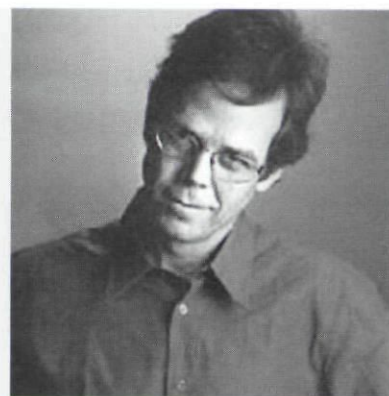


# Chile in the Time of the Generals:

## An Interview with Andrés Wood

by John Esther



**A**ndrés Wood was born in Chile in 1965. Of Irish and Scottish descent, Wood was educated in an English School in Santiago, Chile. He later studied economics at the Catholic University of Chile where he graduated in 1988. In 1991 he came to the U.S. to study film at New York University Film School. He directed two shorts, *Idyll* (1992) and *Family Reunion* (1994), before making his first feature, *Football Stories* (1997), which he directed and cowrote. In 1998 he directed and cowrote a television series called *Revenge*. He gained wider prominence with his 2001 film, *Loco Fever*, which was followed by his latest film, *Machuca*.

From his office in Chile, Wood was interviewed by phone in March about the political reactions to *Machuca*, some particulars regarding the film, and the state of Chile's filmmaking industry today. —John Esther

**Cineaste:** How much of the film was based on your own experiences and how much on research?

**Andrés Wood:** It was very researched. I and one of the screenwriters worked on a documentary for TV on that period, so we had the research anyway. I interviewed the real priest and my classmates, and I have always been in contact with that period. I always liked it and I knew about it. I went to a similar school with a similar priest. But the film is not autobiographical at all.

**Cineaste:** You said you wanted to tell this story from a child's point of view to give it an innocent perspective. Why was that important?

**Wood:** When we started working on the script, we knew we were dealing with an issue that divided that country; some favored Allende and some Pinochet. We weren't clear on how to approach the movie, but when we decided on that point of view, it gave us a lot of freedom. But it's a partial history, subjective, and it doesn't pretend to be the official story.

**Cineaste:** What are your basic political intentions with *Machuca*?

**Wood:** I didn't start with political intentions, but I knew it would be impossible to avoid. In a way I just wanted to show the craziness, how everything was not that black or white. How crazy people were back then, how selfish they were on the right and the left.

**Cineaste:** You previously mentioned that people from right-wing neighborhoods would boo and hiss the film. What was it about the film that upset them?

**Wood:** They said it was partial to one side and, of course, it was partial. I never wanted it to be impartial. Some classmates of mine said I was lying and others would say that is exactly what happened. I learned from this film that people see in history what they want to see.

**Cineaste:** Why do you think the left responds more favorably? Do they have any criticisms?

**Wood:** There were no critics of the left in Chile though some from inside the country said I showed the [Allende] government in chaos. Critics from outside of Chile said, "How dare you play with kids with an issue that important? Who cares about the kids?"

**Cineaste:** What do you think the film says about class divisions in Chile back then?

**Wood:** One of the biggest legacies of the [Pinochet] dictatorship is the separation of classes in Chile. The country has gotten richer, but the divisions remain.

**Cineaste:** How did reaction to *Machuca* differ from your previous films?

**Wood:** It was much more popular and that was a big surprise. There's always this preconceived idea we had that people would not want to see movies about the period because it would be something that would divide the country. To see again their past, people might not want to relive it. They said young people wouldn't care about the time. Yet a lot of people saw it.

**Cineaste:** How did the government react to *Machuca*?

**Wood:** Actually they didn't support it formally, but we received help from the state, a subsidy from the ministry of culture. I believe they like the vision of the film. We had a lot of freedom and they never controlled the way the film would go. I feel the government shares the film's point of view, but I don't have any proof.

**Cineaste:** What kind of distribution did the film receive in Chile?

**Wood:** A big one. It was one of the top five movies of the year 2004.

**Cineaste:** Do you think a right-wing director could come in and make a film justifying Allende's removal and be a success?

**Wood:** Who knows? [Laughs] I would love to see the movie. You never know. I learned that with my movie. For me *Machuca* was a very personal and ambitious movie.

**Cineaste:** What was life like for you under Pinochet?

**Wood:** Well, you know, I wanted a mixture in the film. I have incredible, good memories as a teenager with friends and family, but was uncomfortable with what kind of country we were living in. But I didn't suffer under the dictatorship like the characters did in the movie.

**Cineaste:** What do you think Chilean filmmakers can do to prevent another Pinochet-type reign of terror?

**Wood:** They have to keep things alive, not only memory, but the country. I don't think a movie has to have that kind of purpose, but we need to know our culture and who we were and who we are, to be much more awake. We can't let others trespass on our values. If you have an artistic ambition it will help the country, more than just an idea or theme.

**Cineaste:** The church in the form of Father McEnroe is at great odds with the wealthy parents of St. Patrick's. Did the church side with the poor during those times?

**Wood:** Yes, the Church in Chile has a history of watching out for human rights. They're different than other Latin American countries, like Argentina, whose clergy are really conservative.

**Cineaste:** Why aren't Chilean films distributed in the U.S. as much as those from other South American countries like Brazil and Argentina?

**Wood:** Because we have a smaller industry. We are recovering from being shut off for twenty years. In a good year, we make eight films. Brazil and Argentina make seventy films. They have much more participation but we are growing, there is more participation, and we are joining the wave of Latin American films.

**Cineaste:** How can you and your fellow countrypersons create a culture of Chilean cinema?

**Wood:** It's one of the challenges because it's something it's impossible to handle outside. It's got to be something natural. We need many more films and a new generation has to come through. A larger quantity of films will help. In a way we are winning the battle. Every year a Chilean film becomes popular with the public. ■

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