

MONTREAL MAIN



Steven Lack in *Montreal Main*

Montreal Main - directed and edited by Frank Vitale; associate directors - Allan Bozo Moyle and Steven Lack; producers - Frank Vitale and Allan Bozo Moyle; camera - Eric Block; music composed and performed by Beverly Glenn-Copeland; associate producer - Kirwan Cox; sound - Pedro Novak; gaffer - Brian Parker; assistant editor - Susan Schouten; sound editors - Jy and Gail Chiperzak. Cast and script: John Sutherland, Dave Sutherland, Anne Sutherland, Peter Brawley, Pam Marchant, Steven Lack, Allan Bozo Moyle, Frank Vitale, Jackie Holden; based on an original story by Frank Vitale. Distributed by New Cinema Enterprises.

Destined to become an underground classic, *Montreal Main*, a Super-16 feature film by Frank Vitale, has a history of trials and tribulations as fascinating as its subject matter.

The film chronicles the story of a young artist/filmmaker (played by Frank himself) loosely part of Montreal's gay scene, who becomes friends (falls in love) with a 12-year-old boy. The boy, Johnny, values the friendship as much as Frank, but neither his pseudo-hip-intellectual parents nor Frank's gay community allow the relationship to continue. It is their meeting which sparks the unmasking of the thin veils of our tolerance.

The two-year period covering the time from the film's conception to its answer print is a ridiculous black comedy. *Montreal Main's* creators went through scores of letdowns and potential-investor freakouts before sheer determination conquered reason. This sensitive and beautiful film finally got made with the help of: friends, the NFB, ACPAV, David Vachon, David McPherson, Walter Allen, Harry Gulkin, Ron Blumer, an editing job at Cinépix, Canada Council grants, a feature-length videotape, the much-sought-after cooperation of the CFDC, and a hell of a lot of begging and borrowing.

True to the history of its making, Frank Vitale arrived two days late (with *Montreal Main* wrapped in a plastic shopping bag under his arm) for the world premiere at Winnipeg's Film Symposium. *Montreal Main* has since been shown at the Whitney Museum in New York, reviewed in *Variety*, and is now headed for Canada-wide distribution with a little help from . . .



John Sutherland, who plays the young boy



Frank Vitale, Allan Bozo Moyle, Steven Lack, and Peter Brawley

An Appreciation

— by David Beard

Frank Vitale is a genius. Or at least, I am prepared to accept him as one.

To write about *Montreal Main* is very difficult. Vitale has created something entirely new on film, this is what makes the task almost impossible. Most criticism is based on a frame of reference, but there is nothing in this case to refer to.

Let me clear up one basic thing: the film, at any level of comprehension, is very entertaining. What lies beneath the surface is something quite remarkable.

The setting of the film is Montreal. The environment which the characters inhabit is something they made for themselves. It is this reality that is different. One cannot recognize the environment immediately because it is created as the film progresses.

Frank and his friends live in an environment composed of discarded parts. These parts exist because the consumer-oriented system built into its products a factor now known as obsolescence. An example: Frank 'drives' a van. It is not a second-hand vehicle. It is a piece of obsolescence. He uses a still camera but we never find out if it actually takes a picture — we don't see the film or the results of the shoot.

In *Montreal Main* characters inadvertently imitate parts that have reached the scrap heap. An item has no market or operative value at the point of being obsolete — in the film, certain characters become, in terms of obsolescence, 'operative'. They are creatures in this self-created environment behaving in terms of emotional obsolescence.

The other aspect of the film that I considered new is the lack of conflict. Yet it is not a film of resignation or acceptance, but a film where the characters seem to say, "This is how it is and this *is* how it is. It is not good or bad, innocence or guilt. It is. This environment is."

There is space here only to write about the main character — Frank. When the film ends, nothing is revealed or concealed by Frank. The major questions that might place him in relevance to our "moral" society remain, and should remain, unanswered. We cannot diagnose his "case". Is he a sexual deviant? And of what sort? According to whose theory? Is his behaviour motivated by a philosophical rather than a psychological concept? There is no evidence for any real case. It is also clear to the viewer that Johnny does not change — ever. As an obsolete part he cannot change nor can he become "useful".

Frank's relationship to his peer group is also interesting. There is a conscious distance between them. Frank's friends have experienced the transfer to the position of emotional "obsolescence" and in this junk yard, they are equal. No one is more desirable or more useful than another. The "distance" does not separate them. It creates an iron-clad intimacy.

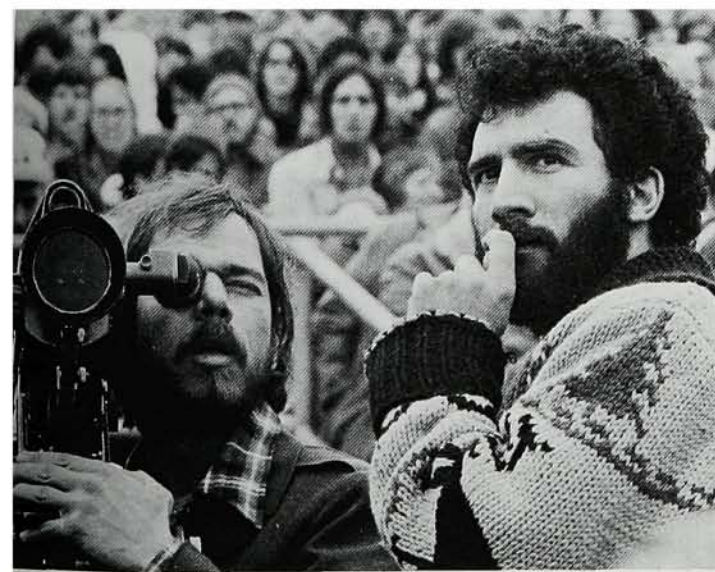
Beyond obsolescence, there is no more possibility of movement — either socially, morally, individually — the works. Frank's relationship to Johnny can never "work", i.e. it cannot bring joy or pain because they are emotionally obsolete in human terms. Yet, they are intensely human.

Thus, the obsolete object or person can only be employed to form an emotional collage. All the characters in *Montreal Main* can be comprehended by the audience. They have life only when we look at the film. Everything exists as a totality in it. Just as certain artists created "pictures" out of scrap, Vitale has created a human collage. This human collage can only be comprehended in art.

If it is possible to glimpse what I'm trying to convey, you will appreciate the uniqueness of the characters in their environment when you see the film for the first time, or again. This effect — of a world beyond our complete comprehension — bequeathes to the film a quality that cannot be written or contrived into a work of art. It exists beyond the power of the pen, the camera, and the actor. It is the only trademark a genius has or needs.



Johnny, one of the leads in *Montreal Main*



Eric Block, cameraman, with Frank Vitale