ATHANOR XXXVIII

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

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Cosmic over or Athanor from Annibal Barlet, *Le Vray Cours de Physique*, Paris, 1653.

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Embodying Violence, Manipulating Space: The Irony of Vallotton's Police States

Jordan Hillman

"Turbulent antitheses, contrasts, —clashes": this is how Michel Zévaco of *Le Courrier français* characterized the graphic work of Félix Vallotton, a new contributor to the illustrated Parisian weekly in 1894.¹ The militant journalist and anarchist activist was not alone in recognizing the violent pictorial tendencies of the Swiss-born artist, who had relocated to the French capital in 1882 at age seventeen.² A month earlier in his literary column "Lettre de Genève" in the *Gazette de Lausanne*—a daily journal published in Vallotton's hometown for which the artist had worked as the Parisian correspondent since 1890—Gaspard Vallette remarked, "M. Vallotton's art does not insinuate with delicate or scholarly nuances. It forcibly implants itself and takes possession [...] with] a healthy strength and an invigorating bitterness."³ Vallotton's creative spirit indeed culled an acerbic, morbid pleasure from observing the harsh realities of urban experience and translating them into striking and incisive graphic form.⁴ Nowhere was this vitriol more apparent than in the many depictions of police officers that Vallotton produced around 1900. By appropriating and upending authoritative visual and compositional devices, the artist pictured the Parisian police in ways that actively and violently challenged their potency as a force of law and order.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the visual and experiential character of the French capital was being reshaped as the urban street took on renewed social significance. Though considered a politically charged site of demonstration and insurrection since the Revolution, widespread social protests in the 1890s exacerbated the perceived danger of proletarian crowds.⁵ Propelled by heightened tensions between the bourgeois establishment and increasingly radical social reformers, the anarchist movement also reached a fever pitch around 1895. Attacks and bombings in service of the cause—notably, the assassination of Sadi Carnot, President of the Republic, a year earlier—shook the political foundations of France and precipitated a need for more efficient and ubiq-

uitous law enforcement.⁶

The arch of anarchism's rise in France coincided with Vallotton's arrival there and the height of his illustrious graphic career working for popular and fine art ventures alike. Playing out publicly—and violently—in the street, and privately within the circles of avant-garde artists and writers with whom Vallotton was closely associated, its anti-authoritarian ideals clearly informed the artist's attitude towards his adopted country.⁷ His illustrations for leftist organs like *L'Assiette au beurre*, *Le Rire*, and *Le Cri de Paris*, as well as his contributions to books and limited-edition albums, expressed stark, often caustic, views on the state of life in modern Paris. Moreover, though Vallotton was not as active as some of his close friends and collaborators, such as Théophile Steinlen, Félix Fénéon, and Lucien Pissarro, he was a known supporter of anarchist hostility toward the uneven power structures in France.⁸ Vallotton's work for Jean Grave, a driving force in the international anarchist movement and editor of the journal *Les Temps nouveaux*, attests to his sympathies.⁹ Moreover, a woodcut he produced in 1892 entitled *L'Anarchiste* (Figure 1) clearly channels the artist's own revulsion of authority through its titular figure, who turns his back and recoils from the long-fingered hands of the law as four policemen haul him into their clutches. In the rear of the scene storefronts are partially visible, and Patrick McGuinness has suggested that the cropped sign of the "*Librairie-Papeterie*" at far left hints at the significant relationship between anarchist action and intellectual, literary, and artistic coteries.¹⁰ Vallotton further includes two *bourgeois* spectators who watch as the arrest unfolds, wary of whatever the *anarchiste* seems to be extracting from his pocket, an act that reveals the contingency of vision and order in the urban spaces of Paris.

Like his fellow Nabi artists, with whom he began exhibiting in 1893, Vallotton was undeniably drawn to the chaotic, crowd-filled streets in the French capital.¹¹ Deliberately diverse in style and execution, the members of the Nabi were

1 "Tourbillonnantes antithèses, contrastes, — heurts." Michel Zévaco, "Nos collaborateurs. — Félix Vallotton," *Le Courrier français*, 25 March 1894, 8.

2 Zévaco founded the anarchist weekly *Gueux* in 1892 and wrote for others, including Sébastien Faure's *Libertaire* and the anarchist newspaper *La Renaissance*.

3 "L'art de M. Vallotton ne s'insinue pas par des nuances délicates ou savantes. Il s'implante de force et prend possession...Il a une robustesse qui est saine et une amertume qui est tonique." V (Gaspard Vallette), "Lettre de Genève," *Gazette de Lausanne*, 22 February 1894, 3.

4 "Il ne se regale que d'amertume." Jules Renard, *Les oeuvres complètes de Jules Renard: 1864-1910*, Vol. 14 (Paris: F. Bernouard, 1927), 1150. On 16 December 1904, Jules Renard wrote of his friend in his journal, "He only enjoys bitterness."

5 See Howard G. Lay, "'Beau Geste!' (On the Readability of Terrorism)." *Yale French Studies* 101, *Fragments of Revolution* (2001): 79-100; Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Liberation Ideas and Movements* (New York: New American Library, 1962).

6 Sadi Carnot died on 25 June 1894 from stab wounds inflicted by Geronimo Casserio, an Italian anarchist, after delivering a speech in Lyon, France the day before.

7 Vallotton became a naturalized French citizen in 1900.

8 In 1894, Vallotton painted a portrait of Fénéon, an art critic and known anarchist who was jailed on suspicion of participating in the bombing by militant anarchists of the *Restaurant Foyot*, a popular haunt of politicians.

9 Vallotton contributed a design, *La Débâcle*, to supplement *Les Temps nouveaux* on 17 November 1900. It was reproduced as a lithograph in an album published by the journal in 1903.

10 Patrick McGuinness, "Vallotton and fin-de-siècle France," in *Félix Vallotton: The Painter of Disquiet* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2019): 23-24, Exhibition Catalogue.

11 Vallotton first exhibited with the Nabis in Paris in 1893 at Le Barc de Boutteville where he showed four of the five woodcuts that he would submit to the exhibition organized in Toulouse the following year.

unanimously committed to experimentation: they disavowed illusions of depth, stressed the continuities between art and design, and favored subjective expression over objective representation. The streets of Paris provided an ideal atmosphere for exploring such notions of individual experience within the ever-changing, visually stimulating, and politically uncertain world of modernity.¹²

On the one hand, then, Vallotton clearly shared more with the Nabis than a mere fascination with the urban spaces of Paris; he also shared their ambivalent relationship to illusionism. Influenced by artist and journalist Maurice Denis's credo that "a picture...[was] essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order," as well as by the profusion of Japanese prints in France, members of the Nabis grappled with the two-dimensionality of the picture plane.¹³ The resulting compositions often played with the notion of surface depth through uplifted horizons, the cutting of silhouetted shapes devoid of modelling, and the decorative arrangement of forms. In Vallotton's prints, such anomalies were accompanied by a visual language of flat planes of color and abbreviated forms that was largely revered by critics: Vallette's "Lettre de Genève" celebrated Vallotton's "almost supernatural power of simplification which acutely strikes the mind."¹⁴ Vallotton's poet friend and fellow Swiss expat, Mathias Morhardt, described it as "a breadth, a nobility, a simplicity of conception which does not seem [to him] to have been equaled."¹⁵ Pointing to two of Vallotton's earliest woodcuts, the editor of the revue *L'art et l'idée*, Octave Uzanne, further exclaimed that in these "brutal xylographs we find a reduction to one-tenth: they are only silhouettes that appear cut almost in Chinese shadows, but do you not see what intensity of life and of reality is enlivened by the unique spirit of the engraving?"¹⁶ The "intense, impenetrable, uncompromising blacks" of Vallotton's designs pointed to the artist's skillful manipulation of the relief-printmaking process that produced precise, high contrast, visually arresting images of Parisian street-life.¹⁷ Indeed, he developed this innovative, often politically charged pictorial shorthand through his close contact

with vanguard caricaturists, avant-garde artists, and leftist supporters in Montmartre, including Steinlen, another transplant from Lausanne who settled in Paris the year before Vallotton.¹⁸

Unlike his Nabi counterparts, however, Vallotton's anarchist sympathies often made him a more skeptical, ambivalent, and critical observer.¹⁹ It was on those terms that Octave Mirbeau singled Vallotton out from the group, writing in the preface to the catalogue for an exhibition of the artist's work at the Galerie Druet that, "like those who have seen a lot, read a lot, think a lot, he is pessimistic. But there is nothing aggressive about this pessimism, nothing arbitrarily negative. This righteous man does not want to deceive himself [...] and he seeks in all things, in good faith, the truth."²⁰ Like Morhardt and others, Mirbeau identified Vallotton's concern for authenticity as integral to his artistic identity. As Zévaco poetically described, "there is a frankness in his compositions that sometimes touches brutality, yet it remains seductive like the cry of a mind eager to see and know everything."²¹ Despite his penchant for bitterness and wit, his realist impulse prevented him from resorting to "the too-easy grotesque, [or]...exaggerat[ing] to the point of caricature"; instead, "[the] irony [of his art] is expressed exclusively through the composition of the forms."²²

The candor and irony of Vallotton's art has not been lost on art historians, though much of the scholarship has tended to focus on his uneasy relationship to the Nabis and his later painting career, which became the artist's primary focus after 1899.²³ When studies have addressed his graphic work, it has typically been in the context of his virtuosic handling of the woodcut medium or his prolific illustrations for the popular

12 For more on Vallotton and his relationship to the Nabis see Nathalia Brodskaja, *Félix Vallotton: le nabi étranger* (New York: Parkstone Press Ltd., 1996); *Le très singulier Vallotton* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001); and *Félix Vallotton: Le feu sous la glace* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).

13 Maurice Denis, "Définition du néo-traditionnisme," *Art et critique* 65 (23 August 1890): 556-58.

14 "Il y a dans cet art une force presque surnaturelle de simplification qui frappe vivement l'esprit." Vallette, "Lettre de Genève," 3.

15 "C'est d'une largeur, d'une noblesse, d'une simplicité de conception qui ne me semblent pas avoir été égalées aujourd'hui..." Mathias Morhardt, "Les artistes vaudois à Paris. M. Félix Vallotton," *Gazette de Lausanne*, 24 March 1893.

16 "Remarquez cette Foule à Paris ou bien Un enterrement en province, ces deux xylographes brutales dont on trouve ici la réduction au dixième : ce ne sont que des silhouettes qui apparaissent taillées presque en ombres chinoises, mais n'y voyez-vous pas quelle intensité de vie et de réalité égayée par l'humour spécial de la gravure ?" Octave Uzanne, "La renaissance de la gravure sur bois—Une néo-xylographe : M. Félix Vallotton," *L'art et l'idée*, February 1892.

17 Octave Uzanne, *Badauderies parisiennes: Les rassemblements; Physiologies de la Rue* (Paris: H. Floury, 1896): IV.

18 In the 1890s, Vallotton was often associated with Steinlen and other artists with anarchist-socialist views. See Sasha M. Newman, Marina Ducrey, Richard S. Field, Deborah L. Goodman, Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold, John Klein, and Rudolf Koella, *Félix Vallotton*, edited by Lesley K. Baier (New Haven and New York: Yale University Art Gallery and Abbeville Press, 1991): 21, 72.

19 Vallotton was known within the group as the "Nabi Étranger" or "Foreign Nabi" both for his Swiss nationality and for his discordant artistic politics.

20 "Comme ceux qui ont beaucoup vu, beaucoup lu, beaucoup réfléchi, il est pessimiste. Mais ce pessimisme n'a rien d'agressif, rien d'arbitrairement négateur. Cet homme juste ne veut pas se leurrer dans le pire, comme d'autres dans le mieux, et il cherche en toutes choses, de bonne foi, la vérité." Octave Mirbeau, "Preface," in *Catalogue de l'exposition Vallotton*, Druet Gallery, Paris, 1022 Janvier 1910.

21 "Il y a dans ses compositions une franchise d'allure qui touche parfois la brutalité, mais demeure séduisante comme le cri d'un esprit avide de tout voir et savoir." Zévaco, "Nos Collaborateurs."

22 "ne recourt jamais au trop facile grotesque, ne s'exagère nulle part jusqu'à la caricature... son ironie ne s'exprime exclusivement que par la composition des formes..." Thadée Natanson, *La Revue blanche*, 15 April 1893.

23 For more on Vallotton's painting career, see Christoph Becker, ed., *Félix Vallotton: Idyll on the Edge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Nathalia Brodskaja, *Félix Vallotton: The Nabi from Switzerland* (New York: Parkstone Press International, 2013); Katherine Kuenzli, *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010); and *Félix Vallotton: The Painter of Disquiet* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2019), Exhibition Catalogue. See note 10 regarding his association with the Nabis.

press.²⁴ Recently, however, scholars like Richard Thomson and Bridget Alsdorf have undertaken more sustained examinations of Vallotton's graphic interest in violence and the law. In a chapter titled, "Picturing and Policing the Crowd," Thomson considered Vallotton among a slew of other artists whose pictures registered the nineteenth-century crowd and attempts to control it. Thomson mobilizes psychological theory to read Vallotton's masses as fragmented, yet unanimously repressed by the threat of the state.²⁵ Alsdorf takes up a similar thread in her examination of Vallotton's expression of vision as violent through his semi-autobiographical novel, *La Vie meurtrière*. She focuses on the ethical dilemma of vision as related to witnessing accidents and random violence in modern Paris and postulates that such witnessing engenders a level of responsibility that implicates bystanders in the act.²⁶ Building on and diverging from these studies, I argue that the seeming violence of Vallotton's spatial interventions in his police prints—the transposition of space into form and back again—works not as hyperbole but rather as an astute expression of the unpredictable and shifting experiences with police in the streets of Paris.

As Morhardt wrote in a review of the 1893 *Salon des indépendants*, Vallotton was "an indefatigable walker, who in the streets of Paris has encountered a thousand burlesque or painful, tragic or ridiculous episodes, which he interpreted with the same sincerity, the same cult of truth, and with a very keen sense of the picturesque crowds."²⁷ His graphic submissions to an exhibition in Toulouse the following year generated a similar response. Organized by the newspaper *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, the exhibition aimed to promote "independent artists" whose "curious works" were then relatively unfamiliar beyond the urban environs of Paris.²⁸ A notice, published in *La Dépêche* five days before, further explained its impetus: "We thought it would be interesting to make [these young painters] known to the public of our region [...] Undoubtedly, the efforts of the new school have not yet resulted in a definitive formula, but these efforts nonetheless mark an

interesting stage in the story of French art."²⁹ Vallotton's works proved especially compelling on this front. A critic for the provincial newspaper praised the artist's "frank originality" and perceived in Vallotton's woodcuts the "process of the old masters [...] rediscovered by an artist very much enamored with modernism and applied by him to the spectacles of the present-day street."³⁰ Indeed, it was in the street that Vallotton's avant-garde modes of expression and uncanny perception met, which meant, within the shifting political milieu, a continued pictorial confrontation with the growing number of police officers who occupied it. When commissioned to produce an original lithograph for the limited-edition catalogue that would accompany the exposition in Toulouse, Vallotton's choice of subject—a closely cropped encounter between a citizen and a police officer on a cobbled street—only affirmed his preoccupation with the everyday realities and urban experiences of modern Paris and the role of police within them (Figure 2). Moreover, the man's status as a laborer, signified by his smock and doffed cap, coupled with his precarious footing on the uptilted street, point to Vallotton's keen awareness of the volatile relationship between socioeconomic status and policing in the period.

Forty years earlier, steps were already being taken to mitigate political instability and working-class rebellion through a confluence of infrastructural and legislative action in Paris. Driven by Emperor Napoléon III's desire to secure his new and precarious imperial power in the wake of his 1851 coup-d'état, reforms were introduced to restructure, bureaucratize, and nationalize the French police force. Notably, the existing system of legal and administrative jurisdictions, or *préfectures*, was overlain with a superstructure of political police granted sovereign authority to localize and manifest governmental control. This secondary force became the eyes and ears of the state, allowing it to "foresee and direct, to take the initiative in all matters, and properly to govern France."³¹ Coupled with Baron Haussmann's complete overhaul of the city's medieval plan which called for the demolition of neighborhoods hous-

24 On Vallotton and the press, see Patricia Eckert Boyer, ed., *The Nabis and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Jean-Paul Morel, *Vallotton: Dessinateur de presse et graveur* (Lausanne: Éditions Favre, 2002); and *Vallotton, dessinateur de la presse* (Paris: Chêne, 1979).

25 See Richard Thomson, "Picturing and Policing the Crowd," in *The Troubled Republic Visual Culture and Social Debate in France, 1889-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

26 See Bridget Alsdorf, "Félix Vallotton's Murderous Life," *Art Bulletin* 97, no. 2 (May 2015): 210-228.

27 "...un promeneur infatigable qui, dans les rues de Paris, a rencontré mille épisodes burlesques ou douloureux, tragiques ou ridicules, qu'il a interprétés avec la même sincérité, avec le même culte de la vérité, et avec un sentiment très vif du pittoresque des foules." Mathias Morhardt, "Les artistes vaudois à Paris. M, Félix Vallotton."

28 "peintres indépendants [...] les oeuvres si curieuses." "Nos Expositions," *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 17 May 1894.

29 "Nous avons pensé qu'il serait intéressant de les faire connaître au public de notre région, dont l'esprit si affiné est si largement ouvert aux choses délicates et précieuses de l'art. Sans doute, les efforts de la nouvelle école n'ont pas encore abouti à une définitive formule, mais ses efforts marqueront à coup sûr une étape intéressante dans l'histoire de l'art français." "Nos Expositions," *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 17 May 1894. The use of "new school" implicitly refers to the Nabis, whose members made up the majority of the fourteen artists invited to exhibit.

30 "Je ne saurais trop recommander aux amateurs d'estampes ces planches d'une si franche originalité." Homodei, "Les oeuvres," *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, 22 May 1894; "De M. Vallotton je louerai ses réserves les originales gravures sur bois. C'est le procédé des vieux maîtres de la gravure, de Marc-Antoine et de Albert Dürer, trouvé par un artiste très épris de modernisme et accommodé par lui aux spectacles de la rue actuelle." Homodei, "Les oeuvres." In criticism, Vallotton is repeatedly compared to the fifteenth century masters of woodcut. See also Morhardt, "Les artistes vaudois à Paris. M, Félix Vallotton," 2; S. de Felice, "Exposition d'Yverdon," *Gazette de Lausanne*, 24 Septembre 1894; and Raymond Bouyer, "Les graveurs sur bois de fil au canif," *L'estampe et l'affiche*, 15 December 1899.

31 *Le Moniteur Universel*, 31 January 1851, 161, quoted in Howard C. Payne, "Police Science: An Early Concept of the Modern Police State in Nineteenth Century France," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 43, no. 3 (1952): 379.

ing the “dangerous classes” and the widening of boulevards to prevent the construction of barricades and to allow the easy deployment of troops, modern Paris became a city structured on the principle of public order.³²

Despite such measures, urban space was not so easily defined nor controlled. In the devastating aftermath of the Paris Commune in 1871 and amid concerns of increasing industrialization and urbanization, the discontentment of citizens frequently played out publicly in the streets. Their active and visible resistance to the government of the Third Republic and the bourgeois establishment it engendered ultimately resulted in the state’s 1892 authorization of more than a thousand additional policemen in Paris.³³ Not only were they highly visible in the city thanks to the implementation of a standard uniform—which consisted of a dark buttoned coat, flat-brimmed cap, knee-high black boots, and a *bâton blanc*—clandestine police surveillance and undercover work were also well-known to Parisian citizens.

Confronted with more officers than ever in the street, but also in official bulletins, police memoirs, journals, and photographic albums published by the state, Vallotton sought to challenge the pervasive reality and image of social control by the forces of order. In Paris, Toulouse, and several other venues and publications, Vallotton presented graphic works that represented more than a visual analog for the police encounters he witnessed in the capital; rather, he provided an impression of the experience. He did this by exploiting the very same visual strategies of domination adopted by the police themselves. Vallotton’s use of unusual points-of-view and high horizon lines, for example, co-opted the specular authority over urban space presumed to belong to the police, who patrolled the city on horseback or surveilled from elevated vantage points. Moreover, that power was seemingly consecrated from above within the hierarchy of the French government, making the police the most visible and visualized representation of state authority. Yet in contrast to the official portrayal of the police as orderly and regimented (Figure 3), Vallotton’s prints were destabilizing and turbulent, flattened and cropped. Whether officers appeared as participants in the scene or only as forces beyond the frame, Vallotton’s violently distorted and truncated pictorial spaces thus translated the actual urban spaces he represented into powerful commentaries on police and social life in Paris. He also developed compositional devices, such as

pronounced graphic voids and the transposition of horizontal and vertical planes, that gave form to the instabilities of police authority and the dynamics of its visibility and invisibility in city streets. By embodying such modes of spatial control in his compositions, Vallotton’s police prints forcefully expose the contradictions of policing in this period and demonstrate how, rather than maintaining order, police intervention often had the opposite effect.

Beyond the visual jolt of the images themselves, Vallotton’s modality of engagement with the street constituted a secondary layer of dissension and irony, as it was in these pictures that the artist took his experiments with compositional flattening and perspectival disruption to extremes. In these works—which frequently thwart, tear up, and collapse completely the structuring elements of the street—Vallotton depicts chaotic demonstrations, state efforts to construct and maintain public order, and varied encounters with officers that challenge the nature and efficacy of the police force and amplify the problematic incidents with authority witnessed in this period.

Of the works Vallotton submitted to the exhibition in Toulouse, three envisioned the street, but it is *La Charge* (Figure 4) that most brutally wields the graphic potential of the medium.³⁴ The incendiary charge of the print’s title is palpably felt in his depiction of policemen engaged in a violent encounter with the crowd rendered as an amorphous mass of black, differentiated only by buttons, batons, and cropped visages formed from the paper’s reserves. In the print, an elevated viewpoint flattens the image, and the arrangement of bodies on the sheet produces a patterned effect. Simplified figures with caricatural features are crammed into the picture’s lower register; above, others are forcibly scattered across the printed surface. The gridded lines of the cobblestone street have been obliterated, creating a space devoid of any architectural elements. Despite this, Vallotton partially renders the implied three-dimensional space of the composition. He uses diminution to suggest that the much larger figures at the bottom of the frame are closer to the viewer than those smaller figures at the top. Moreover, he articulates the plane of the street by positioning a man at far left lying completely flat on his back and another crawling away just right of center, the white soles of his shoes indicating the foreshortened nature of his body in space. This hint at spatial recession is ultimately contradicted, however, by the rising ground plane, which allows for the figures in the supposed distance to be visible at all; should Vallotton have composed the scene head-on, the already injured and fallen men would be entirely obscured by the attacking officers. A dark border printed around the plate’s

32 In nineteenth-century France, the “dangerous classes” referred to the poor, members of some racial and ethnic minorities, sex workers, and criminals. Large-scale riots and insurrections in the 1830s as a result of industrial development, a changing economic situation, and growing class consciousness led the working classes to be deliberately subsumed into the “dangerous classes.” See Louis Chevalier, *Working Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973); Haussmannization has also been the subject of numerous studies. See David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Peter Soppelsa, “How Haussmann’s Hegemony Haunted the Early Third Republic,” in *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century?* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 35-52; and Rupert Christiansen, *City of Light: The Making of Modern Paris* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

33 The Third Republic was installed in France in 1870 following the Siege of Paris, which culminated in Napoléon III’s disastrous defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and led to the establishment of the Paris Commune.

34 In his historical study of the police and public order in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris, Quentin Deluermoz dedicated a section to the use of images in this sociopolitical construction. Of Vallotton’s *La Charge*, Deluermoz says that its heightened visual confusion perfectly captures the fear of proliferating officers and the violent clashes that ensued in Parisian streets during this period. See Quentin Deluermoz, *Policiers dans la Ville: La construction d’un ordre public à Paris, 1854-1914* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012). Bridget Alsdorf’s recent essay further argued that in *La Charge*, Vallotton placed the viewer in an “uncomfortable position of political fence-sitting and ethical doubt.” See Bridget Alsdorf, “Vallotton, Fénéon, and the Legacy of the Commune in Fin-de-siècle France,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 49, nos. 3 & 4 (Spring-Summer 2021): 273.

edge emphasizes the limits and control imposed by the artist over the imagined street, activated and violently cropped by the policemen forcefully swinging their *bâtons blancs*.

Two prints that bookended Vallotton's decade-long engagement with the image of the policeman further illustrate how physical, legislative, and visual conceptions of space became for the artist a means through which urban order could be facilitated, maintained, and ultimately disrupted.³⁵ *La Foule à Paris* (Figure 5), produced in 1892, depicts a policeman at the lower left corner, his outstretched arms forming an obtuse angle around a compressed mass of citizens.³⁶ His left arm is aligned with the diagonal recession of the street while his right extends parallel to the paper's surface, holding in the obviously proletarian throng. That Vallotton inscribed his monogram on the policeman's dark uniform announces the artist's authoritative role in visually ordering the street. His precipitously rising ground plane works against this by upending the street itself, which threatens to spill the crowd out of the frame and the control of the officer. A pair of disembodied feet dangling from the upper left corner serve as a further reminder of the street's potential instability. Through this interplay, Vallotton reveals the ways in which urban space is multiply—if ineffectually—constructed in relation to the police.

The policeman in Vallotton's *L'Affaire Crainquebille* (Figure 6) signifies a similar paradox. Published in the Parisian literary and satiric journal *Le Canard sauvage* in April 1903, Vallotton positions a policeman on a Paris street at the far-right edge of the composition, his back aligned with the picture's frame. The officer's dark uniform is accentuated by the wide expanse of open space that surrounds him. Vallotton fills the void with sketchy, crayon-like scratches that heighten the sense of motion created as the working-class crowd flees quickly in the opposite direction of a man whom the caption claims "spreads terror." The scattering crowd is seen from different points of view simultaneously: from behind, in profile, and head-on, heightening the sense of confusion and manipulating the viewer's response to this chaotic urban scene. Empty space radiates outward from the policeman, further widening the physical and judicial distance between the officer and these citizens as they escape the frame of both the picture and the law. There are no signs of outward brutality, yet the crowd disperses; here, the policeman's presence alone is capable of altering the street from a site teeming with life to an emerging void overseen only by authority.

In *Le Canard sauvage* this two-page illustration accompanied Jules Renard's parodic column "Au Théâtre" in the April 4th issue. The title refers to a three-act play by Anatole France, adapted from his short novel of the same name, that

was staged at the Théâtre de la Renaissance that March.³⁷ *L'Affaire Crainquebille* tells the tale of a street merchant who is arrested after a verbal misunderstanding with a police officer, and who, upon his release from jail, finds that his record has left a permanent stain on his reputation. He decides he must return to prison in order to survive. After soliciting a second arrest to no avail by actually insulting an officer in the same manner in which he was previously accused, Crainquebille ultimately resigns to his fate and drowns himself in the Seine. France's story mocks the law through its narrative of justice gone awry: Crainquebille's comically sad experience underscores the inherent biases and prejudices of the French judicial system. At the same time, the title points to the story's central irony: that France aligns the trivial incident of the lowly Crainquebille with the serious drama of *l'affaire Dreyfus*, a contemporary scandal that divided the nation over the fate of the Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus who had been falsely accused of treason.³⁸

Vallotton's lithograph, like France's story, operates in a critical space between reality and representation. A nameless, nearly faceless, police officer stands his post, yet the recognizable silhouette of his uniform operates as an obvious sign of his authority. The velocity with which the figures disperse, and the anxiety that Vallotton's caption instills, suggest an exaggerated sense of fear; perhaps it is the proletarian status of this crowd that renders the officer all the more frightening. Here, however, the potential threat has reversed: no longer is the disorderly crowd the source of anxiety. Instead, it is the figure of order who poses the threat. This was, to some extent, the officer's role in the last decades of the nineteenth century: the modern force was largely centered around the maintenance of social order, often through modes of surveillance, intimidation, and intervention. Vallotton thus not only acutely registers these ironies in the new police system, but also the nature of its contradictory and condemnatory public criticism.

Attitudes toward the police during this period were indeed complex. An essay entitled "The Parisian Police" published in *The English Illustrated Magazine* by A. Shadwell in 1892 explained: "It seems impossible for [the police] to please the public. When we want them, they are our best friends, to whom we turn with the utmost confidence, when we do not, we join in treating them as a common enemy."³⁹ Competing categorizations of the police as absent or overly present, too lenient or unnecessarily harsh thus occupied the Parisian cultural imagination. Read in this context, the graphic punch of Vallotton's policed Paris takes on a more critical tone. The growing space that fans outward from the officer in *L'Affaire Crainquebille* visualizes the distance between the moral and

37 Anatole France, *L'affaire Crainquebille* (Paris: E. Pelletan, 1901).

38 For more on the Dreyfus Affair see Tom Conner, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Rise of the French Public Intellectual* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2014); Norman L. Kleeblatt, *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and James D. Redwood, "The Conspiracy of Law and the State in Anatole France's 'Crainquebille'; or Law and Literature Comes of Age," *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 24, no. 2/3 (Winter 1993): 179-210.

39 A. Shadwell, "The Parisian Police," in *The English Illustrated Magazine* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892), 904.

35 Thomson states that, in nineteenth-century Paris, "the city served as a metaphor for order, the moral authority of which was embodied by the police." However, as the work of Vallotton and others attests to, that order was by no means guaranteed, morally or otherwise. Thomson, *Troubled Republic*, 108.

36 *La Foule* is one of the prints that Uzanne referred to in his article. He reproduced it in the prologue to his 1896 anthology, *Badauderies parisiennes: Les rassemblements; Physiologies de la Rue*, a collection of stories illustrated by varied artists that celebrates both the typologies of the street and the revival of the woodcut, of which Uzanne saw Vallotton as the leader.

ethical expectations of police behavior and their actual conduct in the urban sphere, a space that is likewise indicated by the contrast between this officer's detached surveillance and the hands-on exertion of force in *La Foule à Paris* and *La Charge*.

Indeed, in other images, this detachment is made complete by Vallotton's erasure of the policeman from the image entirely while still acknowledging the ways in which his palpable presence continues to activate those around him. Such is the case for *La Manifestation* (Figure 7), which depicts the characteristically frantic aftermath of one of late nineteenth-century Paris's many demonstrations. Writing in the *Gazette de Lausanne* shortly after its publication, Morhardt described the print:

Imagine a very wide boulevard. The crowd flees in a fan shape, into the distance, exhibiting diverse attitudes which evoke...memories of scenes that we've often witnessed over the last five years. However, nobody pursues the crowd. Yet it scatters in frantic flight. Near the front just one bloke...turns around, and his expressive silhouette indicates that he expects the regulation kicking from the police, which is the very ethos of these demonstrations.⁴⁰

Published in 1893 in the first edition of André Marty's *L'Estampe originale*, and exhibited the same year at the *Salon des indépendants*, *La Manifestation* likewise appeared during the height of both the labor strikes and the anarchist bombings in Paris. Yet, as Morhardt describes, *La Manifestation* includes no police presence whatsoever, only an implication of their likely proximity to the scene. This was further acknowledged by Julius Meier-Graefe in his 1898 illustrated biography of the artist, in which his entry for the print points out that Vallotton audaciously chose a point of view that "left out of the picture... the principal thing, the police, who do not show themselves but whose effect is nonetheless felt."⁴¹ This absence is made present through Vallotton's elevated angle of view, which seems to embody the vantage point of mounted police at the charge. In so doing, Vallotton forces the viewer to identify with the officers who loom above the crowd even as members thumb their noses or fling insults in their direction. The seeming ambivalence of the menacing perspective coupled with the frenzied nature of the crowd's dispersal echoes the terror inspired by Vallotton's policeman in *L'Affaire Crainquebille*. Richard Thomson has suggested that, in light of the splintering crowd bound together only by "the ungiving struc-

ture of the street," the practicalities of crowd control by command or violence are the true subjects of *La Manifestation*.⁴² Yet, as I have argued, Vallotton's interventions in the street are also violent: he upends, tears up, and collapses completely the gridded elements of Thomson's ungiving street in ways that disorient and displace the policeman, the crowd, and therefore the viewer.

Vallotton's two-frame cartoon for Jules Renard's "Au Voleur" (Figure 8) takes this on directly, offering multiple positions from which the same street might be encountered. Both describe the ruckus caused by the story's main character, Cham, who finds amusement in playing "thief," and who judges his own performance by the number of policemen who end up in his pursuit. In the left image, only the legs of the faux criminal are visible, a spotted dog and three officers hot on his heels. The print opens towards the picture plane, with various types—haberdashers, butchers, grain sellers—fanning out across the page. The space of the street is made strange here by the conflicting directionalities of motion and the visual confusion between street and sidewalk. United by the reserves of the paper, the only demarcation of space is the cursory sketch of a curb at upper left. Vallotton's monogram, prominent in the otherwise empty lower right corner, suggests the ways in which absence can become a kind of charged materialization through artistic agency.

Indeed, the artist's role in this purposeful absence is visualized in the second illustration, where Vallotton's signature itself becomes a void, a piece of fabric torn from the back of a man's dark coat to reveal the letters "FV." In this frame, the chase is also reversed, shown instead from the rear. But the rupture of time and space between the two frames of the story disjoins the scene and disorients the viewer, making it difficult to determine where they are now positioned relative to the crowd. The small boy from the lower right corner of the first frame, for example, is now found at the upper right of the second, pushed back in space yet still recognizable from behind by his costume and coiffure. However, the policemen are nowhere in sight; again, Vallotton's removal of the officers from the frame only serves to highlight their former presence.

Vallotton's bold distillations of actuality, rendered though dramatic cropping and disorienting spatial distortions, refuse ideological resolution, registering the ironies of a world shaped by, and filtered through, the law. This is bolstered by a refusal of optical resolution, as graphic void oscillates between blank page, abstract design, and built environment. Returning to his lithograph in *Le Canard sauvage*, we see Vallotton using the volatile nature of the Parisian street to destabilize the very notion of authority itself. While the crowd aptly navigates their way through the scene, the still policeman seems to hover in midair with nothing to anchor him. Vallotton dissolves the solid ground beneath the officer's feet, revealing the only blank space in an otherwise roughly shaded composition. As in many of his police prints, the artist thereby effectively inverts or erases the elements of the street that feign order, exposing gaps in its structural logic, both physical and legislative. I posit that through these violent interventions, Vallotton gives visual

40 "La Manifestation ne plaira guère qu'aux Parisiens. Je crois qu'elle leur plaira beaucoup. Imaginez un boulevard très large. La foule s'enfuit en éventail, très loin, dans les attitudes les plus diverses et qui évoquent d'une façon surprenante le souvenir des scènes que nous avons eues depuis cinq ans si souvent devant les yeux. Personne ne poursuit, d'ailleurs, cette foule. Elle s'écrase cependant en une fuite éperdue. Seul, au premier plan, un bonhomme, à moitié accroupi, tourne le dos, et son expressive silhouette atteste qu'il attend le coup de pied réglementaire des gardiens de la paix, ce qui est la philosophie même des manifestations." Mathias Morhardt, "Les artistes vaudois à Paris. M. Félix Vallotton."

41 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Félix Vallotton, Biographie* (Paris: Edmond Sagot and Berlin: J.A. Stargardt, 1898), 33.

42 Thomson, *Troubled Republic*, 110.

form to the inherent disconnects that occurred between law and its enforcement in the unpredictable streets of late-nineteenth century Paris. Although rendered as blank or disjointed spaces by the artist, these visual voids in the urban fabric are not devoid of meaning; rather, they function for Vallotton as charged synaptic junctures where exchanges between the police and the policed—in reality and in artistic re-imaginings—were continuously negotiated, complicated, and misunderstood. Exploiting such confusion, Vallotton's prints of police called attention to the instabilities of urban space and of its control at the turn of the century.

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Figure 1. Félix Vallotton, *L'Anarchiste*, 1892, woodcut, 6.7 x 9.8 in (17.1 x 25 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 2. Félix Vallotton, *Le Renseignement* (*The Inquiry*), published in "Exhibition of *La Dépêche* of Toulouse. Catalogue illustrated with 17 original lithographs. Price 1 Franc. (Printed by Edw, Ancourt, 83 Faubourg Saint-Denis, Paris),"1894, lithograph, 7.3 x 5.4 in (18.5 x 13.8 cm). MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève.

Figure 3. *Boutiques parisiennes, Commissariat de police, 7e arr.* (Parisian Boutiques : Police Station, 7th arr.), 1905-1915, silver gelatin print on barite paper, 3.5 x 5.4 in (8.9 x 13.8 cm). Ville de Paris/ Bibliothèque historique.

Figure 4. Félix Vallotton, *La Charge* (The Charge), 1893, woodcut, 7.9 x 10.2 in (20 x 26 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 5. Félix Vallotton, *La Foule à Paris* (Paris Crowd), 1892, woodcut, 5.5 x 7.7 in (13.9 x 19.5 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 6. Félix Vallotton, “*L’Affaire Crainquebille: Un mâle qui répand la terreur*” (“The Crainquebille Affair: A man who spreads terror”), in *Le Canard Sauvage* (Paris) 3 (4-10 April 1903), lithograph, 12.4 x 9.5 in (31.5 x 24 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 7. Félix Vallotton, *La Manifestation*, 1893, woodcut on cream wove paper, 8 x 12.6 in (20.3 x 32 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 8. Félix Vallotton, "Au Voleur!" (Thief!) with text by Jules Renard, in *Le Rire*, 16 March 1895, chromotypograph, 12.1 x 18.7 in (30.8 x 47.6 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France.