

Hold up: The power of the image

by Lois Siegel

Eight years ago my first article/photo story for Cinema Canada was entitled "The man upstairs or... on the shoot of *Blood Relatives*," a Franco-Canadian co-production produced by Denis Héroux of Cinevideo and directed by Claude Chabrol making his first film in English.

In May, 1985, I once again was invited to set foot on a Cinevideo set. This time the picture was another Franco-Canadian co-production, *Hold-Up*, featuring Jean-Paul Belmondo, and directed by Alexandre Arcady.

Eight years ago my photo/story highlighted an incident whereby a man refused to remove his car from an archway in Old Montreal, nearly preventing a million-dollar-shoot from happening. It was a lovely production nightmare, and no one could do anything for two hours until a producer showed up and supposedly bribed the guy with \$2,000 to remove his car.

Hold-up, Day 1: I call up Cinevideo and speak to their publicity director. I explain that I would like to do a photo/story for Cinema Canada. At first he insists Cinevideo can provide the photos. My stomach flips once over, not so lightly. Everyone knows what boxed-lunch-type photos look like; they drip with the creamy richness of too many cheesecakes. I renege on the offer.

After these preliminaries, he finally agrees to let me do my work and tells me to meet him at 2 p.m. By 2:15 we arrive on set and are told that everyone has just left for lunch. So I mark that one off to bad timing. No harm done: shootings are rarely on schedule. The publicity director said I could return in an hour and take any photos I wanted. But I was not to aim my camera at Jean-Paul Belmondo, who had his own private, personal, exclusive photographer. Fine. I returned in an hour.

As I was preparing my camera for shooting, this same publicity director ran forward, explaining that I had to leave the set. Belmondo's photographer was having a fit. No other photographer was to be allowed on-set.

Wonderful, I thought, now people have contracts on entire productions. I wondered how all the Montreal photographers who thrived on selling photos to newspapers and magazines were going to do their jobs and earn a living, me included.

The publicity director told me that I would have no trouble taking shots because I could merely remain behind the barriers a few feet away. What he didn't tell me, and what I later found out, was that no photographer except Belmondo's, had been allowed on-set since the beginning of the shoot May 6.

In addition, the barriers to the public were at the end of the street on Rue McGill, a block away from the action. So why did he invite me down to the set?

Curiously enough, when I also asked him for some written publicity on the shoot, which all productions usually provide journalists, he said lots of arti-

cles had already been written. In other words, why didn't I just read the news-

papers? It's encouraging to be written off like that. I had to obtain a call sheet from a crew-member for some of the information I required.

Anyway, I stuck around for a few hours to observe what one could see between the camera trucks parked tightly around the set in Old Montreal, in front of the impressive Banque Intercontinental du Canada in Place d'Youville. Overshadowing everything was a \$100,000 newly constructed monstrosity which looked distractingly familiar -

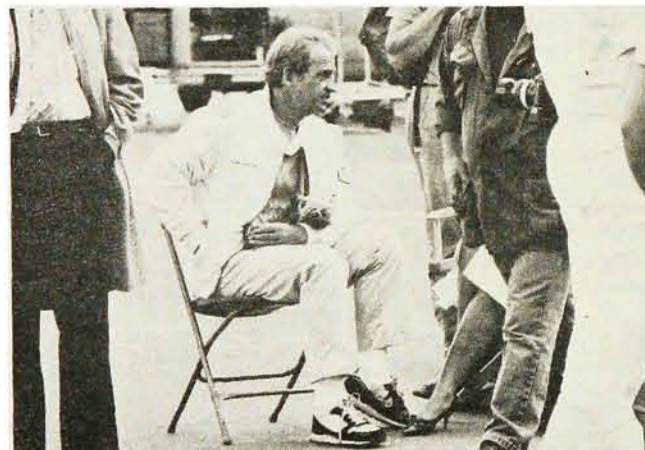
something like the Brooklyn Bridge in New York - and painted ugly, hospital green. Someone joked that when the bridge was disassembled, they were going to use it as Mayor Drapeau's Olympic Stadium roof.

Then I ran into one photographer friend who said he got some great shots with his 600mm lens. Great, I thought, getting my 105mm so that it wouldn't be insulted or ashamed of being little in a big people's world.

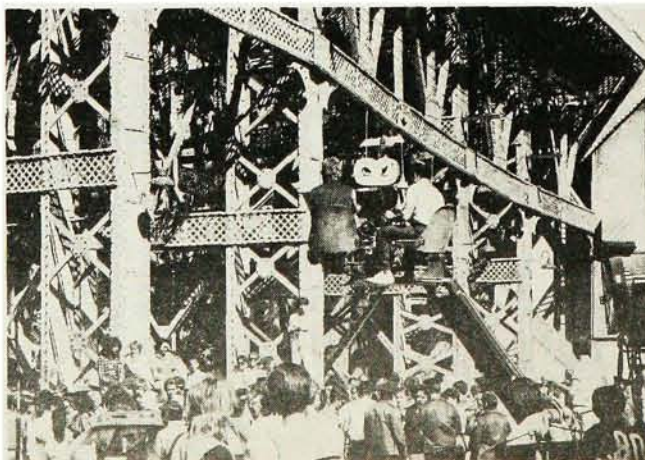
I trailed this photographer as he



1. What Jean-Paul Belmondo looks like to a photographer not allowed to get close enough to photograph him.



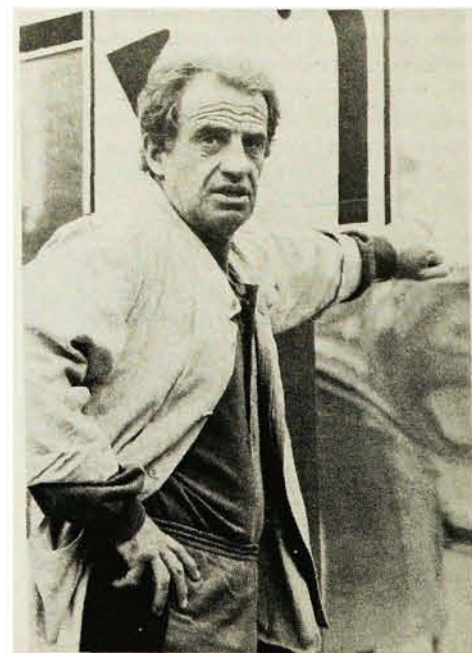
3. Belmondo with furry friend



5. Extras pretending to be a crowd

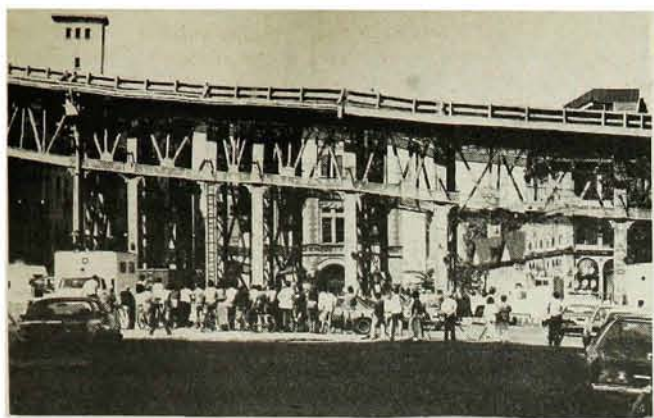


2. What JPB looks like with a 105mm lens one block away and enlarged to the maximum in the darkroom. Belmondo plays the old man with the cane.

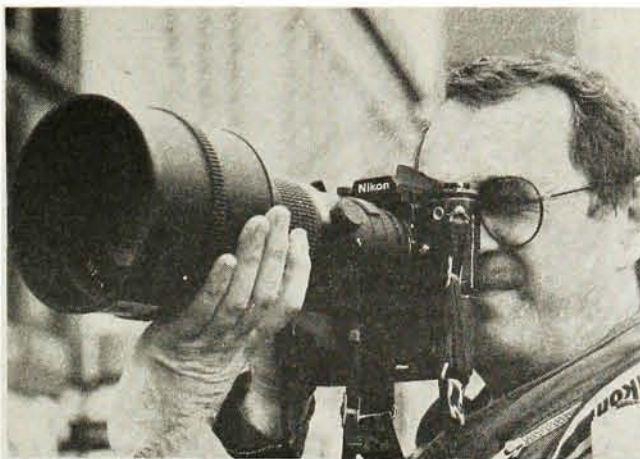


4. JPB up close

photos: Lois Siegel



6. The Brooklyn Bridge's brother-in-law



7. M.F. Ponomareff with his man-sized camera. He's trying to earn a living, taking photos at a distance



8. JPB's infamous private, personal, exclusive photographer shows Belmondo some snapshots



9. Lois Siegel, rather small and unassuming, espionage photographer-at-large



10. A walking arsenal tree



11. DOP Richard Ciupka takes an actresses' temperature



12. An artistic creation : North Atlantic Bank

weasled his way through the barriers to a friend's "private parking" lot adjacent to the shoot. The production assistants, Belmondo's guarding watchdogs, descended immediately to word us away. We didn't budge.

"Private property," my heavily-experienced photographer friend admonished them, "you can't make us move." Then a resident of the remodeled condominium adjacent to the private parking, appeared. He was, by this time, fed up with film shoots that created noise and congestion. He also hated trying to exit his car from the barricaded premises, so he jumped to our defence.

I was still not on-set, but from this less than advantageous point-of-view, I was able to snatch the photos you see, captured from a distance.

Day II : Three-thirty p.m. I head over to the set, again in Old Montreal. Everything looks the same. I station myself at the "private parking" lot, flashing my Cinema Canada card to avoid displacement, while mentioning the publicity director's name. People are impressed by name-tags.

Belmondo isn't far away, being lit in a telephone booth with lots of reflectors, and glaring into my lens. Every few minutes his private photographer also glares at me ; I love significant glares : they do wonders for my sense of well-being.

But I look like a stupid, innocuous female (just barely 5' small), and I am soon ignored. If I had been a 6', 300-lb. male with a huge, phallic camera lens aimed at Belmondo, forget it. I would have been out of there quicker than you could have said "the image is the message." So much for male chauvinism.

Belmondo eats an ice-cream cone - "click."

The crowd-scene extras pretend to be a crowd - "click."

More ice-cream - "click."

I couldn't get close enough to do anything else.

But just as I was leaving, a production assistant (God's greatest gift to the accidental misadventure) approached : they needed more extras for the crowd-scene... On The Set ! Who wanted to be in the film, he encouraged encouragingly. I did. He promptly guided his small but eager new extra to the nearest crowd-scene. I smiled obediently, joining the crowd, neatly hidden in the second row, but at a good vantage-point for shooting photos, and since people with cameras were part of the scene, no one bothered me.

A few of my friends on the crew smiled in disbelief when they noticed me, after having seen me escorted out-of-bounds the day before. I smiled back.

By then (5 p.m.), Belmondo sat out of costume with a furry thing (animal) on his lap - "click."

His photographer was nowhere to be seen - "click."

When his photographer finally did appear, I took *his* picture - "click."

The moral, or rather, morass of this story ?

Image monopoly is a result of power. If I can control my image, I can control what people think of me. Barbra Streisand is said to allow cameramen to shoot her from one profile only. Some actors/actresses have a say as to which director of photography will photograph them.

One would think that if Telefilm Canada is kicking in one million dollars in Canadian money on this shoot, that at least Canadian photographers should be allowed on the set.