

Star of the Silvio screen

A disturbing look at the TV empire of Italy's leader and the cult of celebrity

Videocracy

★★★★★

Director: Erik Gandini
85 mins, cert 15

Erik Gandini's *Videocracy* is an intriguing, mordant look at the world of the Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi: an acrid *Dolce Vita* for the modern day. But it's a very different kind of film-making from that of Berlusconi's most famous critic, the satirist Sabina Guzzanti, whose docu-polemics are influenced by Michael Moore. Gandini's film is more like a dreamy, mesmeric and highly disturbing psychogeography of 21st-century Italy, or perhaps a meandering, anthropological study of a dysfunctional cult, ruled by a thin-skinned, self-pitying leader.

It is ostensibly about Berlusconi's TV empire and its crassly sexified world of stripping housewives and endless reality shows, which has engendered in Italy an infatuation with celebrity that perhaps even outstrips Britain or the US. (Berlusconi publishes many gossip

magazines.) Everyone wants to be a celebrity and Berlusconi is the biggest celebrity of all. Yet *Videocracy* is not overtly polemical, nor even, at first, obviously critical. It's 22 minutes before Berlusconi's name is even mentioned, and 29 minutes before we see a picture of his grinning face - on a paparazzi shot, just before we see a picture of Berlusconi's most favoured party guest, Tony Blair.

Gandini begins by interviewing a tragic reality show wannabe: a singing martial arts hombre who aspires to be a cross between Ricky Martin and Bruce Lee. And then he moves on to

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interview the powerful and fantastically creepy celeb agent Lele Mora, a wealthy Mussolini enthusiast who invites the director to his fabulous home and introduces him to the pretty young boy and girl celebs who are permitted to hang around his pool. This is, of course, situated on Sardinia's Emerald coast, near to where Berlusconi has his own substantial compound; the location for much partying.

The interview with Mora leads us to one of the strangest and most loathsome individuals I have seen in any documentary: Fabrizio Corona, narcissistic body-builder, top paparazzo and celeb-snap agent, a former colleague of Mora who dominates the pap busi-

ness and became notorious for selling incriminating pictures to their subjects so that they could be suppressed - a blackmailer, in other words, but one who became tolerated by the celebrazzi because his dominance meant he effectively regulated and controlled the market in this kind of material.

It appeared to be something like mafia protection: Corona was briefly imprisoned for extortion and blackmail and emerged from jail a hideous, self-admiring celebrity. These are all Berlusconi's people. *Videocracy* is a fascinating film, indicative of the new wave of scorn and revulsion felt by a younger generation of Italians for Berlusconi's smug and mediocre rule. **PB**