



Historicising the Monstrous: Georges Bataille's 'Les écarts de la nature' (1930), Pronatalism and French Eugenics in the Interwar Period

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Each 'individual form,' Georges Bataille announced in 1930, 'is, to a certain degree, a monster.'¹ This uncomfortably anti-idealistic statement appeared in *'Les écarts de la nature'* ('The Deviations of Nature'), an essay starkly decorated with teratological illustrations displaying children suffering from various birth defects, written for the notorious and, perhaps unsurprisingly, short-lived avant-garde magazine, *Documents* (plate 1, plate 2 and plate 3). Published in Paris between 1929 and 1931, *Documents* was an interdisciplinary endeavour, comprising leading figures from the blossoming field of French ethnography, revered archaeologists and art historians, as well as a number of artists and writers recently ousted from André Breton's Surrealist group.² In the role of *secrétaire général* was Bataille himself, a decidedly slippery character in the Parisian avant-garde scene, working as a numismatist at the prestigious Bibliothèque nationale de France by day and writing transgressive pornographic novels by night.

Nuancing the deconstructionist reception of the journal's operation—an interpretative tradition inclined to abstract the transgression enacted to a linguistic register, far removed from the messy materiality of the lifeworld, and subsequently read it as an effort to enact a semiotic destabilisation—this essay resituates '*Les écarts de la nature*' within the visual culture of interwar France to reconsider the subversive gesture at play.³ And, once returned to such paradigmatic image economy, a different avant-garde strategy soon emerges. This is one that hinges not on an ability to displace signification but, on the contrary, on the widespread legibility of an anxiety-laced motif, radically repurposed by *Documents* to disruptive ends. Indeed, wrapped up in the inveterate axiom that France, plagued by plummeting birthrates, was on the verge of becoming depopulated, the image of the infant occupied charged territory in Third Republican France (1871–1940) and was extensively and repetitively disseminated in political as well as popular discourse. Subjecting a burdened motif to troubling teratological treatment, the journal's intervention into France's longstanding obsession with the child therefore deliberately agitated the political weight that this figure shouldered in discourse. Defying Third Republican ambitions to cement a regenerated and homogenised national self-image of strength, stability and progress, *Documents* unyieldingly unveiled a monstrously heterogeneous counter-portrayal of France and its *citoyens*.⁴

Detail from Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault, *Les Écarts de la nature, ou Recueil des principales monstruosités que la nature produit dans le genre animal*, 1775 (plate 3).

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The images accompanying Bataille's essay were reproduced from *Les Écarts de la nature, ou Recueil des principales monstruosités que la nature produit dans le genre animal*—a teratological treatise produced by Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault in 1775 (plate 1, plate 2 and plate 3). While long having been the subject of esoteric and

I Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault, *Les Écarts de la nature, ou Recueil des principales monstruosités que la nature produit dans le genre animal*, 1775. Coloured engraving illustrating Georges Bataille's essay 'Les écarts de la nature', *Documents*, no. 2, 1930, page 80. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



theological inquiries, by 'the eighteenth century,' Bataille explains, 'the interest in monsters could be attributed to an alleged scientific curiosity'.⁵ Indeed, under the label of 'teratology', derived from the Greek noun *téras*, meaning monster, this prevailing pursuit was fitted within a scientific framing, where it merged with embryology and investigations into the genesis of congenital anomalies, a field rapidly developing in the nineteenth century.⁶ In 1875, a Laboratoire de tératologie was established in France.⁷ Four years later, it was attached to the *École pratique des hautes études* by Jules Ferry—the Republican ideologue who, in the role of Minister of Education, had just commenced his now-famous secular reform of the French school system.⁸ Its director, Camille Darest, had made a splash with his 1877 tract on 'experimental teratology,' arguing that 'the causes producing monsters amongst viviparous animals and the human species' are not predetermined but 'the consequence of a developmental disturbance'.⁹ Indeed, after professing to have 'produced monsters'

by exposing chick embryos to various ‘external agents,’ Daresté concluded that ‘the different types of monstrosities’ arising correlated to the timing, intensity and duration of their exposure to ‘teratogenic causes’.¹⁰

In a France preoccupied with the impending doom of national decline, the language and theory of teratology soon emerged as an interest of degeneration theorists. Charles Féré’s 1894 *La famille névropathique: Théorie téralogique de l’hérédité, de la prédisposition morbide et de la dégénérescence* dedicated an entire chapter to ‘The Teratological Stigmata of Degeneracy’.¹¹ ‘The characteristics constituting the stigmata of degeneracy,’ he explained, ‘are teratologic malformations.’¹² Traversing allegedly



'monstrous' anomalies across the shapes of ears, crania, organs and bone structures, as well as the length of legs and fingers, Fétré turned to announce that even 'the appearance of erratic hair locks' can be explained by a similar 'developmental accident' to the embryo.¹³ Some three decades later, after defining 'teratology' as 'the science of [...] malformations, deformities, abnormalities, monstrosities,' François-Xavier Lesbre's 1927 *Traité de tératologie de l'Homme et des animaux domestiques*, illustrated with no less than 252 figures, framed tuberculosis, syphilis and alcoholism—perceived as the primary causes of degeneracy—as 'as forceful, teratogenic factors,' the 'toxins or microbes' of which threaten to disturb 'the development of the embryo'.¹⁴ As Michel Foucault notes in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), the emergence of modern medicine had distinguished itself by being 'regulated more in accordance with normality than



3 Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault, *Les Écarts de la nature, ou Recueil des principales monstruosités que la nature produit dans le genre animal*, 1775. Coloured engraving illustrating Georges Bataille's essay 'Les écarts de la nature', Documents, no. 2, 1930, page 83. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

with health'.¹⁵ 'The access of the medical gaze into the sick body,' he continues, was therefore not the result of a successive accumulation of expertise but rather 'of a recasting at the level of epistemic knowledge itself'.¹⁶

Posing as a helpful model through which, as Eric Hello writes, to 'highlight the mechanisms of retrogression,' teratology entered the popular press too.¹⁷ In a five-part article series on the topic published in 1926, one of France's major newspapers, *Le Petit Journal*, covered the development of teratological science, famous cases and moral questions around what might justify the termination of 'the living dead, the monsters promised to the jars of the Musée Dupuytren, the idiots, the cretins'.¹⁸ After deplored the 'chronic pains from which humanity suffers,' the conservative newspaper patriotically proclaimed: 'In our France, eldest daughter of Science, is it logical that the word incurable can still be uttered? Incurable is not French.'¹⁹

Identifying the Regnaults' 1775 publication as an early example of such supposedly sober and scientific probing of 'monstrousness,' Bataille framed their 'luxurious album' as a corroboration: 'in one way or another, in one period or another, mankind cannot remain indifferent to its monsters.'²⁰ The original album, held in Bataille's place of work, featured forty-two full-page engravings depicting creatures suffering from different bodily anomalies: a guineapig with two bodies, a horse with one eye, cats with two heads, a dog with six legs, a pair of conjoined deer, a pigeon with two beaks. It is therefore notable that while the Regnaults' teratological study featured an array of species—humans, both young and old, as well as animals—the six images selected for print in *Documents* were all of children, victims of infant mortality or stillborn. Shedding new light on such striking selection, this essay reassesses Bataille's critical gesture, untangling it against what Robert Nye dubs the 'master pathology' of *dégénérescence*—the perceived threat of French depopulation—where the motif of the child loomed as an ideologically charged sign.²¹ Indeed, formed within such paradigmatic persuasion, French eugenicists also anchored their rhetoric in this vexed terrain, promoting not the restriction of 'unwanted' births, as their European counterparts did, but instead the cultivation of 'healthy and beautiful babies'.²² Contextualising Bataille's subversive manoeuvre within the visual culture of interwar France, this essay frames 'Les écarts de la nature' as a critique of Third Republican pronatalism and the intertwined development of a particular French brand of eugenic thought, rattling national fears embedded in an encumbered motif and turning the political logic it upheld on its head. Indeed, all eugenics had managed to demonstrate with certainty, Bataille joyously announced alongside the teratological illustrations, was that each 'individual form,' uniformly unable to meet its inflated ideals, is 'a monster'.²³

Interpreting the Monstrous: A Historiographical Survey

Taken as an important, early articulation of Bataille's critique of Hegelian dialectics, 'Les écarts de la nature' is probably the text, after the dictionary-entry on 'Informé' ('Formless'), that has enjoyed the most prominent afterlife amongst his *Documents* contributions.²⁴ This attentiveness has been particularly noticeable among thinkers interested in inserting Bataille's oeuvre into a deconstructionist lineage. Of course, Derrida, too, rejected Hegel. 'If there were a definition of *différance*,' he announced in 1972, 'it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian dialectical synthesis wherever it operates'.²⁵ Moreover, as part of his displacement of Hegelian dialectics, Derrida had already in 1967 turned directly to the work of Bataille for theoretical support, thus laying the groundwork for what was to become a long-lasting deconstructionist reception of the latter's critical thought.²⁶

As we will see, although Derrida's 1967 interpretation of Bataille has since been revised, the deconstructionist identification of Bataille's teratological infants has remained prevalent in art historical scholarship.

Published five years after Bataille's death, in a special issue of the deconstructionist-adjacent magazine, L'Arc, Derrida's 1967 piece frames Bataillean thought as an antidote to the logocentricity of Aufhebung, or sublation. Indeed, unwilling to subscribe to any neatly idealising narratives, opting instead to expose irre recuperable expenditure and transgressive incompleteness at the heart of things, Bataille provided Derrida with an alternative terrain to Hegel's totalising schema of reason. Identifying Bataille's oeuvre as 'a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes, and wastes words,' thus enacting a 'transgression of meaning,' Derrida effectively mapped Bataillean excess onto a deconstructionist epistemology that, Bruce Baugh writes, 'falls outside' the structure of 'thesis-anti-thesis-synthesis,' achieving 'this "escape" through the mobility and undecidability of its terms.'²⁷

Four years later, as part of L'Arc's second posthumous homage to Bataille's work, Rodolphe Gasché turned his attention directly to the teratological children of 'Les écarts de la nature'. Working from Derrida's representation of Bataillean thought, Gasché explained that, 'having violently projected their meaning outside of themselves,' these 'monsters' reveal a 'dialectic of forms' that 'contrary to that of Hegel, is not a movement of synthesis'.²⁸ In the work of Bataille, Gasché explained, 'the dialectic, if we may call it such, describes an opposed movement,' marching in 'the direction of monsters, revealing nature as an exercise of deviations and as itself essentially discarded.'²⁹ 'This is why these monstrosities are "literally overwhelming,"' Gasché concluded: 'They make words wobble.'³⁰

Transferred to the field of visual representation, Denis Hollier endowed Bataille's teratological infants with a similar capacity to semiotically unsettle, this time pitting them against the taxonomic requirements of reproducibility. Whilst 'genus' is defined 'by reproduction,' he explained in *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (1984), monsters, posing as 'unexplainable discrepancies,' deviate 'from a genus and from that law of the genus – reproduction'.³¹ 'The very definition of monster is that it eludes reproduction,' Hollier continued: 'like Plato's simulacrum it is neither copy nor model'.³² Expanding on these destabilising effects in 1991, Hollier added that 'teratology (the deviation of nature)' is not only 'at the core' of Bataille's 'aesthetic,' but more, amounts to 'one of the decisive components of the aesthetic ideology of Documents'.³³ Thwarting 'the reproduction of similarity, the engendering of the same by the same,' monstrous deviation produces, across the pages of *Documents*, 'above all an anti-aesthetic of the untransposable (a resistance to aesthetic translation)': 'A failure of a failure'.³⁴

The incommunicable status of the monstrous was subsequently picked up by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman in *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (1995). Indeed, the 'theoretical richness' of the teratological illustrations reproduced in *Documents*, Didi-Huberman announced, resides in their ability to enact an 'excess in form'.³⁵ By bringing 'encroachment' to 'the foreground of the representation itself,' he continued, 'images lose their dignity as communicable signs,' posing in the end only as 'symptom'.³⁶ The radical result, Didi-Huberman thus concluded, unfolds throughout *Documents* as 'a veritable symptomology of forms' working to 'exceed iconographical thought'—a phenomenon labelled 'entirely heterogenous to signification'.³⁷

Two years later, in Yve-Alain Bois' and Rosalind Krauss' exhibition catalogue, *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997), Bataille's teratological motifs were once more placed in the service of deconstruction. 'The inevitable production of the monstrous,'

Krauss writes in the catalogue's concluding essay, 'is the force that creates nonlogical difference out of the categories that are constructed to manage difference logically'.³⁸ The other term, Krauss adds, 'to which Bataille turned to evoke this process of "deviance" was *informe*', the 'legacy' of which, she elaborates, is 'partly that of liberating our thinking from the semantic'.³⁹ Inserting *Documents*' 'monstrous' infants into her influential reading of Bataille's 'formless', Krauss thus makes them productive agents within the wider effort central to her work of the 1980s and 1990s, aiming to challenge the dominant interpretative traditions in art history and criticism by exposing their practices to theoretical frameworks and philosophical approaches, broadly termed postmodernist, that had begun to shake up academic and cultural discourse since the late 1960s.⁴⁰ A principal target, as is well known, was her modernist mentor, Clement Greenberg. The opus of Bataille, a theorist posthumously hailed by Derrida himself as a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*, was therefore perhaps a natural place to turn as part of such a mission.⁴¹ Indeed, working from Derrida's 1967 framing of Bataille, Krauss was able to enact a transfer of deconstructionist thought onto the realm of art historical interpretation and identify a postmodernist avant-garde whose criticality amounted to nothing less than a 'splitting apart of meaning from within'.⁴² Greenberg's modernist vision was far gone.

As evidenced by this brief survey, within the deconstructionist reception of his work, Bataille's treatment of the monstrous tends to be transposed to a textual terrain, identified as a gesture that undermines semiosis by exceeding the limits of the signifier. Bataillean transgression, as Derrida had put it in 1967, is a 'transgression of meaning'.⁴³ As such, while having triggered a significant critical reappraisal of Bataille and *Documents*, as well as of the avant-garde at large, this interpretative tradition has had decontextualising effects. Indeed, by transposing Bataillean excess into Derridean écriture and thus limiting its criticality to a linguistic domain, the subversive work of Bataille is ultimately dehistoricised, detached and displaced from the situated reality of lived experience. When Derrida 'changes the priorities of Bataille's project,' as noted by Allan Stoekl, 'the political and social conflict' is 'stripped' from his work.⁴⁴ It is therefore a theoretical manoeuvre, Patrick ffrench adds, that 'tends to efface the history of these ideas and concepts,' effectively producing a 'forgetting of the historical and existential dimensions'.⁴⁵ As Derrida himself admitted, he was interpreting 'Bataille against Bataille'.⁴⁶ Seeking to counter the ramifications of such remove and instead produce a historicised understanding of *Documents*' radical operation, this essay returns Bataille's 'monstrous' infants to the lifeworld of interwar France and reinterprets the mechanisms fuelling their avant-garde force.

Tracing the Image of the Infant in Third Republican France

To uncover the critical currency that the motif of the child carried in interwar France, it is necessary first to return to the cultural context out of which the Third Republic emerged. Having once been the most powerful and populous nation in Europe, nineteenth-century France faced steeply declining birthrates. In 1854, for the first time in France, the number of deaths exceeded that of births.⁴⁷ With nation-state rivalries intensifying, increasingly perturbed attention was therefore called to the assumed correlation between population size and military power. In 1868, the French writer Lucien Prévost-Paradol announced the stakes at hand: 'the number of Frenchmen must rise rapidly enough to maintain a certain equilibrium between our power and that of the other great nations of the world'.⁴⁸ Three years later, as France suffered a humiliating loss against Prussia in 1871, triggering the fall of the Second Empire and the instalment of the Third Republic, French fears were felt to

have been confirmed. It was broadly recognised that the formerly unquestioned power of France was being glaringly superseded. And it was going fast. Between 1850 and 1910, France grew by 3.4 million people, while Germany increased by some 25 million, 1.6 million of which had resulted from the 1871 annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.⁴⁹ In the Third Republic, therefore, haunted by what Virginie de Luca Barrusse describes as an ‘anxious, even anguished pensée démographique,’ the issue of depopulation—perceived as both a cause and a symptom of *dégénérescence*, and a particularly measurable manifestation at that—became a central theme in political as well as popular discourse.⁵⁰ Indeed, although demographic transition was a universal effect of modernisation, France’s stagnant population growth was interpreted as a national problem, as a marker of a specifically French fragility, causing concerning cracks in the Third Republican self-perception of orderly progress.⁵¹

Helped by a sea of literature emerging on the topic, as well as political support from the newly installed Republican regime, a powerful pronatalist movement took form.⁵² Marking its success, the Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française was launched in 1896, one year prior to Bataille’s birth in the French town of Billom.⁵³ Consisting of physicians, academicians and politicians, the Alliance worked as a lobby group—promoting legislation that would encourage births, such as financial relief for large families via tax reforms, allowances and marriage loans—as well as a publicity machine that organised public conferences and disseminated vast amounts of posters, pamphlets, postcards and other propaganda materials.⁵⁴ The discursive impact of these fervent campaigns is evidenced in the following observation from 1910: ‘One can hardly open a newspaper or a review without finding an article on depopulation, on its causes and its effects, and on the remedies which must be implemented.’⁵⁵ As the Alliance’s founding president and chief statistician of Paris, Jacques Bertillon, announced in his 1911 treatise, *La dépopulation de la France*, the nation’s shrinking birthrates is ‘a sickness absolutely unique to our country’ and, thus, an ‘agonising problem’ that ‘should occupy all French minds’.⁵⁶

In the years leading up to the First World War, as European rivalries sharpened once more, the causal link between France’s birthrate and military might was diligently reactivated as a trope in Third Republican discourse. ‘The danger is all the greater as the population of all other countries is growing very fast,’ a 1913 Alliance pamphlet declared: ‘every time that we give birth to 2 future soldiers, there are 3 born in Italy, 4 in Austria-Hungary, 5 in Germany!’⁵⁷ Decorating the cover of the publication, entitled *Comment sauver la France: si j’ai des enfants, l’avenir est à moi!*, was an illustration featuring Marianne, the embodiment of the French Republic, carrying a large red-white-and-blue flag in one hand and a young child in the other.

Positing the infant as a future soldier became a well-exercised trope in French pronatalist imagery. A postcard dating to the war years shows a soldier watering a bed of cabbages alongside his wife (plate 4). From the leafy legumes, smiling children crop up. The postcard thus refers to the myth, richly illustrated in French literature and visual culture, that babies are born from cabbage heads—a tale that, Gina Greene writes, ‘seems to speak to a fantasy, unique among the French, that the fertile soil itself was capable of producing crops of healthy infants.’⁵⁸ Above the cabbage-field, a sign reads: ‘Graine de Poilu’. Poilu being a nickname for First World War-soldiers, the French newborns are labelled as a soldier-seeds, grown and nurtured in national soil. Another postcard, dating to 1915, shows two scenes: the first depicts a group of French poilus in battle, the second illustrates a newborn child, emerging from a head of cabbage (plate 5). Alongside the infant, a text announces: ‘Alas, I arrive too late!’.



4 Lévy & ses fils, *Graine de poilu: Dans ce joli parterre tout en nous promenant, voilà ! comment, ma chère nous aurons un enfant!*, c. 1914–1918. Postcard. Photo: Ville de Paris/Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.

Despite victory in 1918, marked by the recuperation of Alsace-Lorraine, the destruction of war was experienced as a sharp blow to France.⁵⁹ Writing in *Le déclin d'Europe* (1920), Albert Demangeon, a professor in geography at the Sorbonne, described its devastated regions as 'good soil transformed into a desert, a wild steppe, a field of eruptions'.⁶⁰ A city that had suffered particularly heavy German bombardment was Reims, located in the north-east of France. The 1914 shelling of Notre-Dame de Reims, the city's historic cathedral, was conceived as a particularly barbarous act, described in French newspapers as an 'insult to our entire history'.⁶¹ Bataille, who had moved there with his parents around 1900, evoked the violent ruination of the city in his first ever published text, eponymously titled after its renowned church. The short yet impassioned pamphlet, written around 1918, during his short stint as a devout Catholic, recounted:

on September 19 shells tore through, killing children, women, and old people; fire crackled and raged from street to street; houses collapsed; people died, crushed by the rubble, burned alive. Then the Germans set the cathedral on fire. There is no more painful turmoil and confusion than when a city burns.⁶²

Mere weeks before the raid, Bataille, along with his mother and most of the civilian population, had been evacuated. His father, sick with syphilis, was left behind and died soon thereafter.⁶³ The traumatic events of his childhood in Reims were dramatically recalled in Bataille's first full-length novel, *Histoire de l'œil*, published in 1928.⁶⁴

With over 1.4 million diseased and more than one million permanently injured, France had not only suffered more casualties than their allies—birthrates had abruptly plunged too. Compared to prewar statistics, the number of children born in France

had halved by 1919.⁶⁵ Afflicted by an agonising mixture of the long-term perils of *dégénérescence* and the more explosive, short-term devastation of war, the depopulation of France seemed more palpable than ever. As Georges Clémenceau, France's wartime prime minister, declared during a parliamentary debate concerning the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles on 11 October 1919:

The treaty does not say that France must undertake to have children, but it is the first thing which ought to have been put in it. For if France turns her back on large families, one can put all the clauses one wants in a treaty, one can take all the guns of Germany, one can do whatever one likes. France will be lost because there will be no more Frenchmen.⁶⁶

5 *Hélas! J'arrive trop tard—Classe 1935*, c. 1915.
Postcard. Photo: Réseau
Canopé/Le Musée national de
l'Éducation.



Unanimously interpreted as a demographic disaster, the First World War thus energised and magnified the pronatalist dictate in French political discourse.⁶⁷ In September of 1919, the first annual conference on French birthrates was held and, at the start of 1920, a Conseil supérieur de la natalité was set up by the government. Acting as an advisory body, the Conseil was given the official task of researching 'all possible measures to combat depopulation and increase birthrates' as well as examining 'proposals for legislation'.⁶⁸ Responding to the Third Republic's fervently patriotic pronatalism, the pacifist-feminist Nelly Roussel, writing in *La Voix des Femmes*, demanded a birth strike. 'No more babies!' she announced, 'until we can be certain that we are not laboring and suffering in order to fertilize battlefields'.⁶⁹

Two months later, Roussel and other radical feminists' outrage notwithstanding, a draconian law criminalising the sale and promotion of contraceptives, as well as any incitement to abortion, was passed with an overwhelming majority of 521 votes against 55.⁷⁰

With little political opposition, pronatalist activity mushroomed. By 1922, in addition to the Alliance, eight national associations, sixty-two regional associations, and eleven federations of large families were active in France.⁷¹ Having been granted official patronage by President Raymond Poincaré in 1914, however, the Alliance remained the most powerful body. With memberships growing tenfold between 1920 and 1925, and a close relationship with the sitting government, the organisation continued to lobby for pronatalist legislation as well as produce and circulate propaganda, with the aim of creating—as their new monthly mouthpiece, *Natalité*, launched in 1925, declared—a vast current in public opinion in favour of pronatalist and family politics.⁷² Some posters circulated in numbers of up to two million copies.⁷³

The interwar years, however, experienced not only an expanded pronatalist effort. The rhetoric, too, had been ramped-up. In the period leading up to the war, the issue of depopulation was primarily recognised as a threat to France's relative power on the world stage. In the aftermath of the war, uniformly received as having worsened France's demographic prospects, the stakes

were dramatically raised. In a shell-shocked France, sluggish birthrates signalled not merely deteriorating military potency but—much worse—an existential threat.⁷⁴ ‘France,’ a 1924 Alliance pamphlet declared, ‘is confronted today with this Shakespearian dilemma: “to be or not to be”’.⁷⁵ Written by one of the Alliance’s founding members, Dr Eugène Ledoux, the pamphlet went on to make a dystopian forecast for the future of France. Having had a population of 39 million in 1922, France’s size will—at current rates—diminish to 35 million by 1940. In 1965, it will have shrunk to 25 million. France, he therefore concluded, was about to ‘slowly sink into nothingness’.⁷⁶

Historian Roxanne Panchasi suggests futurity as a particularly effective category of analysis for interwar France—a society where, she writes, ‘anxieties and hopes for “the future” shaped concerns of the present’.⁷⁷ In this ‘culture of anticipation,’ Panchasi explains, representations of such speculative futures expressed ‘a kind of cultural “premourning,”’ a nostalgic longing for French values and cultural phenomena that had not yet disappeared.⁷⁸ To exemplify, she lists forward-looking trends in design and urban planning, prophecies of the next war, visions of Esperanto as a future language and so on. Another candidate for this list, not discussed by Panchasi, is, I suggest, the friction-fuelled discursive space that children came to occupy in French interwar culture, acting as an embodied site onto which an array of anguished anticipations for the future of France could be projected and negotiated in the present. As we have seen, the future tense was frequently employed in the prevailing pronatalist climate. Already in 1919, setting the tone for the interwar years to come, Clémenceau had declared: ‘France will be lost because there will be no more Frenchmen’.⁷⁹ Five years later, Dr Ledoux predicted that France’s Shakespearian dilemma would end a tragedy: ‘France will soon no longer be France’.⁸⁰

This formula operated visually too. In the profusion of pronatalist imagery, the motif of the child was repeatedly mobilised to visualise, in Panchasi’s words, ‘anxieties and hopes for “the future”,’ and thus to premourn a national self-image (that had not yet disappeared).⁸¹ An early example of this visual manoeuvre is an Alliance poster dating to 1920, featuring a group of six French newborns: rosy-cheeked and smiling, neatly wrapped in white fabric (plate 6). The background, covering the top of the poster, is dark blue. A slab of bright red colour envelops its base. No longer identified as a ‘graine de poilu’—the propagation of which is needed to defend the French flag and its military power—the materiality of child instead merges into and becomes the tricolore itself. In its interwar articulation, further weight had thus been added to the familiar pronatalist motif. The child, as an image and an idea, embodied not merely a future soldier, but the future of France itself. In bold type font, the poster reads: ‘WITHOUT CHILDREN TODAY, NO FRANCE TOMORROW!’⁸²

Another iteration of this interwar operation, presenting the image of the child as an embodied prognosis of the nation’s future, can be found in a particular type of well-disseminated demographic illustrations, visualising national birthrate statistics through differently sized infants.⁸³ The more children born, the larger the body of the illustrated infant. The motif of the child thus amounts to an allegory of sorts, a surface onto which anxious anticipations could be directly mapped. As seen in the comparative row of international infants gracing Paul Haury’s *La vie ou la mort de la France*—winner of the 1923 Alliance nationale Prix Michelin for best written piece on the depopulation issue—the allegorical representation of the future of France, stunted by dreadful demographic statistics, materialised as a puny child (plate 7 and plate 8). ‘France of Louis XIV,’ Haury explained, ‘was the most populous in Europe.’⁸⁴ ‘We no longer have this power,’ he continued: ‘the loss has cost us and is still costing us very expensively’.⁸⁵ The French infant is by far the smallest, reaching only the

6 Jean Droit, *Sans enfants aujourd'hui, plus de France demain!*, 1920. Poster for Alliance Nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française. Photo: Ville de Paris/Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.



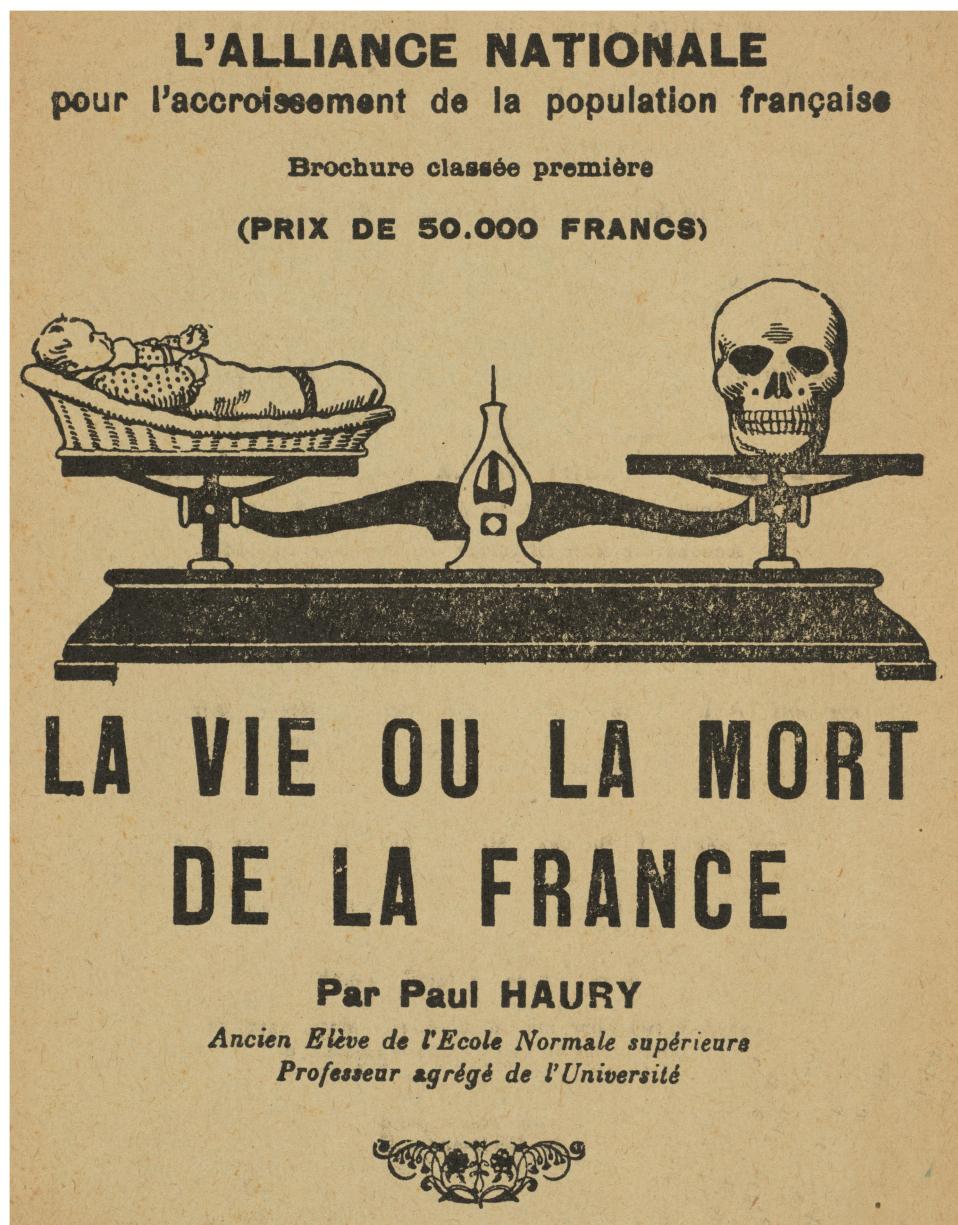
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bellybutton of its neighbouring rival of Germany. ‘The sickness that is killing France,’ Haury prophesised, ‘is the suicide of a great population!’⁸⁶ The same year, a similar aesthetic trope graced an Alliance poster. Under the alarmist rubric ‘The depopulation is the ruin of the nation’, two young children are displayed. The infant representing Germany is almost twice the size of that personifying France (plate 9).⁸⁷

Reproducing six teratological illustrations featuring infants suffering from fatal congenital abnormalities in 1930, the year that the Alliance reported a record peak of memberships, Documents deliberately stoked French fears. Swapping the idealised image of a cosseted infant, discursively posing as an embodied allegory promising a regenerated and repopulated nation, for a rigorously more troubling vision, the journal refused to conform to the established sign-use only to invert the desperate yet decidedly hopeful pronatalist programme that the motif of the child had been used to promote in interwar France. Indeed, far from that imagined by the Third Republican

regime, Documents' future France was not only set to be weak and fragile, plagued by physical pathologies, but worse, monstrous.

The government-supported pronatalist dictum was not the sole target of Documents' anti-idealistic attack, however. Part of the journal's embrace of the 'monstrous' child was a pointed critique, aimed directly at a particular French tradition of eugenic thought that had grown out of puériculture—a discipline of infant hygiene renewed and redefined at the turn of the century by a Parisian obstetrician particularly obsessed with the state of French children, Adolphe Pinard (plate 10).⁸⁸ Indeed, concerned not only with the quantity of French offspring but also with their quality, Pinard's puériculture soon entered the terrain of racial hygiene, where it would become, William Schneider writes, 'the French equivalent of eugenics'.⁸⁹ In France, thus, early eugenic activities differed from those emerging in neighbouring countries like Britain and Germany. Conditioned by Third Republican predictions of imminent depopulation and a widespread belief in a Lamarckian theory of heredity that posited the genetic transmissibility of acquired

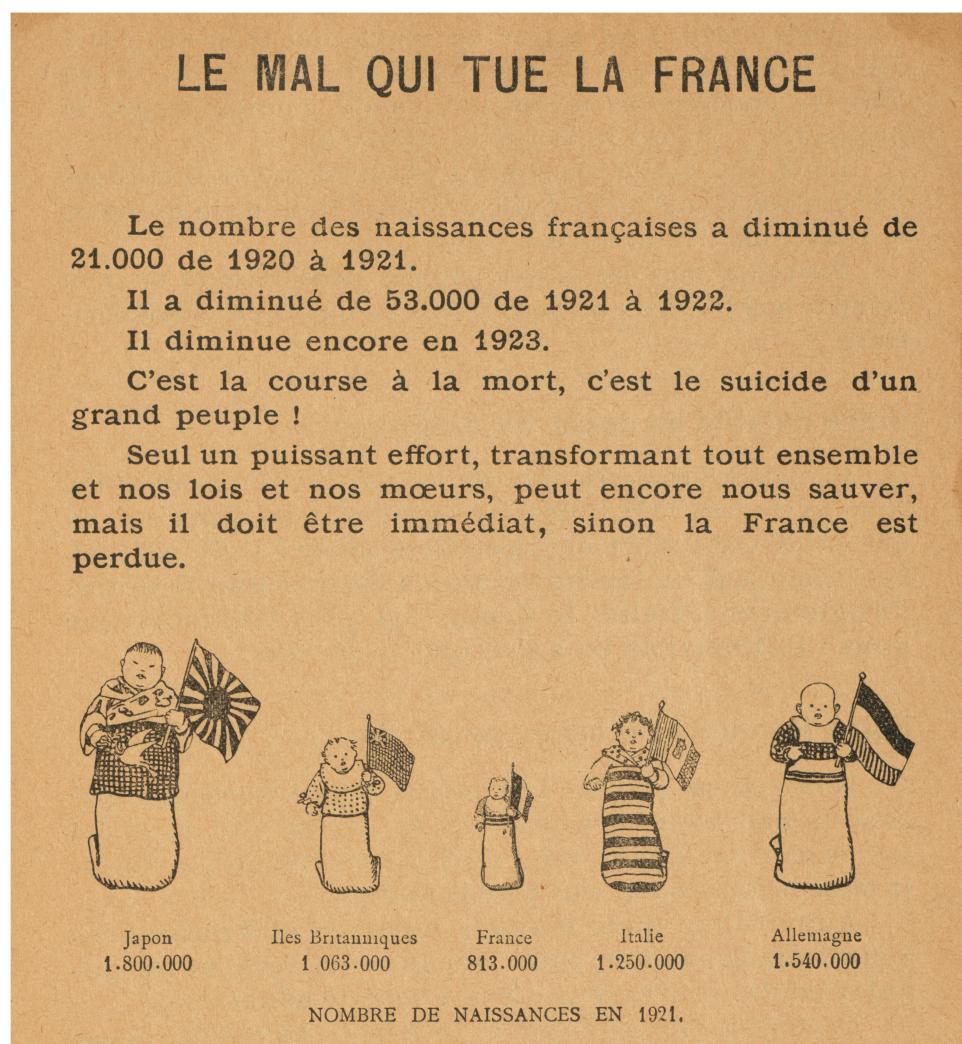


7 Paul Haury, *La Vie ou La Mort de la France*, Paris: Alliance Nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française, 1923, front cover. Photo: Author.

characteristics, French eugenicists tended to promote not the restriction of births but instead, as Edmond Perrier, president of Société française d'eugénique, declared in 1920, the cultivation of 'healthy and beautiful babies'.⁹⁰ In fact, six years later, when Pinard, in the role of député de la Seine, proposed France's first concrete eugenic legislation—an obligatory prenuptial medical exam to prevent, Pinard announced, the birth of 'monsters'—Louis Forest, editor of *Le Matin* and fervent campaigner of the premarital medical certificate, even suggested that the French Eugenics Society should consider changing its name to the 'French Society for the Production of Beautiful Children'.⁹¹ Pinard's proposal, marking a sharp shift towards a more repressive eugenic programme in France, provoked a lively debate that lasted the interwar period. Setting out to prod and pressurise the weighted image of the infant at the height of these discussions, Bataille's subversive gesture therefore sought not only to foment French fears of a feeble population but also amounted to a firm denunciation of the eugenic rationale and Pinard's vigorous campaign for a certificat prénuptial.⁹²

Adolphe Pinard, Puériculture and the Development of a French Brand of Eugenic Thought

Puériculture—the etymological root of which stems from the Latin word for child, *puer*—was a term coined in 1858 by the Parisian physician Alfred Caron.⁹³ When



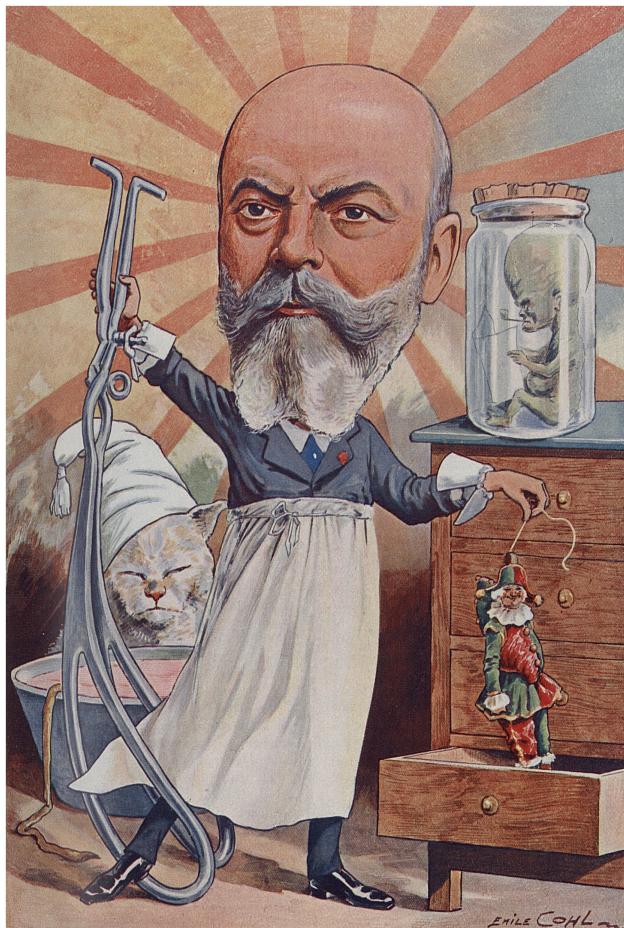
8 Paul Haury, *La Vie ou La Mort de la France*, Paris: Alliance Nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française, 1923, page 1. Photo: Author.

9 Jean Droit, *La dépopulation, c'est la ruine du pays*, c. 1923.
Poster for Alliance Nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française. Photo: Ville de Paris/Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand.



expanded upon in 1865, Caron explained: 'PUÉRICULTURE IS TO THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN WHAT AGRICULTURE IS TO THE FERTILITY OF THE SOIL.'⁹⁴ It was only in 1895, however, when Pinard, head of the Baudelocque clinic and chair of clinical obstetrics at the Paris School of Medicine, revived and refined the term in a speech to the Académie de médecine—of which he had been an elected member since 1892—that puériculture began to gain real traction.

In addition to dwindling birthrates, fin-de-siècle France was, to the despair of Third Republican demographers, simultaneously suffering from soaring infant mortality.⁹⁵ This 'grave problem of hygiene and politics,' Albert Balestre wrote in 1891, is a 'serious cause of depopulation'.⁹⁶ Ten years later, seamlessly sewing



10 Émile Cohl, *Le Professeur PINARD*, drawing published in *Chanteclair*, no. 32, 1909, page 3. Photo: BIU Santé, Paris.

the shocking statistics into the familiar pronatalist rhetoric, Balestre announced: 'We let 30,000 children die each year. [...] 15,000 soldiers! [...] it is a gradual weakening, it is the decadence, it is the fall of the homeland.'⁹⁷ Pinard's 1895 speech—dusting off the doctrine of puériculture as part of a report demonstrating that mothers who were cared for prior to delivery produced bigger and healthier children, and, as a result, a 'strong and vigorous population'—thus fell into a fertilely anxious culture and was soon embraced by the official establishment.⁹⁸ In 1901, the avid hygienist and senator Paul Strauss declared that puériculture 'constitutes the strongest and surest work for national defence'.⁹⁹ The following year, Pinard was appointed to the Commission on Depopulation, tasked with preparing a report on the causes of infant mortality.¹⁰⁰ In 1906, Victor Wallich—obstetrician and professor at the Paris Faculté de médecine—announced that following Pinard's timely 'renaissance of puériculture,' the term has become 'common use: everyone employs it, and everyone understands it'.¹⁰¹

The discipline soon entered Third Republican education. By 1905, 'puériculture' had been added to the subjects taught at écoles normales. In 1909, it entered the curriculum of écoles primaires supérieurs. The course material, set by the Ministry of Public Instruction, was pulled from Pinard's *La Puériculture du premier âge* (1904) (plate 11 and plate 12).¹⁰² The book announced the task of puériculture

as twofold: '1st, to preserve them, that is to say: to prevent them from dying; 2nd, to do all that is possible in order for them to develop for the better, that is to say: make them grow well and become vigorous'.¹⁰³ A child of the Third Republic, Bataille himself, along with many of his Documents-colleagues, belonged to one of the first generations subjected to France's new school system, transformed by Ferry's renowned reforms of the early 1880s into an all-important infrastructure through which the new regime set out to exchange a fragmented France for a nation fused together by a singular moral, laic and thus universal in reach. As Eugen Weber writes, the Third Republican school system, making education both mandatory and secular, helped France 'civilise a citizenry'.¹⁰⁴

The puériculteurs' remarkable devotion to French children, however, sought to improve more than prenatal care and infant hygiene regimes. Their programme was categorically and self-professedly eugenic, seeking to ameliorate the hereditary constitution of future generations and thus, in Pinard's own words, to 'preserve and improve the species'.¹⁰⁵ A crucial premise, consolidating claims of a causative connection between improved individual health and an improved species was a Lamarckian theory of heredity, which was enjoying a widespread revival in the Third Republic. Indeed, as Darwinian models began to gain foothold across Europe, the French, boosted by nationalist reaction to the 1871 defeat, opted instead to revitalise the homebred tradition of evolutionary transformisme, based on the theories of the eighteenth-century naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.

A central feature of the Lamarckian framework is a belief in hereditary transmission of acquired characteristics.¹⁰⁶ Peter J. Bowler writes: 'Lamarckism is

II Didactic illustration in Adolphe Pinard, *La Puériculture du premier âge*, 18th edition, Paris: A. Colin, 1934, page 44. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



based on the assumption that changes of structure produced by the activity of the adult organism can be reflected in the material heredity and passed onto the next generation.¹⁰⁷ Contrary to the relative fixity of Darwin's model, Lamarckian theory thus endows the individual with the power to alter and affect their gene transfer through what Lamarck called 'the influence of circumstances'.¹⁰⁸ The prospect of an immediately pliable genetic constitution, capable of acquiring and subsequently transferring both wanted and unwanted traits, spurred equal measures of optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, it fuelled a fundamental belief in the power of intervention, through public health reform and education. On the other hand, Nye writes, it meant that 'each case of individual pathology was both a symptom and a cause: a symptom that a syndrome of degeneracy was unfolding, and a cause of the future—worse—cases'.¹⁰⁹ The 'degenerate,' Nye continues, was 'endowed with a double power: a painful reminder of the weakness of the "race" and a living assurance of its continued decline'.¹¹⁰ Lamarckism thus chimed well with the Third Republican zeitgeist, where deeply pessimistic projections of seemingly insurmountable French decay could sit alongside idealistic and hopeful calls for immediate national improvement. This conflictual milieu, the trembling of which was to be radically exacerbated by the gruesome experience of the First World War, would prove rich soil for the avant-garde subversion enacted across the pages of *Documents* in the interwar years.

A staunch neo-Lamarckian, Adolphe Pinard declared during an 1898 lecture at the Baudelocque: 'I am absolutely convinced today that every pathological state [...] has a manifest influence on the product of conception and on its future development'.¹¹¹ Having observed families where 'a degenerate, a cripple, or an idiot' is born amongst 'healthy' siblings, and discovering that, in most cases, one parent 'had been, in the moment of procreation, either ill or convalescent,' Pinard went on to explain that there are two types of hereditary transmission.¹¹² In the first case, dubbed 'homologous,' the child inherits the same afflictions affecting the parents. In the second, 'heterologous' type, the child inherits 'the pathological state of the parents, in the moment of conception'.¹¹³ The 'range of influences,' Pinard added, 'is variable': 'sometimes it will only produce a simple degradation whilst, other times, it will provoke a monstrosity'.¹¹⁴ In the work of Pinard, Anne Carol notes, prophecies of French 'degeneracy' thus firmly realigned 'with the **teratological** discourse explicating its origins'.¹¹⁵ 'I dare to hope,' Pinard continued, 'that when these facts are well-known and well-disseminated, parents will abstain from procreating other than in the best possible physiological state'.¹¹⁶ Pinard's address, marking an important step in what Schneider has called 'the evolution of puericulture towards eugenics,' concluded: 'It is by pursuing this path that we will react against the degeneracy of the race and that, in due

course, the atavism will transmit to future generations only selected elements rather than those of decadence.¹¹⁷

The French style of eugenics, growing out of puériculture, thus differed from that emerging in neighbouring countries. Permeated by a virtually unopposed pronatalist dogma, as well as a sustained belief in neo-Lamarckian heredity, the premise of which allowed the health of the individual to become a genetically pliable springboard for future generations, French eugenicist thought tended to emphasise positive measures. These encouraged the production of a stronger populace through public health reforms, social hygiene and preventative medicine, while downplaying negative programmes such as enforced sterilisation.¹¹⁸ In turn, this meant that French eugenicists—albeit, just like Francis Galton and his followers, aiming for nothing less than the hereditary improvement of the species—could affiliate not only with pronatalists but also with the broader hygienist cause, relentlessly battling the various pathologies weakening the Third Republican organism, the most feared of which were tuberculosis, syphilis and alcoholism.¹¹⁹ Emerging as a medical matter, subject of interest to doctors over anthropologists, the French brand of eugenics was therefore quickly endowed with a broader base for support since, Schneider writes, ‘it was more acceptable to call for having healthier babies than eliminating the unfit’.¹²⁰

When London hosted the first International Congress of Eugenics in July of 1912, the French delegation stood out. Amongst a few demographers, biologists, academicians and high-ranking politicians, the largest group were doctors—most of whom were paediatricians, obstetricians or puériculteurs.¹²¹ Too ill to attend the event, Pinard’s paper was presented by a colleague. The script confidently declared that what ‘Sir Francis Galton had entitled Eugenics’ is, in fact, ‘nothing but puériculture’—a science, ‘studied for years in France,’ having as its goal to research the ‘conditions relative to the reproduction, preservation, and improvement of the human species’.¹²² The 1912 congress was widely reported on in French newspapers, and before the end of the year the French Eugenics Society had been launched in Paris.¹²³ While Pinard, in the role of vice-president, initially called for the word ‘puériculture’ to feature in its title, after settling on the international legibility of ‘eugenics’, the Société française d’eugénique hosted its inaugural meeting at the Paris Medical School in January of 1913. Over sixty percent of the attendees were doctors.¹²⁴ The society was soon in full swing, marked by over one-hundred members, monthly meetings and regular publications of their journal, *Eugénique*.

With all activities put on hold during the hostilities, the society’s first major interwar event was a 1920 public conference examining ‘The Eugenic Effects of the War’. Edmond Perrier, president of the society, opened the event by reiterating the modus operandi of French eugenics: ‘to research, define and spread the means of perfecting the human races by indicating the conditions which each individual, each couple must strive to fulfil

12 Didactic illustration in Adolphe Pinard, *La Puériculture du premier âge*, 18th edition, Paris: A. Colin, 1934, page 43. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



in order to have healthy and beautiful babies.¹²⁵ Revealing the continued influence of Lamarckism, Perrier emphasised that, while ‘bearing fruit,’ it is crucial ‘that the milieu itself is not a cause of degradation’ and, therefore, that the ‘individual ignorance that propagate contagion’ and ‘debaucheries of all kinds’ are ‘mercilessly pursued’.¹²⁶ In turn, Eugène Apert—puériculteur and founding member of the Société française d’eugénique—reassured the nation that there was no risk of ‘wounds,’ ‘amputations,’ ‘vicious scars’ or ‘fractures’ acquired during the war being genetically transmitted onto future Frenchmen.¹²⁷ As such, Jacques Léonard explains, ‘the neo-Lamarckian eugenicists’ of France tended to follow the path of teratological research, ‘proving the influence of toxic external agents,’ such as ‘microbes,’ ‘on the germplasm’.¹²⁸

Broadly publicised in the press, the conference marked a change of direction that would come to characterise the society’s operations throughout the interwar years.¹²⁹ Having acted as a learned society during the prewar period, the Société française d’eugénique now turned its efforts outwards, educating the public through lectures and university courses, as well as seeking to impact the body of intellectual, scientific and political decision makers in France.¹³⁰ The most pronounced example of the latter was the society’s campaign for a premarital examination law, proposed by Pinard himself in 1926. The discussion around this, as we will see, was still ongoing in 1930, when Documents interfered in France’s enduring concern with infant health to put forth a fierce critique of the eugenic mission by scathingly exposing a debilitating discrepancy at the heart of its rationale.



Pinard’s Politics: The French Campaign for a Eugenic ‘certificat prénuptial’

Pinard had been elected député de la Seine in 1919, a role that he would maintain until retiring from politics in 1928, at the age of eighty-four.¹³¹ During this period, Pinard relentlessly pursued his political platform to promote the eugenic programme of puériculture. Already in his second year as deputy, Pinard had called for the need of ‘a law having as its goal the improvement of French births from the point of view of quality’.¹³² Although nothing came of it, he did not cease his efforts. Once re-elected in 1924, Pinard, as the eldest député, was officially dubbed *doyen d’âge*, a position allowing him to open sessions with a lengthy speech. His inaugural address, held on 1 June 1924, announced his ambitions.¹³³ After deplored the financial deficit terrorising interwar France, Pinard swiftly turned his attention to another problem, ‘infinitely graver for our country: the deficit of French lives!’¹³⁴ ‘France,’ Pinard decried, in full convergence with the amplified interwar pronatalist rhetoric, is ‘fatally marching towards death!’¹³⁵ ‘But is it enough to elevate birthrates?’ Pinard went on to ask: ‘No. That is only half the task. Quantity will not suffice. We also need, above all, quality.’¹³⁶ Once more exploiting the frightening figure of teratology, he continued:

We know where monsters come from, and we also know how they can be avoided. Still, this does not hinder the majority from procreating in exactly the same way as our Stone Age ancestors, to procreate without thinking. Now, we have to think. And puériculture teaches us to think, before procreating.¹³⁷

‘Long live the Republic!’ rallied Pinard, met with applause from all ends of the Chamber, ‘who will let France live in all its force and splendour’!¹³⁸

Two years later, in November of 1926, Pinard presented France’s first concrete proposal for eugenic legislation. Aiming to ‘guarantee and safeguard future

generations,' the motion announced: 'Every French citizen wishing to marry can be entered in the civil registry only if he has a medical certificate dated from the day before'.¹³⁹ A spirited debate ensued across all major newspapers. 'We are going to impose the prenuptial certificate,' announced *Le Matin*: 'Bravo! This law is necessary because the physical dupery is deplorable.'¹⁴⁰ Writing in *Le Petit Journal*, the former minister, Laurent Bonnevay, in turn expressed concerns over its efficiency: 'the prenuptial certificate will be without effect; it will neither preserve the spouse from contagion, nor protect society from malformed children'.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile *Le Quotidien* went on to express their allegiance to the certificate, deplored that eugenics—defined as the 'science and art of having beautiful children'—is 'still not widespread enough in France, despite the efforts of its most famous propagandist, professeur Pinard'.¹⁴² The article, entitled 'How to diminish the number of abnormal children?', concluded that the birth of 'crippled children, idiots, born criminals, wretched biological waste,' who, in due course, 'will themselves produce new unfortunates,' is not only 'inhumane' but also 'dangerous for the future of the race'.¹⁴³

In *Le Journal*, Clément Vautel, known for his natalist and antifeminist views, even devoted his cinema column to 'this curious law proposed by Professor Pinard'.¹⁴⁴ After summarising the opinions of an array of medical professionals, Vautel recounted reactions received from *Le Journal*-readers. One claimed that his marriage had cured him from tuberculosis, thus arguing that, with 'the Pinard certificate,' he 'wouldn't be married' and therefore 'would perhaps be dead today'.¹⁴⁵ Another reader rebelliously exhumed: 'what if I want to marry a tuberculeux? The heart has reasons that social hygiene cannot know'.¹⁴⁶ Vautel concluded:

science should, it is certain, intervene in this essential elaboration where chance plays a dangerous role. We occupy ourselves very seriously with the improvement of horses, dogs, pigs, etc. The human species is haphazardly improvised... But how can this be done? It is not a book by Professor Pinard that lovers hold in their hands when, married or not, they decide not to read anymore...¹⁴⁷

In the words of *L'Intransigeant*: 'The newspapers talk a lot about Doctor Pinard's proposed law'—either in support or in scorn'.¹⁴⁸

Tasked with examining the motion on behalf of the Commission de l'hygiène, Dr Paul Niccollet was called to present his findings to the Chamber in December of 1927.¹⁴⁹ Following the devastation of war, Niccollet announced, the 'future generation [...] seem to become, eugenically speaking, worse than that which preceded it'.¹⁵⁰ The idea behind the certificat prénuptial was thus 'very simple,' Niccollet continued: to prevent French citizens from bringing 'into existence a poor being, defective and sick, perhaps a monster, and in any case a human misfit...'.¹⁵¹ With full support from Niccollet, the Commission de l'hygiène, as well as long list of high-ranking ligues, organisations and politicians, Pinard's proposal was set to be voted on.

The debate across French newspapers was immediately amplified. *Le Petit Journal* spoke of a 'dictatorship of Hygiea'.¹⁵² *L'Homme libre* similarly asked if 'M. Pinard and M. Niccollet' found themselves superior to 'absolute freedom,' explaining that 'love is a child who knows neither the law nor certificates'.¹⁵³ *Le Rappel*, on the other hand, elaborated that while 'infatuated fiancés' were 'all good and well,' the 'children that will be born mad, with tuberculosis or rickets, are innocent victims of this love, and that is monstrous...'.¹⁵⁴ 'The important and essential thing,' the newspaper continued, 'is not to have many children, but to have beautiful children, that is to say, healthy and normal

children, without hereditary malformation.¹⁵⁵ Demands of a complementary report to be produced by the Commission de l'hygiène, however, forced the vote to be deferred in February of 1928. When the newly elected Chamber was subsequently installed in April, Pinard had retired from his political career and his motion was shelved.¹⁵⁶ Taking stock of the discursive impact of Pinard's campaign, Georges Schreiber—another passionately eugenic paediatrician—recounted: 'It has been spoken about in journals, in parliament, in the salons; we would like to have had talked about it even in the bedrooms. It is progress, since above all we wanted to modify the public opinion.'¹⁵⁷

Despite the legislative setback, the proposal continued to permeate political debate and the press. It seeped further into popular culture too. In December of 1928, *Déshabillez-vous*—an opérette in three acts—premiered in Paris. The plot circled around the young garçon Paul visiting Dr Malanson, characterised by *Le Matin*'s reviewer as a 'fervent pronatalist propagandist,' to obtain a premarital medical certificate.¹⁵⁸ A chaotic flurry of interlinked sexual encounters, involving even Dr Malanson himself, is uncovered, provoking, once more in the words of *Le Matin*'s reviewer, 'piquant situations' and 'incessant bursts of laughter'.¹⁵⁹ Newspapers soon described it as a 'triumphal success'.¹⁶⁰ In 1929, another Pinard-inspired drama premiered in the French capital. The film, entitled *Le permis d'aimer: le certificat prénuptial*, was significantly more serious in tone. The script had been written by Dr Malachowski, whose back catalogue included titles such as *Le baiser qui tue* (1928)—a melodrama about a young marin contracting syphilis from a sex worker, produced with the support of the Ministère du travail et de l'hygiène and the Musée social (plate 13).¹⁶¹ In *Le permis d'aimer: le certificat prénuptial*, Dr Malachowski himself featured in the role of Dr Battisti and can be seen performing a Wassermann blood test—a serologic reaction developed in 1906 to detect syphilis—as part of a premarital medical examination (plate 14). After describing Dr Malachowski as a Eugène Brieux of cinema, Excelsior's reviewer dubbed his 1929 film a 'plea in favour of the prenuptial certificate'.¹⁶²

A new campaign surfaced. Arguing for the immediate implementation of Pinard's certificate, député Marius Moutet declared in December of 1929: 'to have children is good, but to prevent them from dying is better'.¹⁶³ Mediating the debates, French newspaper-headlines asked: 'To Have Beautiful Children: Would the premarital certificate give serious warranty to married couples?' and 'For Parents with Children to Marry: Will the Prenuptial Certificate Guarantee Beautiful Infants?'¹⁶⁴ The same year, Marcel Labbé, professor at the Paris Faculty of Medicine and longstanding member of the Académie de médecine, announced: 'In our gentle epoch of civilization, the brutal processes should be abandoned and replaced with those of eugenics. This consists, above all, in an intelligent choice of a partner'.¹⁶⁵ 'The future procreator, aware of his duty,' Labbé added, should 'prepare himself for marriage by improving his health and his strength'.¹⁶⁶ 'Since the health certificate,' he continued, 'has not been instituted, it is important that each spouse informs themselves about the health of their partner and makes a decision, not only based on interest or love, but on health too'.¹⁶⁷ Firmly conflating teratological discourses with those surrounding Pinard's certificat, Labbé reminded his readers that 'malformations discovered at birth,' traced to 'pathological influences' such as 'trauma, infection, intoxication, harmful physical or chemical conditions in the humoral environment,' should all 'be classed in the domain of teratology'.¹⁶⁸ In the end, however, although the directeur général de l'Assistance publique, Dr Louis Mourier, enabled the provision of voluntary premarital medical consultations in the spring of 1930, triggering the press to exclaim 'The Premarital Examination is Created' and 'Towards a Prenuptial Certificate,' French eugenicists would have to wait until 1942 and the instalment of the authoritarian Vichy regime for the certificat prénuptial to be passed into legislation.¹⁶⁹



Historicising the Monstrous: 'Les écarts de la nature' (1930) and the Visual Culture of Interwar France

In 1930, when six teratological illustrations of supposedly 'monstrous' infants furnished the Parisian avant-garde journal, *Documents* (see plate 1, plate 2 and plate 3), the Third Republic was caught up in a roused debate negotiating the possible implementation of France's first eugenic law.¹⁷⁰ Marking its prominent place within the collective consciousness of interwar France at the time of *Documents'* provocative gesture, a dictionary-definition of 'Certificat prénuptial' graced the pages of a 1930-issue of *Larousse mensuel illustré*—a monthly magazine published by the encyclopaedia-giant where topical terms not yet included in their mastodont book-form dictionary appeared as part of an attempt to track current events and maintain an updated scope of the language and its use.¹⁷¹ Penned by Dr Henri Bouquet, a long-



13 Posters advertising a Parisian screening of *Le baiser qui tue*, announcing the film as 'a campaign in the interest of the national and the social', depicted in André Kertész, Montparnasse, Rue de Vanves, photograph, c. 1928. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Photo Scala, Florence.

14 Still from *Le permis d'aimer: le certificat prénuptial*, Isis-Film, 1929, published in Charles Vayre, *Le permis d'aimer (le certificat prénuptial): roman abondamment illustré par les photographies du film du Docteur T. Malachowski*, Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1929, page 52. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.



term champion of the certificate, the entry, which quoted Pinard's 1926 motion in full, announced in its opening line: 'It is obviously abnormal that the care provided by animal breeders [...], with the aim of obtaining healthy products, is not applied to the human species.'¹⁷² Concurrently, a passionate manifesto in favour of Pinard's certificat echoed across national radio, presented by Adolphe's nephew, Dr Marcel Pinard, under the auspice of the National Office of Social Hygiene.¹⁷³

This debate encompassed visual material too. Building upon and adding to the significance carried by a motif saddled by relentless use in pronatalist campaigns, French eugenicists also traded in the fruitfully fear-inducing currency lodged within

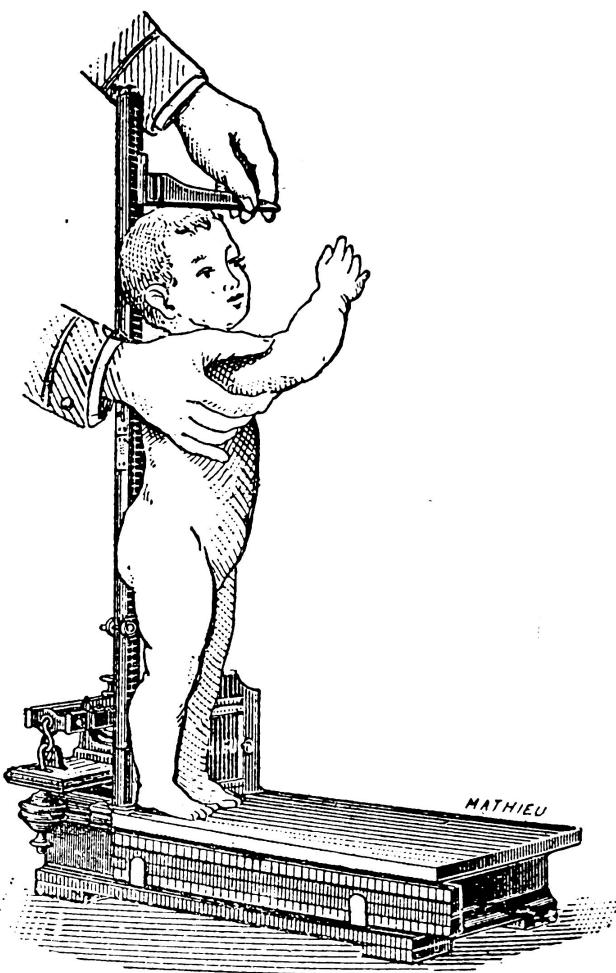


Fig. 32. — Pédiomètre.

15 Pedagogic drawing depicting the practice of measuring newborns using a pédiomètre, in Dr Gaston Variot, *La Puériculture pratique, ou l'Art d'élever les enfants du premier âge*, 5th edition, Paris: Octave Doin, 1930, fig. 32. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the image of the infant in Third Republican France. Circulating in its fifth edition by 1930, *La Puériculture pratique*, an instructional treatise written by Dr Gaston Variot, comprised forty-four illustrations. Photographs of children suffering from an array of ailments appeared alongside didactic drawings showcasing the practice of measuring newborns using a pédiomètre (plate 15). After having thanked his fellow Frenchmen for welcoming his pedagogical tract ‘so favourably,’ Variot—a founding member of the French Eugenics Society and the first director of the Paris’ Institut de puériculture—announced: ‘The future and greatness of France depends on our birthrate, which must not remain in decline!’¹⁷⁴ At the same time, *La Culture physique*, a popular magazine ardently promoting a eugenic ideal, hosted regular concours de bébés where photographs of the infant deemed the healthiest and most beautiful would appear in print (plate 16 and plate 17).¹⁷⁵ Working to verify the Lamarckian premise scaffolding Pinard’s premarital certificate, the photographs posed as visual proof that physically healthy parents produce ‘higher-quality’ offspring.¹⁷⁶

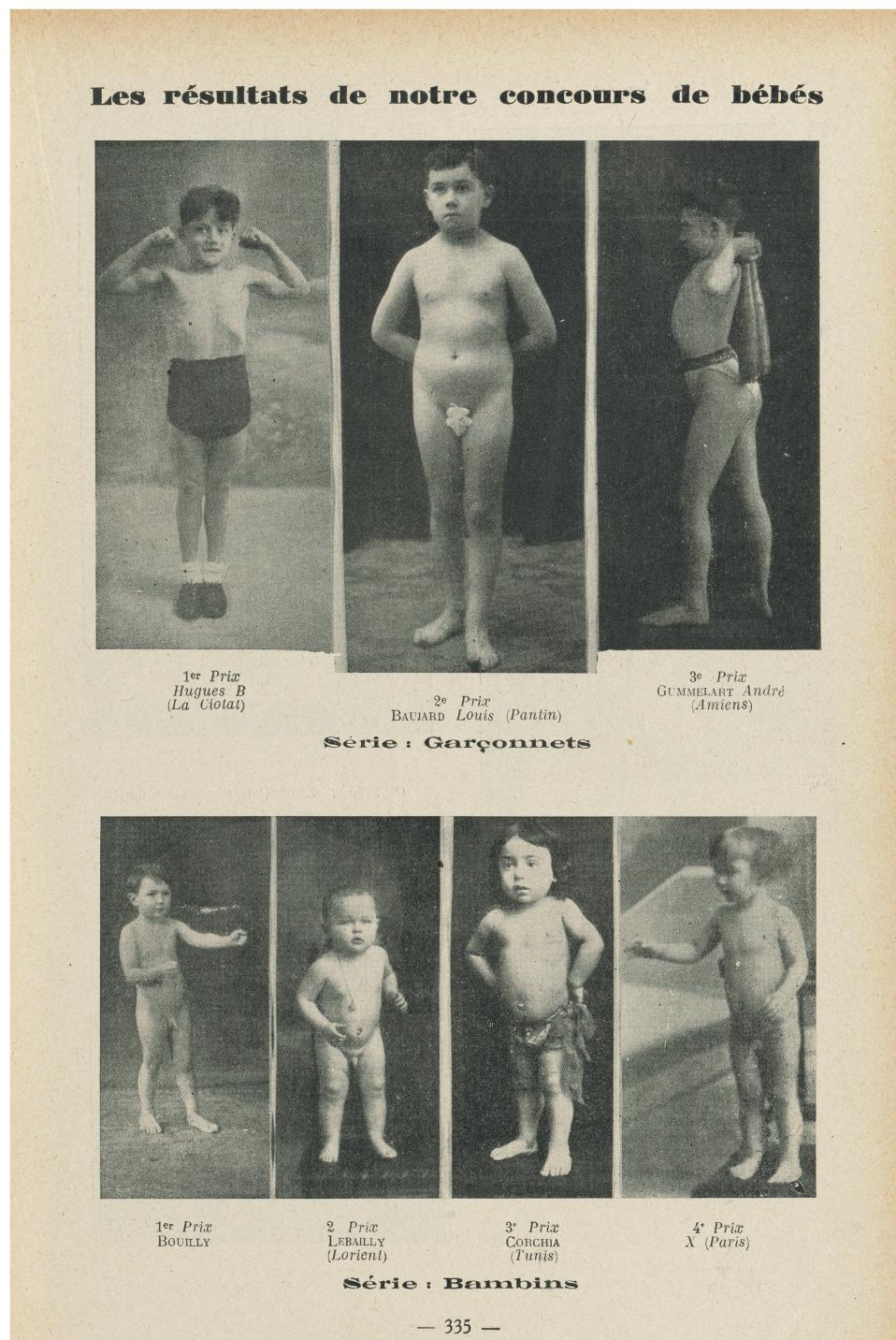
Recirculating teratological illustrations of infants afflicted by bodily anomalies within the visual culture of interwar France, Bataille was thus intruding into an already established, puéricultural image tradition, set to promote the cultivation of a ‘vigorous’ France by exposing its citizens to a polarising set of possible French futures, juxtaposing the familiar pronatalist image of a cosseted and rosy-cheeked infant, promising a regenerated France, with horrifying visions of its

supposed anathema: ‘monstrous’ children, foreboding a France of unimpeded decline. As the far-right and later-to-become collaborationist journal *Gringoire* wrote in the spring of 1930: ‘Go visit the service for underdeveloped children at Bicêtre. You will see monsters who are the frightful products of couples unaware or ignorant of their defects.’¹⁷⁷ ‘I am sure this spectacle would force young couples to think,’ Gringoire added, ‘if not about resisting getting married then at least about not procreating without knowing if they are worthy of it.’¹⁷⁸

Documents’ participation in such propagandistic imagery, however, was fuelled by a contrary ambition. Under the aegis of Bataille’s ‘impossible’ periodical, the motif of child was not reproduced to encourage improvement, elevation or homogenisation. Instead, the hazardous implications it bodied forth in interwar France were foregrounded only to be invalidated. The discursive potency it carried was seized and subverted, put to use to promote an opposing, radically heterogenous worldview. Indeed, represented according to the standards of classical portraiture, sitting or standing in a variety of pastoral scenes, the teratological infants occupying the pages of Documents appear naturalised and assimilated.¹⁷⁹ No longer positioned as foreign to the image of civilised humanity but rather as constitutional to it, their alleged ‘monstrousness’ is reframed from anomaly to norm, shifted from the territory of the other to that of the self. ‘On a practical level,’ Bataille unabashedly announced,

'incongruity is elementary and constant: it is possible to state that it manifests itself to a certain degree in the presence of any given human individual.'¹⁸⁰

Further attesting the communicability of the motif, and thus sharpening the critical focus of Documents' avant-garde gesture, Bataille's accompanying essay mounted a cutting rebuke of the eugenic logic. Framing the emergence of eugenics as a contemporary manifestation of humanity's seeming incapacity to remain 'indifferent to its monsters,' Bataille laid bare a conceptual oversight looming within its rationale, with specific reference to its founder, Francis Galton, and his



16 'Les résultats de notre concours de bébés', *La Culture physique*, no. 463, November 1928, page 355. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

method of composite photography.¹⁸¹ ‘The composite images that Galton achieved through successive exposures of analogous but different faces, on the same piece of photographic film, are well known,’ Bataille wrote: ‘From the faces of four hundred male American students, one obtains the typical face of the American student.’¹⁸² On ‘the relation between the composite image and its components,’ however, Bataille noted that ‘the first was necessarily more beautiful than the average example of the others’: ‘twenty mediocre faces constitute a beautiful face, and one obtains without difficulty faces whose proportions are very nearly those of Hermes of Praxiteles.’¹⁸³ ‘It is useful to observe here,’ Bataille writes:



17 ‘Les résultats de notre concours de bébés’, *La Culture physique*, no. 463, November 1928, page 356. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

that the constitution of the perfect type with the aid of composite photography is not very mysterious. In fact, if one photographs a large number of similarly sized but differently shaped pebbles, it is impossible to obtain anything other than a sphere: in other words, a geometric figure. It is enough to note that a common measure necessarily approaches the regularity of geometric forms. Monsters thus would be the dialectical opposites of geometric regularity, in the same manner as individual forms, but in an irreducible way.¹⁸⁴

While hoping to ‘give a kind of reality to the necessarily beautiful Platonic idea,’ Bataille continues, eugenics—blinded by impossible idealism—thus ends up engendering the reverse effect: to call attention to and accentuate the jarringly monstrous lurking within ‘any given human’.¹⁸⁵ Eugenic theory, he derided, is an operation through which only ‘the common character of personal incongruity and the monster can be expressed with precision.’¹⁸⁶

A wholesale reprimand of idealism was a central occupation of *Documents*. Enthusiastically debunking the fragile composition of a modernity permeated by lofty positivist promises of boundless progress and perfectibility, the journal instead promoted a doctrine of base-materialism. This was a critical project, as Bataille had explained in an earlier issue, solely concerned with things ‘external and foreign to ideal human aspirations’ and that which ‘refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations’.¹⁸⁷ It is ‘the image of this base matter,’ he continued, ‘that alone, by its incongruity and by an overwhelming lack of respect, permits the intellect to escape from the constraints of idealism.’¹⁸⁸ In an interwar France suffocated by a fraudulently exalted self-conception, the ‘time has come,’ Bataille rebelliously declared, ‘when employing the word materialism, to assign to it the meaning of a direct interpretation, excluding all idealism, of raw phenomena, and not of a system founded on the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis’.¹⁸⁹

An illustrative example of *Documents*’ urge to, as Bataille put it, ‘bring things down in the world’ is their encyclopaedia-entry on ‘Man’, published in the fifth issue of the journal’s first year, as part of its recurring ‘Critical Dictionary’.¹⁹⁰ Putting that frank anti-idealist base-materialism to use, *Documents* starkly revalues human worth by calculating the monetary value of its chemical composition. The ‘bodily fat of a normally constituted man would suffice to manufacture seven cakes of toilet soap,’ there is iron ‘to make a medium-sized nail’ and enough ‘sugar to sweeten a cup of coffee’.¹⁹¹ There is also ‘a little potassium and sulphur,’ although ‘in an unusable quantity’.¹⁹² Fully dethroned, firmly denied access to its habitual high perch, humanity is—‘costed at current prices’—valued at an approximate of twenty-five francs.¹⁹³ In the preceding issue, Michel Leiris—a core collaborator at *Documents* and close friend of Bataille—subjected the glossy image of civilisation to similar debasement:

All our moral habits and our polite customs, that delightfully coloured cloak that veils the coarseness of our dangerous instincts, all those attractive forms of culture of which we are so proud—since it is thanks to them that we are able to regard ourselves as ‘civilised’—are ready to disappear at the slightest turbulence, to shatter at the least impact [...], allowing our horrifying savagery to appear in the interstices, revealed in these fissures just as hell might be in the chasms opened by earthquakes [...]. Not a day passes when

we do not notice some premonitory sign of just such a catastrophe, [...] our whole life, our very breathing, is in touch with lava flows, craters, geysers, and everything else to do with volcanoes, and, as a consequence, if we hold up to it a mirror with a suitably thick silvering and a sufficiently sensitive surface, it must be capable of tracing vigorous sulphur-coloured lines upon it.¹⁹⁴

Condemning the Third Republic's persistent dread of depopulation and the entangled emergence of a particular French brand of eugenics to equally unflinching, base-materialist exposure, *Documents* hijacked the anguished currency carried by the image of the infant and repurposed its critical force. In a gesture that is as ridiculing as it is revealing, Bataille topples *puericulture* from its elevated seat, brings down Pinard's lofty programme of national regeneration and recalibrates its function. Unapologetically up-ending its ultra-utopian rationale, *Documents* unmasked eugenics as a programme affirming precisely that which Pinard's *certificat prénuptial* sought to annihilate: the irrecuperable heterogeneity at the core of human existence. Indeed, perpetually exceeding the homogenising frame of eugenic thought, each 'individual form,' Bataille consequently concluded, 'is, to a certain degree, a monster.'¹⁹⁵ In the hands of *Documents*, the motif of the infant was thus disseminated against the grain of official culture, morphed into a disobedient insurgent tasked to shatter the very political programme it had been made to uphold in the Third Republic.

Once returned to the visual culture of interwar France, once rehistoricised and recontextualised, the subversive heterogeneity enacted by Bataille's teratological infants is no longer that of a semiotic destabilisation, performed in an abstracted and purely textual domain. Instead, it is one enacted within the contradictory fabric of lived experience, strategically redeploying a motif that sabotaged the orderly identity of the Third Republic only to expose in its place an incongruously monstrous vision of mankind. A further effect of this reinterpretation, therefore, is the emergence of an altered, less heroic image of the avant-garde gesture. Indeed, while the modernist narratives that Derrida's intervention and Krauss' 'formless' effectively ruptured were unequivocally heroic, predicated on logocentric illusions of essence, authenticity and originality, the deconstructionist modelling of criticality was, to a certain extent, equally competent and complete in its gesture. In art historical discourse, the deconstructionist image of the avant-garde that emerged in place of the outdated, modernist formulation depicted an operation capable of extreme things, fit to enact—in the words of Bois and Krauss—a 'wreckage of representation'.¹⁹⁶ The modernist heroic was replaced by a postmodernist heroic. This was one predicated not on logocentric narratives of presence, but on a ghostly ability to deal only in absences, to enact a gesture that never participates or produces but only wrecks, never reconstructs but only deconstructs. By doing, it was un-doing. As Edward Said has noted, this capacity is dependent on a form of deconstructionist displacement: 'a conception of the text as existing within a hermetic, Alexandrian textual universe, having no connection with actuality'.¹⁹⁷ Through a historicising grasp, however, the criticality of the avant-garde gesture is never complete, stainless or fault-free. On the contrary, it is always porous and incomplete, inevitably interwoven with and rubbing up against the socio-political discourses that surrounds it, shaped by and thus complicit with the cultural terrain within which it exists and takes form. Here, it is impossible to un-do without also doing.

Notes

I thank David Hopkins, Deborah Lewer, Olivier Salazar-Ferrer and Sabine Wieber for their unending support and generous guidance during the course of this research.

- 1 Georges Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, Minneapolis, 1985, 55. The text was originally published in *Documents*, 2, 1930.
- 2 For a general account of Documents, see: Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London, 1978; Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, eds, *Undercover Surrealism: George Bataille and Documents*, London, 2006.
- 3 For an account of the deconstructionist reception of Bataille's work and *Documents*, traversing Derrida's 1960s writings as well as those of Rosalind Krauss and her colleagues at October, dating to the 1980s and 1990s, see C. F. B. Miller, 'Rotten Sun', *Art History*, 34: 2, April 2011, 388–411. 'Krauss's alliance with Denis Hollier—the editor of the Bataille Œuvres complètes, who participated with Derrida in the network around the radical journal *Tel Quel*—was a decisive factor', Miller writes, in 'the deconstructive turn in American art history' (392).
- 4 'Heterology' is a concept that Bataille explored in several published and unpublished texts during the *Documents* years. Loosely mirroring and re-working Durkheim's classic categorisation of sacred and profane realms of social life, Bataille explained human existence as profoundly paradoxical, conditioned by irresolvable, irrecuperable contradiction. There is the profane and homogenous realm of scientific rationality, utility, work, progress, futurity, accumulation and calculation. And then there is the heterogenous world of the sacred: of that which is unintelligible; of that which exceeds and falls outside of rational comprehension and logic, making it thus irreducible to scientific knowledge; of that which cannot be incorporated into the homogenous realm without simultaneously being subjected to a 'hypocritical cancellation of their excremental character'; Georges Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)', in *Visions of Excess*, 98. For a general account of the role of 'heterology' in Bataille's oeuvre, see Marcus Coelen, 'Heterology', in *Georges Bataille: Key Concepts*, 88–98. See also the special issue of *Theory, Culture & Society* on 'Bataille and Heterology', 35: 4–5, 2018.
- 5 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 53.
- 6 F. X. Lesbré provides a history of 'teratology', identifying the work of Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and his son, Isidore, as the first real scientific investigations into 'monstrous beings': F. X. Lesbré, *Traité de tératologie de l'homme et des animaux domestiques*, Paris, 1927, 10. For more recent accounts of the scientific and cultural histories of the 'monstrous', see, for example: Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, Oxford, 2009; Andrew Mangham, *We Are All Monsters: How Deviant Organisms Came to Define Us*, Cambridge, MA, 2023.
- 7 Camille Darest, *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités, ou Essais de tératogénie expérimentale*, 2nd edition, Paris, 1891, 59.
- 8 Darest, *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités*, 59. For an extensive account of the secularisation of France and its schools, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*, Stanford, 1976.
- 9 Darest, *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités*: 'les causes qui produisent les monstres chez les animaux vivipares et dans l'espèce humaine' (568); 'la conséquence d'un trouble de l'évolution' (565).
- 10 Darest, *Recherches sur la production artificielle des monstruosités*: 'Les méthodes que j'ai mises en œuvre pour produire des monstres' (79); 'l'influence de l'incubation, c'est-à-dire d'agents extérieurs' (73); 'Les différents types de la monstruosité ne dépendent donc pas de la nature même de causes tératogéniques; mais de l'époque à laquelle elles agissent sur le germe, de leur intensité, et très probablement aussi, [...] de la durée de leur action' (82).
- 11 Charles Féré, *La famille névropathique: Théorie tératologique de l'hérédité, de la prédisposition morbide et de la dégénérescence*, 2nd edition, Paris, 1898, 253 (Chapitre XIX: Les stigmates tératologique de la dégénérescence).
- 12 Féré, *La famille névropathique*: 'Les caractères qui constituent les stigmates de la dégénérescence sont des caractères qui n'appartiennent pas à la race [...] Ces caractères sont des malformations tératologiques' (253).
- 13 Féré, *La famille névropathique*: 'Un accident développemental du même genre peut expliquer l'existence de tourbillons erratiques situés plus ou moins loin du tourbillon normal' (260).
- 14 Lesbre, *Traité de tératologie*: 'DÉFINITIONS—La tératologie est la science des anomalies de l'organisation [...]. Les anomalies s'appellent encore déviations organique, vices de conformation, malformations, difformités, abnormités, monstruosités' (9): 'expérimentateurs ont réussi à troubler le développement de l'embryon en injectant à des femelles gestantes des produits toxiques ou microbiens [...]. L'alcoolisme, la tuberculose, la syphilis sont considérés à juste titre comme des facteurs tératogéniques puissantes' (13). In *Third Republican France, alcoholism, tuberculosis and syphilis were known as 'the three great scourges'*.
- 15 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan, New York and London, 2003, 35.
- 16 Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 137. See also Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, London and New York, 2003.
- 17 Eric Hello, 'De l'anthropogenèse à l'anthropogénique, l'œuvre de Charles Binet-Singlé (1868–1941)', *Bulletin d'histoire et d'épistémologie des sciences de la vie*, 2: 27, 2020, 150–151: 'La tératologie permet donc aussi de mettre en évidence les mécanismes de la rétrogradation (la méduse se situant loin en amont dans la chaîne de l'évolution), lesquels, du fait de l'hérité des caractères acquis, font peser de lourdes menaces sur l'espèce car il y a contradiction dans la marche normale de l'évolution.' In the 1922 edition of Larousse, teratology was defined as 'an area of natural history' concerned 'with monsters'.
- 18 Marcel Nadaud and Maurice Pelletier, 'Les Morts Vivants: Dans l'abîme de la misère humaine', *Le Petit Journal*, 18 April 1926, 1: 'Morts vivants, les monstres promis aux bocaux du Musée Dupuytren, les idiots, les crétins, [...] N'aurait-on pas le droit de les tuer?'. The series was published between 18 April and 16 May. The same year, the authors published *Les morts mystérieuses: Les sorciers modernes*, Paris, 1926. Established in 1835, the Musée Dupuytren was a museum of pathological anatomy and teratology, annexed to the École de Médecine in Paris. Today it is the Paris Museum of the History of Medicine.
- 19 Nadaud and Pelletier, 'Les Morts Vivants': 'Dans notre France, fille aînée de la Science, est-il logique que le mot incurable puisse encore être prononcé? Incurable n'est pas française' (1).
- 20 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 21 Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics: The Medical Concept of National Decline*, Princeton, 1984, 140.
- 22 Edmond Perrier, 'Eugénique et Biologie', in *Eugénique et sélection*, ed. E. Apert et al., Paris, 1922, 1–2: 'avoir de robustes et beaux enfants'.
- 23 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55. For analyses of the motif of the monstrous in Western art, see, for example: Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Princeton, 2003; Frances S. Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture*, Cambridge, 2012.
- 24 Already in 1963, as part of Critique's 'Hommage à Georges Bataille'-issue, published the year after his death, Raymond Queneau identified the essay as an example of Bataille positioning himself as an 'anti-Hegelian'.
- 25 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, London, 1981, 40.
- 26 Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, 1978, 251–277. The essay originally appeared in a special issue on Bataille published by L'Arc, May 1967, 24–44.
- 27 Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', 347, 339; Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, London and New York, 2013, 135.
- 28 Rodolphe Gasché, 'L'Avorton de la pensée', *L'Arc*, 44, 1971, 21–22: 'Décisions capitales, figures sans têtes, ayant violemment projeté hors de soi leur sens, elles relèveraient de cette dialectique des formes, dont parle Bataille dans *Les écarts de la nature*. Cette dialectique, contrairement à celle de Hegel, n'est pas un mouvement de synthèse de contraires dans une identité relevée.'
- 29 Gasché, 'L'Avorton de la pensée': 'Chez Bataille la dialectique, si l'on peut dire, décrit un mouvement opposé. Elle marche à reculons. En direction des monstres, qui désignent la nature comme une pratique

- d'écart et comme essentiellement écartée elle-même' (22).
- 30 Gasché, 'L'Avorton de la pensée': 'Voilà pourquoi aussi ces monstruosités sont "littéralement bouleversantes". Elles font chanceler les mots' (22). Gasché also adds: 'En partie aussi ce travail faisant l'objet d'une communication au séminaire de M. Jacques Derrida sur la théorie du discours philosophique' à ENS (1969–70)' 11, n. 1.
- 31 Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, Cambridge, MA, 1989, 139.
- 32 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 139.
- 33 Denis Hollier, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible', trans. Liesl Ollman, *October*, 60, Spring 1992, 20.
- 34 Hollier, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible', 20.
- 35 Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris, 2019, 153: 'Insistons de nouveau sur la richesse théorétique de ces exemples, de ces images: ils nous introduisent à la nature "dialectique"—mot employé par Bataille lui-même dans son article, mot sur lequel il nous faudra évidemment revenir—du processus de l'informe envisagé précisément comme excès des formes, excès dans les formes'.
- 36 Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe*: 'exhibant l'empietement des figures en avant-plan de la représentation même, elle semble faire perdre aux images leur dignité de signes communicables, et ne se donne pour finie que comme le symptôme' (310). On Didi-Huberman's theoretisation of the 'symptom', Chari Larsson writes: 'Against this semiotic readability of the sign, Didi-Huberman accentuates the dynamism and the movement of the symptom. Unlike the sign, the symptom is not a stable visual object. It is the point of instability, contention and crisis in the image. [...] Rather than a stable, readable image, the symptom is in perpetual motion, governed by a rhizomatic chain of associations, infinitely deferring synthesis'; (*Didi-Huberman and the Image*, Manchester, 2021, 41).
- 37 Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe*: 'Les formes du symptomatique se repèrent, en deuxième lieu, dans tous ces textes de Bataille écrits pour Documents, à travers ce qu'on pourrait nommer une véritable symptomologie des formes elles-mêmes. [...] Documents [...] menait en France un travail de dépassement de la pensée iconographique' (371, 417).
- 38 Rosalind Krauss, 'The Destiny of the Informe', in *Formless: A User's Guide*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, New York, 1997, 252.
- 39 Krauss, 'The Destiny of the Informe', 252.
- 40 See, for example, Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA, 1985. In this collection of essays, Krauss uses the term 'postmodernist' to refer to 'the theoretical domain of structuralist and poststructuralist analysis' (6).
- 41 Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', 251–277.
- 42 Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 245.
- 43 Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 339.
- 44 Allan Stoekl, *Politics, Writing, Mutilation: The Cases of Bataille, Blanchot, Roussel, Leiris, and Ponge*, Minneapolis, 1985, 115, xvii.
- 45 Patrick ffrench, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community*, London, 2007, 1–3.
- 46 Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', 348.
- 47 For an account of French demographic statistics of this period, see Joseph J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation: Postlude Edition*, 1936–1976, Durham, 1979.
- 48 Lucien Prévost-Paradol, *La France nouvelle*, Paris, 1868, 413: 'le nombre des Français doit s'augmenter assez rapidement pour maintenir un certain équilibre entre notre puissance et celle des autres grandes nations de la terre'.
- 49 Karen Offen, 'Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France', *American Historical Review*, 89: 3, June 1984, 650–651.
- 50 Virginie De Luca Barrusse, *Population en danger! La lutte contre les fléaux sociaux sous la Troisième République*, Bern, 2013, 296: 'une pensée démographique, anxiouse voire angoissée'. For further accounts of French dégénérescence, see: J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman, eds, *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, New York, 1985; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848–1918*, Cambridge, 1989; William Schneider, *Quantity and Quality: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-Century France*, Cambridge, 1990.
- 51 For an account of French depopulation as a cultural rather than a demographic issue, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927*, Chicago, 1994.
- 52 The literature of the French pronatalist movement is vast. See, for example: Richard Thomlinson, 'The Disappearance of France 1896–1940: French Politics and the Birth Rate', *Historical Journal*, 28: 2, 1985, 405–415; Catherine Rollet-Echalier, *La politique à l'égard de la petite enfance sous la IIIe République*, Paris, 1990; Virginie De Luca Barrusse, *Les familles nombreuses en France: une question démographique, un enjeu politique (France 1880–1939)*, Rennes, 2008.
- 53 For a detailed account of Bataille's life, see Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, London and New York, 2002.
- 54 For a detailed account of the Alliance's activities, see Virginie De Luca Barrusse, 'Des liaisons avantageuses: l'Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française et les fonctionnaires (1890–1914)', *Annales de démographie historique*, 116, 2008, 255–280.
- 55 Joshua Cole, '"There Are Only Good Mothers": The Ideological Work of Women's Fertility in France before World War I', *French Historical Studies*, 19: 3, Spring 1996, 640. See also: Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ithaca and London, 2000.
- 56 Jacques Bertillon, *La dépopulation de la France: ses conséquences, ses causes: mesures à prendre pour le combattre*, Paris, 1911: 'le mal est absolument spécial à notre pays' (3); 'Un problème angoissant devrait seul occuper toute la pensée des Français: "Comment empêcher la France de disparaître? Comment maintenir sur terre la race française?"' (1).
- 57 Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française, *Comment sauver la France*, Paris, 1913, 1. Bibliothèque nationale de France, 16-LL1-764: 'chaque fois qu'il naît chez nous 2 futurs soldats, il en naît 3 en Italie, 4 en Autriche-Hongrie, 5 en Allemagne!'
- 58 Gina Greene, 'In the Garden of Puériculture: Cultivating the Ideal Infant in Real and Imagined Landscapes of Care (1895–1935)', *Change Over Time*, 6: 2, Fall 2016, 193.
- 59 For a contemporary account of French receptions, see, for example, Georges Clémenceau, *Grandeurs et misères d'une victoire*, Paris, 1930. The book—an aggrieved account of the First World War and its aftermath—was published posthumously, after Clémenceau's death in 1929. See also: Philippe Bernard and Henri Dubief, *The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914–1938*, trans. Anthony Forster, Cambridge, 1985; Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Bernstein, *Victoire et frustrations: 1914–1929*, Paris, 1990.
- 60 Demangeon (1920), quoted in *Victoire et frustrations*: 'la bonne terre a transformé en désert, en une steppe sauvage, en un champ d'éruptions' (169).
- 61 'Sus aux Barbares', *Le Figaro*, 20 September 1918, 1: 'Oui, ils ont osé hier bombarder la cathédrale de Reims [...] pour insulter à tout notre histoire.' For an account of the bombardment of Reims and its longlasting aftereffects on Franco-German relations, see Thomas W. Gaehtgens, *Reims on Fire: War and Reconciliation between France and Germany*, trans. David Dollenzmayer, Los Angeles, 2018.
- 62 Georges Bataille, *Notre-Dame de Rheims*, Saint-Flour, 1918. The piece has been translated and published in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 15–19. Bataille's period of Catholicism stretched between 1914 and 1920.
- 63 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 14–26. Bataille was drafted but discharged in 1917 for health reasons (Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 24).
- 64 The second part of the novel, which was originally published under the pseudonym Lord Auch, deals directly with Bataille's childhood memories of his father. (Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, London, 2001, 69–74.)
- 65 Schneider, *Quantity and Quality*, 117–119.
- 66 Clémenceau (1919), quoted in Paul Haury, *La vie ou la mort de la France*, Paris, 1923, 7: 'Le traité de Versailles ne porte pas que la France s'engage à avoir beaucoup d'enfants, mais c'est la première chose qu'il aurait fallu y inscrire. Car si la France renonce aux familles nombreuses, vous aurez beau mettre dans les traités les plus belles clauses que vous voudrez, vous aurez beau prendre tous les canons de l'Allemagne, vous aurez beau faire tout ce qu'il vous plaira, la France sera perdue, parce qu'il n'y aura plus de Français.'
- 67 On interwar pronatalist activities, see: Françoise Thébaud, 'Le mouvement nataliste dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres: l'Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 32, April–June 1985, 276–301; Marie-Monique Huss, 'Pronatalism in the Inter-War Period in France', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25: 1, January 1990, 39–68; Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914–1945*,

- Ithaca and London, 2003.
- 68 'Décret du 27 janvier 1920', quoted in Virginie De Luca Barrusse, 'Premiers jalons d'une politique familiale', *Informations sociales*, 189, 2015, 23: 'de rechercher toutes les mesures susceptibles de combattre la dépopulation, d'accroître la natalité [...]'; de procéder à l'examen des dispositions intéressant la natalité pouvant être introduites dans tous les projets ou propositions de lois'.
- 69 Nelly Roussel, 'La Journée des mères de familles nombreuses', *La Voix des femmes*, 6 May 1920, quoted in Karen Offen, *Debating the Woman Question in the French Third Republic, 1870–1920*, Cambridge, 2018, 609. Roussel was a neo-Malthusian, advocating for the distribution of contraceptives as a means to limit population growth. However, as Elinor Accampo notes: 'The French neo-Malthusian movement differed from its counterparts in Britain and the United States, because its founder, Paul Robin, and his disciple Nelly Roussel put women and women's control over their own bodies at the center of birth control doctrine.' (Elinor Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republican France*, Baltimore, 2006, 5). Unsurprisingly, the neo-Malthusian doctrine had since long posed as a bête noire for the Third Republican pronatalist movement. In his 1911 treatise, *La dépopulation de la France*, Jacques Bertillon even labelled the neo-Malthusian promotion of birth control as 'criminal'.
- 70 Offen, *Debating the Woman Question*, 609–612. Amongst its critics, the law was dubbed the loi scélérate, or the wicked law. It should be noted that Bataille, in his 1957 publication, *L'erotisme*, would identify the demand of reproduction as a fraudulent attempt to subject the sacred and heterogenous experience of eroticism to the useful, rational and homogenous world of utility. Eroticism, in Bataille's hands, is defined in opposition to reproduction: 'Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death. (...) Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children' (11). This argument therefore sits within Bataille's wider project, set to champion non-productive expenditure across all levels of human activity, as laid out in his three-part treatise on general economy, *The Accursed Share*. The second volume, published posthumously in 1976, deals specifically with the history of eroticism. For an interpretation of the queer politics at play in Bataille's radical resistance of the social, political and religious demands of reproductive sex in favour of a sovereign and delightfully useless form of pleasure, see Shannon Winniburst, 'Bataille's Queer Pleasures: The Universe as Spider or Spit', in *Reading Bataille Now*, ed. Shannon Winniburst, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007, 75–93.
- 71 Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation*, 128.
- 72 'Qu'est-ce que l'Alliance nationale?', *Natalité*, 2, May 1925. Bibliothèque nationale de France, JO-46085: 'L'Alliance nationale cherche à créer un vaste courant d'opinion en faveur d'une politique nataliste et familiale'. Five of its members were ministers in the 1920 government.
- 73 Huss, 'Pronatalism in the Inter-War Period', 43.
- 74 For an astute analysis of how surrealist art reflected the resulting, deeply conflicted image of manhood in interwar France, see Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007.
- 75 Eugène Ledoux, *Le problème de la population française*, Besançon, 1924, 1. Bibliothèque nationale de France, 8-L31–283: 'France est en face d'un redoutable danger: la diminution progressive de sa population. Elle se heurte aujourd'hui à ce dilemme shakspearien [sic]: "être ou ne pas être"'.
- 76 Ledoux, *Le problème de la population française*, 1: 's'enfoncer lentement dans le néant'.
- 77 Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France between the Wars*, Ithaca and London, 2009.
- 78 Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 8, 5.
- 79 Clémenceau (1919), quoted in Haury, *La vie ou la mort de la France*, 7.
- 80 Ledoux, *Le problème de la population française*, 1.
- 81 Panchasi, *Future Tense*, 8, 5.
- 82 This illustration also circulated on postcards as well as appearing on the cover of a report on pronatalist politics, requested by and presented to the cabinet in 1924.
- 83 For an account of the centrality that demographics held to the political project of the Third Republic, see Libby Schweber, *Disciplining Statistics: Demography and Vital Statistics in France and England, 1830–1885*, Durham and London, 2006.
- 84 Haury, *La vie ou la mort de la France*, 1: 'la France de Louis XIV ou de 93 était le plus peuplés de grands pays d'Europe'.
- 85 Haury, *La vie ou la mort de la France*, 1: 'Cette force, nous ne l'avons plus; sa perte nous a coûté et nous coûte encore terriblement cher'.
- 86 Haury, *La vie ou la mort de la France*, 1: 'LE MAL QUI TUE LA FRANCE [...] c'est le suicide d'un grand peuple!'
- 87 The poster also reads: 'Born in 1922: 760.000 Frenchmen, 1.450.000 Germans [...] 274.000 less French births than in 1868.' Mirroring the surge of pronatalist politics in France, the motif of the child and, more broadly, the theme of motherhood, featured widely in artistic productions of the period, visible in the works of late-nineteenth-century painters, such as Maurice Denis, Auguste Renoir, Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, and Berthe Morisot, as well as in those of artists varyingly connected to postwar calls for a 'Return to Order', including Gino Severini, Amédée Ozenfant, Fernand Léger, and Pablo Picasso (in particular his Maternity-paintings from 1920–1921). For art-historical discussions of these tropes, see: Michael Leja, "'Le Vieux Marcheur'" and "Les Deux Risques": Picasso, Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Maternity, 1899–1907', *Art History*, 8: 1, March 1985, 66–81; Francesca Berry, "'Maman is my Muse': The Maternal as Motif and Metaphor in Édouard Vuillard's Intimisme", *Oxford Art Journal*, 34: 1, March 2011, 55–77; Barbara Larson, 'Jean Geoffroy and the Conflicted Response to Childhood Epidemics in Fin-de-Siècle France', in *Visual Culture and Pandemic Disease Since 1750*, ed. Marsha Morton and Ann-Marie Akehurst, New York, 2023. For an analysis of 'deformed' bodies in fin-de-siècle French art, see Allison Morehead, 'Defending Deformation: Maurice Denis's Positivist Modernism', *Art History*, 35: 5, November 2015, 890–915. There is also a burgeoning body of literature on the theme of maternity in the long history of surrealism and its legacies: see, for example, Anna Watz, 'Maternities: Dorothea Tanning's Aesthetics of Touch', *Art History*, 45: 1, 2022, 12–34. See also the oeuvre of Rosemary Betterton, for example: 'Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination', *Hypatia*, 21: 1, 2006, 80–100; and *Maternal Bodies in the Visual Art*, Manchester, 2018.
- 88 The literature on Pinard, puériculture and the development of eugenics in France is vast. See, for example: William Schneider, 'Toward the Improvement of the Human Race: The History of Eugenics in France', *Journal of Modern History*, 54: 2, June 1982, 268–291; William Schneider, 'Puériculture, and the Style of French Eugenics', *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 8: 2, 1986, 265–277; Nadine Lefacheur, 'La puériculture d'Adolphe Pinard', in *Darwinisme et société*, ed. Patrick Tort, Paris, 1992, 413–435; Anne Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France: Les médecins et la procréation*, XIXe–XXe siècle, Paris, 1995; Marius Turda and Aaron Gillette, *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective*, London and New York, 2014; François Secco, *L'eugénisme de la Puériculture d'Adolphe Pinard: modeler l'individu pour améliorer l'humanité*, Paris, 2021.
- 89 Schneider, 'Puériculture, and the Style of French Eugenics', 265. Similarly, Anne Carol writes that puériculture was 'the French doublet of eugenics' (38).
- 90 Perrier, 'Eugénique et Biologie', 1–2.
- 91 Louis Forrest, 'Propos d'un Parisien: À la société d'eugénique', *Le Matin*, 9 May 1926: 'Pour que la Société d'eugénique si intéressante trouve de l'écho dans le public, je vais lui proposer ici d'ajouter à son nom un sous-titre. Qu'elle s'appelle Société d'eugénique ou Société pour l'amélioration de la race humaine. [...] elle pourrait s'appeler encore: Société pour la fabrication, en France, de beaux gosses!'
- 92 After the First World War, eugenic policies were increasingly adopted by governments across Europe. As Marius Turda has argued: 'It was largely due to the demographic changes brought about by the war that political elites turned to eugenics as a means of promoting social and biological revivalism amidst a disillusioned political environment. [...] The First World War was a defining moment in the crystallisation of European eugenic thinking' (Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*, Basingstoke, 2010, 57, 121.)
- 93 V. Wallich, 'A propos de l'histoire de la puériculture', *Annales de gynécologie et d'obstétrique*, 1906, 19–23.
- 94 Alfred Caron, *Introduction à la puériculture et l'hygiène de la première enfance*, Paris, 1865, 14: 'LA PUÉRICULTURE EST À LA SANTÉ DES ENFANTS CE QUE L'AGRICULTURE EST À LA FERTILITÉ DU SOL'. The following year, an expanded edition was published under the title *La Puériculture*,

- ou la Science d'élever hygiéniquement et physiologiquement les enfants.
- 95 Rollot-Echalier, *La politique à l'égard de la petite enfance*, 21–108.
- 96 Albert Balestre, *Cours d'hygiène pratique: hygiène individuelle, hygiène scolaire, hygiène publique*, Paris, 1891, 178, 180. Bibliothèque nationale de France, 8-TC2-27: 'La mortalité de l'enfance soulève un des problèmes plus graves de l'hygiène et de la politique [...]. La mortalité de l'enfance est une cause grave de dépopulation'.
- 97 Albert Balestre, *Étude sur la mortalité de la première enfance dans la population urbaine de la France de 1892 à 1897*, Paris, 1901, 42. Bibliothèque nationale de France, NUMM-81349: 'Nous laissons mourir tous les ans 30 000 enfants. [...] 15 000 soldats! [...] c'est l'affaiblissement graduel, c'est la décadence, c'est la chute de la patrie.'
- 98 Adolphe Pinard, 'Note pour servir à l'histoire de la puériculture intra-utérine', *Bulletin de l'Académie nationale de médecine*, 34, 1895, 594–597: 'une population forte et vigoureuse'.
- 99 Paul Strauss, *Dépopulation et puériculture*, Paris, 1901, 9: 'La puériculture constitue [...] l'œuvre la plus forte et la plus sûre de défense nationale.'
- 100 Schneider, *Quantity and Quality*.
- 101 Wallich, 'A propos de l'histoire de la puériculture': 'Dans la période qui s'écoule de 1866 à 1895, entre la chute et la renaissance de la puériculture' (21); 'Le mot puériculture est aujourd'hui entré dans l'usage courant: tout le monde l'emploie, et il est compris de tous' (19).
- 102 Linda Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne: Textbooks and the Socialization of Girls in Modern French Primary Schools*, Albany, 1984, 83–84.
- 103 Adolphe Pinard, *La Puériculture du premier âge*, 18th edition, Paris, 1934, xi. Bibliothèque nationale de France, 8-T-4553: '1^o de les conserver, c'est-à-dire: les empêcher de mourir; 2^o de faire tout ce qui sera possible, afin qu'ils se développent pour le mieux, c'est-à-dire: qu'ils grandissent bien et deviennent vigoureux.' The book, selling almost 100,000 copies, circulated in its sixth edition by 1913.
- 104 Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 366. On the relationship between the French avant-garde and Third Republican education systems, see: Jack J. Spector, *Surrealist Art & Writing: 1919/1939*, Cambridge, 1997; Molly Nesbit, 'Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model', October, 37, Summer 1986, 53–64.
- 105 Adolphe Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce', *Revue Scientifique*, 1899, 167–174.
- 106 Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics*, 119–121.
- 107 Peter J. Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution: A Century of Debate*, 1844–1944, Oxford, 1987, 257.
- 108 See Jean Baptiste Pierre Antoine Lamarck, 'On the Influence of Circumstances on the Actions and Habits of Animals, and that of the Actions and Habits of Living Bodies, as Causes Which Modify Their Organization', trans. E. E. Galt, *The American Naturalist*, 22: 264, 1888, 960–972.
- 109 Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics*, 143.
- 110 Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics*, 143.
- 111 Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'Je suis absolument convaincu aujourd'hui que tout état pathologique, tout dépression physique et morale, toute déchéance physiologique, en un mot, de l'un des générateurs ou des deux, a une influence manifeste sur le produit de conception et sur son développement futur' (174).
- 112 Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'Dans 23 familles parmi lesquelles je trouve, au milieu d'enfants bien portants, l'existence d'un dégénéré, d'un infirme ou d'un idiot, 22 fois j'ai pu constater et faire constater aux parents que l'un des deux était, au moment de la procréation, ou malade ou convalescent' (174).
- 113 Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'soit par hérédité similaire (homologue), soit par hérédité dissemblable (hétérologue). Dans le deuxième, l'enfant hérite bien encore de l'état pathologique des parents, au moment de la conception' (172).
- 114 Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'la gamme de son influence sur le produit de conception est variable, à ce point que là il ne produira qu'une simple déchéance, tandis qu'ailleurs il déterminera une monstruosité' (172).
- 115 Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France*: 'La dégénérescence renoue ici avec le discours tératologique de ses origines' (108).
- 116 Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'Combien peu se demandent s'ils sont aptes à procréer, et songent aux conséquences si graves de cet acte! [...] j'ose espérer que, lorsque ces faits seront bien connus et vulgarisés, nombre de parents, dans bien des circonstances, s'abstiendront de procréer autrement que dans un état physiologique aussi bon que possible' (174).
- 117 Schneider, 'Puériculture, and the Style of French Eugenics', 269; Pinard, 'De la conservation et de l'amélioration de l'espèce': 'C'est en faisant ainsi de la puériculture avant la procréation, c'est-à-dire en faisant de la prophylaxie, qu'on arrivera à diminuer le nombre de déchets sociaux, des informes, des idiots, des dégénérés. C'est de cette façon que l'on arrivera, j'en ai la conviction profonde, à diminuer le nombre des inégalités naturelles, dites fatales. C'est en entrant et en préservant dans cette voie que l'on réagira contre la dégénérescence de la race et que, plus tard, l'atavisme ne transmettra aux générations futures que des sélections et non des éléments de décadence' (174). For an account of cultural and artistic reactions to Pinard's neo-Lamarckian eugenics, see Fae Brauer, 'Eroticizing Lamarckian Eugenics: The Body Stripped Bare during French Sexual Neoregulation', in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delicti*, ed. Fae Brauer and Anthea Callen, Aldershot, 2008.
- 118 Lefacheur, 'La puériculture d'Adolphe Pinard', 428.
- 119 For an account of Documents' subversive treatment of tuberculosis contagion, see Disa Persson, 'Spittle, Dust, and Flies: Documents and Tuberculosis in the Visual Culture of Interwar France', in *Contagion, Hygiene, and the European Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins and Disa Persson, New York, 2023.
- 120 Schneider, *Quantity and Quality*, 82–83. Carol contrasts 'l'eugénisme galtonien' with 'l'eugénisme médical français' (77).
- 121 Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France*, 77–78. Also attending the event was Paul Doumer, a pronatalist senator and soon-to-be president of the Republic, who in his address to the congress announced his hopes that the next international event would be held in Paris.
- 122 The Eugenics Education Society, *Problems in Eugenics: Papers Communicated to the First International Congress Held at the University of London, July 24th to 30th, 1912*, London, 1912, 457–459.
- 123 See, for example: Jacques Léonard, 'Le premier congrès international d'eugénique (Londres, 1912) et ses conséquences françaises', *Histoire des sciences médicales*, 17: 2, 1983, 141–146; Jacques Léonard, 'Les origines et les conséquences de l'eugénique en France', *Annales de démographie historique*, 1985, 203–214.
- 124 Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France*, 80–81. The French Eugenics Society was comprised of 64.5% doctors, compared to 22.5% in Britain, 19.6% in America, and 33.4% in Germany.
- 125 Perrier, 'Eugénique et Biologie': 'la Société française d'eugénique dont le but de rechercher, de préciser, de répandre les moyens de perfectionner les races humaines, en indiquant les conditions que chaque individu, chaque couple doit s'efforcer de remplir pour avoir de robustes et beaux enfants' (1–2).
- 126 Perrier, 'Eugénique et Biologie': 'Pour qu'ils portent tous leurs fruits, il faut que le milieu lui-même ne soit pas une cause de dégradation; que les vices nationaux comme l'alcoolisme, les négligences personnelles qui propagent les contagions, les débauches de toute nature soient impitoyablement poursuivies' (20).
- 127 E. Apert, 'Eugénique et Santé Nationale', in *Eugénique et sélection*, ed. E. Apert et al., Paris, 1922, 59–69: 'quand il s'agit de blessures des membres, amputations, ankyloses, cicatrices vicieuses, fractures, [...] il n'y a aucun danger de transmission de la mutilation aux enfants à venir.'
- 128 Léonard, 'Les origines': 'les eugénistes néolamarciens s'acharnent à mener des expériences de tératogénèse prouvant l'influence des agents toxiques extérieurs sur le plasma germinatif, et, pavoisant devant l'immunologie, ils aimeraient que les causes des mutations proviennent des microbes ou des toxines' (209).
- 129 The Société française d'eugénique merged with the Institut International d'Anthropologie in 1926.
- 130 William Schneider, 'The Eugenics Movement in France, 1890–1940', in *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*, ed. Mark B. Adams, Oxford, 1990, 77–79.
- 131 Already during the war, Pinard had been positioned as vice president of a Committee for the Protection of Mothers and Children. Additionally, in 1920, Pinard and Richet were made Vice Presidents of the council of birthrate as part of the new Ministry of Social Hygiene and Welfare. (Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1890–1920*, Ithaca and London, 1993, 267.)
- 132 'Annexe n°1730, Séance du 2 décembre 1920', *Journal officiel de la République française. Documents parlementaires. Chambre des députés: annexes aux procès-verbaux des séances*, 1920, 347: 'une proposition de loi ayant pour objet le

- relèvement de la natalité française au point de vue de nombre et de la qualité'.
- 133 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924', *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés: compte rendu in-extenso*, 2 June 1924, 2221–2226.
- 134 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924': 'Mais si le déficit financier est grave, il en existe un autre, infiniment plus grave, hélas! pour notre pays: le déficit des vies humaines françaises!' (2222).
- 135 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924': 'La France marche ainsi vers la mort, fatalement!' (2223).
- 136 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924': 'Mais, est-ce tout que d'accroître la natalité? Non. Ce n'est là que la moitié de la tâche. La quantité ne suffit pas. Il faut aussi, il faut surtout, la qualité' (2224).
- 137 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924': 'Nous savons d'où viennent les monstres et nous savons aussi comment on peut éviter leur apparition. Cela n'empêche pas l'immense majorité de nos semblables de procréer exactement de la même façon que nos ancêtres de l'âge des cavernes, de procréer sans réfléchir. Or, il faut réfléchir. Et la puériculture apprend à réfléchir, avant de procréer' (2224).
- 138 'Ouverture de la session ordinaire de 1924, Séance du 1^{er} Juin 1924': 'Vive la République! qui fera vivre la France dans toute sa force et sa splendeur!' (2226).
- 139 'Annexe n°3585, Séance du 24 novembre 1926': 'garantir [...] les générations futures [...]. Tout citoyen français voulant contracter mariage ne pourra être inscrit sur les registres de l'état civil que s'il est munis d'un certificat médical, daté de la veille' (131).
- 140 Guy Launay, 'Certificat', *Le Matin*, 10 December 1926: 'On va instaurer le certificat prénuptial. Bravo! Les candidats au mariage devront présenter au maire une note médicale prouvant qu'ils sont en bonne santé! Ce conseil de réforme nous évitera sans doute de lamentables héredos. Cette loi est nécessaire, car la duperie physique est une chose lamentable.'
- 141 Laurent Bonnevay, 'Le futur mari: doit-il apporter une fiche sanitaire?', *Le Petit Journal*, 16 June 1927: 'le certificat prénuptial sera sans effet: il ne préservera pas l'épouse contre la contagion, ni ne gardera la société contre la mise au monde d'enfants tarés.'
- 142 Albert Chenevier, 'Comment diminuer le nombre des enfants anormaux?', *Le Quotidien*, 14 September 1927: 'Science encore trop peu répandue chez nous, malgré les efforts de propagandistes dont le plus célèbre est le professeur Pinard, président de la Société française d'eugénique.'
- 143 Chenevier, 'Comment diminuer le nombre des enfants anormaux?': 'il est, tout à la fois, inhumain et dangereux pour l'avenir de la race, de laisser toute liberté de procréer à des hommes, à des femmes qui engendreront des enfants infirmes, idiots, criminels-nées, malheureux déchets biologiques appelés à devenir de lamentables déchets sociaux, et qui feront souche eux-mêmes de nouveaux infortunés.'
- 144 Clément Vautel, 'Mon Film', *L'Intransigeant*, 16 December 1926: 'cette curieuse proposition de loi suggérée par le professeur Pinard'. In 1924, Vautel wrote *Madame ne veut pas d'enfant*, a story about a woman modern who declines on motherhood in favour of a pleasure-filled life. (Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, 131.)
- 145 Vautel, 'Mon Film': 'Un lecteur m'a écrit [...] Faute du certificat Pinard, je n'aurais pu me marier et je serais peut-être mort aujourd'hui' (131).
- 146 Vautel, 'Mon Film': 'Une lectrice ajoute: 'Et s'il me plaît, à moi, d'épouser un tuberculeux? Le cœur a des raisons que l'hygiène sociale ne connaît pas...' (131).
- 147 Vautel, 'Mon Film': 'la science doit aussi, c'est bien certain, intervenir dans cette élaboration essentielle où le hasard joue un rôle dangereux. On s'occupe très sérieusement de l'amélioration des races chevaline, canine, porcine, etc... L'espèce humaine s'improvise au petit bonheur... Mais comment faire? Ce n'est pas un livre du professeur Pinard qu'ils tiennent à la main, lorsque les amoureux, mariés ou non, décident de ne pas lire plus avant...' (131).
- 148 'Nos échos', *L'Intransigeant*, 16 December 1926: 'Les journaux parlent beaucoup, [...] soit pour approuver, soit pour la blaguer, de la proposition de loi du docteur Pinard, sur le "certificat prénuptial".
- 149 'Annexe n°5172, Séance du 6 décembre 1927', *Journal officiel de la République française. Documents parlementaires. Chambre des députés: annexes aux procès-verbaux des séances*, 1927, 372–378.
- 150 'Annexe n°5172': 'La génération à venir semble donc devoir, au point de vue eugénique, être moins bonne que celle qui l'a précédée' (373).
- 151 'Annexe n°5172': 'Le point de départ de sa proposition de loi est très simple [...]. La proposition de loi du professeur Pinard demande au législateur de permettre au médecins, sinon d'empêcher, tout au moins de détourner du mariage un "contagieux", un malheureux qui, souvent sans le savoir, peut porter à sa future conjointe une maladie d'autant plus dangereuse qu'elle n'est pas dépistée dans son origine, sa cause réelle, et en cas de procréation, de lancer dans l'existence in pauvre être débile, malade, parfois un monstre, et dans tous cas, une "épave humaine"' (376).
- 152 de La Palisse, 'Aux vérités de La Palisse', *Le Petit Journal*, 26 February 1928: 'la dictature d'Hygée'.
- 153 A. Ch.-M., 'Amour et certificat', *L'Homme libre*, 28 February 1928: 'L'amour est un enfant qui n'a jamais connu de loi, — ni de certificat, et, à vouloir l'enserrer dans des diplômes parcheminés, on fera si bien qu'il se réfugiera dans la liberté absolue; et alors, en serez-vous plus avancé, M. Pinard et M. Nicollier?'
- 154 Line Deberre, 'La question des enfants', *Le Rappel*, 29 December 1927: 'L'important, l'essentiel n'est pas d'avoir beaucoup d'enfants, mais d'avoir de beaux enfants, c'est-à-dire des enfants sains, normaux, sans tare héréditaire.'
- 155 Deberre, 'La question des enfants': 'Deux fiancés s'adorent [...] Fort bien... mais les petits qui naîtront fous, tuberculeux, rachitiques seront les innocentes victimes de cet amour, et cela est monstrueux...'.
- 156 Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France*, 226–227.
- 157 Georges Schreiber, 'Les examens sanitaires périodiques', *La Puériculture*, March 1928, 130: 'On en parlera dans les journaux, on en parlera au Parlement, dans les salons; nous voudrions qu'on en parlât même dans les chambres à coucher. C'est un progrès, car nous voulons d'abord modifier l'opinion publique.'
- 158 'Les premières', *Le Matin*, 27 December 1928: 'Mais Malanson n'examine pas que des maladies; fervent propagandiste de la natalité, il est à la disposition des pères de famille qui entendent soumettre leur futur genre à une investigation qui rassura sa constitution.'
- 159 'Les premières': 'quelles situations piquantes surgiront, quelles folies concevront les personnages et quelles incessantes rafales de rires secoueront la salle'.
- 160 'Courrier des théâtres', *Le Matin*, 12 February 1929: 'l'opérette ultra-gaie *Deshabillez-vous* (succès triomphal)'.
- 161 Thierry Lefebvre, 'Le cinéma contre la syphilis—des débuts prometteurs', *La revue du praticien*, 54, 2004, 2–5. For an account of the theme of interwar anxiety, in particular in terms of how it pertained to notions of sexuality and gender in André Kertész's photography, see Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 80–114.
- 162 'Les films de la semaine', *Excelsior*, 5 July 1929: 'C'est un plaidoyer muet en faveur du certificat prénuptial.'
- 163 Monet (1929), quoted in Ida-R. Sée, 'L'Hygiène et l'Enfance: L'enfance en péril', *L'Hygiène Sociale*, 25 January 1930, 457: 'Essayer de faire naître des enfants, c'est bien, mais les empêcher de mourir, c'est mieux, il y a chaque année, cinquante mille petites vies humaines à sauver!'
- 164 'Pour avoir de beaux enfants: Le certificat prénuptial donnerait-il des garanties sérieuses aux époux?', *Paris-Soir*, 4 December 1929; 'Pour les parents qui ont des enfants à marier: Le Certificat Prénuptial assurerait-il de beaux gosses?', *Le Midi*, 5 December 1929.
- 165 Marcel Labbé, 'Hérédité et éducation morbides', in *Annales de médecine: recueil mensuel de mémoires originaux et revues critiques*, February 1929, 138: 'À notre époque de civilisation plus douce, les procédés brutaux doivent être abandonnés et remplacés par des notions d'eugénique. Celle-ci consiste d'abord dans un choix intelligent du partenaire.'
- 166 Labbé, 'Hérédité et éducation morbides': 'Le future procréateur, conscient de son devoir, devrait aussi se préparer au mariage par une amélioration de sa santé et de ses forces' (138).
- 167 Labbé, 'Hérédité et éducation morbides': 'Tant que le carnet de santé [...] n'aura pas été institué, il importe à chaque conjoint ou à ses parents de se renseigner sur la santé de l'autre et de fonder son choix, non plus seulement sur l'intérêt ou l'amour, mais aussi sur la santé' (138).

- 168 Labbé, 'Hérédité et éducation morbides': 'les malformations constatées à la naissance devaient être classées dans le domaine de la tératologie et rejetées de celui de l'hérédité. Leur pathogénie ne se conçoit point, en effet, comme la transmission d'un facteur héréditaire au moment de la conception, dans le germe sexuel, mais comme la conséquence des influences pathologiques qui se sont exercées sur l'œuf au cours de son développement: traumatismes, infections, intoxications, conditions physiques ou chimiques nocives apparues dans le milieu humoral, telles en sont les causes' (135).
- 169 'L'examen pré-nuptial est créé', *L'Œuvre*, 3 June 1930; 'Vers le certificat prénuptial', *Le Journal*, 23 May 1930; Carol, *Histoire de l'eugénisme en France*, 326–329.
- 170 It should be noted that Laurence Bataille, the daughter of Georges and his then wife, Sylvia, was born on 10 June 1930. For details, see Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 143–152.
- 171 Dr Henri Bouquet, 'Certificat Prénuptial', in *Larousse mensuel illustré: revue encyclopédique universelle*, April 1930, 369–370. *Larousse mensuel illustré* was launched in 1907 by Claude Augé. For details of its operation, see Jeff Loveland, *The European Encyclopedia: From 1650 to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, 2019, 52–54.
- 172 Bouquet, 'Certificat Prénuptial': 'Il est évidemment anormal que les soins que prennent les éleveurs de races animales [...], afin d'obtenir des produits sains, ne soient pas de mise dans l'espèce humaine' (369). Dr Bouquet had promoted Pinard's certificate in, for example, *Le Temps*.
- 173 'Pour l'avenir: Il faut exiger le certificat prénuptial. Le Dr Pinard nous dit...', *L'Intransigeant*, 22 February 1930; 'Un appel aux jeunes gens en faveur de la consultation prénuptiale', *Le Petit Parisien*, 13 February 1930.
- 174 Gaston Variot, *La Puériculture pratique, ou l'Art d'élever les enfants du premier âge*, 5th edition, Paris, 1930. Bibliothèque nationale de France, 8-T-2185: 'L'avenir et la grandeur de la France dépendent de notre natalité, qui ne doit pas rester défaillante.' The Institut de puériculture had been founded by the city council in 1911 as a centre for research aiming to 'popularise infant hygiene'.
- 175 See, for example, 'Les résultats de notre concours de bébés', *La Culture physique*, November 1928, 355–357.
- 176 *La Culture physique*, launched in 1904, was the creation of Albert Surier and Edmond Desbonnet. Steeped in neo-Lamarckian thought, its primary mission was to promote physical exercise as a pathway to the improvement of the race. For a discussion of its politics, see Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France*, Oxford, 2012.
- 177 Sauville, 'Puériculture: Le certificat prénuptial', *Gringoire*, 13 June 1930: 'Allez visiter le service des Enfants arriérés à Bicêtre. Vous verrez des monstres qui sont les produits affreux d'unions inconscients ou ignorantes de leurs tares.'
- 178 Sauville, 'Puériculture': 'Je ne doute pas que ce spectacle donnerait à réfléchir aux jeunes couples, il les inciterait sinon à ne pas s'unir, du moins à ne pas procréer sans savoir s'ils en sont dignes.'
- 179 For an analysis of the engravings printed in Regnault's treatise, see: Andrew Curran and Patrick Graille, 'Exhibiting the Monster: Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault's *Les Ecarts de la Nature*', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21: 2, May 1997, 16–22; Zoe Copeman, 'Deviating from Monstrosity: The Paradox of the Normal in *Les Ecarts de la Nature* by Nicolas-François and Geneviève Regnault', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 17: 4, 2023, 415–433.
- 180 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 181 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 182 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55. Bataille is referring to a series of 'composite portraits' of Harvard students produced by John L. Lovell in 1887, using Galton's method. For a summary of Galton's technique, see Francis Galton, 'Composite Portraits, Made by Combining Those of Many Different Persons into a Single Resultant Figure', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 8, 1879, 132–144.
- 183 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 184 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 185 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 186 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 187 Georges Bataille, 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism', in *Visions of Excess*, 51. The text was originally published in *Documents*, 1, 1930.
- 188 Bataille, 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism', 51.
- 189 Georges Bataille, 'Materialism', in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, assembled and introduced by Alastair Brotchie, trans. Ian White, London, 1995, 58. The text was originally published in *Documents*, 3, 1929.
- 190 Georges Bataille, 'Formless', in *Visions of Excess*, 31; 'Man', in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 56–57. The text was originally published in *Documents*, 5, 1929.
- 191 Bataille, 'Formless', 56.
- 192 Bataille, 'Formless', 57.
- 193 Bataille, 'Formless', 57.
- 194 Michel Leiris, 'Civilisation', in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 93. The text was originally published in *Documents*, 4, 1929.
- 195 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', 55.
- 196 Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, 146.
- 197 Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Cambridge, MA, 1983, 39–40.

