

Moyle's film *The Rubber Gun* should be seen. Moyle and his associates, Stephen Lack and John Laing, have chosen a popular subject, the drug trade, but instead of Robin Spry's slightly smug approach, they took a decidedly personal and "uncommercial" route. Made over a period of more than two years on a minimal budget, using as cast and crew people who worked on Frank Vitale's *Montreal Main* (see *Cinema Canada*, no. 46), it at first seems to be a documentary. What is being done here is that the common coin of modern cinema is being used in an electric fashion. Thus, one may see influences in Moyle's work from the New Wave, the direct cinema of Leacock and Pennebaker, the jumpy, loosely connected Pirandellian dramas of John Cassavetes and the gritty, improvisational street style of the young Martin Scorsese.

As in *Mean Streets*, Moyle focuses on a group of people who form a quasi-family, with a character who harbors doubts about the leading position he occupies therein. But the "family" of *The Rubber Gun* is not bound by anything as indissoluble as race or neighborhood, the way Scorsese's characters are. Their ties to each other, despite the artistic reasons that first brought them together, lie in their drug dependence, and the skill of Steve Lack, their leader, to keep them going in their business of dealing.

Steve is the figure upon which the film turns and, in spite of one's first impressions of diffuseness, the plots are quite carefully and clearly designed. The group's latest shipment of dope sits in a locker in Montreal's Windsor Station, but Steve knows that he cannot go near it, for the police have placed a phalanx of men around it. At the same time, Allan Moyle's screen persona, a naive McGill sociology student named Bozo who is doing his thesis on Steve and his "family," insinuates himself into their company. What he, and through him the audience, witnesses is the gradual breakup of the group under pressure. There is, however, a subtle difference in perspective which develops as the film goes on. The view that Allan Moyle the character has diverges from the view that Allan Moyle the director has, although they sometimes coincide. This game is carried even further with the character of Steve.

Steve Lack is a master gamesman; it is his wit which enables him to survive in the world of dealers. But the

audience is never too certain where Stephen Lack the writer is aiming the character. Is he playing with the audience, or with Bozo, whom he regards with bemused contempt, or is it both at once? This uncertainty is intended; it is built into the Pirandellian structure of the film. Some things, on the other hand, are made quite clear. Steve articulates perfectly what has happened to cause the collapse of the counter-culture in the seventies. "It used to be," he says, "they'd get stoned and go out and do something... now, it's like they are just reliving their old stoned..." The standoff between the "family" and the cops is an exercise in collective ennui. "They're as bored as we are, and believe me, they are bored..." Gradually, the narcissism which always underlay the movement comes to the fore in the ursine, all consuming Peter Brawley, the sexually insecure Pierre Robert and his dissatisfied wife Pam Holmes. And all the while, Bozo has been writing in his thesis that this group has been vitalized through drugs. Only Steve, who has kept up his art, seems to feel he can walk away from it all, even though one of his friends reminds him that he hasn't made a living for years from anything other than dealing.

In the end, the whole operation blows up when Pierre, who has been kept supplied with heroin by one of the cops, makes a move with Brawley to pick up the stash and is naturally caught, to the growling voice of Lewis Furey. Bozo, his thesis completed, gives a copy to Steve, who can no longer take this kind of patronizing that is redolent of the social sciences. "It's like," he says bitterly, "you expect me to croak..." Everyone has had their illusions shattered; Bozo on the street, Pam and her daughter on the road, Pierre and Brawley in St. Vincent de Paul Prison. Only Steve seems to be unscathed, as he works on his painting while Furey's voice cries on the soundtrack.

The collective approach to *The Rubber Gun* results in very strong and affecting performances from all concerned. In spite of a seemingly loose style, there is very little that is extraneous to the plot. Even those scenes, such as Steve showing off his sadomasochistic leather mask, and Steve and Brawley cruising a group of hockey playing boys, serve to illuminate the characters. The only areas that do not seem to be properly developed are the motivations of the cops, especially

Pierre's "friend," and the treatment of Pierre and Pam's daughter Rainbow. Moyle seems to see this little girl, an apparently normal child in spite of the fact that her mother took a hundred acid trips while pregnant, as the hope of the future, but he does not explore this idea further, as Alain Tanner did in *Jonah Who Will be 25 in The Year 2000*.

The fact that this film has finally gotten some recognition outside Montreal, thanks to the Cineplex in Toronto, is telling evidence that the co-production route is not the only future for Canadian features. Unfortunately, this may be the last of this kind of picture. Our distributors do not have the capital to risk, as Warner Bros. could with Claudia Weill's *Girl Friends*, and the cutbacks at the Canada Council and the National Film Board, (organizations that helped Allan Moyle and his friends) do not portend well. With the Canadian Film Development Corp. wedded to the "international" policy, the prospects that films like this will be made and properly exhibited, appear bleak. And that is a great loss to Canadian cinema.

J. Paul Costabile

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