Francois Bouvier's and Jean Beaudry's
Les Matins Infideles
(Unfaithful Mornings)

Marc and Jean-Pierre, friends and fellow baby-boomers, are unusually committed to the project they ostensibly share. Marc (Jean Beaudry) is writing a novel based on the photographs taken by Jean-Pierre (Denis Bouchard) of an undistinguished street corner in Montreal. The deal is that Jean-Pierre will provide a daily shot of the corner (taken at exactly 8 a.m.) for a period of one year. However, Jean-Pierre soon begins to cheat, winding back the clock in the window of the café, (which appears in each photograph), whenever he misses the appointed time. Worse yet, he skips weeks at a time and compensates with a series ofphony shots which he submits to Marc. To complete the assault on the assumed purity of artistic inspiration, he also takes liberties with the composition of the supposedly candid photo by imposing his own mise-en-scene. Jean-Pierre's unfaithfulness to the creative pact is interwoven with his unfaithfulness to his loved ones. He ditches his lover/photographic assistant, Julie, (played by Violine Forest), after meeting another woman while photographing the street corner. She, too, is1 shocked off by Jean-Pierre when she becomes pregnant; he even sheds his car, abandoning it on the street when it has outlived its usefulness. And when the landlord threatens Jean-Pierre for lack of payment, he adopts the time-honoured, Montreal tradition of the midnight move, clearing his things out of the apartment in the dead of night and imposing himself on Marc. As played by the manic Bouchard (Lance of Montreal, Jefrée Montreal), Jean-Pierre is a cad—a charming cad, but a cad nonetheless. He blows the rent money up his nose and generally behaves with a whiff of sickness to those around him. Jean-Pierre's one redeeming feature is his obvious devotion to his five-year-old boy. (He lets the kid paint on the walls while he snorts coke and watches hockey, the very model of the enlightened, Yuppie parent.)

Betrayal is commonplace. Marc, already being betrayed by his partner, Pauline. (Louise Richer) — she leaves him in spite of their 'modern', open arrangement — realizes that Jean-Pierre is being unfaithful to the street-corner project. The purity of the original idea has been sullied by Jean-Pierre's lack of commitment and Marc's work on his novel suffers. He is further betrayed by his colleagues at the university who give up their principled strike, leaving him alone on the picket line. He resigns in protest.

The only successful relationship portrayed in the film is one between father and son. But here, the indulgence so central to the relationship points mainly to the self-absorption. The boomer generation brings to every aspect of life. This is, after all, the first generation to use the word "parent" as a verb, and the explosion of books and films on the subject would have us believe the concept has just been invented.

Co-writers and directors Bouvier and Beaudry (their first feature was the acclaimed Jacques of November) in what is perhaps an ironic commentary on their own partnership, paint a portrait of two individuals whose collaboration is doomed by their personalities. Jean-Pierre is a "mtand irresistible," as Marc tells him, while Marc, the positively correct, guilt-ridden college professor in a fit of anger after Pauline leaves him, kicks over a garbage can, only to come back and clean up the spilled contents — is a "hierarchic" in Jean-Pierre's view. Ultimately, it's next to impossible to have any sympathy for Jean-Pierre, and the contrived climax of the film (in which he sheds his life the way he's abandoned the constituent elements of it) is thus robbed of its potential impact. It's also hard to understand what drives the friendship between the two men, or between any two characteristics in the film for that matter (with the exception of the blood bond between father and son).

Les Matins Infideles marks back to an earlier time in Jean-Pierre's life when everything was depressed, alienated, and unable to get any satisfaction. Back then it was due to not having reached maturity (read independence). Now, it's supposedly a result of the comfort and indifference of the post-referendum era. (Which, I suppose, amounts to the same thing.)

Technically, Les Matins Infideles is assured. The acting is uniformly good; the photography and editing are of very high standard, and Michel Rivard's soundtrack adds greatly to every scene. The film contains some memorable images, but as a psychological exposé, it falls somewhat short of its goal. After raiding a number of important questions about commitment (and its flipside, betrayal), and offering up some occasionally humorous insights into the creative process, Les Matins Infideles settles down to the level of mere novel-gazing.

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