



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD

THE DELINQUENTS

(Los Delincuentes)

Directed by Rodrigo Moreno

Press Contacts:

US Press

[Ryan Werner](#)

Emilie Spiegel

International Press

Claudia Tomassini

Nicola Passarotto

Sales

Magnolia Pictures International

Lorna Lee Torres

Austin Kennedy

Short Synopsis:

A scheme to break free from the obligations of society is hatched between two bank clerks. After one robs the bank where they work, the other serves as his accessory in concealing the stolen funds. A heist film that probes the maddening divide between work and life.

Synopsis:

Morán (Daniel Eliás) is a bank employee in Buenos Aires who dreams up a risky plan to liberate himself and his co-worker Román (Esteban Bigliardi) from the shackles of working life: Morán will steal enough cash from the bank to fund their retirement if Román hides the money for him after he confesses and serves prison time; in three years' time, they'll reunite, split the cash, and never have to work again. Departing to the countryside to fulfill his side of the deal, the less adventurous Román finds himself transformed by Morán's idyllic vision of economic liberation far from the rigors of urban life. But what is the true cost of freedom? From writer-director Rodrigo Moreno (*A Mysterious World*) comes an existential probe into the work-life balance and what happens when it's shattered and replaced with something radical and new. Combining sumptuous imagery and dry humor, Moreno finds universality and complexity in the eternal dilemma of forging our livelihood.

Interview with Rodrigo Moreno

Q: Morán and Román are caught in an eternal conflict— the need to make a living versus the desire to be free from work. What got you thinking about this struggle?

A: Modern society has led us to live lives that we don't want to live: there are obligations, formal obligations that strip our freedoms. Now, in days of economic crisis, we depend on obligations more than ever, but we also depend on technology, our existences have become totally dependent. Morán's decision invites us to get rid of this fate.

Q: Was Morán's story in any way based on truth? Did somebody attempt his scheme in real life?

A: There is a real story in Argentina about the best bank employee of a certain bank in a city who robbed 3 million dollars of the money he was meant to safeguard. He was caught with his lover some weeks later in Paraguay and was sent to prison. The money never resurfaced. After some years in prison he was placed under house arrest, but as his last address was the home of his former wife, he had to serve the two years sentence with his ex-wife. None of this directly inspired this story, but I thought of this guy during the writing, trying to reflect on his existence, the fact of giving such a turning point to his life. He had to suffer a lot in his work to make such a decision.

On the other hand, there is an old Argentine film that works with the idea of employees stealing money from their job to stop working and be free, *APENAS UN DELINCUENTE* by Hugo Fregonese. I baptized Morán thinking of that character, who also was named Moran, but both films only share that point. It's a slight link to the old Argentine cinema, my previous films were isolated somehow from the history of

Argentine cinema, and I didn't feel comfortable with that, so in this film I wanted to dialogue with our own film history.

Q: These two men are co-workers, yet they are very different people in life. Describe the development of these two characters—what each character represents in your mind, and how they came to life in your story.

A: My initials are R and M. Román and Morán could be analyzed as two hemispheres of my own. There is always a struggle inside, to obey or to rebel, to live under the pressure of obligations or to take risks and get lost in adventure. I think both characters represent somehow, maybe in an over psychoanalyzed reading, this eternal and interior struggle. But if you see the film it's easy to determine where I'm standing.

Q: The people Román meets in the countryside, the same people Morán met before the robbery, are filmmakers, artists, lovers, and free spirits. Describe writing these characters, where they came from in your mind, and how they wound up where they did.

A: First of all I had these two sisters I wanted to describe as free spirited women living in this landscape. We don't really know what they do exactly for a living but they live an opposite life from Morán and Román. Regarding Ramon, played by Chilean director Javier Zoro, the character is totally based on and inspired by himself. He has been trying to complete a film about gardens since we met for the first time and I asked him to work on the film as almost himself. He has some theories about gardens and forms of nature and he speaks those as dialogue in the film. It made me laugh, the fact of filming a bank employee like Morán working on a totally indie production shot in the middle of the hills.

Q: I love the way this movie moves. It's not quite Slow Cinema; it has a sense of urgency about it, but it's never in a hurry. Describe the pacing of this movie, in your own words.

A: If you are filming passion, concentrate on what is happening inside the frame, if the feeling you try to catch is mostly happiness, that unavoidably will be conveyed to the spectator. The pace is the result of that.

And I love detours, because they expand the storytelling, the characters, the spaces you are filming and telling.

Q: There is a vast distinction between the bank scenes in Buenos Aires and the country life outside the city — it's the difference between miserablism and a kind of sumptuous and permanent summer idyll. Describe how you created the tone and texture for these very different locations.

A: I was interested in shooting the downtown area using the structure and the style of a documentary film, to intervene with the streets as little as possible so we could record our characters submerged in the crowds that usually populate the city's financial district, known simply as "the financial city".

The documentary is a concept that, used in this context, refers to working in fiction but with as little intervention in reality as possible. This is reflected in the scenes out on the streets and in public transportation.

The presence of the city has a real, palpable feel, as if this story was happening truly in this overcrowded context of traffic and masses of people.

The contrast with the lush green landscapes of Córdoba is both obvious and essential. This landscape comes across as liberating, as opposed to the gloomy degradation that working life offers. We used natural backlighting, skin with no makeup, dirt tracks driven along in battered cars, and the peaceful presence of reflections in different bodies of water and lakes. This relates to the idea of making the most of the natural environment on one side, and allowing for a production design that facilitates the production of the film, on the other. In this sense, the production scale is intimately linked to the way I work and therefore to my aesthetics. I work with a fifteen to twenty person crew, with the specific technical equipment needed, and I usually apply the structure of the documentary inside another, more predictable one. This has granted me, especially in *A MYSTERIOUS WORLD*, *PROVINCIAL CITY*, and *REIMON*, a sense of freedom during shooting that the more conventional, industrial format does not allow. I need freedom when I'm shooting, to try and tailor the scenes, situations, and characters, to the actual time in which they are being captured. Connecting to that present and unique time that takes place during shooting provides the picture with vivaciousness and energy, because the camera necessarily records that. It is also important that a shooting plan can resist and accommodate changes that happen on the spot, during the shooting process, changes that may respond to whims, adverse weather conditions, or new and unforeseen ideas. Ideas that come forth in the shooting process have the potential risk of leading to mistakes (as is the case with all of our best-laid plans, right?), but they also carry the vigor and the boldness of the new. And those things have happened along the 4 years and a half of shooting this film.

Q: The bank itself is starkly cinematic: a grim beast from another time and place—yet the story is set in the present day. Why were you interested in this specific location? In contrast, the country scenes are lush and cinematic, using long shots and wide-screen cinematography. Where did you film, and what were you looking for visually here?

A: I didn't want to shoot the bank and prison under a realistic regard so it was the opposite from shooting the country scenes: the crew was bigger than in the hills, the production design was focused on giving this timeless filter to the film's look, the way of representation, the acting was slightly shifted

from a realistic way in order to reinforce the feeling of telling a fable. A fable not in terms of moral but in the sense of telling a story that belongs to fiction. The combination of those diverse elements, documentary, fable and a portrait of simple living in natural surroundings, gives the film the feeling of many films inside as well as the passage of time, which in this case is about almost four years.

Q: The cinematography stands out overall in the film— it conveys so much feeling in both settings. Describe working with your DP, and what you were looking for visually overall, outside of the specific locations.

A: I began working with Ines Duacastella and, in the middle of the process, she became pregnant so I called Alejo Maglio, whom I had worked with in the past. We started working with less artificial light and, as soon as Maglio came on, we decided to bring more light and movement to the film in order to put the film in a more dynamic mise en scene. This decision was also linked to the work Gonzalo Delgado made in terms of color and set design. Gonzalo is the production designer of THE DELINQUENTS but also EL CUSTODIO and A MYSTERIOUS WORLD, an old and important collaborator.

Specifically regarding the image, this is not an isolated issue, it is also linked to a general cinematic form I'm thinking of when I think about filmmaking. In general I am not interested too much in a contemporary form of filming, my references are all the classic and modern films, above all American and French films from the 70s, one of my favorite decades in film history. I love what Rohmer made in the 70s, what Bresson filmed in that decade also, what Pialat filmed in late 70s and early 80s, what Eustache did during that time, what Chabrol made, as well as many American directors like Robert Altman, Walter Hill, Friedkin, Bogdanovich and many others. Aesthetically, I feel represented by those great filmmakers as well as Jarmusch and Kaurismäki from the 80s, Omirbayev in the 90s or Rossellini, Bresson, Satyajit Ray and Ozu during the 50s and 60s. I look at them every time I have to think about a new film.

Q: You use split-screens sparingly in this movie, but they stand out, and they are used so ingeniously. Why did you use them?

A: The challenge of this film was how to keep on telling the same obsessions of my work (working life versus leisure, dependency versus freedom, routine versus adventure) in a new formal context. Cinema has new obligations ever since it has been relegated to the background owing to the phenomenon of TV series and TV films. Its obligations consist of bringing old cinematic creativity back to the screen. Cinema has to rescue the audience from standardization and lazy habits of watching, where they are manipulated stupidly just to keep on watching the next episode. It's sad, it's very sad, this present time. So my aim, based only on pleasure and love for cinematic resources, was to tell this long story with the grace of cinema (suggestive using of music, split screen, dissolves, et cetera)

Q: Discuss your approach to music in the film, and how it reflects the psychological state of the two main characters. You use a particular song at the end of the movie — could you name it, and describe it, and explain why it's relevant to the story?

A: Regarding music in the film, there are two levels : diegetic and extra diegetic.

The usage is not about the psychological state of any character but to embrace the atmosphere of genre, also to evoke music from film noir. There are elements in the film linked to classic films and at the same time linked to the revision of classic films that French Cinema from the 1960s have made. To create that atmosphere I found an incredible piece from Argentine master Astor Piazzolla, "Symphony for Oboe," which is totally unknown above all because of the lack of bandoneon which was the instrument Piazzolla played in every composition of his own. On the other hand the film begins with a classic tango from Piazzolla and jazz musician Gerry Mulligan that gives to the overture a local feeling from Buenos Aires that I really wanted for the film. This story is mostly set in Buenos Aires, a city I love, where I was born and live. I was adamant about shooting in downtown Buenos Aires, to set this story within the weight of its architecture and populated streets. Piazzolla is the right translation of that feeling to the music.

Regarding the diegetic, there are two songs from an old rock-and-roll legend from Argentina named Pappo. He was a giant of guitar, who was named by B.B. King as one of best guitar players he had ever seen in his life (Pappo played many times as a guest in B.B.'s concerts). Besides that, Pappo's Blues album is a mysterious object in the film that travels from one character to the other, making a curious link between them. The lyrics of the last song, titled "Where is Freedom," an old rock-and-roll theme from Pappo's Blues album, Vol. 1 (1971) tells a lot about the characters' drama: "Where is Freedom? I never stop asking myself that. Maybe they have it somewhere around, I think that never, yeah that never have we ever been so bad..."

At certain moment in the film Moran gives the album to Norma and says to her, "When you listen to track number 8 you will remember me." The last song we hear in the film is precisely "Where is Freedom," the eighth song of Pappo's Blues album.

Q: .I found it interesting that your character names are all palindromes: Morán, Román, Morna, Norma. Why?

A: And Ramon!! Unfortunately I didn't find any more anagrams with those five letters. I would have enjoyed naming all the characters with those letters! But I couldn't. Namor could have been another character if it weren't a Marvel superhero.

I like wordplays and creative language and besides that I love to shoot games, like the game of capitals in this film.

Most of my previous films are full of these kinds of observations on leisure and on language as well. These anagrams have one dimension linked to this and another one linked to the fact of playing a game built by duplicities, shared destinies and faces of the same cube. There are people with the same life,

says Marianela in the beginning while she is trying to find an explanation for the absurd scene of duplicate signs. This is not an innocent line; it's there to give an important clue to the spectator.

Q: There is a subtle comic tone coursing through this movie — its subject is serious, the stakes are real, and the central dilemma is an existential one. But this movie is never depressing. Discuss your light touch and dry humor — epitomized for me in the performance of your second lead, Esteban Bigliardi, whom you've worked with before. Both of your leads feel mordantly funny at times—something beyond hapless. Was this intentional?

A: Absolutely intentional. A lack of humor takes you directly to a dead and pretentious art.

Q: The ending is ambiguous, we're left wondering, pondering, uncertain of each man's destiny. Why did you choose to end it in this fashion?

A: Because the film is not about what happened to the money but it is about the process of having made a life changing decision, so the ending isn't obligated to reveal any mystery.

Q: You are one of the figureheads of New Argentine Cinema, which launched in the 1990s. Have the concerns of that school of cinema changed, or have you moved on from it?

A: New Argentine Cinema was something that never had a visible film identity. There were many directors from the same country making many different films at the same time. And, it has been renovated along the years, by new generations. So if I have moved on from it, I wouldn't really know what that would mean. Once I finished *EL CUSTODIO*, which was a successful film in terms of festivals and reviews, I moved away from precisely that, to make films that are more free in terms of structure, in terms also of production, et cetera.

In any case, this film is the result of a personal process in terms of film concerns.

Q: So many films out of Argentina in recent years, including *LA FLOR*, *TRENQUE LAUQUEN* and *HISTORIAS EXTRAORDINARIAS* feel literary as well as cinematic, including *THE DELINQUENTS*—as if they were touched by the spirit of Bolaño and Borges. Would you agree, and if so, why?

A: Thanks for the compliment, being related to films I love and to filmmakers and writers I like very much is an honor. But I really don't find any link in this case at all. Borges' literature veers between the suburbs of Buenos Aires, the 19th century and the Pampas; He takes old classics from Homer to the Arabian Nights, from Cervantes to German traditions and passes them through an Argentine Criollo filter in order to create a new epic from the South. Regarding Bolaño, he also tends to elevate lowly figures from the bohemian life in Latin America. I think that's not the case in this film, except for the Chilean filmmaker, Ramón, who comes from the same country as Bolaño. The film takes a long detour at that

moment to show Morán a new and unknown world where there are people using their time to film flowers and nature. But I'm not really sure if this kind of observation belongs also to Bolaño's universe.

What you can relate this film to is some kind of similar structure to a novel, in terms of length and of a non-linear narrative, coming and going from the events. In general it is common to compare short stories to long length films and series to a novel structure. In this case, in a 3 hour film like this, the structure is reminiscent of a novel, in terms of every single character being portrayed and every single event being told.

NOTES ON THE DELINQUENTS

BY RODRIGO MORENO; MAY, 2023

On the subject

One issue comes forth naturally when considering this film is the matter of freedom in the face of the mechanical routine imposed by work.

Morán imagines a risky plan to conquer that liberation even when it implies committing a crime and paying his dues. Román is his accessory.

These two men embody a collective fantasy: to break free from the rigors and obligations of the working life in order to attain a higher life filled with freedom.

To choose a better life means leaving the city, your job, even a family, and moving to the countryside, the ocean, the mountains, to give in to leisure, and to stop depending on something or someone. There are both existential and practical matters that make this dream a difficult one: How to make a living? How can I live without all the things I already have? When should I pursue it?

The protagonist solves these questions by virtue of a crime: to rob from a bank (the same bank he's employed by) the equivalent of his salary times 25 years. It's not about being millionaires; it's about living without working all the way to the end.

As is the case in heist movies, the morality of the robbery is not the object, even more so when the target is a bank. I'm invoking the old maxim, always ascribed to Brecht, that it is a worse crime to establish a bank than it is to rob one.

This film, in that sense, takes a more anarchistic viewpoint and does not dwell on these bourgeois matters, but rather contemplates the notion that modern life, as it is intended, obliterates the possibility of a truly free man. It is this tension that Morán's dream is built upon, that he finally acquires by means of the sacrifice of imprisonment. It is said in a passage of the film that the incarceration of jail for three years and a half is preferable to the incarceration of working for the rest of your life.

The capitalist system, supported and sustained by almost everyone, puts work at the very center of our organization, and at the top of the value chain: even the most progressive schools of thought fight for a dignified work force. Work, in the capitalist system, is everything because it is the only way to produce capital. The symbolic value of all that is represented by money, thus the dependence and devotion it unfolds. Our life today is organized by these parameters.

Even the proclamation for reduced work hours, or the old propositions that considered adding an extra day of rest to each week, are both behind us.

Today's rest and leisure do not carry the distinction they once had. Even more so in our peripheral, poor countries, where progressive governments sometimes emerge, and still the ideal of changing our stance in regards to money, production, and therefore work, taking the center stage, the notion of constructing a more humanitarian, anthropocentric vision that revolves around the full exercise of freedom, has been abandoned.

These ideas, that may seem a bit ambitious when read in a text like this, not only are subjacent in THE DELINQUENTS but in all my previous films, the contrast between the everyday work routine as an alienating factor, as opposed to the possibility of escaping, or choosing to wander as a means to uncover new forms of freedom.

This film defies these assumptions and portrays a utopian vision that to my understanding art should always offer, in which this goal is achieved without any major obstacles. It's not a script that nurtures itself with desperate measures, but it tries to establish moments of joy and candor.

This brings us to another matter that I feel should be pointed out: far from a gritty perspective, THE DELINQUENTS is conceived as an utterly luminous film. It's the glimpses of life that unfold the path for this story and not, as it could be expected from a film that takes on these issues, a set of tensions both dark and violent. These glimpses converge in fleeting romance, in coming into contact with poetry, in the enjoyment of rural life, in the establishment of a complicity between two men.

It is this spirit of adventure, of impulsiveness and audacity that must resonate throughout the film.

We all have a job, we all dream of a better life, and at some point in our lives, no matter how much we love our jobs or trades, we wish to quit working and be free people, released from the work yoke. This film is about that impossible dream, in an attempt to bring it closer to the audience as one of the many possible lives that we all choose to lead.

On the form

The main feature of this film to me is probably the diversity: there are many characters, many locations, a lot of time goes by from the starting point to the end, and the characters go through different stages and emotions like adrenaline, fear, intrigue, pleasure, tedium, love, absurdness and adventure, among others.

It's fair to say that there are many films inside THE DELINQUENTS.

This is the way I found to convey a sense of time passing, almost four years in the lives of the characters, and to get the audience to witness this experience by "living it" alongside the protagonist in a wide series of different events.

An in-depth journey into this adventure will allow me to build upon the idea of the richer life experience that I'm interested to put the characters through, as well as the audience.

There is a sentence by the Argentine writer Rodolfo Enrique Fogwill that I like a lot and it is relevant to my work: *"I'm not interested in realism, I'm interested in the real."* Regarding this, I think THE DELINQUENTS is a fable set in a specific space, Buenos Aires and the Cordoba hills, in an unspecific time, it could happen today or yesterday. The film runs through a timeless style that allows me to liberate the whole thing from the concept of realism. I don't want to owe anything to reality, That's why the bank looks like if it were in the sixties or seventies, at times. There are absurd or implausible situations that lead the film to an area that cannot be defined. And that uncertainty is what I really like from films and from cinema, where the only certain thing is that what I'm seeing is possible because it is in a film.

Director Biography

RODRIGO MORENO -

Moreno is an Argentine filmmaker born and based in Buenos Aires. His films were awarded and exhibited in several film festivals like Berlinale, Donostia/San Sebastian, Toronto, Sundance, Rotterdam, Viennale, New Directors / New Films, London, among many others. His work was also exhibited at MoMA, Guggenheim Museum, Anthology Film Archives and Lincoln Center (USA), Centre Pompidou (France) and Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Germany). In 2017, the Ibertigo foundation from Spain organized a retrospective of his work in Las Palmas. Another retrospective of his work was held in summer 2019 at Wolf Kino of Berlin. His film *El Custodio* won the Alfred Bauer Preis in Berlinale and best Latin American script in Sundance among many others awards. His following film *A mysterious world* was also invited to the official competition in Berlinale while *Reimon* and *Provincial City* were filmed in 2014 and 2017 respectively and both were produced by his own company Compania Amateur. He teaches Film Direction at the Universidad del Cine of Buenos Aires. Moreno sits on the editorial board of the annual publication Revista de Cine where he also writes articles and essays on cinema. He also have been venturing into the visual arts with photography, experimental video and performing arts. His performance "Professional Radio Announcers Read Karl Marx's Capital" co-created with Bruno Dubner, was finalist of ArteBA/Petrobras, one of the most prestigious visual arts award of South America.

Filmography

Los delincuentes (2023)

Una ciudad de provincia (2017)

Reimon (2014)

Un mundo misterioso (2011)

El custodio (2006)

El descanso (2001)

Wanka Cine was founded in 2005 as a postproduction studio. Wanka was in charge of editing and supervising on-set visual effects, VFX and color correction for directors of the size of Francis Ford Coppola, Pablo Trapero and Lisandro Alonso, among others. As associated producer, Wanka was also involved in awarded films such as Santiago Mitre's 'El Estudiante' (Gijón, Locarno and BAFICI Film Festivals), Maximiliano Schonfeld's 'Germania', (prized in Hamburgo, Prague and BAFICI Film Festivals), and, recently, in documentary feature films directed by Daniel Casabé & Edgardo Dieleke: 'Cracks de nácar' and 'La forma exacta de las islas'. Wanka supported successful film projects such as Alejandro Fadel's 'Los Salvajes', Nicolás Goldbart's 'Fase 7', and 'Los Posibles' by Santiago Mitre. In recent years, Wanka expanded its field-range, producing fiction contents for open-air TV. Outstands '23 pares', directed by Albertina Carri, 'Best One-off Drama Award' in National prize 'Nuevas miradas en la Televisión' in 2012. Wanka Cine co-produced the feature film, 'Jauja' directed by Lisandro Alonso and starring Viggo Mortensen, selected for Official selection 'Un Certain Regard' and winner of FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics), Cannes 2014. In 2015 Wanka co-produced the new film by Hugo Santiago, 'El cielo del centauro'. And produced 'El invierno' the debut film of Emiliano Torres, winner of the Special Jury Award and the Jury Award for Best Cinematography (DoP: Ramiro Civita) in the Oficial Competition of San Sebastian Film Festival 2016. In 2017 Wanka produced 'Al Desierto' by Ulises Rosell, international premier at 65 San Sebastián Film Festival 2017. In 2020 Wanka premiered "Sangre" by Juan Schnitman and "My tender matador" by Rodrigo Sepúlveda together with Forastero (Chile) at the Venice Film Festival. In 2021 Wanka finished the shooting in Argentina of "Re Granchio" by Alessio Rigo de Righi and Matteo Zoppis, a co production together with Volpe Films, Ring Film and Shellac films that will have it international premiere at the Quinzaine des realisateur in the 74th edition of Cannes Film Festival. In 2022 Wanka premiered "El sistema K.E.O.P.S." by Nicolás Goldbart, a Netflix acquisition, and in early 2023 "Las Fiestas" by Ignacio Rogers. Nowadays is working on the postproduction of "Los Delincuentes" the new film of Rodrigo Moreno and developing "Sin dolor" by Michael Wahrmann.

Credits

TECHNICAL FEATURES / FICHA TÉCNICA

Title: (Original Language) : Los Delincuentes

Title English: The Delinquents

Direction: Rodrigo Moreno

Script: Rodrigo Moreno

Stars: Daniel Elias, Esteban Bigliardi, Margarita Molfino, German De Silva, Laura Paredes, Mariana Chaud,

Cecilia Rainero, Javier Zoro Sutton, Gabriela Saidon.

Production company: WANKA CINE

Co-production company: LES FILMS FAUVES / SANCHO&PUNTA / JIRAFÁ FILMS / JAQUE CONTENT / RIZOMA FILMS.

Production: Ezequiel Borovinsky

Executive Production: Ezequiel Borovinsky, Ezequiel Capaldo, Eugenia Molina, Rodrigo Moreno, Gilles Chaniel, Julia Alves, Michael Wahrmann, Bruno Betatti, Hernán Musaluppi, Daniel Lambrisca.

Production manager: Ezequiel Capaldo, Eugenia Molina.

Cinematography: Alejo Maglio, Ines Duacastella.

Sound Design: Roberto Espinoza.

Art Direction: Gonzalo Delgado, Laura Caligiuri

Montage: Manuel Ferrari, Nicolás Goldbart, Rodrigo Moreno

Costume design: Flora Caligiuri

VFX Supervisor: Leandro Pugliese

Genre: Fiction

Language: Spanish

Format: 1.55:1 (3:2) / Color

Duration: / 189 min.

Premiere: 2023

Country: ARGENTINA / LUXEMBOURG / BRAZIL / CHILE

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