Criminocorpus

Revue d'Histoire de la justice, des crimes et des peines

Détective, histoire, imaginaire, médiapoétique d'un hebdomadaire de fait divers (1928-1940)
Communications

Quand le crime donne un visage au journal à sensation

W‍ILL S‍TRAW

Résumés

Français English
Le fameux *Détective* de Gallimard et des frères Kessel fut d'abord une feuille professionnelle créée par le détective privé Henri La Barthe en 1925, qui la vendit à Gaston Gallimard trois ans plus tard. Cet article revient sur le parcours obscur du détective Ashelbé (HLB), qui acquit une éphémère notoriété quand le cinéaste Julien Duvivier adapta son roman *Pépé le Moko*. Il éclaire le fonctionnement d'une feuille corporative dans le milieu souvent médiocre de la police privée française des années 1920 et s'attache à cerner les relations qui existèrent ensuite entre Ashelbé et Gallimard.

The famous magazine *Detective* founded by Gallimard and the brothers Kessel was first a professional gazette created in 1925 by the private detective Henri La Barthe, who sold it to Gaston Gallimard three years later. This article highlights the unsung fate of "Detective Ashelbé" (HLB), who acquired an ephemeral notoriety when the film director Julien Duvivier adapted his novel *Pépé le Moko*. It illuminates the functioning of a small corporate sheet in the mediocre milieu of the 1920s French private police and traces the relationships that eventually link Ashelbé and Gallimard.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : détective, police privée, agences de renseignements, police technique, presse professionnelle
Keywords : private detective, private police, forensic science, professional press

---

Texte intégral

1　　My article begins with an observation: in the evolution of *Détective* magazine during the 1930s, the periodical's covers became progressively centred on the human face. Increasingly, as the decade unfolded, covers were occupied by photographs of people located in the foreground of the image, their faces looking outward from the page. By the middle of the 1930s, photographs of faces regularly occupied the cover's entirety, as the backgrounds that might have revealed details of social and geographical context became less and less common. In 1937, the year in which this tendency was most pronounced, roughly 75% of covers featured large-scale images of human faces, compared to fewer than half in the periodical's first year.

2　　In this article, I will discuss *Détective's* increased reliance on the portrait cover in the 1930s in terms of several developments. One of these is the growing currency and specificity of *Detective's* reporting, which moved from a general treatment of criminal phenomenon towards reports on single cases. In this shift, the portrait photograph became the most common iconic representation of a criminal case on the magazine's covers. A second development involves a decline in the sense of social depth conveyed by the images on *Detective's* covers. In particular, images of collective action, of a social or institutional character, were more and more displaced by images of individuality, in which the photogenic qualities of the celebrity-criminal or the tragic victim were exploited. Finally, I will show how, as with other crime-oriented periodicals, *Détective's* emphasis on human figures and faces compensated partially for the unavailability of photographs of criminal acts themselves.

The covers of Détective, 1928-1929

3　　In the first nine issues of *Détective* (1928-1929), only one cover photograph showed a single individual. On the cover of no. 8 (20 décembre 1928), we see Marlyse Maye, a French nurse accused of having killed her fiancé in the United States, as she waits for the verdict in a New York jail (Figure 1) Maye looks out from the bars of her cell, her eyes apparently searching for signs of the messenger who will bring news of her fate. This cover, more than any other from 1928 or 1929, anticipated those of later issues, which would often feature people recognizable to large portions of the periodical's readership and linked to criminal cases of public interest. What distinguishes this photograph from later images of similar composition is the fact that, while the caption beneath the photograph of Marlyse Maye identifies her and briefly describes her crime, no interior article linked to the cover photograph is to be found. This is one of the few cases, in the original incarnation of *Détective*, in which a cover bore no relationship to an article in the interior of the magazine. The image of Marlyse Maye seems to have been chosen for its intrinsic appeal to potential readers, perhaps because it resonated with other reports on the same crime appearing in other media.

Figure 1. *Détective*, n° 8, 20 décembre 1928

— *Marigse Moye attend, dans sa cellule, le verdict des Jurés de New-York.*

4   Human figures were not entirely absent from the covers of the very earliest issues of *Détective*, of course. The cover of *Détective* no. 1 (1928) is dominated by a photograph of a crowded city street in Chicago, taken from a high angle. However, none of the human beings in the crowd are distinct and recognizable and, while the photograph's caption makes reference to an "attentat en plein jour, en plein rue," the overall effect of the image is to suggest an indistinguishable mass in an urban setting, viewed from such a distance that the signifiers of criminal activity are difficult to discern. Several of the other covers from 1928 and 1929 feature no human beings at all. We see an empty Parisian street (n° 3, 1928), inscriptions on a wall (n° 17, 1929), and an empty children's chapel (n° 23, 1929). Other early covers contain images of architectural structures in which humans are only partially perceptible – the door to a woman's prison (n° 8, 1928), a ship (n° 10, 1929), or the bars of a prison cell (n° 22, 1929). After 1929, however, and until the magazine ceased publication, in 1940, human figures are central to all but two covers of *Détective*. One is the issue of 3 février 1938 (n° 484), whose cover shows the ingredients needed to make an explosive grenade ("Les Grenades du C.S.A.R."); the other is the cover of n° 538 (1939), which shows two large ships, one of which has been overturned ("La guerre sourde").

5   The majority of faces appearing on *Detective*'s covers in its first year are not identified by name in the accompanying captions. Indeed, those faces occupying the centre of covers during this period are mostly racialized, anthropological subjects, such as those linked to the articles "Un bête humaine" (n° 14, 1929) or "Crimes et châtiments aux Antipodes" (n° 16, 1929). In almost all such cases, these faces appear to have been chosen for their typicality rather than individuality, photographed in contexts intended to highlight their miserabilism or exoticism. By 1932, anthropologized subjects such as these had almost entirely disappeared from the covers of the periodical. Thereafter, and with very few exceptions (such as the cover image of n° 225, 1933, "Guerre des gitans") the only unmamed and exotic subjects of cover photography were the inhabitants of French urban underworlds (rather than distant lands), representatives of classes of people, like drug addicts or prostitutes, who were the focus of thematic reportage.

6   Throughout its history, *Détective* presented coverage of specific current crimes alongside various kinds of miscellany. The latter included overviews of particular sectors of crime (like the drug trade), accounts of famous crimes from the past, profiles of historical figures and so on. Such coverage was most common, however, in the magazine's early years. Compared to those published later, the issues of 1928-1929 are marked by the

low frequency of journalistic and photographic reference to specific events transpiring close to the date of publication. Even when the early *Détective* reported on contemporary phenomenon, this coverage was dominated by articles dealing with ongoing situations rather than punctual crimes. Characteristic articles in 1928 and 1929 dealt with the condition of certain populations (like the alcoholism of the Canadian Inuit), the ongoing work of crime professionals (such as those who combatted smuggling), social movements (like the Ku Klux Klan) and what might be called atmospheric settings (like "Paris la nuit")[1]. The low topicality of *Détective*'s reportage during this period was doubled in its use of cover photographs that offered a weak sense of journalistic actuality.

The facialization of the cover and other transformations

7   Between 1930 and 1937, there was an observable increase in the number of faces on the covers of *Détective*. In 1930, the covers of 23 issues featured single faces or images of two or three individuals, presented in close-up or medium shots which produced a sense of proximity for the observer. This number rose incrementally until 1937, when the number of covers dominated by faces reached 45. (In 1938 and 1939, this number declined to 33 per year). During the same period, we also see an increase in the frequency with which human figures on the front covers were identified by name in the textual captions that accompanied the images: 15 in 1930, versus 30 in 1937. This naming tied the cover image to coverage of a specific crime rather than to more general social conditions or criminal phenomena.

8   By the mid-1930s, then, the covers of *Détective* had been transformed in two ways. Their images now carried a stronger sense of singular eventfulness than had been the case in its earliest years. At the same time, human faces more and more adorned the covers of all issues, including those announcing articles in which single individuals did not play a significant role (like "Lyon ville secrete," n° 413, 1936). We may speak of a growing *facialization* of *Détective*'s covers, as photographic portraits become the privileged visual token for articles of all kinds. Thus, in a sequence of six issues 1937, (n° 446-451), each cover is centred on the image of a human face, positioned at close or medium distance. Three of these covers carry an image of people named in the captions as participants in crimes. Another uses the image of an unidentified woman to represent an article on "l'épuration" of London's streets in advance of the royal coronation; two other covers, linked to reportages on "Les musettes de Paris", show unidentified musicians or dancers.

9   If the growing *facialization* of *Détective*'s covers and more frequent naming of the people featured upon them produced a heightened sense of specification, so, too, did another transformation of the cover – its increased *textualization*. Words, which had previously been limited to the tops and bottoms of the cover photograph, now appeared alongside images of faces (n° 276, 1934), or in textual banners which crossed the image (often obscuring parts of it, as with n° 432, 1937) or, in one case of fanciful design, as a phrase – "Je suis libre" – inscribed across the image of a human figure in order to express his words or thoughts (n° 294, 1934). These bits of textuality, printed in a wide variety of expressive typefaces throughout the latter half of the 1930s, communicated their own sense of sensation, but they also reduced the semantic drift of the images, linking them to unique events or situations specified by the accompanying text.

10   A further transformation in cover design, from approximately 1935 onwards, involved the growing recourse to photographic montages in which different images were arranged alongside each other or overlaid upon each other. These lay-outs generated forms of juxtapositional dynamism which departed from the unitary perspectives and documentary realism of *Détective*'s earliest covers. In these new montages, large-scale human faces might be made to peer over buildings or other human faces, in ways that rendered these

additional elements miniature in comparison (n° 344, 1935; 507, 1938, and n° 365, 1935). In other instances, close-ups of faces were arranged against separate, smaller images of other people, usually the secondary characters in a criminal drama (n° 443, 470, 1937).

11   It is tempting to see all of these developments – the centrality of the human face, the expanded use of text and the increased frequency of fanciful montage or collage – as evidence of a shifting competitive environment for *Détective*. By the mid-1930s, the innovative covers of contemporary picture magazines like *Vu* and *Voilà* risked rendering the look of Détective old-fashioned[2]. Certainly, *Detective*'s cover images from 1928 or 1929, showing multiple agents of authority assembled around a crime scene, recalled the photojournalism of World War I or the documentation of early 20th century exploration rather than the fanciful layouts of the 1930s picture periodical. It might be suggested, however, that these transformations in *Détective*'s covers responded, as well, to a particular challenge confronting *Détective,* as a periodical devoted to crime. As I shall argue in greater detail later in this article, true crime journalism in all formats confronts the usual unavailability of images of criminal acts themselves. In the absence of such images, *Détective*, like most crime-oriented periodicals, turned to the human face as the most effective device for eliciting reader interest.

12   Since the beginning of the twentieth century, as Carolyn Kitch as shown, the portrait (whether drawn, painted or photographed) has been the most common type of cover image for all classes of popular magazines[3]. Kitch suggests several reasons for what we have called the *facialization* of the magazine cover. Historically, in the United States, magazines prior to the 1890s carried covers which differed from one issue to the next only at the level of small, textual details (like issue number). By the beginning of the 20th century, as periodicals were more and more purchased outside of the home (rather than delivered by subscription), the portrait cover became an ideal tool for distinguishing one issue from another, even as it allowed magazines to construct and maintain a consistency of style and tone over time. At the same time, the portrait cover, whose image of the human face will often approach the size of faces encountered in everyday life, came to exemplify the intimate proximity to strangers characteristic of a new, imagistic popular culture in which public advertising, cinema, tabloid newspapers and the picture periodical itself had become prominent. We may follow Kitch, as well, in her suggestion that the facialized cover was an effective instrument for focusing the attention of the reader/observer, through the ways in which the eyes of the cover's face held the attention of the reader or potential buyer. In this respect, the facialized cover may be seen as one of those devices, like cross-cutting in the cinema, through which vision in the 20th century came to be regulated and constrained.

13   Finally, as Kitch notes, the most common variety of cover photograph for many classes of magazines was that of a photogenic, youthful woman. The frequency with which such images adorned the covers of magazines in the twentieth century signalled, simultaneously, the shifting status of women, as they circulated more widely within public life, and the exploitation of their image for ornamental purposes, to render covers pretty and seductive. Examining the covers of *Détective* in the 1930s we find a use of images of women that exceeds the frequency of both their involvement in real-life crimes and their centrality to the crimes covered in the magazine's interior pages. While photographs of women's faces appear only on a minority of the magazine's covers (approximately one third), this frequency is nevertheless greater than the rate of their participation in the criminal activity on which the magazine reported. It is clear, as well, that articles covering generalized contexts of moral transgression (like the three-part series "Les mystères des femmes nues" in 1936) served as rationales for cover images of glamorous women, even as reports on individual crimes provided fewer such pretexts.

14   For periodicals covering crime, the *facialized* cover had particular value in a decade marked by high-profile crimes whose victims and perpetrators assumed (or already possessed) the status of celebrities. The face which suggested guilt or expressed grief offered a more emotionally rich imagery than photographs of the buildings in which
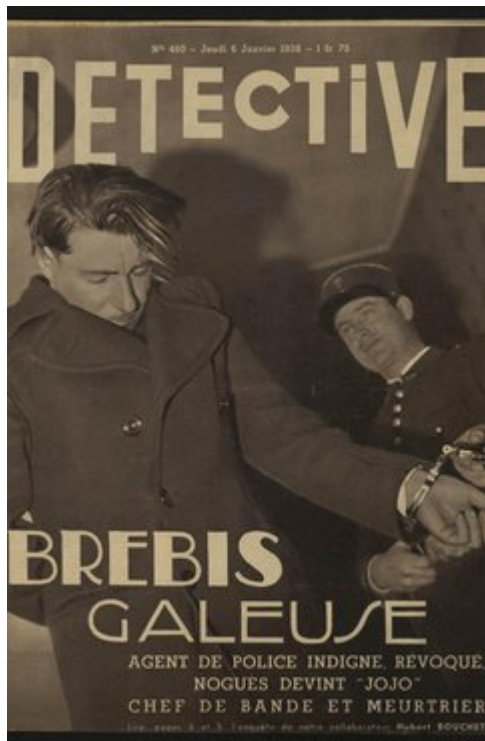
crimes had taken place or of the police seeking evidence. At the same time, we may see the increased recourse to faces and the growing use of text on covers as mutually supportive. The textual summaries of criminal narratives on the cover of *Détective* announced the sensational content within, and, by doing so, left the magazine free to present glamorous photographic portraits which might not otherwise suggest such content. Likewise, juxtapositonal arrangements of faces with other elements of a crime (like stolen jewels or victims of murder) allowed covers to exploit the *photogénie* or celebrity of individuals while showing, if only partially or obliquely, the materials of criminal intrigue. In both cases, the addition of supplementary elements on the cover provided the alibi for an exploitation of human faces that did not themselves suggest criminality.

Frontality and the disappearance of social depth

15   *Détective*'s increased use of human faces on its covers manifest the magazine's growing participation in what art historian Kajri Jain has called "the imperative of frontality"[4]. This designates, in part, the tendency to photograph human figures turned towards the camera, often performing a direct gaze which meets that of the viewer. It is common, in histories of photography, to see frontality as marking the photographic treatment of the middle and lower classes, a treatment observed most clearly in the rigidly constrained posing of families for portrait photographs taken by commercial photographers. This is the argument, for example, of the social art historian John Tagg, who traces the various ways in which, since the nineteenth century, members of the upper classes have resisted the conforming (and thus demeaning) associations of frontality, by turning their head, body and gaze away from the camera in an assertion of individuality[5].

16   The frontality of the periodical cover, however, cannot be explained entirely in the terms of a broader social history of commercial photography. In those periodicals that claim a journalistic mission, like *Détective*, the "imperative to frontality" enacts a specific relationship to knowledge and understanding. It may be observed, for example, that the frontal photograph of the human face typically flattens the space of the image, reducing the visible detail of backgrounds. In the late 1930s, large numbers of *Détective*'s covers set their subjects against empty, often darkened backgrounds. This manner of presentation eliminated any sense of an anterior space and made the human face the exclusive object of attention. In other cases, a sense of spatial depth was blocked by collage-work which set images of faces alongside disconnected pictures of other people or places, in a manner that often violated the rules of perspective or other doctrines of scalar contiguity. With backgrounds either absent, or rendered abstract in montage lay-outs, covers often lacked any sense of the geographical or social contexts of crime.

17   We may contrast the frontality of *Détective*'s covers of the mid-1930s with the magazine's earlier use of photographs of complex, collective action in which no human figure turned to face the look of the camera or reader. A significant number of covers of *Détective*'s earliest issues show human figures in a position of posteriority, facing actions or situations located deeper in the space of the image. We see agents of justice examining the automobile of a possible smuggler (n° 5, 1928), a member of the medical "service de nuit" entering a limousine en route to care for a patient (n° 6, 1928), police shooting at a Corse guerilla fighter (n° 7, 1928), and, in the south of the United States, a group of white men standing around a lynched African-American man (n° 11, 1929). If some of these photographs are images of a violence from which we are excluded, others show the work of collective institutions in ways that highlight their apparent disinterest in journalistic recognition or in expressions of individuality. In all of these cases, the look of people photographed is directed away from the camera, towards detailed, complex settings organized in the form of the tableau.
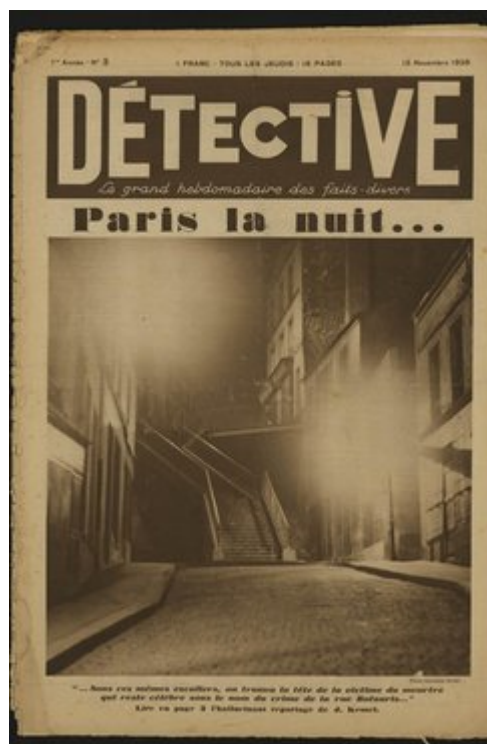
18   By 1936, such posterior images had all but disappeared from the covers of *Détective*.
When agents of justice were shown, in these later issues, they were inevitably placed in
peripheral positions relative to the criminals, witnesses or other individuals to whom the
cover accorded greater significance. Usually as well, these institutional agents were now
turned towards the camera, or towards a central figure who occupied a place closer to the
foreground of the image (Figure 2.) We may trace a broad shift, then, in the cover images
of *Détective*, from images of a more conventionally documentary character, which show
the workings of institutions and social forces shot from "behind", to a frontality in which
the photogenic human subject caters to an interest in (and the pleasure of) contemplation
of the human face.

Figure 2. *Détective* n° 480, 6 janvier 1938

19   We may speak, as well, of a third category of *Détective*'s cover photographs, examples of
which run through the entire history of the magazine in the 1930s. This category consists
of those cover images which promise revelations about worlds of vice and mystery.
Typically, these covers show the entrances to city streets or alleyways, into which human
figures appear ready to enter, or from which they are shown emerging. Such cover images
were usually linked to longer articles reporting on sexual underworlds and territories –
cities or neighborhoods – of moral transgression rather than specific crimes. The first of
these cover photographs, set below the title "Paris la nuit . .." (n° 3, 1928) appeared early
in the magazine's history (*Figure 3*). On a street from which human figures are absent, we
see the glare of reflecting light, in a composition characterized by unusual angles and
eccentric architectural forms. Other covers of a similar sort appear regularly in the 1930s:
"Nuits des Halles" (n°, 78, 1930), "Dans Paris Secret" (on Paris' quartier chinois) (n° 95,
1930), "Une Nuit de Paris" (n° 87, 1930), « Ombres de Minuit, » (n° 153, 1931), « Mystères
de Paris » (n° 323, 1935), « La vie secrète des femmes nues » (n° 419, 420, 421, 425, 1936),
« Paris-Sodome » (n° 506, 1938).

Figure 3. *Détective*, n° 3, 15 novembre 1928

20   Dominique Kalifa's study of the *bas-fonds* as cultural motif confirms the extent to which the words contained in the titles of these articles belong to historical conventions for the fictional and journalistic representation of cities[6]. The images representing these articles on *Détective*'s covers belong to one of the most distinctive of photographic genres in the 1930s French periodical – that of the *fantastique sociale*. The doctrine of the *fantastique sociale* had been elaborated, albeit incompletely, by the writer Pierre Mac Orlan (an occasional contributor to *Détective*) in a number of texts published since the late 1920s[7]. In Clément Cheroux' efficient summary, the *fantastique sociale* involved the textual and imagistic production of a *inquétante latente*, of a sense of unease and intrigue to be found in the *bas fonds* or peripheries of modern cities. This *inquiétude* was best expressed by nocturnal images of streets and architectural structures that assumed the character of menacing environments. In both the documentary photographs and fiction films associated with the *fantastique sociale*, the interplay of light and shadow in the photographing of obscured spaces (like alleys and doorways) communicated the possibility of violence or moral transgression[8].

21   The interest of the *fantastique social* for our purposes lies in the way in which its distinctive photographic style imprinted itself upon several of *Détective*'s covers. This style, we might suggest, mediated between those images of collective action taken "from behind" and the frontal, face-centred covers that dominated in the latter half of the 1930s. Like the former, these images encouraged the contemplation of a social depth, but they shared, with the latter, a seductive effort to engage the observer's attention. In *Figure 4*, for example, no human figure looks outward from the page; rather, we follow two figures, viewed from a position of posteriority, as they gaze towards the brightly lit exterior of Le Rat Mort nightclub in Place Pigalle. However, while this photograph looks past the two men, towards the deeper social space of the building and surrounding street, that space, in a sense, looks back. Its illuminated surfaces and dark corners together function as an object of desire and bearer of an aesthetic *photogénie*. Arguably, the visual motifs of *le fantastique sociale*, in this and many other cover photographs, facialize the city, endowing it with the expressivity of personality, even as they beckon towards a perspectival depth that had earlier been used simply to capture the prosaic details of crime scenes or institutional settings.

Figure 4. *Détective* n°323, 3 janvier 1935

The absent crime

22   The final aspect of *Detective*'s covers to be discussed here involves a condition shared by all periodicals engaged in the photographic coverage of crime. This is the usual unavailability of images of the criminal act itself[9]. Photographers, like the agents of police forces or prosecutorial offices, will typically arrive at the scene of a crime only after it has taken place. While the reasons for this are obvious – crimes, unlike other events of journalistic interest, are rarely announced in advance – the belatedness of the photojournalist's presence has shaped the coverage of crime in important ways. Most notably, it has meant that photographers and editors, missing an image of the criminal act itself, can do little more than treat a crime in fragmentary fashion, dividing it into its constitutive elements and using images of these elements taken separately, before or after the crime itself. Typically, these elements include the human participants in a criminal act (perpetrators, victims and investigators), the places in which crimes occur, and any objects (such as guns, stolen goods, automobiles, and so on) bearing some connection to the event.

23   From the corpus of images appearing on the cover of *Détective* between 1928 and 1940, only two photographs appear to show a crime in the moment of its commission. On the cover of *Détective* n° 175 (1932), under the title "Attaque de la banque", we see a group of robbers, with raised revolvers, as they carry out the robbery of a bank (Figure 5). However, there is every reason to doubt the documentary veracity of this photograph, and to suspect that it was staged, using actors, at some later point in the unfolding of the case. The same suspicion – that a crime scene has been re-enacted – applies to the cover of n° 539 (1939), on which a story entitled "Espions" is illustrated with the image of one man shooting another in a forest, photographed such that we see the moment in which the bullet leaves the gun. In a very limited number of other occasions, *Détective* appears to have recreated, for its covers, scenes showing the immediate aftermath of crimes. This is the case, for example, of the cover illustrating "Ma parole d'homme : Confession d'un souteneur" (n° 529, 1938), in which we see a man, brandishing what is probably a weapon, bent over a dead body.

Figure 5. *Détective*, n° 175, 3 mars 1932

24   The photographs used to illustrate articles in the interior pages of *Détective* regularly displayed scenes of recreated action that featured models and were apparently shot in photographic studios. With very few exceptions, however, the magazine's covers eschewed this practice. This is a significant point of distinction between *Détective* and the American true crime magazines which enjoyed success during the same period. Since their emergence in the early 1920s, magazines like *Startling Detective* or *Inside Detective* had used paintings or drawings of criminal acts on their covers to compensate for the absence of photographs of these acts. In the late 1930s, to further distinguish themselves from the pulp fiction magazines (and emergent comic books) with which they competed, the covers of American true crime magazines began to feature photographs showing crimes re-enacted by human models in studios. This shift to the photographic image was intended to heighten the claims of these magazines to documentary realism, though their lurid poses and the reliance on images of sexualized women severely reduced their levels of veracity. Through such recreations, nevertheless, the normal fragmentation of the criminal act might be overcome: criminals, victims and the accoutrements of crime (like guns or knives) could be shown together in the commission of the criminal act.

25   Because such re-enactments were rare on the covers of *Détective*, other means were necessary to express the tragedy and sensation of crimes. Like newspapers, *Détective* engaged in the division of the crime into different elements, a practice most evident in the variety of human figures represented in the magazine's interior illustrations and on its covers. When the crime was murder, the violence of the criminal act itself, of which no image existed, was dispersed across the emotional states of those involved in the crime: onto the guilt of the accused perpetrator, the mourning of those close to the victim, and the determination displayed by the agents and institutions of investigation and justice. A focus on these figures, as condensed carriers of emotional intensity, encouraged the use of the portrait photograph as the most common kind of cover image by the middle of the 1930s.

Varieties of the human figure

26   On occasion, *Detective's* covers might contain images of the dead victims of crimes. These were typically photographed at the scene of the crime and thus able to convey a sense of tragedy. Across the 599 issues of *Détective* published between 1928 and 1940, 17 covers featured bodies which were clearly those of dead people[10]. The frequency of such images was highest from 1930 to 1932, and they ceased to appear after 1937, suggesting that the magazine's preference for glamorous or expressive portraits of the living was now absolute. The low number of images of dead bodies on covers is one feature distinguishing the French crime periodical from traditions in other countries. The bodies of the dead are rare on the covers of *Détective* during the 1930s, but uncommon, as well, on those of its main competitor, *Police Magazine,* and later reincarnations of *Détective* as well. In contrast, in Mexico – probably the country in which the production of crime papers and magazines has been most voluminous – photographs of cadavres have been featured on covers with great regularity from the 1930s through the present. (At present, they are a daily feature of several metropolitan newspapers, such as *El Grafico* and *La Prensa*.)

27   If images of dead bodies represent one class (albeit relatively rare) of photographs on *Détective's* covers, we may identify two additional classes of image marked by a high level of standardization. Each of these offers a way of capturing the drama of crime in the absence of any image of criminal activity itself. In each case, as well, the drama of the criminal act is displaced onto a psychology of human suffering and hope, which the human face seeks to render intelligible. The first of these image groups is that which shows a prisoner behind bars, of which *Figure 1* (already discussed) was the first example in *Détective's* history[11]. The aesthetic possibilities of such images are simple, and easy exploited. Typically, the prisoner is framed by the bars of the cell, whose grid-like structure is lightly disrupted by any turn of the subject's head or gaze. The prison cell photograph is both highly frontal (in its blatant offering of the prisoner's face for inspection) and slightly distancing (in the imposition of the bars between viewer and subject). At the same time, the prisoner's immobility invites the contemplative gaze of the reader at the prisoner's face, to seek out the signs of defiance, submission, or regret.
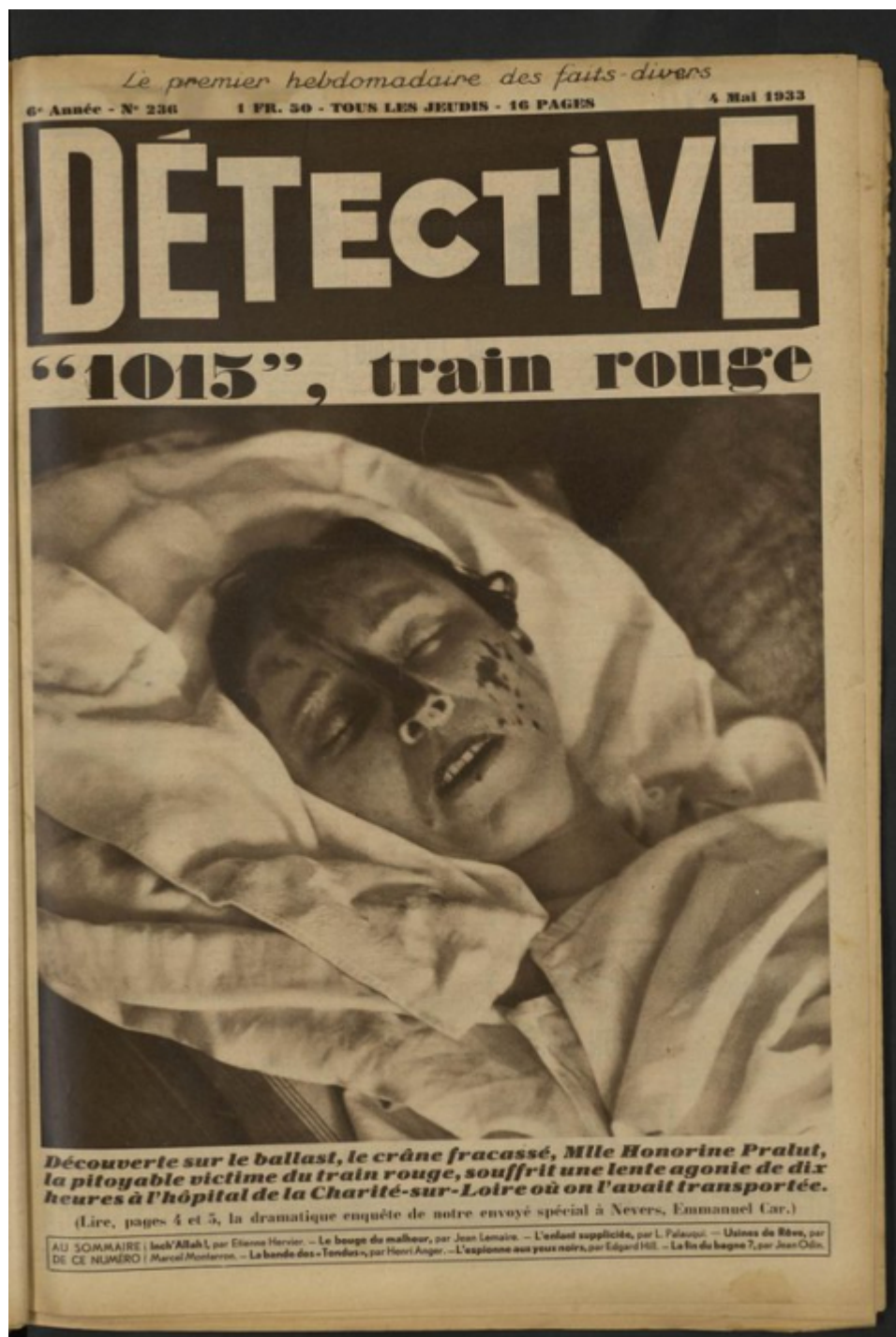
28   Another familiar class of photograph in the true crime periodical is the image of an individual in bed, recovering from an act of violence. While the criteria for inclusion in this category are unstable – such images are often indistinguishable from those of dead bodies – the composition of such images is highly formulaic[12]. Here, as with the images of prisoners in their cells, we confront photographs whose emotional resonances are easily grasped. *Figure 6* is the image of the victim of a homicidal attack on a train. While the victim eventually died, the inside article tells us, she suffered "une lente agonie" in a hospital for several hours, and it is unclear whether the cover image represents her before or after her death. If this image invites simultaneous reactions of mourning and hope, we may point, as well, to its formal dimensions, typical of images of victims in hospital beds. Almost without exception, such images organize the human figure diagonally. This has the

effect of allowing the human figure to take up more of the space of the image than would be possible in a more upright pose. The diagonal representation of the body also blocks any larger sense of spatial or institutional context, rendering the human figure the exclusive object of attention. The extended crossing of the space of the magazine cover by the human figure, whose posture is in tension with the rectangular dimensions of the page and text, adds an element of pictorial dynamism which nurtures the affective dimensions of these images. In his study of Mexican photographs of violence, Leonard Folgarait suggests that the diagonal photograph of victims underscores their unknowability and mystery, particularly when set against the grid-like form of official photographs of criminals, suspects and crime scenes. The diagonally-posed photograph invites responses which are contemplative rather than judgemental, personal rather than official[13].

29   Images of prisoners and cells, or victims in hospital beds, have become clichés of the crime periodical. Examples of both recur with regularity in *Détective* and its successor magazines during the 1940s and 1950s, and they were a common class of images in the English-language tabloid newspaper from the 1920s through the 1950s. They join other, minor photographic genres – like images of prisoners being led to court, or police investigators searching through a field – within the imagistic vocabulary of the crime periodical. Despite the sensational singularity of crimes themselves, the photographs with which crime is represented usually belong to highly formalized genres such as these, endlessly repeated combinations of theme and compositional form.

Figure 6. *Détective* n° 236, 4 mai 1933

Le premier hebdomadaire des faits-divers
6e Année · N° 236   1 FR. 50 · TOUS LES JEUDIS · 16 PAGES   4 Mai 1933

DÉTECTIVE

"1015", train rouge

Découverte sur le ballast, le crâne fracassé, Mlle Honorine Pralut,
la pitoyable victime du train rouge, souffrit une lente agonie de dix
heures à l'hôpital de la Charité-sur-Loire où on l'avait transportée.

(Lire, pages 4 et 5, la dramatique enquête de notre envoyé spécial à Nevers, Emmanuel Car.)

Conclusion

30   In later, postwar reiterations of the *Détective*, this focus of its covers on the individual face would become even more pronounced. In the latter half of the 1950s, all but a few covers of *Qui? Détective* and its successor (after March, 1958) *Détective*, featured solitary human faces, and this pattern continued through the 1960s. By the middle of the 1970s, as Philippe Chassaigne has shown, the covers of *Détective* rarely featured images of individuals linked to crimes reported inside the magazine; these had been replaced by photographs of women, in sexualized poses, with no obvious or specified connection to crime[14]. Just as the covers of *Détective* in the late 1930s converged, in subject and style, with those of picture magazines such as *Voilà* and *Vu*, so *Détective*, since the 1970s, came to resemble the sensational celebrity tabloid magazine.

31   In his study of « seconds rôles" in French cinema – of the performers and characters who inhabit the backgrounds of dramatic scenes in films – Serge Regourd describes the dense social textures characteristic of that cinema in the 1930s, when action almost invariably unfolded amidst richly populated social worlds[15]. In later decades, he suggests, social background would shrink, as narratives were organized around the more exclusive worlds of bourgeois families or romantic couples. We may see the transformations in *Détective*'s covers, from 1928 onwards, as operating in similar fashion, to displace the crowd or institutional group by the solitary, photogenic face. This displacement may well have been an effect of shifting fashions in periodical design, but it signalled, as well, the magazine's declining interest in images of collective action. *Détective*'s covers came to privilege an intimate proximity to the photogenic human face over the distanced documentation of social forces in action.

Bibliographie

BADIOU Alain, Cinéma : *Textes rassemblés et présentés par Antoine de Baccque*, France, Nova Editions, 2010, 419 p.

CHASSAIGNE Philippe, « La justice mise en images par Détective (1945-1980), » *Sociétés & Représentations*, n° 18, 2004, p. 263- 275.

CHÉROUX Clément, « Du cosmopolitisme en photographie. Portrait de Paris en échangeur culturel », *in* Quentin Bajac and Clément Chéroux, dir., *Voici Paris : Modernités photographiques, 1920-1950*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2012, p. 31-41.

FOLGARAIT Leonard, *Seeing Mexico Photographed: The Work of Horne, Casasola, Modotti, and Alvarez Barvo*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2008, 208 p.

GERVAIS Thierry (avec la collaboration de Gaëlle Morel), *La fabrication de l'information visuelle : Photographies et magazines d'actualité,* Paris, Editions textuel, 2015, 240 p.

JAIN Kajri, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2007, 280 p.

KALIFA Dominique, *Les Bas-Fonds : Histoire d'un imaginaire*, Paris, Seuil, coll. « L'Univers historique », 2013, 416 p.

KITCH Carolyn, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, The University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 252 p.

MAC ORLAN Pierre, *Écrits sur la phtographie. Textes réunis et introduits par Clément Chéroux*, Paris, Editions Textuel, 2011, 240 p.

REGOURD Serge, *Les seconds rôles du cinéma français : grandeur et décadence*, Paris, Archimbaud/Klincksieck, 2010, 270 p.

STRAW Will, "After the Event: The Challenges of Crime Photography," *in* Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz (dir.) *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News,* Londres, Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. 139-144.

TAGG John, *The Burden of Representation*: *Essays on Photographies and Histories,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 242 p.

Notes

1 See these covers and interior stories: "La Sorcière des Innuit," *Détective*, n° 12, 17 janvier 1929; "Sus aux contrebandiers !... », *Détective*, n° 5, 29 novembre 1928; « Les mystères du Ku-Klux-Klan, », *Détective*, n° 4, 22 novembre 1928; « Paris la nuit, », *Détective*, n° 3, 15 novembre 1928.

2 For studies of the 1930s French picture magazine, see, among others, Thierry Gervais (avec la collaboration de Gaëlle Morel), *La fabrication de l'information visuelle : Photographies et magazines d'actualité,* Paris, Éditions textuel, 2015, p. 120.

3 Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

4 Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 192.

5 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 35-36.

6 Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-Fonds : Histoire d'un imaginaire*, Paris, Seuil, 2013.

7 See, for example, the articles collected in Pierre Mac Orlan, *Écrits sur la photographie. Textes réunis et introduits par Clément Chéroux*, Paris, Éditions Textuel, 2011.

8 Clément Chéroux, « Du cosmopolitisme en photographie. Portrait de Paris en échangeur culturel », *in* Quentin Bajac and Clément Chéroux (dir.), *Voici Paris : Modernités photographiques, 1920-1950*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2012, p. 31-41. See also Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-Fonds*, p. 262.

9 I have explored this issue elsewhere . See, for example, Will Straw, "After the Event: The Challenges of Crime Photography," *in* Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz (dir.) *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News,* Londres, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 139-144.

10 Issues whose covers feature dead bodies are the following: n° 82 (1930), n° 87 (1930), n° 90 (1930), n° 96 (1930), n° 97 (1930), n° 160 (1931), n° 183 (1932), n° 195 (1932), n° 196 (1932), n° 205 (1932), n° 265 (1933), n° 324 (1935), n° 352 (1935), n° 369 (1935), n° 426 (1936), n° 432 (1937), n° 445 (1937). I have not included here cover images in which the status of a body is ambiguous.

11 These are n° 8 (1928), n° 58 (1929), n° 245 (1933), n° 310 (1934), n° 313 (1934).

12 These are n° 106 (1930), n° 202 (1932), n° 236 (1933). It is interesting to note that the last of these covers is from 1933.

13 Leonard Folgarait, *Seeing Mexico Photographed: The Work of Horne, Casasola, Modotti, and Alvarez Barvo*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2008, p. 12-14.

14 Philippe Chassaigne, « La justice mise en images par Détective (1945-1980), » *Sociétés & Représentations*, n° 18, 2004, p. 263- 275.

15 Serge Regourd, *Les seconds rôles du cinéma français : grandeur et décadence*, Paris, Archimbaud/Klincksieck, 2010, p. 9. For an analysis that offers similar observations, see Alain Badiou, *Cinéma : Textes rassemblés et présentés par Antoine de Baccque*, France, Nova Éditions, 2010, p. 64.

Table des illustrations

Titre	Figure 1. *Détective*, n° 8, 20 décembre 1928
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-1.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 28k

Titre	Figure 2. *Détective* n° 480, 6 janvier 1938
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-2.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 20k

Titre	Figure 3. *Détective*, n° 3, 15 novembre 1928
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-3.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 20k

Titre	Figure 4. *Détective* n°323, 3 janvier 1935
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-4.png
Fichier	image/png, 697k

Titre	Figure 5. *Détective*, n° 175, 3 mars 1932
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-5.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 24k

Titre	Figure 6. *Détective* n° 236, 4 mai 1933
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/docannexe/image/4873/img-6.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 88k

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique
Will Straw, « Quand le crime donne un visage au journal à sensation », *Criminocorpus* [En ligne], Détective, histoire, imaginaire, médiapoétique d'un hebdomadaire de fait divers (1928-1940), Communications, mis en ligne le 18 décembre 2018, consulté le 06 janvier 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/4873

Auteur

Will Straw
Will Straw est Professeur de « Cultures urbaines » à l'Université James McGill de Montréal au Département d'histoire de l'art et de Communication. Ses recherches portent principalement sur le cinéma, la presse populaire et la culture urbaine. Publications :"The Visuality of Scenes", Numéro thématique co-dirigé avec Nathalie Casemajor, *Imaginations: Revue d'études interculturelles de l'image*, n° 172, mars 2017."The Sporting Pornographer : Shifting formations of the New York men's magazine in the 1920s and 1930s", *Media History*, vol. 23, n° 17, 2017, p. 4-27."Media Networks and Language-Crossing in Montreal", dans Sherry Simon, dir., *Speaking Memory : How Translation Shapes City Life*, Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 2016, p. 153-168."Constructing the Canadian Lowbrow Magazine: The Periodical as Media Object in the 1930s and 1940s", *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, vol. 6, n° 2, 2016, p. 112-133.

Droits d'auteur

Ce site utilise des cookies et collecte des informations personnelles vous concernant.
Pour plus de précisions, nous vous invitons à consulter notre politique de confidentialité (mise à jour le 25 juin 2018).
En poursuivant votre navigation, vous acceptez l'utilisation des cookies.Fermer