

# MENEMSHA FILMS

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A Production by

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# machuca

*a film by*

Andrés Wood

Running time: 115 minutes / Aspect Ratio: 1:1.85 / Sound: Dolby Surround  
Chile

## US DISTRIBUTION

MENEMSHA FILMS, INC.

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*“Children experience events, but they do not judge.  
They simply live, and bear witness.”*

“I was eight years old when the military overthrew Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973. Of my forty classmates, at least fifteen lived in the shantytowns on the shore of the Mapocho River. These poor children were granted full scholarships by my school’s headmaster, a North American priest with progressive ideas about integration. This was a very enriching experience. It was stormy and cruel but also wonderful -- a flood of contradictions. That short period marked us all deeply, as it reunited two worlds that previously were completely separated by the history of Chile.”

“It seemed to me that to make this film was something absolutely necessary. Nobody has ever touched the loss of the democracy in Chile from this innocent perspective. Children experience events, but they do not judge. They simply live, and bear witness. Such a stance gives a great deal of freedom and truth to the story -- a perspective that is neither ‘political’ or ‘social’ but true to human life in all its greatness and misery.”

“MACHUCA is also the very first film about that period done by a director who actually lived through the dictatorship in Chile. What’s more, I am the first Chilean filmmaker between ages 30 and 40 who would even go near the subject. This does not in itself confer greater value, but I believe that it opens the possibility of a further glance by others at those intense years.”

“The worst sin would have been to try to say everything. For that reason, we strictly limited ourselves to that which the children wanted to show to us.”

-- Andrés Wood

## SYNOPSIS

Santiago, Chile, 1973: Pedro Machuca (Ariel Mateluna) is a poor boy of tribal descent, brought into an upper class private school during Chile's brief socialist era. Gonzalo (Matias Quer), the well-to-do boy seated a row ahead, befriends Pedro against the bullying will of his classmates. In so doing, he discovers a raw, thrilling but wildly complicated world outside his own previously sheltered homelife. Pedro's fierce, attractive young neighbor Silvana (Manuella Martelli) by turns mocks Gonzalo's pampered background, only to fondly lead both boys in a number of kissing games. All around them, Chile drifts toward civil war. Protest marches fill the Santiago streets with zealots of the right and left. At school, their humane headmaster Father McEnroe (Ernesto Malbran) comes under an hysteria-driven attack by parents for his charity toward poor students.

Amid so much public turmoil, little Gonzalo must also contend with more intimate kinds of upheaval. His sexy, melancholy mother (Aline Kuppenheim) is having a love affair with a wealthy older man (Federico Luppi). His father (Francisco Kings) is sweet but ineffectual, and lacks the fire to fight for his marriage. Thus Gonzalo's household seems headed for a regime change as unwelcome as the one brewing in the streets.

He therefore escapes into his friendship with Pedro, and for a time the two boys become witnesses to each other's lives. Pedro gets a look at the intense dysfunctions in Gonzalo's life, and Gonzalo in turn is immersed in Pedro's world of extreme poverty. The two boys share a love of comic books devoted to the Lone Ranger. With Silvana's encouragement they also take part in protest marches -- selling cigarettes and flags to demonstrators on the right as well as the left, but chanting with committed vigor when marching with the left.

The already enormous rift between Gonzalo's comfortable household and Pedro's hard-scrabble life a few miles away in an illegal shantytown ultimately becomes impossible to bridge, once the bloody military coup of September 11, 1973 erupts and capsizes the nation. All three children suddenly face moral tests far beyond their young capacities. As they do, *Machuca* inevitably surges to a heartbreaking, insightful finale.

MACHUCA  
about the production

“It was late winter for us -- a cloudy day,” Andres Wood recalls in a soft voice. Picturing it afresh, he firmly repeats this last detail: “It was a *cloudy* day.”

He is speaking of September 11, 1973 -- the day Chilean President Salvador Allende was violently overthrown by his own military. Wood was at that time an eight year old student at St. George’s English School, in the capital city Santiago. For him, the primary embodiment of the *coup d’etat* was a military fighter jet which flew low over his suburban neighborhood. The emotional consequences of that day were more shocking and profound, and the military regime which took over Chile upon Allende’s bloody death would for decades dictate the shape not only of Wood’s life, but that of his countrymen.

That jet and that cloudy sky are precisely evoked in his new film *Machuca*. Over the years, there have been works by such renowned Chilean filmmakers as Miguel Littin and Raul Ruiz, which have either dealt politically with the *coup* or communicated in poetic terms the experience of exile. But *Machuca* is the first Chilean film to treat this moment in history in a purely humanist way, from the point of view of a child, as recaptured by a filmmaker who was himself a child at that time, and lived through the regime that followed.

Andres Wood originally studied to be an economist, but as democracy returned to Chile in the 1990s, he followed a deeper wish to become a filmmaker -- winning international recognition for his ability to combine humor, melancholy, and a satiric social observation in such films as *Football Stories* (1997) and *Loco Fever* (2001). Wood often wished to revisit the 1970s of his childhood in a film -- but the topic was so loaded for the Chilean mass public that for many years he didn’t dare. “There is a cultural ‘self-censorship’ in Chile,” he explains, and laughs: “Talk about the *future* of Chile, and 80 percent of the people will happily agree with you. Talk about the *past*, and people fight, screaming.”

One of the writers he worked with on *Loco Fever*, Gilberto Villaroel, approached him in the summer of 2001 with an idea about treating the disco era in Santiago, circa 1978. Wood was enthused, but he and Villaroel quickly found to their mutual frustration that they were thinking about very different films. “When I got home from this meeting,” Wood recalls, “My wife said to me, ‘The film *you* want to make is set much earlier in the ‘70s.’” Again, he laughs: “All my best ideas come from either my wife or my sister.” He did not require any further persuasion.

The idea so forcefully took over his imagination that Wood even abandoned another script which was half-written, to start right away. The writing process, which he undertook in collaboration with producer Mamoun Hassan and another cowriter, Roberto Brodsky, was a combination of remembrance and research. "The film is not an autobiography, but 90 percent of what you see either happened to me, my friends, my classmates or my neighbors."

The name "Machuca" - a fairly common surname, in Chile, was at first just a working title, says Wood: "We liked its simplicity as a last name for Pedro, and also, because in Chile the name suggests one who is beaten but perseveres. But as the story grew, it became clear that we were right to name the film 'Machuca,' because he is the boy who makes for a change in our hero Gonzalo Infante."

Otherwise, all the names are changed -- his real school, St. George's, is "St. Patrick's" in the film. Father Whelan, the North American priest (educated at Notre Dame) who boldly integrated his wealthy pupils with extremely poor boys, is fictionalized as "Father McEnroe" (Ernesto Malbran). "I didn't want people to block out the movie by saying of this or that part, 'No! You're making that up.' I'm making it *all* up -- it is all my 'fiction,' my 'vision.' But it is based on real remembrance." He researched the film by interviewing Father Whelan, who was still alive in 2001. "It was he who told me about eating all the wafers in the tabernacle."

This act of protest forms the moral climax of *Machuca*, when Father McEnroe defies the military who have stormed his school by refusing them communion, and by "de-consecrating" the chapel with the words, "This is no longer a holy place." (Priests and nuns are routinely trained to empty a tabernacle and if need be consume its contents, to prevent acts of sacrilege by an invading force. The extra shock here is that the invaders in this case are themselves Catholics.) "That is an arrogant thing to do, no? Tell them in effect, 'God is with me and not with you!' But for me this arrogance is an essential proof of the priest's heroic character."

Father Whelan never lived to see the film, but "When it was finished, I invited 20 of his friends to see it. They were very moved -- but the discussion after was very revealing. Of the sequence in which he eats the wafers, one priest said: 'No! Whelan would never have done that.' I assured him, on the contrary, Whelan himself told me he did it. Another priest jumped in, and said: 'I *saw* him do it!' And still another priest said, 'You're both wrong! It wasn't Whelan, but Father So-and-so who ate the wafers!'" Wood is deeply amused by the intensity of this disagreement -- and the meaning of it. "You see why I was right to develop *Machuca* as a

work of fiction! Two people can be in the same room at the same event and yet both come away with a completely different memory, a different understanding, a different feeling.”

Writing the script took roughly a year and a half, from August 2001 until March, 2003. As risky as the subject matter was, Wood felt confident. “I knew that once we were committed to a child’s point of view, we were free to express whatever we want.”

“For me, the movie operates in three layers,” he says. “The first is the friendships, and the priest’s experiment at the school; the second is the family, especially that of the main character; and the third is that of Chile, of the country’s history as a background.”

“That’s why the background is so important -- the walls; the newspapers, the faces. We worked very hard, creating an atmosphere, even down to the last extra. Showing the many differences *within* the country -- showing hippies, people with money, people who live in extreme poverty. We also watered down the streets, to particularly enhance this darker, winter feeling. I remember my childhood more as winter than summer, I don’t know why. The school was always open in winter. I also wanted to move away from what people expect of a Latin American movie, because after all, Chile has four seasons.”

Money turned up quickly, in the form of a coproduction deal between Chile and Spain. (There was very nearly an English partner in this mix, but the financial complexities of Britain’s point-system proved too daunting.) The budget ceiling on Chilean films is \$500,000; the international arrangement allowed *Machuca* to be made for roughly \$1.7 million.

Post-production was an especially important consideration, given the period look. “The lab was even a financial partner,” says Wood. Although *Machuca* was shot in Super 16 mm, a “digital intermediate” was foreseen as an essential technical step, to erase the 30 years of newer skyline that has built up in Santiago since 1973, as well as to take out more intimate details, such as the newfangled smoke detectors which now dot the walls of every Chilean household. Wood also considered using this digital palette to play with color: “We thought of going for the look of a living Polaroid snapshot,” he says, “But decided that this would have distracted too much from the story.” In the end, simply using 16 mm afforded *Machuca* a subtle roughness of style that for Wood enhanced the feeling of a memory retrieved from the 1970s.

“Using lightweight equipment was also very helpful in terms of working with the kids,” says Wood. “They were able to be more comfortable, and I was able to relax more as a director. I hate to have to depend on too many people. When we made *Loco Fever*, we were working on a remote island, where there were no telephones and to which boats only traveled twice a week --

that was an extremely stressful circumstance. On *Machuca*, we were working much less hardship, on Santiago streets. I felt like I was visiting family."

He took great pains to prepare and bond with his young actors. "We spent a year casting, working extra hard to find the right children." After that, they spent seven months rehearsing. "These were not 'formal' rehearsals, as such, in the sense of reading a script. We would read the script, but we would also just talk. And, I put all the kids through a course in 'stage combat' -- teaching them ways to fight without hurting each other. We all did that together, and it was great fun." Wood also used his young actors when casting for the adult roles: "This allowed them to practice their parts more directly, but in a very free and confident way, because they already knew they were definitely in the movie."

Filming took eight six-day weeks, and Wood was at pains not to wear his young actors out. "Matias Quer, who plays the lead, is in literally every scene. But because we were working with light equipment and a small crew, we could take time to get things right. The scene where the hero must escape on his bicycle from the shantytown as the military attacks is a crucial moment in the story, and it was very very hard for Matias to get it right, on the first try. This was not his fault -- it's an extremely difficult emotion I was asking him to convey. So we went back three times, on three separate days, and we got it right. In the past I have not just directed but produced, and I know, when a director is surrounded by a big production, to ask for reshoots can be a big fight -- but we prepared, and gave ourselves real freedom."

In hard boxoffice terms, the finished *Machuca* is now comfortably in profit, having made \$2.5 million in US dollars since its opening on August 4, 2004. This makes it Chile's second largest boxoffice hit of the year, and climbing.

How have Chileans responded personally, in conversations with its maker?

"That depends on what theater you see it in," laughs Wood. "If you see it in a neighborhood of the right wing, they will hiss and boo, and many will leave. At other theaters, they will really cry at the end. A lot of people cry. I have received over 300 letters from young people in Chile, telling me about their story. Their family's story. *Machuca* is very open in that way. People now speak of the 'Machucas' and the 'Infantes' in our society, and how they relate. To be a 'Machuca,' now, is to be a poor person who has the opportunity to improve his status. Everyone can see themselves in the film a little bit. There have been editorials, and lots and lots of letters to the editors in newspapers -- against the movie, in favor of the movie. There was one solid month of very public discussion. For Chile, that really is something."

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### ANDRÉS WOOD -- DIRECTOR, CO-WRITER

Born 1965, Andrés Wood is of Irish and Scottish descent, and was educated in an English school in his native Santiago, Chile -- exactly as are the young friends in MACHUCA. He later trained as an economist at the Catholic University of Chile, from which he graduated in 1988, followed by a course of study at NYU Film School in 1991. His previous features, have received widespread acclaim at a variety of international festivals -- including Best New Director at San Sebastián in 1997.

MACHUCA was an Official Selection in the Director's Fortnight at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival.

### ANDRÉS WOOD -- FILMOGRAPHY

- 2004 MACHUCA
- 2001 LOCO FEVER (director, cowriter)
- 1998 REVENGE (TV miniseries; director, cowriter)
- 1997 FOOTBALL STORIES (director, cowriter)
- 1994 FAMILY REUNION (short film; director)
- 1992 IDYLL (short film: director, producer)

### MAMOUD HASSAM -- PRODUCER, COWRITER

Former head of the British Film Institute, himself an accomplished writer-producer-director, Mamoud Hassam's thriving career spans several decades. In the early 1980s, as Managing Director of Britain's National Film Fund, Hassam was instrumental in the financing and creation of countless films, including several that are well remembered and beloved in the U.S.: *Dance With a Stranger*, *Gregory's Girl*, *Defense of the Realm*, *Another Country*, and *A Room With a View*. In addition to his work on *Machuca*, Hassam is currently preparing to produce *Magyar Night* for director Bill Forsyth, and *Justified Sinner*, from a screenplay by Bill Douglas. As a writer *about* film, he is presently finishing a study of Satyajit Ray's *World of Apu* for the popular BFI classics series.

### ROBERTO BRODSKY - COWRITER



*Machuca* marks the debut of cowriter Roberto Brodsky.

#### MIGUEL JOAN LITTIN -- CINEMATOGRAPHER

His name is familiar to lovers of South American cinema, because Miguel Joan Littin is the son of the great Chilean filmmaker, Miguel Littin. He began his own career by directing a pair of shorts, *ASFALTO SIN RUMBO* (1995) and *VOLANDO VOY* (1997). Since then, he has made his career as a cinematographer -- largely in collaboration with Andres Wood.

Littin filmed the second unit work on Wood's debut film *FOOTBALL STORIES* (1997), then became the main cinematographer on *REVENGE* (1998), and *LOCO FEVER* (2001). He also served as principal cameraman on his father's acclaimed *TIERRA DEL FUEGO* (2000).

#### PRINCIPAL CAST

##### MATIAS QUER -- "Gonzalo"

Born May 16, 1990, in Santiago, Matias was chosen over thousands of others to play the sensitive, well-to-do boy who forms a fateful friendship with an extremely poor boy his own age. Prior to *MACHUCA*, he had only acted in diverse theater productions, mostly school related. "Matias has led a happy life," observes Andres Wood, "with loving parents, free of suffering -- yet each time we needed him to do so, he found the exact emotion for Gonzalo."

At present, Matias has stepped back from acting and is pursuing his studies.

##### ARIEL MATELUNA -- "Pedro Machuca"

Born March 21, 1989 in Santiago, Ariel Metaluna had acted in a number of commercials before Andres Wood chose him to play the title role in *MACHUCA*. This is his first feature. "With his interesting face and tremendous screen presence," notes Wood, "It's no surprise that he is very committed to acting, and will soon be seen in more films by other directors."

##### MANUELA MARTELLI -- "Silvana"

Born circa 1985, Manuela Martelli is a few years older than her two co-stars in *MACHUCA* -- though she looks to be their age. Her fiery maturity serves well in a role that

requires her to be an angry rebel socially and a free spirit who knows how to lead a set of kissing games.

“Manuela was already an established actress when we chose her,” says Wood, “she is in a very good film by Gonzalo Justiniano, *B - HAPPY*, which came out earlier this year, and since *MACHUCA* she has already made another feature. We will be seeing a lot more of her.”

#### ERNESTO MALBRAN -- “Father McEnroe”

Born in Chile, Ernesto Malbran was a university professor in Santiago when the coup struck in 1973, overturning his life. He recalled these experiences for director Patricio Guzman in the documentary: *CHILE -- THE OBSTINATE MEMORY* (1997). Since then, Malbran has acted in two films: *MINEFIELD*, aka *NOBODY RETURNS INTACT* (1998) for director Alex Bowen, and *SUBTERRA* (2003) for director Marco Ferreri.

“Ernesto looks North American to me,” says Wood, a quality in accord with his own memories of Father Whelan, the real-life model for Father McEnroe. In any event, Malbran’s dignified ferocity makes him ideal for this decisive role of the priest who brings poor boys into an expensive private school -- in the spirit of both Christian charity, as well as the doomed philosophy of Marxist social equality preached by the Allende regime.

#### ALINE KUPPENHEIM -- Maria Luisa (Gonzalo’s Mother)

Prior to *MACHUCA*, in which she plays young Gonzalo’s beautiful and selfish mother, Aline Kuppenheim worked primarily in Chilean television. “This mother is very stylish and is a social climber,” notes Wood. “Yet she is still a kid herself.” He was not sure that, after playing leads in so many soap operas, Kuppenheim would be fully equal to the role’s subtler, unusual demands, but: “Of all the performances in the film, Aline’s was the most extreme and pleasing surprise to me. Now she’s using her new confidence to make more features.”

#### FEDERICO LUPPI -- “Robert Ochagavia” (The Mother’s Lover)

Born February 23, 1936 in Buenos Aires, Federico Luppi has worked primarily in Spain. With 82 screen credits, he is one of the most admired and accomplished actors in the Spanish-speaking world. Here in the U.S., he is best known as the star of Guillermo del Toro’s *CRONOS*

(1993). Discerning cinephiles will also remember him as the charismatic theater star in EXTASIS (1996), who outwits the equally magnetic con-man played by Javier Bardem, as well as his superb work as the tragic doctor in MEN WITH GUNS (2000) by John Sayles.

## PRINCIPAL CAST

Matias Quer	Gonzalo Infante
Ariel Mateluna	Pedro Machuca
Manuela Martelli	Silvana
Ernesto Malbrán	Father McEnroe
Aline Kuppenheim	Maria Luisa Infante (Gonzalo's mother)
Federico Luppi	Roberto Ochagavia (mother's lover)
Francisco Kings	Patricio Infante (Gonzalo's father)
Luis Dubó	Ismael Machuca (Pedro's father)
Tamara Acosta	Juana (Pedro's mother)
Maria Olga Matte	Miss Gilda (teacher)
Gabriela Medina	Lucy (Gonzalo's sister)
Tiago Correa	Pablo (sister's boyfriend)
Alexander Trejo	Willi (flag vendor)
Andrea Garcia Huidobro	Isabel (maid)
Pablo Krögh	Colonel Sotomayor

## PRINCIPAL CREW

Director / Producer:	Andrés Wood
Writers:	Roberto Brodsky Mamoun Hassan Andrés Wood
Producers:	Gerardo Herrero Mamoun Hassan Andrés Wood
Executive Producers:	Nathalie Trafford Juan Carlos Arriagada Patricio Pereira

Production Supervisor: Patricio Pereira  
Direction of Photography: Miguel Joan Littin, AEC  
Script Supervisor: Eliseo Altunaga  
Sound Design: Miguel Hormazábal  
Sound Direction: Maldavsky Marks  
Sound Production: Plató Sonido  
Art Direction: Rodrigo Bazaes  
Costume design: Maya Mora  
Music: Jose Miguel Miranda  
Jose Miguel Tobar  
Editor: Fernando Pardo  
Post-Supervisor, Chile: Soledad Salfate  
Head of Production: Eduardo Castro  
Assistant Director: Waldo Salgado  
Casting: Carlos Johnson  
Production Design: Maria Eugenia Hederra  
Props: Alejandro Mono González  
Set Design: Guadalupe Correa

## MACHUCA (2004)

Country of Origin: Chile/Spain  
Original Language: Spanish  
Running Time: 115 minutes

## -FESTIVALS AND PRIZES

### FESTIVALS (2004)

Cannes Film Festival: Official Selection Director's Fortnight.

Edinburgh International Film Festival: Director's Showcase

Pusan International Film Festival

Montreal International Film Festival

Vancouver International Film Festival

San Francisco International Film Festival

Sao Paulo International Film Festival

AFI Festival, Los Angeles

### PRIZES (2004)

Chile's 2004 *Academy Award* Entry For Best Foreign Language Film

Vancouver International Film Festival

*Winner: Audience Award*

Lima (Peru) Latin American Film Festival

*Winner: Audience Award*

Valdivia (Chile) International Film Festival

*Winner: Grand Jury Prize*

Quito (Ecuador) Film Festival

*Winner: Audience Award*

Bogota (Colombia) Film Festival

*Winner: Grand Jury Prize*

Viña del Mar (Chile) Film Festival

*Winner: Grand Jury Prize*

*Winner: Best Director*

*Winner: Best Supporting Actor Manuela Mertelli*

Flanders (Belgium) Film Festival

*Runner-up: Audience Award*