



Human Capital

Director: Paolo Virzì

Country: Italy

Date: 2013

A review by Jay Weissberg for *Vareity*:

A slick, stylish drama, “Human Capital” starts as a class critique wrapped around a whodunit, and though the mystery elements have overtaken the social assessment by the final third, the pic remains an engrossing, stinging look at aspirational parvenus and the super-rich they emulate. Perfectly cast with actors who give life to very recognizable Italian types, “Capital” confirms Paolo Virzì as one of the more dynamic directors on the peninsula, blending biting commentary with expert narrational skills. A mid-January Italo run saw returns of around \$7.5 million; brisk sales worldwide should bring higher revenues, including Stateside thanks to Film Movement’s recent acquisition.



Virzì’s strongest movies, including “Caterina in the Big City” and “Her Whole Life Ahead,” showcase the helmer’s acute understanding of screenwriting along with sharp criticisms of cold-hearted greed: His message is unabashedly leftist, yet without the divisive feel of more polemical directors (which is why “Human Capital” has been attacked by the far left for not going far enough, and by the right for being overly critical of captains of industry). In adapting Stephen Amidon’s novel, replacing Connecticut with the wealthy region of Brianza, near Milan, Virzì and his co-scripters mine local social mores to make the tale extremely Italian while retaining the novel’s potent message of capitalist greed and the chillingly low price put on human life.



Among the successful changes from the book is a structural one, as the film is divided into chapters, each approaching the story with a different focus. In the prologue, a cyclist is driven off a road at night following a party. Chapter one, “Dino,” begins six months earlier, with Dino (Fabrizio Bentivoglio) dropping off daughter Serena (superb newcomer Matilde Gioli) at her boyfriend’s fancy villa. Dino is an easily recognizable type: an overly congenial chatterer with no awareness of social barriers and a pathological need to be considered a big shot.

Serena’s b.f., Massimiliano (Guglielmo Pinelli) is the son of hedge-fund bigwig Giovanni Bernaschi (Fabrizio Gifuni); when Dino pulls up to the villa, Giovanni is short a tennis partner, and Dino’s hail-fellow-well-met conviviality temporarily appeals to the banking magnate. Giovanni even suggests Dino join his latest fund scheme, with a mere €500,000 (nearly \$700,000). Dino, a small-time real-estate agent, so desperately wants to be a part of the Bernaschi circle that he mortgages his business and puts his house up as collateral, all without telling his second wife, Roberta (Valeria Golino), an unpretentious doctor who also happens to be pregnant.

Chapter two is named for Carla (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), Giovanni’s debilitatingly insecure wife. A onetime amateur actress, she’s now little more than a neurotic adjunct to the Bernaschi household, condescendingly indulged by her husband when she sees a dilapidated theater and asks to revive its fortunes. Too easily swayed by those around her, Carla has a brief fling with artistic director Donato (Luigi Lo Cascio); Virzì includes a hilarious, quasi-phantasmagoric scene of the two in her home cinema watching Carmelo Bene’s “Our Lady of the Turks,” skewering Donato’s pretensions along with, quite possibly, Bene’s film.

Chapter three focuses on Serena, unimpressed by the Bernaschi fortune and more interested in troubled artist Luca (Giovanni Anzaldo). Whereas the first two chapters offer pointed criticism of the blithe avarice of the ultra-rich and those hungering for such wealth, the last in the trio feels the need to tie up the mystery of the prologue. The ultimate message, that the lives of “little people” are disposable when power is threatened, is potent, but Virzi needn’t have short-changed the social commentary when shifting the pic into thriller territory.

The performances are flawless, from Bentivoglio’s unthinking, foolish windbag to Gifuni’s patronizing yet superficially charming VIP. Bruni Tedeschi’s overanxious schtick often feels tired in other films, but here her nervous tension is absolutely right, and Gioli is a real find whose down-to-earth intelligence comes through best in the third chapter. Golino’s role is small yet offers a welcome dash of warmth.

French d.p. Jerome Almeras (“The Love Punch,” “The French Minister”) provides coldly handsome visuals that capture the aloof formality of the Bernaschi home, contrasted with looser lensing when Serena is on the scene. Location work around Varese and Como highlights the region’s wealth, luxurious yet heartless. Production design is commendable.

From: <http://variety.com/2014/film/box-office/tribeca-film-review-human-capital-1201157301/>