

# STUDY GUIDE



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## THE INVISIBLE HAND (LA MANO INVISIBLE)

a Film by DAVID MACIÁN

SPAIN/2016/84 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 country where that film comes from. Find two or three articles on Spain's crisis and write a brief summary on what is happening and what has happened in the country. Please use reliable sources.

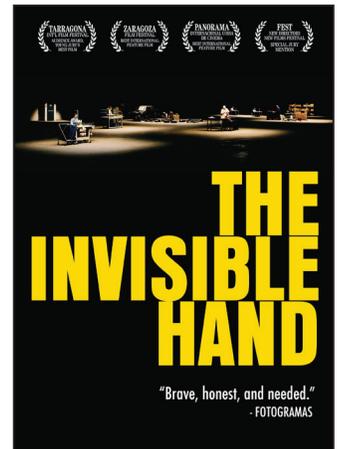
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### INTRODUCING THE FILM

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 *The Invisible Hand*:

In a warehouse in a section of an industrial estate, eleven workers from different sectors perform different tasks: a bricklayer builds a wall that he later demolishes; a girl places pieces on an assembly line without knowing what they are for; a butcher clears decaying animals; a store clerk moves boxes from one place to another; a teleoperator conducts surveys on the consideration of work; a mechanic dismantles a car that he later reassembles ... In front of them, several dozen people observe from the darkness the "wonderful" spectacle of work.

- 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-political background to the film.
- How does the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about 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 beginning quote (00:18-00:28) work to introduce the narrative's plot and theme(s)?
- Close up and medium shots focus not only on the different characters' facial expressions but also the labor itself. What is the purpose of the shots that emphasize labor? What emotions can you detect from the characters' faces? Connect these close up and medium shots to the themes that emerge throughout the narrative.
- The director states, "The Invisible Hand borrows the essence of Isaac Rosa's novel on which it is based to place the viewer in an intermediate space between the protagonists of the story and that audience that is going to see them every day, forcing him to ask certain questions which may not be comfortable: why do we work?... What is the purpose of what we produce? Who do we really work for?..." can you comment on the two different audiences and how the mise-en-scène plays a role?
- Analyze each worker and their relationship to the audience - which ones are more responsive to the public? Which ones are more resentful?
- Does this film feel like a documentary or a work of fiction? Are there moments that feel more real than fictional or vice versa? Analyze the various cinematic techniques, such as the mise-en-scène or the use of mock interviews, in your response.

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## CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

- ❑ Think about the different moments in which the filmmaker decides to show the job interviews.
- ❑ Think about how the filmmaker shoots the warehouse where the workers are “performing.” Does it feel like we are in the same space as the workers, or does it feel like we are watching them as the audience watches them? Why do you think the audience is hidden in the dark?
- ❑ How does the filmmaker blur the lines between cinema, theater, and performance art?



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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 differences can you uncover among the different characters and professions profiled in this film? Do they possess different personalities, physical attributes, or etiquette?
- ❑ What are the points of similarity that can be found among the diverse characters and professions profiled in this film? Think about the reasons for accepting the job, the effort they all put into their work, the outcome of those efforts, their emotions, and their anxieties about work in general when constructing your answer.
- ❑ In what ways do the different characters begin to interact with each other? Does it create problems, offer solutions, or both? Cite specific scene(s) in your response.
- ❑ How do the characters change over the course of the narrative? What else changes as the characters spend more days as part of this work/spectacle experiment?
- ❑ At the beginning of the film, the workers are all “individuals” with unrelated job tasks. How are these divisions made clear at the beginning of this experiment? Do the workers rely on each other’s performance more than they all realize?
- ❑ The characters re-construct the workplace hierarchy as the narrative develops. Explain how this is accomplished.
- ❑ Is there one character in particular that you identify with? If not, is there a specific theme (i.e. the question of job preference or labor ethics) that has impacted you? What about this character or theme is relatable or impactful?
- ❑ Is the narrative suspended, or is there a resolution in the final scene (1:16:47-1:18:17)? What solutions, if any, does this film provide its audience?
- ❑ What did you enjoy most about the film? Was there something you did not like or fully understand about the film?



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## THEMES

- ❑ What do you think is the most important message that emerges from the film? What was the main purpose of the experiment?
- ❑ Although the film is based on Isaac Rosa's novel, the "invisible hand" is also a metaphor created by Adam Smith to explain the economic process in which the actions of self-interested individuals produce unforeseen, yet beneficial consequences to society.<sup>1</sup> This metaphor has lent itself to free market economic theory, which in turn has provided the foundation for the current system of globalization and dominance of neoliberalism. With that said, do you see any point of connection to Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor? If so, is this a critique of free market capitalism? Is another economic ideology (i.e. communism or socialism) championed or attacked in the process?
- ❑ How does this film demonstrate the dehumanization of people through the labor sector? What is instead prioritized in the labor sector? Use specific scene(s) in your response.
- ❑ Think about the "reality TV" aspect to the spectacle of work. Why does the audience like to see the workers fighting with each other? What do you think the filmmaker is trying to say about the way we consume media, about what we like to watch?
- ❑ What moments of irony are present in this film that work to establish the film's themes? Analyze the characters' awareness, actions, and reactions to this irony.
- ❑ Labor, under free market capitalism, has been divided into a class-based system of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor. Does this film champion or critique this division? Explain using specific scene(s).
- ❑ Think about what the computer programmer represents in the dynamic of the warehouse. Why do the other workers feel cheated? Could the computer programmer even be considered a different type of worker?
- ❑ The protestors who disrupt the experiment with signs that state, "FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE LABORER" (15:25-15:42), raise important questions regarding labor ethics. Can you assess the filmmaker's view on labor ethics from the narrative? How do we evaluate what is ethical or wrong, legal or illegal, in the workplace? What similarities can you find between this cinematic reality and actual workplaces? Discuss your own idea of workplace culture and ethics and connect it to key scenes in the film.
- ❑ What message do you believe the director wants the audience to understand about the growing unemployment crisis? What about the effect that layoffs have on an entire operation, such as the warehouse experiment? What about the subject of illegal or non-contractual employees?
- ❑ What message regarding education and technical training does this film offer its audience? How does it explore the value of work experience versus traditional education or training? Select scene(s) that touch on this subject to support your response.
- ❑ How does this film explore racism and xenophobia? Compare and contrast the race relations in the film to the race relations in the U.S.
- ❑ Does the last scene (1:16:50-1:18:18) give the audience a concluding message regarding the film's theme(s)? Why or why not? What tone does the film end on? How does this tone impact the theme(s) that emerge throughout the film?
- ❑ Why do you think the meaning behind the experiment/performance is kept ambiguous? Do you believe this decision enhances or detracts the themes in the film?
- ❑ Explain whether you believe the themes that emerge from the narrative are universal, or whether they only apply to Spanish society.

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<sup>1</sup> Heath, F. E. Invisible hand: Economic. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/invisible-hand>

