

# STUDY GUIDE



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## DELICATE BALANCE (FRÁGIL EQUILIBRIO)

a Film by GUILLERMO GARCÍA LÓPEZ

SPAIN/2016/81 MIN  
Spanish with English subtitles

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## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

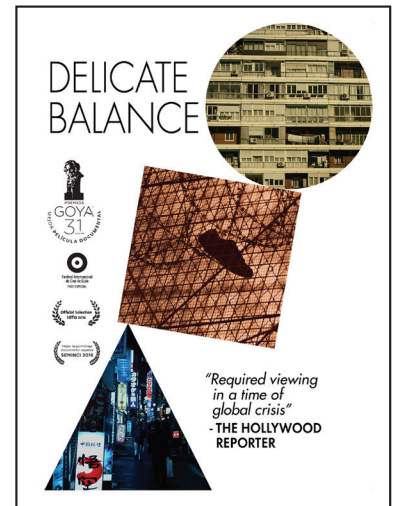
Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the countries where that film takes place, as well as the legacy of Mr. Mujica. Write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the countries. Please use reliable sources.

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### INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key characters in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Delicate Balance*:

Centered around an interview with José “Pepe” Mujica, the former President of Uruguay who gained notoriety on the world stage as a rare politician: one that lives according to the ideas and principles he preaches, *Delicate Balance* is a contemplative essay on the everyday reality of globalization. The documentary centers in three different countries, drawing lessons from the people and situations found in each one. In bustling Tokyo, a salary man questions the futility of his work dominated life; in Spain, families struggle with eviction from their homes as the economy crumbles; and in a settlement in Morocco, people risk their lives trying to cross the border into Europe. *Delicate Balance* is a reflection on the path that the human race is taking, on its habits and its relationship with the world. It is a proposal for change, from the particular to the general. Despite the dark themes of injustice and emptiness explored, this deeply engaging work ultimately offers a powerful message of optimism for the future.



- ☐ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-economic and political background to the film.
- ☐ How does the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ☐ Can you make any assumptions on the film just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?

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## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

### CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ☐ How does the first scene (00:27-03:39) introduce the film's tone? Elaborate on any cinematic techniques (the editing, the diegetic and non-diegetic sound<sup>1</sup> [including the repetitious change of language], the use of color, and any other aspects of the mise-en-scène<sup>2</sup>) you can uncover that contribute to the tone. What sensations or emotions do these techniques elicit for the audience?
- ☐ What do the close up and medium shots of the different characters aim to portray? What can you uncover about the characters' emotions from these shots? Do these emotions vary throughout the narrative?

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<sup>1</sup> "Diegetic music is 'produced within the implied world of the film'...The sound of a mother's voice as she is shown singing to her infant is clearly diegetic, and the faint sounds of a music box might be assumed to be coming from inside the nursery, even if the source is not shown on screen. In contrast, non-diegetic music refers to music that accompanies a scene but is external to the fictional world, such as dissonant orchestral chords sounding as a figure appears in a deserted alley or throbbing music punctuating a car chase." Tan, S.-L., Spackman, M., & Wakefield, E. (2017). The effects of diegetic and non-diegetic music on viewers' interpretations of a film scene. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 34(5), 605-623.

<sup>2</sup> "Mise-en-scène...is used in film to refer to everything that goes into the composition of a shot--framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and the visual environment, and sound." "Term Index." *The Columbia Film Language Glossary*. <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

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## CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- ❑ How does the use of slow-motion in the film highlight or juxtapose the themes in the film?
- ❑ Why do you think the interview with former President Mújica is filmed the way that it is filmed?
- ❑ The camera focuses its attention on skylines and buildings, but more importantly, on the construction of such views and structures. What is important about the urban landscape? What do these buildings and cranes represent? How do they touch on the major themes that emerge in this narrative?
- ❑ Throughout the film, the mise-en-scène often includes religious iconography. Why do you think the director chose to include religious symbols in the frames? Select scene(s) that contain these symbols and connect them back to the narrative.
- ❑ Non-diegetic sound plays a major role throughout the film. Select scene(s) that contain sound without dialogue and explain its use in the narrative: the emotions it produces for the audience and the tone that it creates for the narrative.
- ❑ Throughout the film, the director splices similar images together from the three different stories (i.e. a shot of the salary man eating at a restaurant in Tokyo is followed by a shot of the Moroccan people cooking food in their settlement). Through editing similar image together, the director interweaves the different stories into just one; and sometimes draws attention to the vast difference between cultures. Can you find two or three examples of where this happens, and explain the significance?



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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ What assumptions can you make about the film from the opening minutes? What do you think the film is about? Do these assumptions evolve or stay the same as the film continues?
- ❑ What are the main differences you notice about the people profiled in Spain, Japan, and Morocco? Discuss circumstances, cultures, emotions, etc., in your response.
- ❑ Are there any similarities among these people? If so, elaborate on the common factors and sources of the issues they discuss in their storylines.
- ❑ Why do you think the director added a clip from the 2000 US presidential election (52:26-52:44)? Think about the significance of Bush's election and what that administration did in the international context and connect it to the clip's placement in the narrative.
- ❑ The director states in an interview<sup>3</sup>, "...We chose to approach it as a documentary, but we felt that fiction and nonfiction have a thin line separating the two genres and sometimes they are intertwined." Do you agree with this statement? Did this film feel like a documentary? Were there moments that felt more fictional than real? Make sure to analyze key scenes in your response.
- ❑ Do you share some of the anxieties and, or problems mentioned by the people profiled in this film? Do you know of anyone in your life that shares the worries expressed in the film? Is there one character in particular that you identify with? If not, is there one person in particular whose story has impacted you? What about this person makes their story more relatable or impactful?



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<sup>3</sup> O'Keeffe, C. (2017, August 8). Edinburgh 2017 interview: Delicate Balance Director Guillermo García López talks his socially conscious doc. *Screen Anarchy*. Retrieved from <http://screenanarchy.com/2017/08/edinburgh-2017-interview-delicate-balance-fragil-equilibrio-director-guillermo-garcia-lopez-talks-hi.html>



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## NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- ❑ Did the film follow a general dramatic structure? If so, identify the five main elements of the dramatic structure within the narrative: the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion. If not, how would you describe the narrative: what was the central problem explored in the film? How did the film organize the story line to best deliver this central problem?
- ❑ Provide an analysis on the use of the interview with José Mujica in the film.
- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene? What solutions, if any, does this film provide its audience regarding the issues discussed by its cast?
- ❑ What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the film? Did you learn anything new from the stories explored in this narrative

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## THEMES

- ❑ Explain what you think is the most important message that emerges from the film.
- ❑ What are your preconceived ideas about Japan, Spain and Morocco? How do these ideas coincide with what we see on screen?
- ❑ Why do you think the director chose Japan, Spain, and Morocco to demonstrate the effects of globalization? Why didn't he choose America, for example?
- ❑ This film demonstrates the negative effects of globalization, but it also touches on some of the primary causes of our current global structure with the help of the narrator, former Uruguayan President José Mujica. Explain the ideology that helped cause these negative effects of globalization and that helped create a global culture that normalizes poverty, injustice, and mental illness, making sure to cite Mujica's narration in your response.
- ❑ "Modernity," "progress," and "development" normally carry positive connotations. How does this film subvert these connotations and shed light on their negative impact on the global order?
- ❑ What message do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about poverty? What did you learn from this film regarding the subject of poverty?
- ❑ What message regarding inequality does this film offer its audience? How does it explore class divisions, race, and opportunity? Select scene(s) that provide a moral critique on social and material inequality to support your response.
- ❑ Former President Mujica states, "Freedom can be found in many forms." What are the different "forms" of freedom you can uncover from this film? Reference at least one scene from the Japanese, Moroccan, *and* Spanish storylines in your answer.
- ❑ How does this film portray immigration policy? Does this portrayal make you think differently about immigration and immigrants?
- ❑ How is law enforcement portrayed in this film? Does it counter your own idea of how law enforcement should act? Do you see more differences or similarities in how law enforcement treats people in a first world country versus developing countries? Select scene(s) to support your response.
- ❑ How is the topic of death and more specifically, suicide, explored in this film? In what way does the narrative also place an emphasis on the will to not only survive, but also to live?
- ❑ What tone does the film end on? How did you feel after the film ended? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film?

