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The Image Affair:

Dreyfus in the Media, 1894-1906



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Cover image: *Zola-Mouquette* (Paris: Léon Hayard, c. 1898). Anti-Dreyfusard card with movable panel, ridiculing Émile Zola as defender of Alfred Dreyfus, likely produced during the time of Zola's trial (University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Dreyfus Collection DC354.9.Z65).

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chapter 9

Dreyfus,
Paper Toys, and
Participatory Politics

ANDRÉ DOMBROWSKI



Figure 9.1
Anonymous, *The Game of The Dreyfus Affair and Truth* (*Jeu de l'Affaire Dreyfus et la vérité*),
printed by E. Charaire, Sceaux, c. 1898.
Chromolithograph, 17 x 24 1/4 in. (EP.3).

The rise of mass culture in the nineteenth century carried an implicit promise of participation. Because of the widespread manufacture and distribution of the news that covered broad reaches of society, almost everyone could develop a personalized relationship to public events and, by extension, imagine him or herself as a potential agent in and of history. By the time the century drew to a close, photography and mass printing had nurtured new audiences eager to get their hands on public matters, drawing the distant close, miniaturizing the principal actors in order to repeat (or countermand) their doings within the cultures and protocols of the parlor and other entertainment venues.¹ As faraway lands were brought home to the armchair traveler, the modern political machinery, too, was through mass culture available to anyone so inclined.

The promise of actual participation within newly emerging democracies found its equivalent in the many interactive, mass-produced paper toys (board games, paper ephemera with pop-up parts, and the like), which proffered semi-direct and playful interventions, even if perforce taking place within the ideological parameters of a mass market and its capitalist imperatives. Indeed, more than new venues and page formats for the representation of history and politics emerged with the advent of widely circulating paper novelties. The ubiquity of history on paper, pervasive within the everyday in France and elsewhere by the 1880s at the latest (after the press law changes there of 1881), also fostered a new interactive sensibility that is the topic of this essay.

The Dreyfus Affair was no exception to this development; if anything the episode provided one of its best exemplifications. Few political events in nineteenth-century France, and beyond, coaxed so many into taking a political affair so highly personally, encouraging everyone to express his or her views with or against the prevailing national norm. This overly individualized sense of history was one of the Dreyfus Affair's inadvertent byproducts, accompanied by a plethora of industrial paper goods that ingeniously catered to and intensified it. There are no fewer than two board games (one pro- and one anti-Dreyfusard) in existence that were inserted into newspapers, as well as a handful of (and likely many more that did not survive) paper toys with movable parts that allowed their purchasers an opportunity to enact their views upon the political figures now reproduced in diminutive formats.

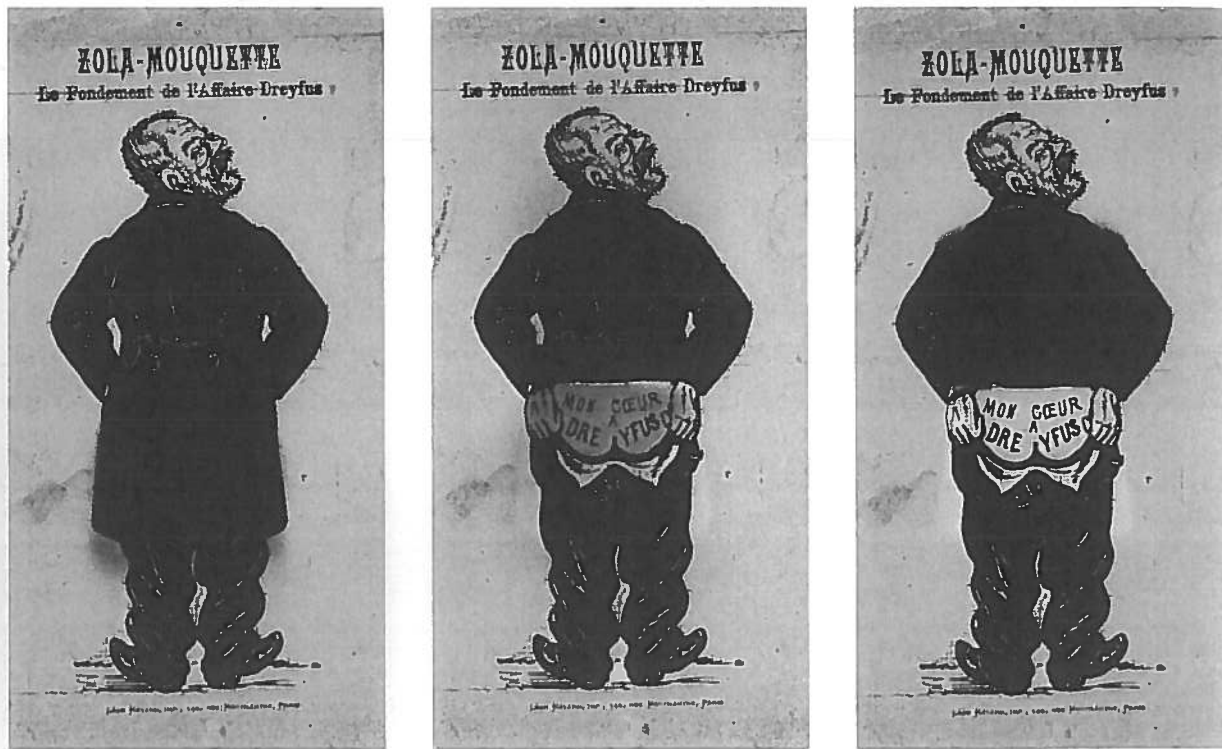


Figure 9.2
Anonymous, *Zola-Mouquette: The Backside of the Dreyfus Affair* (*Le Fondement de l'Affaire Dreyfus*), c. 1898. Lithograph, 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (Dreyfus DC354.9. Z65).

In the last years of the century, Zola was a favorite object of this kind of paper politics, especially during the years immediately following his February 1898 trial, when most of the objects under consideration here were created and first used. Once the toys were purchased, their new owners were able to manipulate current events in a way they could not in reality: roll dice to reveal the “truth” of the Affair (Fig. 9.1); pull up Zola’s frock-coat to reveal his bare buttocks that exhibit the slogan “My heart belongs to Dreyfus” (Fig. 9.2); or dip Zola’s head into a barrel of sewage by means of the movable arm of a street cleaner, where one could leave him submerged, if one so chose, in perpetuity (Fig. 9.3). None of these types of paper toys were new in format, just in theme, and they joined an ever-expanding toy market. Board games go back millennia and their origins are hardly specific to the West, while this type of a “game of the goose” board game (a dice game with 63 spots arranged as an inward-turning spiral, in which several players chase towards the center while encountering various bonuses and obstacles along the way) originated likely as far back as at least sixteenth-century Europe.² By the late nineteenth century, board games had long been adapted to contemporary historical events, such as the French Revolution, Napoléon’s campaigns, and the Siege of Paris, apparently produced on the very heels of these events.³ “Erotic” pop-up paper toys, in which skirts could be lifted to reveal female genitalia, were fairly common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-



centuries, despite the fact that they were often still largely hand-made.⁴ I suspect that the male-derriere view is somewhat rarer and that the *Zola-Mouquette*, as the bare-buttocks toy is entitled, is part of a more obscure iconography. The Dreyfus Affair increased the allure of such ubiquitous products, invigorated by the fervor associated with recent political developments, in order to encourage repeat purchase.

To this end, the Dreyfus Affair and its ephemeral representation in paper toys were in many ways a perfect match, as is proven by the latter's success. Several versions of the pro-Dreyfusard game have survived at the New York Public Library, Harvard's Houghton Library and the Beitler Collection in the United States alone, and of course in France as well, as have quite a few of the Zola pop-up toys, which appear on the rare-book market with some regularity, indicating just how widely they were once distributed. Around 1900, these games and toys offered several opportunities that history could not, at least not until after 1906 when the Dreyfus Affair ended: playful enactments of the "truth;" a final resolution; clear winners and losers; total success and complete disgrace. History perhaps has never been quite so like a board game as when the Dreyfus Affair unfolded, with its manifold twists and turns of fate; repetitions and unexpected revelations; forms of cheating and disguise, lying and deception; and especially its many different partisan iterations of the "truth."

We know fairly little about how such paper toys came into existence, but the publisher Léon Hayard (at 146, rue Montmartre, Paris) seems to have produced many other anti-Dreyfusard paper products as well. Another pull-toy called *The Secret of the Veiled Lady* (*Le Secret de la dame voilée*), a reference to the fictional "veiled lady" who, according to

Figure 9.3
P. Dous Y'Nell, *Zola in a Mess...!* (*Zola dans la Mè...lasse...!*), c. 1898, printed by Léon Hayard, 146, rue Montmartre, Paris. Chromolithograph, 6 3/4 x 4 1/2 in. (EP4).

Esterhazy, had delivered key documents incriminating Dreyfus, was produced by one Raoul Roppart (at 57, rue St. Jacques, Paris). By turning of a wheel in the back of the cardboard, a user could place around Dreyfus two different characters into two opposite cut-out windows. These figures pulled one another into and out of a well, depending on the direction of the wheel's rotation.⁵

Although these toys are not ostensibly serious, they dealt with serious issues nonetheless. Cruel jokes provoking violence and other less serious forms of de-masculinization, these manipulable paper boards functioned as a valve for antipathy if not outright hatred. When Zola's exposed behind, for instance, indicated that his heart belonged to Dreyfus, the attack was squarely against his masculinity since he appeared as potentially penetrable by the officer and by extension the viewer.⁶ The title of the Zola pull-up toy—*Zola-Mouquette*—even doubles its charge. A hybrid composed of the author and his fictional character, Zola has become his own creation. "Mouquette" from *Germinal*, the novel published in 1885, was the promiscuous daughter of the groom *père Mouque*. She tended to flaunt her voluminous breasts and buttocks and eventually died from gunfire. As the flap of Zola's frockcoat goes up and down (it is moved by a slim paper extension that protrudes from the back), or Zola's head disappears in the barrel of sewage to reappear above it only to be dipped down yet again ("Zola in a Mess...!"), the joke is largely on Zola, who has to withstand one insult after the other. At the mercy of the fingers that operate him, Zola is imaginatively made to suffer again and again. But these toys deal the upper hand to a likely anti-Dreyfusard with slightly more irony than this, adding insult to injury. Zola keeps grinning through it all, his appearance never changed by the waste in the barrel, he even seems to be pulling down his own pants below his coat. That the "foundation" or the "backside" (*le fondement*) of the Dreyfus Affair is synonymous with Zola's bare buttocks further underscores the fundamental "perversion" and degradation of any truth that might eventually emerge, be it in favor of the anti-Dreyfusards or not. The simple gestures involved in the act, like the lifting of a little piece of paper, belie the significance of these brief historical "enactments."

Playing a Dreyfus board game—requiring much more effort and time on the part of several individuals than the objects just discussed—is an activity of a different order. In the pro-Dreyfusard version, two dice control one's movement forward along a serpentine path of historical figures, episodes and allegories, a movement propelled forward, or reversed, by the ideological values of the spot one has landed on by chance. The winner is s/he who first arrives at the board's center;

space number 63. In such a game, a clear order is in place from start to finish (even if the potential routes there are numerous); chance and history have been reengineered into new constellations in which instantly changing fortunes and allegiances dominate. That this is different from the long-lasting Affair itself—with its murky origins and endlessly deferred resolution, its famed inconclusive meanderings and messy non-resolve—was the pro-Dreyfus game's very appeal. Several years before the historical conclusion of the case, this board game generated a resolution that was, moreover, manifestly a matter of chance and fate.

As Roger Caillois has argued in his influential study *Man, Games, and Play* of 1958, where he classifies board games under the rubric of “Alea,” or chance-based, group games, any board game (like the Dreyfus Affair itself) is “an insolent and sovereign insult to merit,” depending on everything but one's expertise and professional training.⁷ Since board games “abolish natural and acquired individual differences” and cast “chance” as an “abstract and inanimate power” into the role of true guide of history, politics and the nation, the two Dreyfus board games had the salutary effect of reconfiguring the guilt or innocence of one man into a much larger morality play on fate and the vacuity of any claim to reason in his prosecution.⁸

That two games exist with opposite political persuasions is an interesting fact in itself.⁹ The pro-Dreyfusard game seems to have appeared first, and was published in the pages of *L'Aurore* (the newspaper that had published “J'Accuse...” earlier) at some point in 1898, printed by the publisher E. Charaire in Sceaux who was responsible for other Dreyfus-related paper ephemera as well. The version in the Beitler Collection bears the stamp “prime gratuite de *L'Aurore*,” a free bonus of the journal, which also appears by its title on space number 34. The game's goal is to reach spot 63, exactly, in order to win and claim the bank assembled during the game: “La Vérité toute nue,” the “all-naked Truth.” Any numbers thrown by dice above this “ideal” have to be counted backwards again. Along the way of this “game of the goose”-style amusement, the players encounter various characters, pseudonyms (like Henri Rochefort as his alter ego “M. de Vascagat” on spot 61, or Esterhazy as “Esther-vas-y,” or “Esther-get-lost,” at 40), sites, episodes, and also the very evidence itself (telegrams and the *petit bleu*), as well as thirteen other spots of “Truth.” These spots feature prominently on the board and multiply truth's inevitable occurrence throughout the game, thereby declaring it as the Affair's central metaphor. The game thus mimicked other kinds of board games and their teachings of moral standards and lessons in everyday ethics.¹⁰

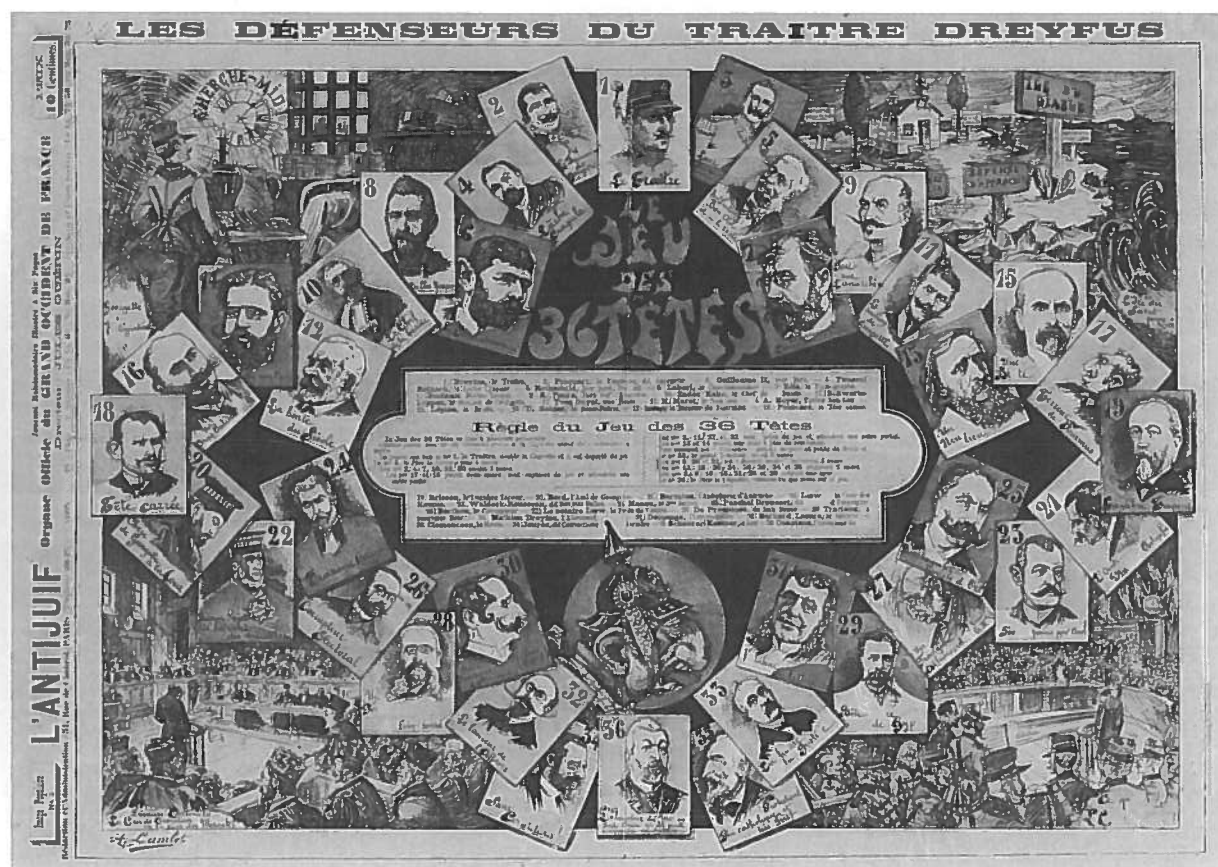
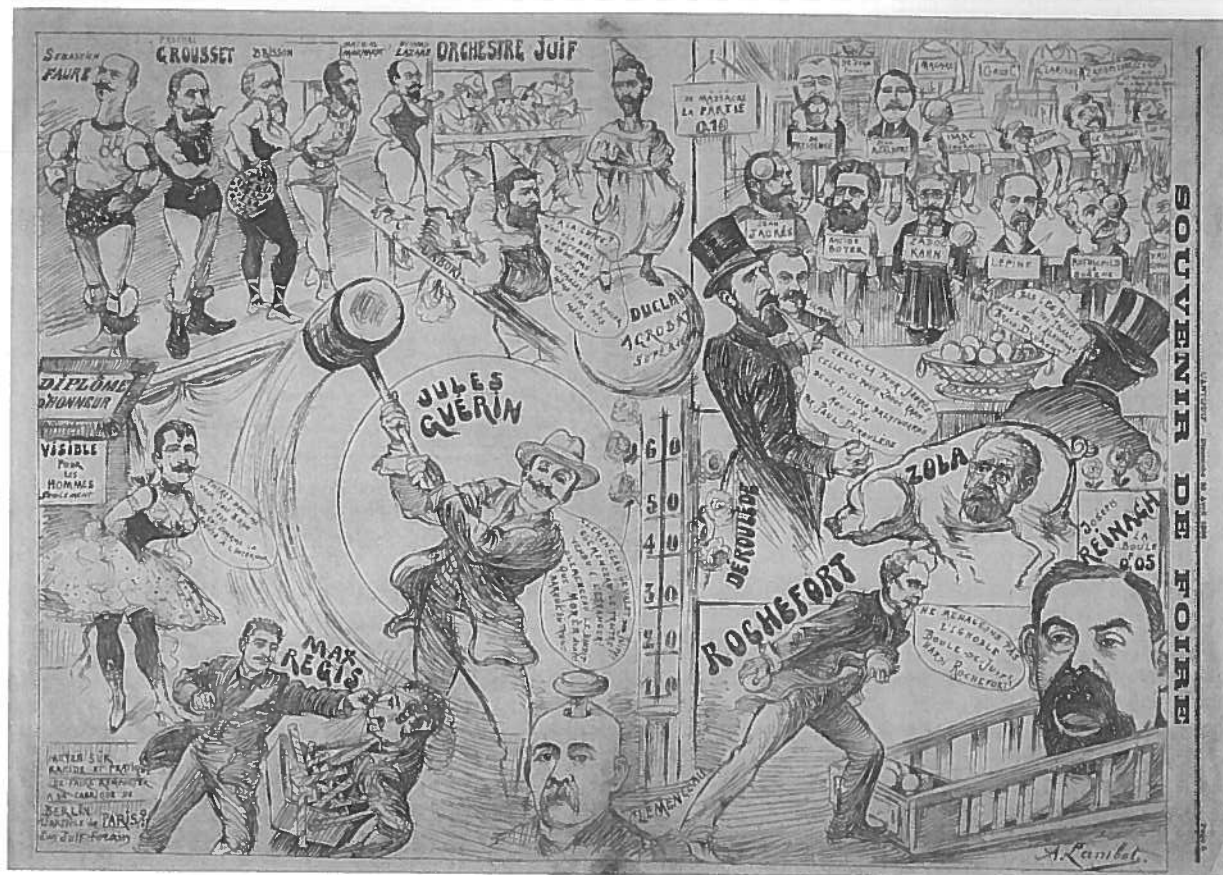


Figure 9.4
A. Lambot, "The Game of 36 Heads (Jeu des 36 têtes)," *L'Antiquif*, February 12, 1899. Lithograph, 17 x 24 in. Houghton Library, Harvard University (FC9.D8262.Zzx4), facsimile on display.

As is to be expected, pro-Dreyfusard encounters push the player forward and anti-Dreyfusard ones backward. If one landed on a spot of truth, one could not stop there but had to throw the dice again and keep moving up, "a very natural thing," so say the rules, "because all truths are up until this point nothing but blah-blah (*du boniment*)."

The rest of the rules of the game are fairly elaborate and take up the entire middle section of the board. Beside the ones mentioned above, one had to pay "one" (monetary unit of the game) if another player happened to land on the same spot and move backwards to the place where that player had come from. One had to pay "two" if one landed on spot 19, the Ministry of War; "three" if one landed on 31, the Fort Mont-Valérien where Henry committed suicide, and wait until another player landed on the same site so one could exchange places; same for spot 52, the Cherche-Midi prison where Dreyfus had been detained. The most unforgiving spot of the entire game was number 58, the "Death of the Veiled Lady, pay three and go back to no. 1"! The game thus established a variety of paths to one inevitable conclusion, a variety that nonetheless depended in no small measure



on the indisputable partisan roles assigned by history to specific characters of the Affair.

The same is true for the anti-Dreyfusard game published in response, as a double-page inside the explicitly anti-Semitic newspaper *L'Antijuif* on February 12, 1899, called *The Game of 36 Heads—The Defenders of the Traitor Dreyfus* (*Le Jeu des 36 têtes—Les Défenseurs du traître Dreyfus*), drawn by one A. Lambot (Fig. 9.4). The game has room only for the anti-Dreyfusard's enemies and not their heroes. It is not a dice game, but seems to have been played with tokens and monetary bets, and is thus no less chance-based. The brief rules indicate that each player had to deposit a certain amount of tokens into the game's bank in order to play, then withdraw or pay into the bank further depending on the bet and what numbers one drew in the lottery based on the thirty-six heads of Dreyfus partisans. Some numbers, like the number one, representing "the traitor" Dreyfus himself, immediately disqualified a player; the same could happen with other characters especially vilified by the anti-Dreyfusard camp, such as German Emperor Wilhelm II,

Figure 9.5
A. Lambot, "Recollection of the Fair
(Souvenir de foire)," *L'Antijuif*, April 23,
1899. Lithograph, 17 x 24 in. (Paj.1).

who the game names as one of the Jews' "gods." The winner seems to be the player who lasted longest in the game and thus walked away with the bank. A few weeks later, on April 23, 1899, Lambot followed up this game in the pages of *L'Antijuif* with an anti-Dreyfusard fairground scene, in which plenty of hammers and balls are thrown at the various pro-Dreyfusards who have become characters in test-of-strength games or transformed into little figurines to be knocked over with a ball (Fig. 9.5). As with any game in which real actors are turned into puppets at the mercy of a player, this fairground scene, too, imagines political enemies as vulnerable, harmless and powerless, there for the taking.

In his influential text on the everyday, Michel de Certeau called these small consumer accomplishments furnished by the market "tactical," meaning a significant intervention within a culture's symbolic order that highlighted the power of the reader and user over that of the producer, author and central historic actor.¹¹ The media-savvy audiences around 1900 knew they were taking part in history through such ephemeral but still highly significant play actions, but how deeply and centrally, it is difficult to say. The attraction of such toys no doubt lies in the fact that they turned history small, thus putting it within one's reach and, for once, under one's control. In the form of play, they tendered the specter of tenable action and imaginative intervention, if not within the real itself, than at least within the fabric of France's national imagination. If anything, the existence of such toys proves that the culture of spectacularized politics that the Affair (and the modern era more broadly) had fostered still made room for highly embodied forms of looking and participation. With the purchase of such toys, one acquired more than a piece of cardboard and achieved more than emerging victorious in a table game. Consumers acquired objects of self-affirmation that projected them directly into the center of their culture's ideological battles, now conveniently relocated inside the parlor where they proved no less preposterous and fraught with ambiguity.

¹ On the wax displays at the Musée Grévin, for instance, see Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 89-148. See also Wanda Strauven, "The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch," in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 148-63; I thank Juliet Sperling for the reference.

² R. C. Bell, *The Boardgame Book*, New York: Exeter, 1983, 141; H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board-Games Other Than Chess*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1952, 1-11; David Sidney Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; Helen Constantino Fioratti, *Playing Games: Games and Their Players from Antiquity to the Present*, Florence: Polistampa, 2014.

³ Bell, *The Boardgame Book*, 100. A game relating to the French Revolution, likely dating to 1791, is illustrated in Jean Adhémar, *Imagerie populaire française*, Milan: Electa, 1968, pl. 76; I thank Glynnis Stevenson for the reference.

⁴ One such example is illustrated in Laurent Mannoni, Werner Nekes, and Marina Warner, eds., *Eyes, Lies, and Illusions: The Art of Deception*, exh. cat., Hayward Gallery, London, 2004, 82-83; I thank Juliet Sperling for the reference.

⁵ *Le Secret de la dame voilée*, paper-board toy, Houghton Library, Harvard University, FC9.D8262.H898s. See Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, exh. cat., The Jewish Museum, New York; and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 189.

⁶ Eduardo A. Febels, professor at Simmons College, is currently undertaking a study on the Dreyfus Affair, anti-Semitism and homophobia, the results of which were not yet available during the writing of this essay. On this pull-toy, see also Kleeblatt, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 189.

⁷ Roger Caillois, *Man, Games, and Play* (1958), New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961, 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ Both games are included in Kleeblatt, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 191-92; Julie Bertrand-Sabiani, ed., *L'Affaire Dreyfus par l'image*, exh. cat., Médiathèque et Centre Charles Péguy, Orléans, 1996, 51-52; Lorraine Beidler, "The Media, Art, and the Imperatives of Social Justice," in *Dreyfus & Zola: A Moment in the Conscience of the World*, exh. cat., University of Toronto Art Centre, Toronto, 2000, 18, 21; *Jeu, jouet et politique*, exh. cat., Musée du Jouet, Poissy, 1982.

¹⁰ On morality and board games, see Jennifer Jensen, "Teaching Success Through Play: American Board and Table Games, 1840-1900," *Antiques* 160 (December 2001), 812-19; Margaret K. Hofer, *The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board and Table Games*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003.

¹¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, XI-XXIV.