

Rhodes. We can only hope that Paul Lynch's next film will come soon and stretch further.

—Alastair Brown

## Les Ordres

### The knock in the middle of the night

*Written and directed by Michel Brault, Edited by Yves Dion, Camerawork by Michel Brault and François Protat, with: Helene Loiselle, Jean Lapointe, Guy Provost, Claude Gauthier and Louise Forestier.*

At 5:17 a.m. on the morning of October 16, 1970, I was watching television. It was quite a funny program, a bit like Orson Welles radio program supposedly about the invasion of the Earth by Martians. This one was called "The War Measures Act," but unlike Welles' production of thirty years earlier, this one wasn't particularly believable — people en masse being arrested and held without trial; soldiers with sub-machine guns at the corner of Peel and St. Catherine. It was just a bit too far-fetched — this is Canada, after all, British system of justice, nice wide roads, street lamps, colour television, pizza parlors — I mean, I know it might sound a little trite, but surely "it can't happen here."

But for 450 other totally innocent people, the spectacle was a little more involving, because for them that famous knock in the middle of the night that's only supposed to happen in Russia and Nazi Germany, had already happened. One minute at home changing the baby's diapers, the next minute stripped

Scene from "Les Ordres"



naked, hands up against the wall of some anonymous garage, with someone looking up your ass with a flashlight.

Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* ("The Orders" as in "I was only following...") is a film that probably will not be shown commercially in Toronto or Edmonton or Vancouver. Maybe there will not even be an English version. Not that the film lacks drama and not that it is

not well made — it's easily one of the most subtle moving films that I have seen this year — but, you see, the story that this film relates could not really interest people in Toronto or Edmonton or Vancouver because, let's face it, it certainly couldn't happen there. Except for one small fact — it already did. For the law that (in gentle bureaucratise) "suspended" the rights of those 450 Quebecers also suspended the rights of all Canadians. The only difference was that it was they that were stripped, showered, shaven and fingerprinted and thrown into a cell without a word of explanation while you and I watched on television thinking, "well anyways, it has nothing to do with me."

Michel Brault's film, however, provides no such emotional loopholes, so perhaps it's lucky that you probably will never get to see it. The film isn't out to prove anything beyond what the events themselves proved. It is the story of five individuals culled from verbatim interviews with over forty people who, like the rest, had been imprisoned and held without being formally charged. At the beginning of the film the well known Quebec actors give their real names and describe who they are representing in the film — a social worker, union organizer, a doctor and a housewife. This is done not through any Godardian razz mataz, but simply because they are telling the truth. And the stories that follow are not souped up to be any sort of epic tragedy because the simple fact was, that for most of the people arrested, the experience was no more than a minor nuisance (especially when put beside what's happening to other people in other countries.)

Nobody was tortured particularly, and in general everything operated with exemplary efficiency — oh ya well there was this unemployed guy, married with two small children and the prison guards jokingly told him that he would be shot in three days (you know boys will be boys) and he believed them! Isn't that a scream! But maybe after five days locked up in a cell with no explanation, when the worst thing that you had ever done in your life was to drink a few too many beers — maybe even someone from Winnipeg might start to believe that anything is possible. And the fact that he had to enter a mental hospital after he was released — well who knows, maybe he would have gone a little looney anyways sitting at home watching television. You see, there are no real horror stories coming out of this particular reign of terror — a few husbands separated from pregnant wives, mothers separated from their children and people arrested through clerical error. Much worse things have happened.

Look at films like *Battle of Algiers* or *Burn*; now here are injustices that we can really get our political teeth into! But strangely enough, Michel Brault's was much more effective because there is something packaged about a drama, and something packaged about your response to it that makes the experience artificial. For in these dramatic films, with everything sewed up and nothing left dangling, we can all smugly retire to our coffee houses with a comfortable feeling of enagement. *Les Ordres* is different. It is haunting like no other political film partly because it's so close to home and partly because it's so understatedly real. When no one gets killed or tortured we are reduced to mild words like humiliation and injustice. But anyone who has read the history books knows that this is how it happens — Nazi Berlin wasn't built in a day. One of the big things in Canadian law is precedent, and because it could happen so effortlessly four years ago, ("Daddy, what were you doing during the War Measures Act?") it could happen again. Brault's subtle camera and his portrayal of these five ordinary John Smiths makes it bloody difficult to feel smug about anything.

—Ronald Blumer

## The Lost Tribe

*On his last day of work as early morning film reviewer with the CBC in Montreal, Associate Editor Ronald Blumer decided to try out a little test — to give a review of a phony film with an absurd plot and see if anyone would react. The thesis was that if the cadence of the voice is right, and the whole packaged in the right style, any imaginable absurdity could get by. The following review was broadcast Friday August 30, 1974 at 8:15 a.m. So far as we know the only question asked was, how can we see this movie? Mr. Blumer is currently on Baffin Island scouting locations.*

The second film I saw this week, *The Lost Tribe*, is a first feature film by the young Vancouver director John Schouten. The film is worth seeing if only for its rather unusual script because the story presents the astounding thesis that the Eskimos of Northern Canada are in fact one of the lost tribes of Israel — presumably they strayed a little North on their way out of Egypt. The amazing thing is that *this* unlikely story comes across totally convincingly with Murry Westgate giving a powerfully moving performance as the village leader; a sort of Moses in seal skins, who has led his people out of the desert into the barren frozen tundra. But the real star of this film is the special effects man, who has turned this vast biblical metaphor into something very believable on the screen. There is, of course, no parting of the Red Sea in the Arctic Ocean,