

Cultural Daily

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Client 9: Before the Fall, and After

Adam Leipzig · Saturday, October 23rd, 2010

The first shocking moment in Alex Gibney's riveting documentary *Client-9* comes two minutes in. Eliot Spitzer's staring at the camera, talking to us, and we realize with surprise this isn't a clip from a campaign ad: Spitzer is on the couch, sitting for a no-holds-barred interview with Gibney.

The interview with Spitzer is one of two big "gets" in this doc. The other is an interview with escort "Angelina" who was the call-girl Spitzer spent most of his time with. When Gibney discovered "Angelina's" identity she agreed to talk openly as long as her face and voice weren't revealed, so in the film she is portrayed by an actor, a filmmaking decision that should be no more controversial than other documentarians' staging of reenactments or animating characters as in *Waltz With Bashir*. According to evidence Gibney uncovered, Spitzer only had one date with Ashley Dupré, and she capitalized on it and used it as leverage for her own career. But she was not his favorite lady.

In this film, as in Gibney's other work, it is all about context. Gibney doesn't shy away from the sexual element of Spitzer's story. He teases us with it in the opening few minutes, but then spends nearly a full hour setting the stage for Spitzer's fall by detailing his assault on the Wall St. financial chiefs and institutions that became his enemies – enemies who, the doc suggests, aided and may have orchestrated Spitzer's downfall.

One of the pleasures of Gibney's work is that he's such a good storyteller, and he matches his style to his subject matter. *Taxi to the Dark Side* has the look and feel of grainy, handheld, war journalism cinéma vérité. *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* looked like it was shot by a clandestine video surveillance system. In contrast, and appropriately, *Client 9* looks and feels like New York City – glossy, bright, bold, and boasting a title sequence where the principal players are splayed across Times Square video billboards.

But the great revelation is Spitzer himself, his own worst enemy, candidly taking responsibility and casting the story as a Greek tragedy like the fall of Icarus.

Client 9 is a must-see, both as a compelling story and as a cautionary tale about pride, power and the fact that even well-intentioned men will be exploited by their inevitable Achilles' heels.

Client 9 opens November 5, a crowded weekend filled with higher-profile movies: *Due Date*, *Fair Game*, *Megamind*, *For Colored Girls* and Danny Boyle's harrowing *127 Hours*. Go support *Client-9* because it is excellent work revealing of humanity, and because high per-screen averages on opening weekend will be good for all quality documentaries.

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