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Weblog White Light 1



"I still don't know whether it will work out. I imagine a programme in which two totally different kinds of cinema are presented back-to-back. It has to be about drugs and film. Because this has been hanging in the air for some time. Because drugs have just as much to do with film as they do with rock 'n' roll."

by Gertjan Zuilhof

"For a long time people giggled about psychedelic slide-show films, but these days very hip clubs all over the world have very different ideas on the subject. At the same time, drug crime is one of the most vital motors of the most vital of film genres. Yes, and you have to do that back-to-back: psychedelic fantasy and the rip-off drug deal.

Not that it should only be about experimental or genre cinema. The International Film Festival Rotterdam 2005 also offered a series of fascinating examples of films within which drugs were either the motor or at least the catalyst. The most original and certainly the most stylish was, I think, *Le conseguenze dell'amore* by **Paolo Sorrentino**. A film that is simultaneously based on the genre of the Mafia-drugs-crime film while distancing itself from this with some kind of Satanic pleasure.

Le conseguenze dell'amore focuses on Titta di Girolamo, played unforgettably by Toni Servillo. Girolamo lives in an old-fashioned and smart hotel in the south of Switzerland (somewhere near Locarno) and seems to be bored to death. Sometimes he plays a listless game with fellow inhabitants, but usually he does little more than very thoughtfully light a cigarette (he even out-bogarts Humphrey Bogart). It slowly becomes clear what Girolamo is doing so far from his family, a family he still turns out to have.

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At regular intervals, he takes large amounts of cash to the bank. Mafia money. Drugs money. Girolamo is a pawn of the Mafia. A cog in the massive drugs crime machine. Sorrentino emphasises that fact nicely by having Girolamo take a shot of heroin at regular intervals. He is as superficially incorruptible as a courier of criminal money, as he is as a drug user. An apparently respectable man, but tied hands and feet to drugs. When Girolamo, after years of introversion, takes an interest in a waitress, his demise is inevitable.

And that demise gives Sorrentino an opportunity to provide a masterful glimpse into a Mafia stronghold. This is far beyond the genre film. It looks just the way you'd think the Mafia does. You can only escape from this in crazy and insignificant films. These are the extreme consequences (the film title translates as *The Consequences of Love*) to which Sorrentino is referring.

Alongside the film by Sorrentino, at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2005 we also screened a handful of films that would fit easily in White Light (based on the immortal song "White Light White Heat" by The Velvet Underground). For instance the hard and nonchalant realistic *Dead Man's Shoes* by **Shane Meadows**, *Clean* by **Olivier Assayas** of course and also *Pusher II* by *Nicolas Winding Refn* about the grubby subclass of Danish crime.

Most certainly the nicest and funniest White Light film at the previous festival was the short film *LSD a Go Go* by **Scott Calonico**. In 10 minutes, he presents in a satirical way almost everything that has made the association with drugs in America so confusing in recent decades. The film is a mix of authentic documents, archive footage and clever fake interventions.

Calonico departs from an affair that took place within the CIA in the 1950s. The Secret Service investigated what the new miracle drug LSD could mean for them. Fairly nonchalantly and without warning, LSD was given to CIA agents to test its effect. Only when a highly respected arms expert jumped out of a window under the influence was the policy changed. Calonico evokes the festive atmosphere of the 1960s (yes, here they are, the psychedelic slides), but he seems primarily interested in cultural political satire. This does not detract from the fact that this short film provides a wealth of images and could easily have been made into a fascinating longer film.

Almost even more fun is a previous film by Calonico entitled *The King and Dick* (2003, 8'). It also reveals Calonico's feeling for political satire. The short film is about the historic visit by Elvis (in his later days) to President Richard Nixon (still in the saddle) in which the former offers his services to the CIA to become an unpaid secret agent in the battle against drugs. As a pop star, he easily has access to the most pernicious circles. The visit is documented in a beautiful series of photographs and, apart from the original documents, Calonico does not provide much comment. At the end, he caps it all by listing the impressive selection of drugs that were found in the body of the King on autopsy.

No comment needed."

photo: still from *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (*The Consequences of Love*) by Paolo Sorrentino (Italy 2004, selected for IFFR 2005)