



Cette photographie a été réalisée le 1er octobre 1910. Si on ne sait pas quand Alphonse Bertillon a réellement inventé la « photographie métrique », nous savons qu'à cette époque-là, il la pratique depuis un certain temps et qu'il est sans doute rodé à l'exercice. Nous savons aussi, à l'aide des informations inscrites au-dessus de la photographie, qu'il s'agit d'un certain "Monsieur André Garson" et que la scène a été prise au 75 boulevard de la Villette à Paris.

Elle est une « photographie métrique » typique d'Alphonse Bertillon, en ce sens qu'elle permet de « figer une scène de crime » comme le fait remarquer le commissaire de l'exposition Pierre Piazza. Avec cette image, en effet, la police scientifique pouvait enquêter de façon détaillée, bien plus qu'avant la photographie. Des détails qui apparaissent sur le cliché permettent d'orienter l'enquête vers tel ou tel acte criminel. « *La flaque de sang, par exemple, en dit long sur la technique du meurtrier pour tuer sa victime. Alphonse Bertillon s'en servait pour éluder un crime* », explique Pierre Piazza. En prenant une dizaine de clichés à chaque affaire criminelle, Alphonse Bertillon pouvait aussi dresser un plan du lieu qui servait ensuite à l'enquête. Non seulement il prendra au début du XXe siècle systématiquement en photographie les scènes de crime de Paris et sa banlieue - parfois aussi en province - mais il ira jusqu'à capturer en image les scènes de catastrophe comme les explosions d'usines par exemple ou les accidents de voitures, ce qu'évoque à merveille le catalogue de l'exposition publié aux Éditions de la Martinière.

**Par Jean-Baptiste Gauvin**

## **BEHIND THE IMAGE – Capturing a Crime Scene**

**As part of the exhibit *La science à la poursuite du crime [Forensic Science Goes After Crime]* at the National Archives in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Blind analyzes a typical photograph by the man who invented modern forensic science, Alphonse Bertillon.**



The dead man is lying on the floor in a pool of his own blood. His legs are bound and tools that could have been used as weapons lie next to him: an iron, a knife and a hammer. All around the crime scene, small numbers have been placed on a ruler to indicate the actual size of the elements at the scene. This is what Alphonse Bertillon called a "metric photograph," which went on to make him famous in the history of forensic science. He was one of the first to systematize the use of photography at crime scenes in France. Better yet, he invented a device to capture these incredible images. Using a huge tripod over two meters tall—one of the tripod feet can be seen in this photo—he would install a camera able to take in the entire crime scene, including the body and the elements around it.

This photograph was taken on October 1, 1910. While we don't know when Alphonse Bertillon actually invented "metric photography," we do know that at the time, he had been practicing it for a while and that he was undoubtedly very good at it. We also know, thanks to the information shown above the photograph, that the deceased was a man named André Garson and that the crime scene was located at 75 Boulevard de la Villette in Paris.

This photo is typical of Alphonse Bertillon's work, in that it "captures a crime scene," as pointed out by the curator of the exhibition, Pierre Piazza. Forensics teams were able to carry out more detailed investigations than they could before such photographs were used. Details that appear on a photo can direct an investigation towards a particular type of crime. "Blood splatter patterns, for example, say a lot about a murderer's technique for killing his victim. Alphonse Bertillon would use them to study a crime," explains Pierre Piazza. By taking a dozen snapshots at each scene, Alphonse Bertillon could also establish a layout of the place, which was then used in the investigation. Not only did he systematically photograph the early 20th-century crime scenes in Paris and its suburbs—sometimes in other regions as well—but he captured disaster and mass fatality scenes such as factory explosions or car crashes, too. The variety of his work is beautifully reflected in the exhibition catalogue published by Éditions de la Martinière.

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