world out there, where advertising and cinematography are starting to shape nothing less than — what an outstanding anticipation on Ford's part! — our modern society of the spectacle. Take the following passage from *Henry for Hugh* where a film director suggests how to end the promotional advertisement for Henry's Monckton cars:

“We've been explaining to Mademoiselle,” Mr. Crape interrupted gently, “that we propose to end the picture with a series of close-ups showing Monckton cars in some of the remotest parts of the globe...”

“Speeding,” Mr. Old-Smith interrupted him in turn, “from Greenland's icy mountains at dawn to sunset over India's coral strands [...]with

of course oodles of heathens whose untutored minds..."

"You would," Henry Martin said, astonishingly to himself, "use Miss Becquerel – my other secretary for – [*sic*] Far Eastern scenes – amongst the palm groves here..."

Mr. Old-Smith said that Mahdamahsell here had told them that already. It appeared that the other lady had gorgeous robes and gadgets and would dance Siamese fashion better than a native... (1934: 236).

The references to "some of the remotest parts of the world" and the "Far Eastern scenes" cannot but recall, by analogy, the South Seas for which Hugh and Henry vainly try to sail. What the return of the idea of primitivism in an advertisement ("oodles of heathens whose untutored mind") seems to add up to is that the only primitive experience we are allowed to attain in the contemporary world is the simulated, mystifying one of cinematographic fiction, where a movie "*vedette*" (172) can "dance Siamese fashion better than a native". What is cultivated beyond the confines of *Provence*, Ford seems to suggest, is a symbolic reality as unreal as that in which Henry seeks refuge.

One should also consider, in this respect, the footage representing the initial phases of car production, which involves the exploitation both of raw materials and human beings:

He proposed to make the film run as you might say from pig-iron to paradises [...] The first picture would show assembled all the raw metal that went into the making of the Monckton car [...] Steel, rubber, nickel, alloys, fine woods, and so on [...]. He trusted that this exposition was not overtiring for Mr. Smith [...] Then, to give an idea of the vast distances these products came from, they would have close-ups of the natives tapping rubber trees in the forests of Para, Spaniards getting out pig-iron, natives toiling in copper mines at the Cape or in Montana; the molten pig-iron pouring into the sand-troughs [...] Say at Middlesborough [...] A fine effect you could get of that [...] All that would give an idea of the vast number of workers that were benefited by the manufacture of automobiles [...] Then you would show the thousands of workers pouring out of the Smithville works: some close-ups again of the more decorative parts of the works themselves, showing the consideration that the family had always shown for the mental development of their employees [...] the famous reading-room, the debating hall, the schools, swimming pools, sport grounds...and then the directorial offices to symbolise the brains that made all these things possible [...] (225-226)

The paternalistic concern for the “mental development” of the labour force evokes the economic phenomenon of ‘welfare capitalism’ and Fordism in the United States. In the 1920s, many large American corporations, impelled by legitimacy problems, began to build houses, schools and libraries for their employees on a wide scale, and provide medical and legal services. Rational capitalists, starting with Henry Ford (whose thriving car industry, just like Hugh’s, managed, almost alone, to survive in the years of the Depression), had realised that this was the only way to create favourable opinions, together with the fact that a better educated work force would be a more efficient one. As Harvey reminds us, this patronising attitude of contemporary American industry which F. M. Ford so intelligently grasps was meant to shape an ideal worker-consumer:

Questions of sexuality, the family, forms of moral coercion, of consumerism, and of state action were, in Gramsci’s view, all bound up with the search to forge a particular kind of worker ‘suited to the new type of work and productive process.’ Yet, even two decades after Ford’s opening gambit, Gramsci judged that ‘this elaboration is still only in its initial phase and therefore (apparently) idyllic.’ [...] In 1916 Ford sent an army of social workers into the homes of his ‘privileged’ (and largely immigrant) workers to ensure that the ‘new man’ of mass production had the right kind of moral probity, family life, and capacity for prudent (i.e. non-alcoholic) and ‘rational’ consumption to live up to corporate needs and expectations. The experiment did not last long, but its very existence was a prescient signal of the deep social, psychological, and political problems that Fordism was to pose. (Harvey 1989: 126)

Now, what strikes me as central to F.M. Ford’s description of the Monckton car’s assembly-line (a mode of production first used by H. Ford) is that the image of the “natives” as having “benefited” from the manufacturing process is as patently artificial as that which wanted them to remain as idyllic “heathens” among “coral strands” and “palm groves”: in that case the mystification was aesthetic, while here it is economic. In other words, what we are faced with in these two passages is the reversal of both primitivist and productivist modernisms. The former was the fantasy according to which, in Foster’s words, “the other, usually assumed to be of color, has special access to primary psychic and social processes from which the white subject is somehow blocked”. The latter is the imaginary representation of the proletariat “as primitive”: “both negatively (the

mass as primal horde) and positively (the proletariat as tribal collective)" (Foster 1999: 175, 276). What Ford suggests, therefore, is the fictional quality of such enchanted aesthetic, social and productivist relationships, or in other words, the fact that, with the appropriation (falsification) of the pictorial ideal of the origin by the industries of the visual, Gauguin's myth is turning into what Barthes dubs as 'mythology'. By the term he defines an ideological mystification which does not deny reality but purifies it through the language of the image so that the world may appear harmonious and reassuring, deprived of the social conflict which, instead, as we have seen, was so paramount in the thirties (prompting Ford to turn to the model of the small agricultural producer).

But what does all this add up to in relation to Gauguin 'going to the edge'? Ford senses that cinema and advertising have changed the relation between spatial perception and bodily motion. Film viewing now implies the possibility for the modern gaze to wonder through space and consume it as a vast commodity: without moving from his standpoint in Provence, Henry can travel to the end of the earth through his exotic women, half Gauguin-like, half cinema "*vedette[s]*", who, when observed, give Henry the impression he is "looking at a film that only just held his sympathy" (1934: 172). Cinematography has turned the voyage into mental and spectatorial tourism, mobility into immobility.

### *Conclusion*

I think we can maintain that, in the thirties, Ford is poised between myth and history. On the one hand, he nourishes hopes of social renewal and regeneration – which he sees as available through a glimpse at the Southern French model with its socially functional art and its old, but constantly revitalised, collective artistic practice. On the other hand, he realises that the modern world does not so readily lend itself to such restructuring. Partly because, outside the confines of Provence, it offers no models of social harmony but tends, instead, to promote irresponsibly "an increasing occultation of the real class structure" (Jameson 1971: xvii). Partly because the mystifying techniques of the new media, and particularly advertising, seem to sunder the myth of a really primitive place which may function as a regenerating source, as something quite other we may turn to. Modern man appears as hopelessly entrapped in a

condition of suspension. Therefore, as Ford the utopian has an ambassadorial mission to fulfil in spreading the *provençal* frame of mind, so (only more so) Ford the historian of the scopic regime of his time realises that, in the incipient society of the spectacle – with its dream world of artificial stimuli and experience – the idea, in Ballard’s words, “that going somewhere helps you reinvent yourself” can turn out to be nothing but a “delusion”.

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