

STUDY GUIDE



PERFECT STRANGERS (PERFECTOS DESCONOCIDOS)

Directed by MANOLO CARO

MEXICO / 2018 / 104 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 that film comes from. Despite the fact that same-sex marriages are performed and recognized in Mexico, machismo and homophobia are embedded in the culture. Research how are same sex relations perceived.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

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

From Mexican director Manolo Caro (Netflix's *The House of Flowers*) comes the electrifying comedy about a seemingly simple dinner party. When a group of best friends gets together during a lunar eclipse to share an intimate meal in the tasteful house of Eva and Antonio, they suspect it's just another typical night, until the hostess proposes a game. All guests must lay their cell phones on the table and read aloud all incoming messages and answer all incoming phone calls in front of the entire group. What begins as a provocative party game quickly becomes a wild ride full of twists and "textual tension" in this over the top comedy about the secrets we all carry in our pockets.

Cecilia Suárez and Bruno Bichir lead a stellar ensemble of some of Mexico's most respected actors in this adaptation of *Perfetti Sconosciuti* by Paolo Genovese, the Italian film that has become a global sensation inspiring remakes in countries like Greece, Spain, China, and France among others.

- ❑ 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 do 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)? In what ways does the marketing material differ from larger commercial productions?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Most of the film takes place inside an apartment. How does the camera work around that setting? Provide a few examples.
- Are these camera movements successful in preventing the film to feel like a theatre play? Explain why or why not by comparing and contrasting examples of the film with those of a theatre play you've experienced in the past. You may be interested to know that director Manolo Caro started his career in the theatre.
- Take into consideration the camera frames, the camera movements, and the setting of the apartment. How does the idea of claustrophobia play in the film?
- Try to think about two or three shots of the film that really spoke to you -- what about them is significant? Why do they stick out in your mind?
- Think about moments where the camera is moving and moments where the camera is still -- what are the differences? What do you think lead the filmmaker to make the decision to use one camera style over the other one?
- What cinematic techniques does the director use to set the tone for the scene? Analyze camera angles, lighting, and other elements of the **mise-en-scene**¹ as evidence for your answer.
- How would you describe the color palette throughout the film? Are the colors dull, bright, vibrant? Think about how the colors of the film might reflect its themes.
- How does the filmmaker use the dining table as a character in and of itself? How is the table filmed? Pick apart one or two scenes where the filmmaker makes extensive use of the table and analyze what he might be trying to convey.
- How would you describe the music score? Is it typical of a comedy or does it have elements from other genres? If yes, which ones? Provide examples with your explanation.
- Think about how music is used throughout the film. How is it used to build tension and suspense? Think about two distinct scenes that use music and analyze what effect they have on the viewer. Does the music imply how the evening will end?
- How would you describe the film's editing style? Is it fast paced, fragmented, or does it respect long takes?

NARRATIVE

- The Mexican remake of *Perfect Strangers* is actually the film's seventh version. A version of the film directed by Alex de la Iglesia was produced previously in Spain. Why do you think the director felt the need to create another Spanish language version so soon after the first?
- The group of friends is meeting with the excuse of watching a blood red moon eclipse. What do you think the event represents?

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¹ 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/>

NARRATIVE *(continued)*

- ❑ The seven characters meeting for dinner are long-time friends. What does the title of the film, *Perfect Strangers*, stand for?
- ❑ What do you think about the film's seven characters? Are they three dimensional? Can you empathize with them? Explain why or why not by providing examples.
- ❑ Think about each of the characters' arch. How does each of them grow throughout the film?
- ❑ How would you describe the relationship between the two members of each of the three couples?
- ❑ What triggers the idea of the game? Why do you think each of the characters accepts the challenge to play?
- ❑ What does Eva mean when she says, "These devices have become the black boxes of our lives," when referring to the cell phones?
- ❑ Consider the secrets that are revealed throughout the night by reading texts out loud and listening to conversations. Did any of those secrets surprise you? Are secrets such as the desire to undergo plastic surgery or going to therapy worth keeping from your friends and family? Why or why not?
- ❑ The most surprising revelation is that of Pepe being gay. Why do you think he kept this to himself for so long? Consider the way his friends react when they find out and what you have learned after researching homophobia in Mexico.
- ❑ The narrative resolution positions the film as a cautionary tale. What do you think about that? Were you satisfied with the ending or would you rather see a different one?
- ❑ The film could also be considered a story about redemption and second chances. After the end of the film, every character has the chance to fix what has gone wrong or carry on living with the paths they've chosen. What do you think each of the characters would take this opportunity?



THEMES

- ❑ Machismo and homophobia remain problematic in Mexico, to say the least. What does that say about the country's society? How is it similar/different to the U.S.?
- ❑ The seven characters can stand for rigid markers of cowardice, lust, and entitlement. Can you provide examples of characters' actions that display these behaviors?
- ❑ In an interview, the director expressed interest in exploring "how we are using this device, this small phone box for or against human relationships". Can you find and analyze scenes that explore this issue? Familiarize yourself with the myth of Pandora in Greek mythology. How would you compare and contrast the cellphone with Pandora's Box?
- ❑ The film explores people's attachment to cell phones. How many of your most intimate secrets it holds and what would happen if your closest friends and significant others get a hold of it. Explore this issue in relation to the duality of each character.
- ❑ How do the sentiments of guilt and fear of exposure are explored in the film? Provide a few examples. *Perfect Strangers* has been adapted to more than a dozen countries with distinct cultures and languages. Why do you think the film is relatable to so many different audiences?
- ❑ Do you think this universality is a positive or negative aspect of the film? Does it make it more interesting or compelling to you personally? Expand on the reasons for your answers.

