

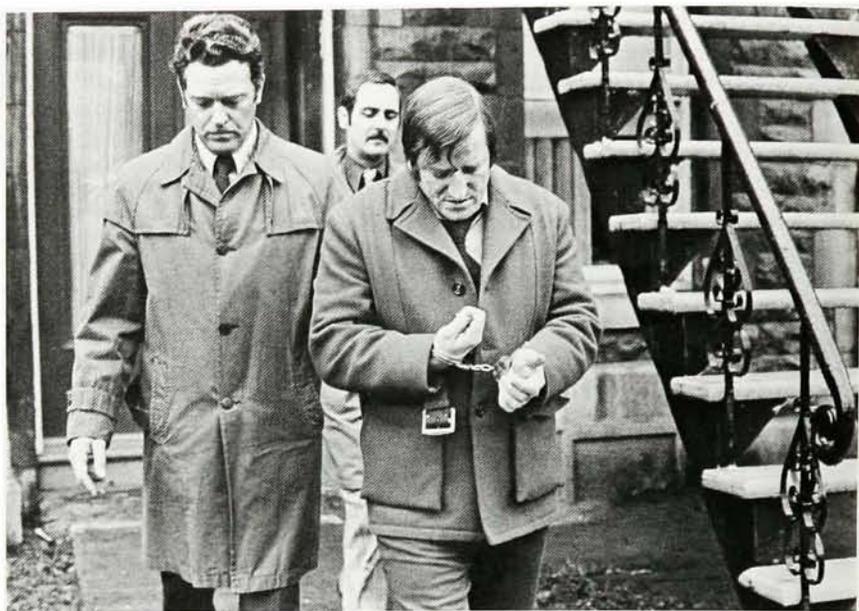
FILM REVIEWS

The Québec Crisis: Once More With Feeling

Whatever else the Front de Libération du Québec understood about their actions in October of 1970, they did at least realize the importance of involving the media as directly as possible in the events as they happened. Pierre Trudeau also understood: "The main thing the FLQ is trying to gain from this is a hell of a lot of publicity for the movement". An oversimplification perhaps, suggesting as it does that the FLQ were working for something more to come, when in fact *this was it*, but Trudeau left no doubt that he did indeed understand. Only a few days later, he responded with the War Measures Act.

No longer could the FLQ speak to the people of Québec: the communication so important to their idea of revolution was silenced. (After their Manifesto had been made public, who knows, perhaps there was little more for them to say.) Nor would the Canadian people have a right to further information about the "parallel power" and its "apprehended insurrection" that inspired the War Measures Act. They would have to be satisfied with speculation, rumour and innuendo. There was no place for explanations. The War Measures Act effectively stilled questions about its author's action and intention, suppressing by law the information that might have supported the country's suspicions.

How much do we really know? Indeed, how much do we *want* to know? Questions are easy enough to ask: the "lid" has been off the Québec Crisis for at least four years. It's now popular history and its historians, people like Robin Spry, Michel Brault, Brian Moore and perhaps even Jean-Claude Lord are, appropriately, the media. In principle, the FLQ would probably be pleased. Others might not. The Québec Crisis is a "hot" property, a fact that might obscure the value of **Action**, **Les Ordres** and, to a lesser extent, **Bingo**. It would be easy to dismiss them. They're just movies: history as Pop Culture politicized (**Action**) personalized (**Les Ordres** and Brian Moore's dramatized novel, **The Revolution Script**) and romanticized (**Bingo**). But together they present a fairly up-to-date, though far from conclusive account of the Québec Crisis. Balanced answers to the ques-



Scene from "Les Ordres"

tions of Knowledge and Responsibility are difficult to find. Most Canadians will see only *what* and *as much* as they wish to see. At the time, they very quickly laid the blame. And they've since forgotten. It's that kind of issue.

The less you know, the better. (**Bingo**) That's a Rule of the Revolution which has been put another way, "no one knows more than he needs to know" in Gilles Pontecorvo's **The Battle of Algiers**, a film which according to Brian Moore, was an inspiration to the FLQ. (How romantic, it started at the movies!) For Françoise, the young photographer and student turned terrorist, to know more about the "revolution" than he needs to know, is to place its success in doubt. To know the truth is to know too much: that it's a trap. His youthful idealism and romantic notions of the "revolution" are being exploited for the benefit of the recognized "enemy". The terrorist activities are really a high level conspiracy to create a social climate conducive to one political party seeking election. A disturbing thought, one of the few in the film, it's somehow a reminder of the FRAP incident in the Montreal Election of 1970, briefly detailed in **Action**. City officials were allowed their accusations but the FRAP party was denied its response. Not that a defense would have made much difference. At the time, it was very

convenient that the "revolution" should be found everywhere. And the less anyone knew to the contrary, the better. That is as much the essence of something like the War Measures Act as it is of the Revolution.

It's not knowing that gets you. (**Les Ordres**) Doctor Jean-Marie Beauchemin speaks for his four fellow prisoners in the film and they, in turn, presumably speak for the four hundred and fifty others actually involved in the Québec Crisis. Beauchemin's is the philosophical voice, rather more distanced in tone from the immediacy of the experience than the others'. And yet his words apply to all parties to the Québec Crisis: the Governments, the public, the media, the FLQ and the War Measures Act prisoners, each awaiting the next development. For the next kidnapping. The next communiqué. The next prime-time speech. The next wave of arrests. The next two-in-the-morning interrogation.

You know it's a mistake. (**Les Ordres**) And in fact, the detention of Marie Boudreau, wife and mother, was an error. The others apparently were not. Doctor Beauchemin, social worker Claudette Dussault, cab driver and union man Clermont Boudreau and unemployed worker Richard Lavoie, all are in jail for a reason. **You don't even know why.** The orders exist only as pap-

ers in the hands of investigating officials. Whatever the reasons, the treatment of the prisoners isn't exactly hospitable. That the guards and officials take advantage of the orders for their own amusement, even to the limited extent that they do in *Les Ordres* is a warning: something about man's inhumanity which has little to do with the Québec Crisis directly. They are no more personally involved in the events of the Crisis than most of the prisoners. They happen to be on the safe side of the War Measures Act. And they alone are not to be held responsible, **their orders come from higher up**. Michel Brault implicates everyone in general and no one in particular for a situation which appears to be beyond *anyone's* control. Of course, it is not.

An accident is an accident. (Bingo) If someone is killed by a bomb meant *only* to "terrorize", the "revolution" calls it an accident. It's just the price that must be paid. The same thinking, success at all costs, supported the War Measures Act. Let someone else pay the price. No doubt the intentions of those behind the War Measures Act were good, if that's any consolation. Indeed, everyone's intentions in the Québec Crisis were probably good. Or so they thought.

There's still more to learn. When and if more is revealed, and surely *Les Ordres* would be a revelation to many of those Canadians who will decline to see it, then a reasoned interpretation of the subject might be possible. To some extent and perhaps prematurely, **Action** attempts just such an interpretation, imposing a very logical, though uncommitted view on what, to this point, cannot yet be understood in logical or uncommitted terms. Robin Spry's calm and even narration, like Michel Brault's controlled and understated direction of *Les Ordres*, belies the high emotion of the Québec Crisis. **Action** generally confirms everything we want to believe; it's not a film to disturb accepted views, whatever and however many they may be. To do that, it will take something more. It might be the CBC's planned fifth anniversary documentary. It might be another film like *Les Ordres*. It might more likely be the accumulation of information in all forms and over many years which will shape the eventual reading of the Québec Crisis.

Certainly no one won by the events of 1970. Some lost much more than others. The media has done as well as any.

— Mark Miller

Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est:

Dreams and Despair on the Main

Nice Neighbourhood, Montreal East. Some call it home, among them the sad and defeated people of André Brassard's film, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est*: the old women in the back alley tenements and the transvestites and lesbians who frequent Sandra's on the Main.

Of course, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* is no more a study of the Montreal East than it is of gays and old women. The subject is Québec, Michel Tremblay's Québec, taken from his many plays *en pièces détachées* (as one of his titles describes it) and recreated on film by Brassard. Tremblay's Québec is very much like the world at Sandra's. It's easy to watch from a distance: there's a floorshow, a parade of dreams and illusions, much to our amusement although not always to our understanding.

The owner of Sandra's hates the gays but admits that they're good for business. So they stay. In effect, he exploits them without sympathy. They serve his purpose, just as they serve Michel Tremblay's dramatic needs. Tremblay too, exploits them as metaphors of Québec and he can't be pleased with the story that they must tell. Indeed when Carmen, the cowgirl singer who is opening a week at Sandra's, obscurely remarks to the owner, "love stories never were your thing", she could be speaking to Tremblay himself. Certainly, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* is not a love story.

Once upon a time in the East, there were two generations of Québécois, the "past" and the "present". The older of the two, the woman of Tremblay's play *Les Belles Soeurs*, gathers in the modest apartment of Madame Lauzon to help her paste the one million Gold Star trading stamps that she has just won. They begin by stealing the stamps one book at a time and end up ransacking the apartment. What else are friends for?

That same eventful day, the appar-

Belles Soeurs ready themselves for an equally climactic evening at Sandra's. Carmen is making her debut at the club. Helène, once Queen of the Main, is making her comeback. And Hosanna is at last realizing his dream. There is to be a drag ball with the theme, Famous Women. Hosanna will be Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra. Unknown to him, so will everyone else, just for spite.

Other characters cross paths between Madame Lauzon's and Sandra's including, in the film's most compelling vignette, a young waitress who dies on an abortionist's table murmuring, "I came into the world by the back door, but I leave by the front". Indeed, life was never sweeter. *La Dolce Vita*.

Tremblay's is a world without love. It's also a world without men. There's only Sandra's owner and significantly, he lives off the avails of people acting out illusions. This night, their dreams have been replaced by despair. Only Carmen survives the evening at Sandra's. She's apparently Tremblay's hope for the future (and the subject of his next play, *Saint Carmen of the Main*; she may get hers yet).

It's difficult to consider the Brassard film as distinct from the Tremblay plays, and yet to think of them together is not always to the good of either. Without some background from the plays, the film must seem rather obscure. Who are all of these people? On film, they live in a void and are developed as characters with a few throwaway details and references to their respective plays which demand further substantiation. In the theatre, the same characters are drawn in some sort of context, usually domestic, and are defined as much by their reactions as their actions. In his collaboration with Brassard on the screenplay, Tremblay has contrived to allow his "gang", as he has called it, to leave the dramatic shelter of their plays and ride headstrong together down the Main on a wave of despair.

Between them, they have done the plays a disservice. It's distressing to find, for example, that Helène of *En Pièces Détachées* is daughter of one of *Les Belles Soeurs*, niece of *La Duchesse De Langeais* and hangs out at the same club with Hosanna listening to Carmen from *À Toi, Pour Toujours, Ta Marie*