

The Pasted Paper Devolution:
Alcoholism, Sex, Syphilis and Sport in the Cubist Papier-Collés

Fae Brauer

By stopping the eye in the same way as an artist's signature, the *papier collés* of Braque and Picasso wrought what •Clement Greenberg called *The Pasted Paper Revolution*. Yet far from ahistorical blockades, the newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements and packaging appended by Picasso and Braque were legible conduits to prevailing discourses. Possibly making Cubism "fully semiological", as •Yve-Alain Bois contends, and spawning "a full play of signifiers", as Rosalind Krauss claims, nevertheless these signs were embedded within an irreconcilable dialectic of •depopulation and repopulation, •degeneration and •regeneration played out by the mass media. When located within this dialectic, the letters in these fragments of pasted paper do not simply act as retinal barricades or liberated signs but as semiological triggers for such controversial keywords as •abortion, contraception, syphilis, gonorrhea, venereologist, impotence, virility, as well as health, hygiene, physical education and sporting life. When read intertextually they signify, following Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, a latent horror of devolution in the *avant-guerre* Radical Republic.¹ By locating these pasted papers within this dialectic and unravelling their contrapuntal interrelationships, this paper will reveal how they reveal this horror amidst what Socialist Député, Edouard Vaillant, called "*the real beginning of civil war*."²

•So acute was the crisis in depopulation that by 1896, national demographer, Jacques Bertillon, formed the •National Alliance for Increasing the French Population and supported Senator Edme Piot's Bill to make large families State Law.³ With devolution and extinction increasingly imminent, four years later it became the National Alliance against Depopulation.⁴ With 40,000 members, 74 general councils, together with support from the leagues, unions and societies for large families and social

hygiene, this enormous pressure group fought against “the great perils” weakening repopulation: Alcohol, abortion, contraception, onanism, ‘inversion’ and ‘conjugal fraud’. •Readily cartoons travestied these perils, particularly alcohol. In 1901, the Alliance successfully lobbied the Waldeck-Rousseau Ministry to investigate these practices throughout France. •Five hundred doctors were commissioned by Bertillon to survey sexual habits.⁵ So prevalent did they find individual and mutual masturbation that in •his *Depopulation* book, Bertillon considered it a general sexual practice.⁶ Classified as a mortal sin by theologians and damned as ‘conjugal fraud’, Bertillon found heterosexual couples gave it the euphemism, •‘marital hygiene’.⁷ A keyterm and strategy in •Neo-Malthusianism led by Paul Robin, ‘hygiène du mariage’ was also used as a clandestine reference to contraception, as illustrated by Braque’s pasted-paper, •*La Mandoline*.⁸

To fight against the Population Alliance, •Robin founded the Neo-Malthusian League for Human Regeneration.⁹ Spurning the procreative imperative, Robin advocated free love and freedom of motherhood. Immediately supported by Integral Feminists,¹⁰ •Hubertine Auclert burnt the Napoleonic marriage code, Nelly Roussel denounced “*the putative national duty of reproduction*” while Marie Huot advocated a “womb strike”.¹¹ To counter Bertillon’s populationist propaganda, •Robin circulated brochures on the *Means of Avoiding Large Families* in which he illustrated the very ‘conjugal frauds’ denounced by Bertillon and the Clergy. •‘*Hygiène du Mariage*’ in Braque’s pasted paper is the title of an instruction pamphlet on these very practices advertised in *Le Journal*.• Not only was it illustrated with a huge range of condoms, improved by the vulcanization of rubber, but also vaginal sponges, syringes, douches known as ‘irrigators’, and newly invented occlusive caps or diaphragms.

That these devices were championed by Integral Feminists is demonstrated by the first cartoon published by Marcel Duchamp, *Féminisme: La Femme Curé*,¹² in which a rubber vaginal douche hangs like a banner on Madeleine Pelletier’s bedroom wall.¹³ Sold from the Malthusian bookshop, the most popular were the diaphragms called the “capuchon Français”,

likened to a black hat – not dissimilar in shape and texture to the one Pelletier is sporting. Large •coloured lithographic posters were circulated throughout working-class arrondissements to demonstrate the use of these contraceptives, particularly insertion of the ‘black hat’, below the cervix, which is ironically referenced by •Braque. This is indicated by his juxtaposition of the advertisement, ‘hygiene du mariage’, with a phallicized length of erect corrugated cardboard encircled at a pregnant point by a thick black disk• - just like the notorious ‘black hat’. Alongside this signifier of contraception appear signs of abortion.

When •Louis Barthou’s stringent anti-abortionist Bill became Law in 1911, not only were abortionists liable to hefty fines and five years imprisonment but also those guilty of inciting abortion.¹⁴ This Bill was targeted at clandestine abortionists posing as ‘sage-femmes’: Mid-wives, as signified by this satire. Despite regulation by mutual associations of ‘sage-femme’,¹⁵ clandestine abortionist promoted their wares on the back pages of newspapers,• including the respectable *Le Journal*.¹⁶ So blatantly coded were their advertisements that Bertillon decried them as scandalous, as illustrated by these two he included in his *Depopulation* book.

Although Bertillon denounced their public display as “monstrous”, •eighteen of them appear in Braque’s pasted-paper with almost identical wording to these advertisements appropriated by Bertillon.¹⁷ Listed directly below the advertisement for sexual hygiene, impotence, ‘maladies secretes des deux sexes’ and opposite the image of the black cervical cap, this configuration constitutes the very bête-noir of Bertillon’s populationists. Yet by no means was this the only pasted paper in which Braque displayed what Bertillon called “criminal propaganda” , as demonstrated by such other pasted papers as his •*Verre et Paquet de Tabac, Le Courier*.¹⁸

Given that these signs refer by implication to Bertillon’s natalist mission, Braque’s pasted papers seem like a tongue-in-cheek travesty of an irreconcilable dialectic. They seem consistent with the way it was played out by the anti-childbirth •Malthusian-Feminist, Thérèse, and her Bertillon styled husband in the spoof opera, *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*, that Guillaume

Apollinaire began writing the very year the Depopulation Alliance was formed but not performed until 1917.¹⁹ •With Thérèse militantly campaigning against childbirth as General Tiresias, while her husband rails against depopulation, the irreconcilability of their positions is illuminated by Apollinaire's ludicrous resolution: The husband giving birth to 40,040 children in a single day. Due to the sexual hygiene campaign led by pioneering syphilographer, •Alfred Fourier, and his French Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, the dialectical surrounding the management of syphilis seemed just as irreconcilable, as revealed by Picasso.²⁰

By the time that Picasso began his Cubist papier-collés, syphilography had taken over pathology. Those reading either Albert or Edmond Fournier believed themselves to be both guilty and threatened for life. Every kind of abnormality and malformation from meningitis, blindness, stammering, skin rashes to •headaches became attributed to syphilis, as illustrated by *L'Assiette au Buerre's* cartoon showing a Medical-Major's first command on inspecting the troops: "If you have a headache, drop your trousers!"²¹ Syphilophobes ranged from the neurotic besieging his doctor's surgery, to those who inflicted such far-fetched remedies upon themselves as cauterizing their lips, tongues and noses with silver nitrate every day. Nevertheless syphilophobia played right into the hands of quack syphilographers seeking to capitalize on male paranoia.

•Advertising their wares on the back pages of popular journals, •as illustrated by the advertisement shown in Braque's *Mandolin* entitled 'Maladies Secrètes des deux sexes', a cure for syphilis is promised rapidly and discretely. Syphilographers also advertised at public urinals. Preying upon syphilophobia, quack syphilologists and venerealogists crowded the walls of public urinals with their louche advertisements as illustrated by the •*L'Assiette au buerre* cartoon. "Syphilitique? Go to see Dr. Brac" reads the top poster on the water sistern: "Recovery assured". "Venereal Disease? Recovery in 24 hours: Dr. R", says the poster below it. •In *Guitar*, Picasso appended similar advertisements published on 31 March 1913 in *El Diluvio*.

The most popular Republican and Anticlerical newspaper in

Barcelona, •*El Diluvio* had long published Anarchist writers and articles on art and controversial social issues. Amidst promotions for gramophone records, engineers, eye-doctors and headache cures are inserted advertisements starting with 'PURGACIONES' (Gonorrhea) and ending with two venereologists, the biggest and boldest being for 'Dr. Casasa'. Like the opportunist venereologists who advertised in French newspapers and at Parisian urinals, the venereologists, Dr. Casasa and Dr. Camps, together with the gonorrhea clinics, openly divulge what aspect of venereal infection they treated from skin infections to impotence, together with their consultation times and addresses.

Brandished on the front rather than back page below the meteorological reports, these advertisements appear as explicit as the posters appended to the walls of French urinals. Through this parody, Picasso like Braque then conveys the paradox inherent in Fournier's hyperregulation: That in generating syphilophobia, fake syphilography flourished in Paris as much as Barcelona. Yet while Bertillon and Fournier linked syphilis to depopulation and devolution, they also linked it to neurasthenia. So prevalent were its symptoms of nervous exhaustion and sexual impotence that neurasthenia was, according to Louis Bailly, *'la maladie du siècle'*.

• 'Maladies sexuelles' and 'épuisement nerveux' are both keyterms in Braque's *Verre et Paquet de Tabac*.²²

• "The most serious, the most important act that man must be able to do", explained Sorbonne professor of obstetrics, Adolphe Pinard, "is the sacred act of reproduction".²³ • His message was widely reiterated, especially in visual culture for Sadow's electric belt to combat neurasthenia. Since impotence disrupted the procreative imperative, •neurasthenics were indicted by Pinard, Bertillon and many other for compounding depopulation. To combat the prickly stigma of impotence and a deep-seated paranoia that, in the succinct words of Alain Corbin, "the virile member would not rise at the appropriate moment", pseudo-medical booklets flourished alongside overnight cures for syphilis. • This is illustrated by Swiss Dr. Georges Rumler's advertisement in Braque's pasted paper alongside numerous apertures.²⁴ • In

his 340 page illustrated book purportedly “drawn from the most competent authorities”, Rumler promises to cure all ‘sexual illness’ and ‘nervous exhaustion’.²⁵ •As this advertisement indicates, “Healthy men will learn how to avoid illness and negotiate intimacy,” he declares, while “those who are already sick will discover the most reliable of all cures” - all for the price of 1 franc 50. While Braque’s pasted paper signals those who preyed upon the neurasthenic phobia of impotence, •Picasso’s pasted paper indicates those opportunist manufacturers who capitalized upon another cure: Virility tonics.

The fin-de-siècle equivalent to Viagra, •*Vin de Vial* with its word-play upon ‘vial’ and ‘virile’ was one of the most popular ‘tonic wines’. Concocted from ginseng, quinine, meat juice and lacto-phosphate, advertisements for *Vin de Vial* appeared in every major newspaper and journal under the headings, ‘santé-force-vigueur’. •Recommended for neurasthenics, feeble women and the elderly, the image of Apollo appropriated from Frederic Leighton’s *Athlete wrestling with a Python* from which a pythonized phallus sprouts from his loins and wraps around the text, leaves little doubt as to its targeted audience. •The variant, *Vin Désiles*, a neologism fusing ‘désir’ and ‘viriles’, was promoted as ‘the best tonic’ and a ‘Cordial Régénérateur’.• Heartily endorsed by •stealthy actors and inexhaustible opera tenors, •its bold advertisement in *Le Journal* on 3 December 1912 as “le meilleur tonique” features in Picasso’s pasted paper as a label on an erect rectangle or phallicized bottle.²⁶ Denounced by physical culturalists as disingenuous, the sperm count could only be replenished and health sustained, they claimed, •through *La Vie sportive* and *L’Éducation physique*.²⁷ “Only the strongest and most beautiful men could fertilize the strongest race”, *La Culture Physique* explained, “and generate a glorious and fecund future for the nation”.²⁸ Yet while •*La Vie Sportive* and •*L’Éducation physique* feature in Picasso’s pasted papers, they are belied by booze.

By 1907, •the National League Against Alcoholism had 40,000 members while the French Society against Alcoholic Abuse had well over 50,000.²⁹ These Leagues, Unions and Societies forged an •anti-café culture. “The

crowds which congregate every day on café terraces, poisoning themselves with alcohol and nicotine", declared Charles Strehly, "which throng to café-concerts on weekends to hear obscenities instead of rowing or football, illustrate how the conditions of modern existence are incompatible with the needs of health and hygiene."³⁰ The wall painting designed by Dr. Galtier-Boissière, provocatively entitled 'Alcohol is the enemy' and contrasting health 'before' and after intoxication was seminal to their campaign, as was *La Vie Sportive*.

The aim of *La Vie Sportive* was, as Senator Charles Humbert explained in *Le Journal*, "to augment the worth of men since alas, we are no longer able to augment their number."³¹ During the Balkans Wars, it was championed not only for healthy regeneration but also militarization, as illustrated by Picasso's pasted paper of *La Vie sportive*. • In this article from *Le Journal* of 6 December 1912, reports on the horse and car races comprise the first column, brevet military winners and military pilots training comprise the second while the impending soccer match between Paris and London make-up the third. These athletic and military feats in *La Vie Sportive* seem complemented by Picasso's signs of a healthy nourishing diet: chromolithographed prints of an apple, pear and quince. Nevertheless this regenerative grouping seems contradicted by the degenerative coupling of •a glass of absinthe with a lump of sugar drawn over an article entitled 'arition'. An abbreviation for the word, apparition, hallucinations like those arising in this newspaper report of a séance were long associated with absinthe,³² and highlighted to justify its criminalization. With the unhealthy condition of conscripts and the increase in criminality blamed onto absinthe, it was posited as the opposite of 'La vie sportive' and a healthy diet, as was 'Vieux Marc'. •

Equally imperative to French health and hygiene was •physical education as illustrated by the huge international physical education congress held in Paris in March 1913, •a front-page newspaper report of which appears in Picasso's pasted paper. Each day at this Congress, teams from 22 nations demonstrated their development of physical culture at the

Gymnase Huygens and Vélodrome d'Hiver. While 'the regeneration imperative' displayed in these performances was projected every afternoon in cinematographs, •it was also exhibited in nearly two thousand works of art,³³ three of which can be glimpsed in Picasso's pasted paper below the headline, *Congrès de l'Education Physique*. Yet directly above this pasted paper are the capital letters, 'Vieux Marc'. As these letters form the brand-name of a 48% proof brandy, a culture is evoked in which nothing is as it seems. With the very means of arresting the devolution spiral to extinction counter-pointed by the cultures identified with its degeneration, they forge a dialectic of degeneration and regeneration. During this fissured avant-guerre culture of Poincariste France, they signal the irreconcilable positions at play: Militarist patriotists opposing antimilitarist pacifists, *laissez-faire* capitalists opposing syndicalists and unionists, repopulationists opposing Neo-Malthusians, sexual liberationists opposing hyperregulationists. At a time when "everything seemed pregnant with its contrary", these logical disjunctions and ironic juxtapositions in Braque and Picasso's pasted papers appear far closer to Jacques Derrida's concept of the aporia, rather than Greenberg's model of Formalism.³⁴ Through their play with aporia, these pasted papers then capture the irreconcilable dialectic on depopulation, degeneration and regeneration compounded by the mass media. Far from being merely optical blockades or free-floating signs, these pasted papers were anchored within this dialectic on such controversial issues as 'conjugal fraud', contraception, abortion, impotence, virility and alcohol abuse. They suggest that bottles of liqueur were consumed over the *Congrès International de l'Education Physique* report; glasses of absinthe were scoffed over *La Vie Sportive*; advertisements for bicycles were scanned alongside those for contraception and abortion, consultations with syphilographers purveyed while gauging the weather report. In conjuring the constant horror of depopulation, degeneration and the implausibility of hyperregulation, this is why the pasted papers mark less a Greenbergian revolution than a devolution and "the real beginning of civil war."³⁵

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been made by the author. The author wishes to thank the Stiftung Dr. Robert und Lina Thyll-Dürr for the writer's residency at which so much of this article was developed.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, 1981).

² Vaillant was a socialist deputy, medical doctor, and veteran of the Paris Commune. He introduced social insurance legislation in 1900 which was modeled after the German laws implemented by Bismarck in the 1880s. The bill came two years after the passage of France's landmark 1898 law on *accidents du travail*, which mandated employer compensation of workers injured on the job. Vaillant's *assurance sociale* would have provided benefits in cases of illness, accidents, invalidity, old age, and unemployment, among other "social risks." Despite vigorous support from Jules-Louis Breton and evidence from the extraparlimentary Commission on Industrial Hygiene, Vaillant's bills were continually blocked by the Alliance Démocratique. Not one was passed on tuberculosis before the First World War.

³ Bertillon was joined by the physiologist Academician, Charles Richet and the Deputy, André Honorat to found the *Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*. Edme Piot, *Loi tendant à combattre la dépopulation en France*, 6 November 1900; refer also Edme Piot, *La Dépopulation* (Paris: Société anonyme de publications périodiques, 1902).

⁴ The *Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation* was not dissolved until 1942.

⁵ Bertillon sent a letter to every doctor in four Departments: Côte d'Or, Lote-et-Garonne, Orgne and Vienne.

⁶ Bertillon, *La Dépopulation de la France*, pp. 98-99: C'est le crime d'Onan qui est généralement pratiqué.

⁷ Alain Corbin, *L'Harmonie des plaisirs : Les manières de jouir du siècle des Lumières à l'avènement de la sexologie* (Paris: Perrin, 2008), p. 267: *L'onanisme conjugal obsède les clercs, bien avant que les médecins ne le dénoncent sous le vocable de "fraude conjugale". Aux yeux des theologians, il constitue un péché mortel. ... La manière dont cet onanisme conjugal hante les théologiens de la première moitié du XIXe siècle ...*

⁸ Bertillon, p. 226. Robin's Neo-Malthusian lecture to 1,500 workers on 10 April 1902 was entitled 'L'hygiène sexuelle et la répopulation'.

⁹ Ligue de la régénération humaine.

¹⁰ Elinor Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood: Bitter Fruit. Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republic France* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006) p. 44.

¹¹ Nelly Roussel, *L'Eternelle sacrifiée*, eds. D. Armogathe and M. Albistur (Paris: 1979);

¹² *Féminisme: La Femme Curé* was published in *Le Courrier français*, No. 47, 19 November 1908, p. 3; refer Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Thames and Hudson, 1997, Volume Two, No. 123.

¹³ Fae Brauer, *Rationalizing Eros: The 'Plague of Onan', the Procreative Imperative and Duchamp's Sexual Automats*, in *Marcel Duchamp and Eroticism*, ed. Marc Décimo, English edition, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 126-148; *De la rationalisation d'Éros: Le fléau d'Onan, l'impératif de procréation et les automates sexuels de Duchamp; Marcel Duchamp et l'érotisme*, Les presses du réel, Dijon, France, 2008, pp. 139-163.

¹⁴ Angus McLaren, "Abortion in France: Women and the Regulation of Family Size 1800-1914", *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring, 1978), pp. 461-485.

¹⁵ The traditional term for midwife, mutual associations of 'sage-femme' formed in 1889. By 1909 they were regarded as a vital part of 'puericulture', the new obstetrics established by Chair of Clinical Obstetrics at the Sorbonne, Adolphe Pinard.

¹⁶ *Journal Officiel*, Chambre des députés, 1^e séance du 21 décembre 1909, pp. 3609-3611.

¹⁷ Bertillon, *La Dépopulation de la France*, p. 244: *Il est monstrueux q'elles puissent meme l'annoncer dans les journaux.*

¹⁸ Nicole Worms de Romilly and Jean Laude, *Braque, le cubisme, fin 1907-1914* (Maeght), nos. 206 and 226.

¹⁹ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (begun 1903; performed Opéra bouffe, Paris, 1917). While promising to cure such menstrual disorders as menorrhea, the texts accompanying the headlines, 'Organ de Madame' and the advertisement entitled 'Les Maladies de la femme,' clandestinely offer the same services as illicit 'sage femmes'.

²⁰ Virginie De Luca Barrusse and Catriona Dutreuilh, "Pro-Natalism and Hygienism in France, 1900-1940. The Example of the Fight against Venereal Disease", *Population*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2009 July-September), pp. 477-506.

²¹ Ricardo Fleuris, 'Au Regiment', *L'Assiette au Buerre*, No. 207, 18 March 1905.

²² *Verre et Paquet de Tabac*; charcoal, pasted wallpaper, simulated wood graining and newspaper; 29 x 46 cms., Schweiz, private collection (Maeght, 169).

²³ Docteur A Pinard, *A la Jeunesse Pour l'Avenir de la Race Française*, Ligue Nationale Française contre le Péril Vénérien (Paris, 1913), p. 7: '... ce que devrait être l'acte le plus grave, le plus important que l'homme doive et puisse accomplir l'acte sacré de la reproduction.'

²⁴ Alain Corbin, *Cries and Whispers*, in P. Ariès and G. Duby (eds.), *History of Private Life*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, volume 4, 1990) 621. I am grateful to Keren Hammerschlag for bringing this quote to my attention in her B.Art Theory Honours Thesis, *Masculinity in Crisis: Dissident Male Fantasies in the Art of Gustave Moreau*, The University of New South Wales, 2004,

²⁵ Rumler promises to provide counselling of "an incalculable hygienic value for all men, young or old, healthy or sick."

²⁶ Refer Pablo Picasso, *Bouteille et verre sur un guéridon*, Daix 547. The advertisement for 'Vin Désiles' appears in *Le Journal*, 3 December 1912

²⁷ Albert Surier, De la nécessité de la culture physique, *La Culture physique*, No 4, June 1904, 75. Modern sport and *la culture physique* were the perfect panacea for Surier, not just to control needs and appetites, but for regulating the libido - the rational usage of musculature stabilising needs and regularising organic functions. *Unsavory passions have no place in healthy souls and the health of the soul is a corollary of physical health.*

²⁸ *LA FORCE*, *La Culture physique*, No 2 (March 1904): *Les hommes les plus forts, les races les plus fortes et par conséquent les plus aptes aux glorieux et fécondes avènements, seront celles qui auront le mieux et le plus parfaitement fait passer ce haut idéal dans la réalité.*

²⁹ This Society was inaugurated as early as 1872. By 1905, the Union française antialcoolique formed in 1895, had 150 Chapters and 40,000 members. The Société française contre l'abus de boissons alcooliques formed at the same time.

³⁰ C. Strehly, *L'Education Physique*, No. 2, March 1902, 18.

³¹ Charles Humbert, 'Pour la race. L'éducation physique obligatoire', *Le Journal* (1 October 1907) 1; as quoted in Nye, *The Culture of Sport*, p. 53.

³² 'L'Apparition', *Le Journal*, 9 December 1912, refers to a séance by Frederic Boutet in a "sumptuous salon".

³³ Every afternoon at 3.00 and 4.30 in the grand amphitheatre of the Faculty, the Etablissements Gaumont projected eight films: Swedish gymnasts; the Union des Sociétés de Gymnastique de France; Un leçon de culture physique à l'école des Fusiliers marins (méthode du lieutenant de vaisseau Hébert); les exercices de gymnastiques de l'Ecole de Joinville; la gymnastique rythmique (méthode Dalcroze); un leçon de gymnastiques à l'école; exercices sportifs divers and exercices des pompiers de Paris.

³⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

³⁵ *Journal Officiel de la République française*, Débats, Chambre, 23 May 1913, 1531; Weber, op.cit.