

'Yo': Morelia Review

12:05 PM PST 11/16/2015 by Boyd van Hoeij



Courtesy of Morelia Film Fest

THE BOTTOM LINE

Intriguing but finally too opaque. 

short story by Nobel laureate J.M.G. Le Clezio.

French-born Mexican director Matias Meyer (*The Last of the Christeros*) might seem like a logical choice to bring a film version of the short story *Yo* to the screen, seeing as it was written by Mexico-loving French Nobel laureate, J.M.G. Le Clezio. But something seems to have been lost in the adaptation – though its narrative is more clearly structured and also allows some character development to creep into the story of a man-child with a severe case of arrested development. That said, the film still took top honors at the recent Morelia Film Festival, the country's most important showcase for local talent, which can only bode well for the festival future of this unabashed arthouse item.

"My name is Yo, I'm 15 years old, or that's what they tell me," explains the protagonist (Raul Silva) early on in the film in a voice-over that's more bookish than the loveable simpleton character seems to be himself. As that phrasing suggests, the awkwardly rotund lead, complete with facial hair, definitely looks older than 15 (he might even be double his professed age). He lives in a container that's also partly a storage room at the roadside chicken restaurant manned by his mother (Elizabeth Mendoza), who has started annoying Yo by sleeping with a good-for-nothing who's now also hanging out at the restaurant.

Yo is of course an odd name to have for a Spanish speaker, since it also means "I" or "me," so when he introduces himself he's basically saying "I'm Me." But no one seems to find this odd and the whole name situation becomes even quirkier



(rendered as "No Name" in the subtitles, though "Yo" remains untranslated).

However, that's just a minor oddity in this otherwise naturalistically shot tale, which at the surface seems to be about an outsider living in the countryside, where he's kept occupied with killing the birds from the coop for the needs of the restaurant so his mother has more time to dedicate to her lover. The voiceover, for example, seems to be more intelligent or at least more explicitly aware than the person to whom the voice belongs. For example, at one point the protagonist walks from the restaurant next to the highway to the river beyond the yard to scream his heart out, while his voiceover remarks that he does that so people think he's not retarded or an idiot.

There's also an initially perplexing scene in which a boy in a wheelchair asks Yo if he can dream he can walk again so he'll be free of his disability. Editor Leon Filipe Gonzalez and Meyer progressively drop more (initially quite disorienting) hints in the slow-moving narrative that gradually starts to make sense as a picture emerges of what's really happening here and as Yo begins to emancipate himself and develop relationships with girls and women that aren't his mother. The most touching of these is with 11-year-old Elena (Isis Vanesa Cortes), the daughter of a restaurant employee who likes spending time with Yo. But because he's clearly much older than 15, there's a sense of dread and menace that hangs over their increasingly intimate relationship.

Only very attentive viewing will reveal the complexity of the tale and the characters, though Meyer is just as often teasingly ambiguous, which will

disappears without explanation, while another, who's provocatively dressed and pushy, has sex with Yo, who says he's done this sort of thing before. There's certainly no suggestion he's ever had sex before, and since we never see any money exchange hands, it's not clear whether the woman is a prostitute or just a local nymphomaniac.

If *Yo* starts out as a naturalistic and deliberately paced drama, it ends up as an intriguing but finally too enigmatic and emotionally opaque film, which keeps its lead at a certain distance (Le Clezio's style allowed a more ready access to Yo's admittedly confused thoughts and world). That's not to knock Silva, who is a non-professional — like the rest of the cast in this and all of Meyer's other films — who has a fascinating presence but not quite enough material to work with. The film's sparingly used, occasionally almost drone-like score is as minimalist as the rest of the tech package.

Production companies: Luc, La Pelicula, Axolote Cine, Eficine

Cast: Raul Silva, Elizabeth Mendoza, Ignacio Rojas, Isis Vanesa Cortes, Hugo Garcia Rojas, Alfonso Miguel Gonzalez, Nicolle Stivenshonen

Director: Matias Meyer

Screenplay: Matias Meyer, Alexandre Auger, based on the short story by J.M.G. Le Clezio

Producers: Julio Barcenas, Matias Meyer, Laura Amelia Guzman, Israel Cardenas,



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Matías Meyer, ganador en el Festival de Morelia

Morelia.- La película mexicana "Yo", de Matías Meyer, se erigió la tarde de este sábado la gran ganadora de la 13 edición del Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia, al ser considerado como Mejor Largometraje y obtener la estatuilla a Mejor Actor.

"La primera vez que estuve aquí fue hace once años con mi corto 'El pasajero' y gané, esta vez llegué con mi tercer película y la tercera, fue la vencida", indicó Meyer al momento de tomar el micrófono.

Yo, aborda la historia de un joven que dice tener 15 años, pese a aparentar muchos más. Ama a su mamá, pero detesta al hombre que duerme con ella; un día conoce a una adolescente de 11 años, quien le cambia la vida.

El relato es original de Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Premio Nobel de Literatura 2008. Meyer es hijo del historiador Jean Meyer.

La cinta ya cuenta con agente de ventas internacionales, esperando respuesta de algún distribuidor en México.

Como Mejor Documental se alzó "Los reyes del pueblo que no existe", dirigido por Betzebé García, el cual también fue considerado como Mejor Documental realizado por una mujer.

En Ficción, la cinta "El placer es mío", de Elisa Miller, ganadora en Cannes 2007 con el corto Ver llover, fue condecorado con el premio a Mejor Primer y Segundo Largometraje.

El largo Almacenados, que en su momento tuvo versión teatro, se llevó a casa el codiciado premio del Público.

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Matías Meyer triunfa en Morelia con Yo

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ÉXITO. El realizador Matías Meyer y el actor Raúl Silva, de la película Yo, posan con el trofeo.

El realizador Matías Meyer, mexicano pero nacido en Francia, se convirtió en el ganador de la noche como Mejor Largometraje

Mexicano de la edición 13 del Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia, con su más reciente filme Yo, el cual centra su historia en un hombre que vive con discapacidad mental.

“Estoy muy contento. La primera vez que estuve aquí fue en el 2004, hace 11 años, y aquella vez me estrené con El pasajero como Mejor Cortometraje. Ahora es la tercera vez que vengo con largometraje y la tercera fue la vencida. Muy importante es el premio para la película y mi carrera, para poder seguir haciendo cine, que es un sueño y que es lo más bonito, poder hacer lo que a uno le gusta. Gracias”, expresó el cineasta al recibir el premio El Ojo, que entrega el encuentro filmico.

El filme se centra en la historia de un hombre joven y fuerte, que se hace llamar Yo, pero con habilidades mentales limitadas, pues dice tener quince años aunque parece tener bastantes más. Vive y trabaja en el restaurante de su mamá a un costado de una autopista. Un día conoce a una niña de once años que se llama Elena que le cambia la vida. El papel de Yo fue interpretado por Raúl Silva, un actor no profesional, que también cautivó al jurado y recibió el premio a Mejor Interpretación Masculina.

“Muchas gracias, éste es mi primer papel, es mi primera película, mi primer premio, mi primer festival, y agradezco que me haya recibido con los brazos abiertos, agradezco a las personas que me han dicho que les ha llegado mi personaje o les ha movido algo, es gratificante poder emocionar a la gente”, comentó el actor al recibir su distinción.

Por su parte en la categoría femenina, la ganadora fue la actriz Jana Raluy, protagonista de Un monstruo de mil cabezas, de Rodrigo Plá, quien no pudo estar presente en la ceremonia de premiación pero que envió un mensaje a través de la guionista del filme Laura Santullo:

“Quisiera agradecer a mi madre quien siempre está en los peores momentos y me ayuda a levantarme, porque cuando filmé esta película, fue una época muy difícil para mí y porque ella es la primera que me ha apoyado desde el principio. Dedico este trabajo a mi padre, quien lamentablemente falleció de cáncer, pero que de seguro, donde esté, ahora se debe sentir muy orgulloso de mí”, citó Santullo el mensaje de Raluy.

Dentro de los premios principales también figuraron los filmes de Julio Hernández Cordón, con Te prometo anarquía que ganó una Mención Especial del Jurado y el Guerrero de la Prensa a Mejor Ficción; El Premio del Público para Almacenados de Jack Zagha y Mejor Primer o Segundo Largometraje para El placer es mío de Elisa Miller.

“Siento una enorme gratitud, por el festival y esta vida que no para de sorprender. Estoy agradecida de que la película existe fuera de mí y deseo que el amor, la esperanza y la paz, regresen a este país tan querido”, comentó Miller al recibir su premio.

Cabe destacar que en esta edición se entregó también el Premio al Mérito Periodístico ‘Joaquín Rodríguez’, que este año se otorgó a la periodista Sonia Riquer, al frente del programa radiofónico Gente de Cine, de Radio Educación.

Lista completa de ganadores

LARGOMETRAJE MEXICANO

Premio a Largometraje Mexicano: Yo, de Matías Meyer

Premio a Primero o Segundo Largometraje Mexicano: El placer es mío, de Elisa Miller

Premio del Público de Largometraje Mexicano: Almacenados, de Jack Zagha Kababie

Premio Guerrero de la Prensa Largometraje Mexicano: Te prometo anarquía, de Julio Hernández Cordón

Mejor Actriz de Largometraje Mexicano: Jana Raluy por Un monstruo de mil cabezas

Mejor Actor de Largometraje Mexicano: Raúl Silva por Yo

Mención Especial del Jurado: Te prometo anarquía, de Julio Hernández Cordón

DOCUMENTAL MEXICANO

Premio a Largometraje Documental Mexicano: Los reyes del pueblo que no existe, de Betzabé García

Premio Guerrero de la Prensa Documental Mexicano: El hombre que vio demasiado, de Trisha Ziff

Mejor Documental Realizado por una Mujer:

Los reyes del pueblo que no existe, de Betzabé García

Premio Especial Ambulante: El hombre que vio demasiado, de Trisha Ziff, y El paso, de Everardo González

CORTOMETRAJE MEXICANO

Premio a Cortometraje de Ficción: Bosnian Dream, de Sergio Flores Thorija

Premio a Cortometraje Documental: El buzo, de Esteban Arrangoiz

Premio a Cortometraje de Animación: Rebote, de Nuria Menchaca

Premio a Cortometraje Mexicano en Línea: Donde nunca morirás, de Héctor Alexis Estrada García

SECCIÓN MICHOACANA

Mejor Trabajo: Donde nunca morirás, de Héctor Alexis Estrada García

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CORTOMETRAJE

Premio a Guión de Cortometraje Michoacano: El futuro, de Ernesto Martínez Bucio

IMPULSO MORELIA

Plaza de la Soledad, de Maya Goded

Minezota, de Carlos Enderle

Morelia: Director Matias Meyer on 'Yo,' Mexico's Education Problem



OCTOBER 21, 2015 | 07:24AM PT

COURTESY: MATIAS MEYER

"Yo" bows in competition at Mexico's Morelia Fest

James Young (<http://variety.com/author/james-young/>)

Variety spoke with Matias Meyer (<http://variety.com/t/matias-meyer/>) about his film "Yo" (*pictured*) which, sold by FiGa Films, will be in the main fiction feature competish at this year's Morelia International Film Festival (<http://variety.com/t/morelia-international-film-festival/>), running Oct. 23 – Nov. 1.

His third feature to compete at Morelia, the film – an adaptation of a short story of the same name by Nobel laureate author Jean-Marie Le Clezio – portrays a sensitive young man who may be full grown and feeling sexual desires but lacking the maturity to know how to handle these feelings.

Do you think the place and circumstances of his upbringing played a role in his inability to mature?

Totally, and in fact, it makes me think of one of the main problems in Mexico, which is education. He's never been in school, but when you see him, he's intelligent, and he's tender and can learn very quickly. And that's what we see towards the end of the movie.

In the film, he tells the young girl Elena that he is 15, which he clearly cannot be. How old is really?

The actor is 22 or 23. You don't know how old the character really is. In the short story, he says: 'They told me I'm 15 years old', and he assumes that because they say that.

With the little kid (Elena), society is very afraid of seeing this couple together, so he's definitely older.

Do you think he was lying when he told Elena he was 15?

No, I think he thought that was true. That also shows in a way that he never had a birthday cake. He just believes what people say. Like all the kids he has a huge imagination and in some aspects he can't tell what's real and what's not.

"Yo" is an adaptation from the original short story by Jean-Marie Le Clezio. What was key for you to keep or change in your film?

The structure in the short story is like his mind, really confused. It's more like an association of ideas. I used a more linear structure, so that I would have an evolution of the character. It keeps you turning the page; it keeps audiences in the theater. Le Clezio told me "Yo" is this character that is never going to grow up. And this is different in the movie, because in the end he evolves. You need this evolution of the character in cinema.

You have consistently used non-actors in your features. When might you use professionals?

I'm planning to use professionals in my next two projects. There is a wonderful

new generation of actors in Mexico. There is a lot of creation from the actors, they help to create the character. With non-professionals, they totally trust the director. If you tell them 'That was perfect, that was ok', then they say 'ok'. They won't say: 'I can do more, give me the opportunity.' I think the actor is always pushing themselves to their last physical and emotional limits.

You have said the main character "Yo" is a child in a man's body with sexual desires. How do you see Yo's energy with Elena, Jenny and Luisa?

Elena is also alone. Yo (<http://variety.com/t/yo/>) is very attracted sexually, but he can control this. He knows she's a little girl. And she's very honest and direct with him. They say in Mexico how 'drunks and children tell the truth.' Jenny is very tender with him for a prostitute. She knows it's the first time of this kid. But she's also afraid. 'I'm going to be sweet with you. Can you be the same with me?' But everything goes well finally.

With Luisa, I think he's attracted not by her physique but by her personality, he asks her about her life, about Belize. There's totally a maternal relationship. When he asks her to tell a story and he falls asleep, she just goes out quietly and leaves him sleeping.

With all of these three relationships, for him, it's about trying to fill the absence of the mother.

His mother is so tired of everyday life and all her work that she cannot give him what he needs. He's just asking for a little love and patience. She thinks she's going to have to be stuck with him for the rest of her life.

You are based in Montreal now. Do you think you will keep shooting in Mexico or might you be doing something there?

I'm based in both countries and doing both, but it's still easier in Mexico culturally, even if I'm discovering I can do this in Canada. In Canada, I've been writing a script about Louis Riel, who was a political and spiritual leader of the Metis people who resisted the government. It's about the foundation of Canada, set in 1885. It was a very apocalyptic time for the indigenous people. And in Mexico, my last three films have been adaptations. Now I want to come more from my personal experiences. And the film will be more recognizable to me. It's a lot

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Fotografías de Balam-ha' Carrillo

MATÍAS MEYER, EL ENCUADRE DE LO ÍNTIMO ([HTTPS://WWW.TIERRAADENTRO.CULTURA.GOB.MX/MA- MEYER-EL-ENCUADRE-DE- LO-INTIMO/](https://www.tierraadentro.cultura.gob.mx/ma-meier-el-encuadre-de-lo-intimo/))

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¿Cómo defines tu estilo cinematográfico?
JCM Matías Meyer. Cine muy personal. Lo considero un medio de expresión artístico en donde lo más importante es dejar que las imágenes hablen por sí solas. *Yo* es una adaptación del cuento homónimo de J.M.G. Le Clézio.

Además de este evidente vínculo, ¿qué otros artistas influyen en la obra?

MM. Se vincula con el libro de John Steinbeck, *De ratones y hombres*, por el personaje de Lennie y su relación con las texturas, sensación que intento reflejar en mi cine, donde los espacios son como personajes. A nivel fotográfico trabajo con el claroscuro y lo que está oculto de la personalidad: el mundo inconsciente a través de la luz. Para otras obras retomo la idea de los sueños y del deseo prohibido que se torna en pesadilla de David Lynch.

¿Qué temas se presentan en *Yo* y cuál es la pertinencia de tratarlos en el México actual?

MM. La marginación, la desintegración familiar; el deseo sexual y la pérdida de la inocencia en una realidad un poco chueca, fragmentada como un espejo roto. Son temas constantes en la sociedad mexicana, por ejemplo, con los padres que deben buscar trabajo en Estados Unidos. También está presente la falta de oportunidades por desigualdad social. Ya no puede desarrollar sus capacidades, aunque las tiene, por un tabú hacia las discapacidades intelectuales que va desde familias que sienten vergüenza por sus seres queridos y prefieren encerrarlos en casa hasta las reducidas opciones de movilidad en la ciudad para personas en silla de ruedas. Queremos ir más allá de las apariencias y comprender los verdaderos deseos de estas personas.

como «personas con capacidades distintas», y que se convierten en una celebración de la intolerancia de la que hablaba Slavoj Žižek.

¿Cómo se inserta *Yo* dentro del resto de tus obras?

MM. Es una visión más oscura de la vida, más trágica. Participan más personajes femeninos junto con el tema de la sexualidad, el deseo y los sueños. En esta película la estructura deja de ser lineal para dar un mayor peso al tema del inconsciente, así como a la imaginación del espectador. Esta vez me enfrenté al reto de grabar en interiores, pues filmar en la naturaleza siempre es más fácil. Tienes la belleza del viento, los árboles y todo dicta un ritmo. Estar dentro de cuatro paredes complica la atracción visual.

Son varias las ocasiones en que a partir de la literatura generas una película, ¿qué nexos encuentras entre ambas disciplinas que te conducen a esta decisión?

MM. El guión en el que se basan la mayoría de las películas es una obra literaria sobre la cual el director decide la escritura cinematográfica. Se puede decir que la cámara es como una pluma en donde cada quien imprime el estilo que no está indicado en el guión. Por eso si le das el mismo guión a dos directores, harán películas muy distintas. Las dos disciplinas cuentan historias y en ambas importa tanto lo que cuentas como de qué forma lo haces.

Mucha gente ve una película por los actores que participan en ella. Cuando eliges actores no profesionales, como en *Yo* o *Los últimos cristeros*, ¿decides hacer cine políticamente o es una preferencia estética?

MM. En un principio sí era una cuestión política, pensaba que los actores siempre tenían cara de telenovela y el mismo tono de piel y me gustaba encontrar personajes en la calle que no tenían la estética de la publicidad; pero hace diez años el cine era muy diferente. Ahora los guiones que he escrito no han necesitado

gob.mx (HTTPS://WWW.GOB.MX) actores profesionales pues no tienen mucho diálogo ni emociones precisas. Cuando todo está basado en diálogos —como en las películas de Woody Allen— trabajar con actores no profesionales

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estética que de acción, no es un requisito. Por otro lado, siento un fuerte vínculo con el cine documental y creo que trabajar con actores no profesionales le da ese rasgo a la película. También opto por ellos porque me cuesta trabajo ver los mismos actores en varias películas y deslindarme de la imagen que ya tengo de ellos. En *Yo y en Los últimos cristeros* todo es nuevo, hasta el rostro de los personajes.



(http://www.tierraadentro.cultura.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/rsz_ta217_simples_alta-34.jpg)

¿Y grabar en México?

MM. Es cultural. Creí en México y aquí están los códigos que reconozco. Además, el país me parece muy fotogénico. Aunque vivo medio año en Canadá, me cuesta trabajo vislumbrar una película allá. México tiene más libertad, más improvisación.

¿Consideras que el cine debe mantener un compromiso político con su país o crees en el arte por el arte?

MM. Conuerdo con las dos posturas, pero prefiero lo estético. Me conmueven las películas políticas como *Heli* de Amat Escalante o *Las elegidas* de David Pablos, las cuales son tanto aciertos estéticos como tratamiento de problemáticas actuales, pero igual me gustan las películas de Carlos Reygadas, que no podríamos

relación que mantiene el cine de autor frente al cine comercial.

MM. El cine de autor convive con el cine comercial; aunque en México parece que para tener éxito en una película, esta debe relacionarse con la televisión. Quizá en el futuro algunos directores se cansarán de ser vistos por cinco mil personas y tomarán elementos del cine comercial para probar si les va mejor.

RS. La apertura de temas del cine de autor puede ser interesante en el futuro. El cine comercial parece estar estancado en los mismos asuntos y métodos de producción.

En 2015 se produjo el mayor número de películas en la historia de México: ciento cuarenta. Sin embargo, sólo se exhibieron ochenta. ¿A qué atribuyes esto?

MM. Al monopolio de las pelicolotas. Cuando se invierte el mismo dinero en la producción que en la promoción, te enteras de ellas aunque no quieras. Esta manipulación te conduce a una obra que se apropia de los espacios de exhibición —donde las películas se convierten en mercancía y no en un bien cultural— y así, si una obra no genera ingresos, es retirada al poco tiempo. En vez de tener tantos horarios, las películas deberían quedarse por más tiempo para que las personas las descubran y recomienden, que es la mejor publicidad. Por otro lado, hacer cine es bastante caro. Nosotros aplicamos al EFICINE y sin ese apoyo no hubiéramos podido distribuir *Yo*. Muchas películas independientes terminan con deudas y no consiguen la posproducción y distribución. También puede ser que de esas ciento cuarenta películas no todas pasen el filtro para tener un estreno, aunque otras sí lo merecen y no lo consiguen.

¿Qué tan complicado es encontrar una distribuidora en México?

MM. Cada vez hay más opciones. Muchas productoras también son

gob.mx ([HTTPS://WWW.GOB.MX](https://www.gob.mx)) distribuidoras y así sustentan su empresa, como PIANO. Cuando recibes un estímulo fiscal puedes cubrir gastos como la distribución y entonces todo lo que la película recauda se convierte en ganancia.

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MM. No es fácil. Necesitas tener una buena carpeta, a un inversionista contribuyente y que una distribuidora, en nuestro caso INTERIOR XIII, haga toda la aplicación.

La productora de la que eres cofundador, Axolote Cine, ¿surge como respuesta a algún conflicto con el tema de la producción?

MM. Faltan productores. Muchas veces surgen a partir de una película a la que le va bien, pero luego el productor recibe tantos proyectos que no puede aceptarlos. Creamos esa empresa como una cooperativa de ocho socios que buscan apoyarse al compartir gastos, oficina y materiales para películas de un mismo sello. Sin embargo, cada vez se crean más casas productoras.

¿Qué otras carencias encuentras en el cine mexicano actual?

MM. La difusión es la principal carencia del cine mexicano. Luego están la falta de productores y de guionistas.

RS. Un problema del cine mexicano es que no lo ven los mexicanos. Puede ser por falta de interés o por un prejuicio respecto a los temas y su presupuesto. Mucha gente espera las formas de Hollywood y ve al cine como un simple entretenimiento y no como una oportunidad para aprender sobre una pieza de arte.

¿Qué estrategias fomentarían el consumo de cine en México?

MM. Empezaría por enseñar, en las escuelas historia del cine mexicano, apreciación cinematográfica y películas mexicanas contemporáneas para despertar el interés desde jóvenes y desacostumbrar al público del lenguaje de las películas gringas. También haría más pantallas para exhibir las películas por más tiempo y recomendaría pasar cine mexicano en la televisión, los aviones y los camiones, y así difundirlo más allá de las élites.

RS. En ese sentido son importantes las carpas donde se exhibe cine

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problemas?


RS. Espacios como la Cineteca dan oportunidades que no existen en las salas comerciales. Además, fomentan el respeto por la película y no se dedican a exhibir durante veinte minutos puros comerciales.


MM. De hecho, esos veinte minutos de anuncios antes de las películas darían tiempo suficiente para exhibir una película mexicana al día. Es horrible tener que ver comerciales de coches y de partidos políticos cuando pagaste un boleto. En Francia informan el horario de la función y el de la película, por si quieres evitar la publicidad. Reconozco el trabajo de páginas como FilminLatino (https://www.filminlatino.mx/) y Retina Latina (http://retinalatina.org/) y de festivales que ayudan a crear público y dar visibilidad.

¿Y el Estado, cómo participa?

MM. Produce casi todo el cine nacional, pues la inversión privada es una minoría. El cine simplemente no existiría sin el apoyo del Estado.

COMPARTE:

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AUTORES

Magaly Olivera (https://www.tierraadentro.cultura.gob.mx/author/magaly-olivera/) (Ciudad de México, 1991) ha trabajado en edición en la Dirección General de Publicaciones de la UNA M, la gira de documentales Ambulante y fue responsable de la sección Letras para la web de *La*



The Glass Bottom Boat of the Cultural Press

Matías Meyer

In [Interviews](#) July 14, 2016



Reflections of Man In Nature: Yo, the meditative new film by Matías Meyer

by [Generoso](#) and [Lily Fierro](#)

On June 17th and 18th, the UCLA Film & Television Archive presented the first complete retrospective on the work of emerging independent Mexican filmmaker Matías Meyer. The retrospective collected the short films across Meyer's career, including his first films made as a student at Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, and his four feature films, with his most recent film, *Yo*, receiving its US premiere on the opening night of the series.

In all of Meyer's films, voyages frame the narratives for both the characters and the viewers, and in each voyage, the environment and the characters have a tacit yet well-understood relationship with each other, moving in a fluid call-and-response way to the presence of one another. As a result, the environment is as much, if not more, of a character than the people in Meyer's films. With the exception of his most recent short, which was filmed in Meyer's current half-home of Quebec, *Le*

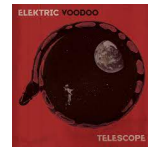
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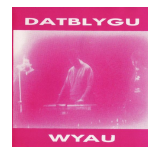
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the ever-changing environment of Mexico, whether looking at its past, as seen in his documentary, *Moros y Cristianos* (“Moors and Christians”), about the largest open-air group presentation in all of Latin America, a re-enactment of the 16th century Battle of Lepanto, and his most ambitious narrative feature, *Los Últimos Cristeros* (“The Last Cristeros”), set during Zapata-era Mexico, or its present day, with films like *Wadley*, an experimental view into one man’s journey through the wild Mexican landscape, and *Yo*, which, based on our conversation with Matías during the series, is his most personal film to date.

Yo refers to the title character (played by Raúl Silva Gómez), a large man in his early twenties who we soon realize is functional, yet developmentally challenged, and as thus, he remains in a state of perpetual adolescence. Yo is under the care of his mother (Elizabeth Mendoza), and they both live and work at the family restaurant where Yo has the unenviable task of slaughtering and plucking the chickens that they serve. Also residing with Yo is his mother’s lover Pady (Ignacio Rojas Nieto), a brutish man in his fifties who has a tendency towards being abusive towards Yo, which seems to have become so commonplace that no one in the house raises any concern, including Yo, who seems content with his menial tasks and chances to play with his coins on the floor of the restaurant and goes unnoticed to the patrons as though he is a piece of furniture, a trivial part of the restaurant setting. This is the first moment that one notices humans’ interactions with their surroundings, a key element in most of Meyer’s previous work.

Furthering this motif of man’s reaction to his environment, man-made or natural, are the moments when Yo, who takes great joy in watching the giant tractor-trailer trucks that tear through his normally serene Mexican village, becomes plagued by nightmares of the local river dangerously overflowing, which wakes Yo from his sleep and forces his mother to reassure him by taking him to the still, placid river in the middle of the night. Even though Yo’s mother turns a blind eye to the abuses in the home by championing her lover over her son, she is still overprotective of Yo when it comes to how he might function outside of her grasp.

With business in the restaurant improving, Yo’s mother hires a woman to help her out who must also bring her eleven-year-old daughter, Elena (Isis Vanesa Cortés), to the restaurant everyday. Elena and Yo immediately become friends, but with this newfound friendship comes a layer of tension for the viewer as Yo, who has had limited interactions with women, may not have the emotional maturity to control his sexual impulses. Yo and Elena take frequent trips to the nearby river together and play with one another in a flirtatious way, but Elena, who seems



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Death Valley Girls

Music Reviews August 23, 2021

twenty-two, these moments with Elena are most likely his first foray into society without the guarded eye of his mother there to establish order. No one has gotten hurt, but soon Yo will be forced to face the outside world head-on when Pady purchases a machine that can handle Yo's singular chore of killing and plucking the chickens for the restaurant. Pady then calls in friends to get Yo work hauling rubble at a local construction site, so Yo can begin the process of becoming an adult away from his mother's daily reach.

Once on the construction site, Yo does hard physical labor and is up to the task, much to the delight of his co-workers and his supervisor. Yo even makes friends at his new job, friends who expose Yo even further to mainstream society as they introduce Yo to the vices of alcohol and prostitution. Whether Yo's newfound friends are laughing with him or at him, they welcome him as part of their group and take him to nightspots where Yo again blends into his surroundings without appearing too out of place, but just like the river that Yo imagines overflowing, how long will his inner peace remain intact given the ever changing environment around him?

As opposed to Meyer's previous feature, the Zapata-era film, *Los Últimos Cristeros*, *Yo* is a fairly modest production that involves a small amount of actors, the usual use of the set, one-camera shot for most scenes, and a few locations, but like his previous feature, it utilizes the spacious natural terrain of Mexico to cleverly further the development of the film's central characters. The tension that Meyer creates with his character of Yo and his disenfranchisement with his surroundings is palpable throughout the film in the same eerily quiet and ominous way that Iranian director Jafar Panahi presents in his equally marginalized central character of Hussein, the beleaguered and impoverished pizza delivery man who wanders through a unwelcoming Tehran, in his 2003 film, *Crimson Gold*. As in *Crimson Gold*, an excellently crafted level of tension is what drives the narrative even during the most tranquil of scenes, which provided the main reason why we were so completely engaged with the film.

Impressed by Meyer's achievement in his fourth feature, my wife Lily and I were fortunate enough to sit down with the young director to discuss his work the day after attending the screening of *Yo* at UCLA.

Review by **Scott Adams**.



Marc Wasserman

SKA BOOM! :An American Ska & Reggae Oral History

Print Reviews August 20, 2021

Marc Wasserman gives us an oral history of American Ska.

 **Director Matías Meyer speaks with Lily Fierro at the UCLA's Hammer Museum**
photo by Generoso Fierro
Director Matías Meyer speaks with Lily Fierro at the UCLA's Hammer Museum

Lily Fierro: Last night, during the premiere of *Yo*, you spoke about the invisibility of Mexican cinema. In your answer, you had mentioned that some of your fellow directors believe that making films more specific to what audiences want, is a solution to this issue. You said that this would not be your own approach. In what way do you think that Mexican filmmakers can make films that capture Mexico's landscape, culture, and tradition without concern that foreign audiences may feel alienated?

Matías Meyer: The thing is in Mexico City, recently, there was the Mexican "Oscars," called The Ariel Awards, and we went to the ceremony and saw the famed director Paul Leduc, who was receiving a Golden Ariel for his career, make a speech for fifteen minutes that focused on the invisibility of Mexican cinema. The government is very proud to say that they have produced one hundred and fifty films a year, and he responded by saying that yes, but no one ever sees them. He then said something that really registered for me, and that was, "Mexicans do not really want to be Mexican. Culturally, they are more into the American cultural empire."

I myself, grew up in a small town in Mexico, and for most young people, it was about wearing Nikes to be more like Michael Jordan or about American football and Deion Sanders, so it was more about this part of American culture. So, you have this American dream, about how cool it is to live in the United States, and for entertainment and films, you have the Rambos and the Commandos that you watched on television, but on the other side, you have the telenovelas, that are all about drama and class struggles. Mexicans are always watching television; even when you see a taco vendor in the street, they will have a small television, and if they are not watching sports, they are watching the telenovelas. So, the public has not been created for accepting other kinds of movies, which leads me to think that the problem is that the public has not been properly informed. I think that the bigger problem in Mexico is about education. Now, there is a large movement of teachers pushing for educational reform, but the roadblocks are the syndicates and the political power of syndicates, so the whole thing ends up being not about learning and educating. I don't know how we can fight against this problem; we can try to find a goal via entertainment, but I don't believe that we can succeed.

I am working on a new film that I hope is less niche than the films that I have done to this point in the hopes of having a wide appeal, but I am not sure if I can achieve this. In the long term, perhaps showing more Mexican films on television is the solution, so Mexican culture, instead of American culture, becomes the norm on the most popular medium for people of Mexico.

ingesting media, does a place exist where arthouse cinema is still shown on a large screen?

Matías Meyer: There is in Mexico City, in Coyoacán, which is the area where Frida Kahlo used to live, a cinematheque that has existed for thirty or forty years that has just been remodeled. It used to have six screening rooms, and now, it has twelve. It is a beautiful place where you can have coffee, and there are even outdoor screenings that are free for the public. The theater gets about a million patrons a year, and if your film is there, it will definitely have an audience. I have just released *Yo* in Mexico City and six other cities, and to this point, five thousand people have seen the film, and the cinematheque represents forty-five percent of that total viewership. As far as the other theaters that have shown it, they have pulled it after one week, so films like this shouldn't be at a multiplex; they should be screened at arthouse cinemas, so we really need more of them. Mexico City has twenty five million people but only one arthouse theater, so the need is there for more cinematheques in not only Mexico City but in the other cities and villages as well.

Lily Fierro: Could you speak about the origins of *Yo*?

Matías Meyer: *Yo* was made right after *Los Últimos Cristeros* (2012), which is the biggest film I have made until now. That film is a western that is set in the 1930s during the revolution, which was a labor-intensive process, so after its completion, I was looking for a different kind of project. One day, my mother gave me this book by Jean-Marie Le Clézio, and she told me that it was a collection of short stories and that there was one story that she felt that I might like, and she was correct. Even though I liked all of the stories, there was indeed one story that I wanted to adapt and see onscreen and that was the story called "Yo". Also, these days, whenever I think of a film, I immediately take into account the production concerns, which ultimately makes me ask myself the question: Am I going to be able to make this film? Most of the story takes place in the restaurant and only involves a few characters, so the production would not be too complicated, and as Jean-Marie Le Clézio was a friend of my family, since he met my father while they were in their early twenties, he graciously gave me the rights to make the film. As "Yo" impacted me so heavily, the next day I contacted a screenwriter friend of mine in Canada and told him that this story would make a good film and that I would send it to him immediately. He read it soon afterwards and agreed that it would make an excellent film.

In a personal way, I wanted to make the film as I have a nephew who reminds me of Yo, as they have similar developmental issues, and my nephew was at the same

sexual attraction to other people. For my nephew and Yo, dealing with sexuality becomes so socially awkward because even if they have been presented with normal societal examples of how to deal with their feelings, they still have issues with their expressions of sexual desire. Besides the connection to my nephew, I also wanted to make a more narrative film as *Los Últimos Cristeros* is more about wandering and experiences, and with “Yo” I thought there was the potential for more traditional narrative structure and the opportunity to convey the anxiety that comes through in the story. There is a feeling of suspense that manifests due to unpredictable nature of Yo’s character that I also found interesting.

Generoso Fierro: Does the short story by Jean-Marie Le Clézio occur in France?

What was the process of adapting an originally French story for Mexico?

Matías Meyer: I felt that the story was very universal. It is about this boy living with his mother on the side of the highway and his relationship with the little girl and the workers whom he comes to be with, so the film could’ve been shot anywhere. I knew that funding would’ve been easier in Mexico as opposed to where I live now in Canada, but I did write the script in French and translated it to Spanish because the co-writer is French-Canadian.

Lily Fierro: We were able to see two of your films yesterday evening that focused on sojourns into nature. The lead character in your first feature film, *Wadley*, exists entirely in nature as he escapes the city for the desert, and in your newest film, *Yo*, the titular character uses the the nearby river as a place to re-center himself, for it is a place of purity. But, does the river also represent the source of Yo’s essence of being, where he is more of an embodiment of nature than others?

Matías Meyer: I think that is a good interpretation. I like to leave my films open to personal interpretation to allow the viewer to be more interactive and less passive with what is onscreen. There is the scene in *Yo* when the mother takes the girl Elena and says, “Where were you? I was very worried, and I do not want you going to that place again,” and Yo goes to the waterfalls, and there is the moonlight, and I don’t know why, but this scene reminds me of Percival from *Le Morte d’Arthur*. I had this memory from when I was a child of watching this film on television where Percival is showered with the blood of a dragon that he has slain and that blood will make him immortal. So, I don’t know why, but I felt that this scene always made me believe that nature is a mystical place.

Generoso Fierro: There is a level of mechanization that increases in *Yo* as he is haphazardly forced onto a journey to manhood. The chicken barrel displaces his

trucks and cranes appear and carry far more than any human can, foreshadowing the eventual mechanization of his job hauling construction excess. Simultaneously, Yo is encountering more men in his life, and they place him in precarious situations involving alcohol and sexuality. How were you thinking about balancing conflicts between the pure essence of male human nature and evolving environment?

Matías Meyer: In a certain way, I think that it is good that Pady, the man who is the lover of Yo's mother, is a bit forceful with Yo because mothers can be a bit too protective of their children. So, I like that Pady pushes Yo, which forces will him evolve and to find his own place in society. In his mother's house, Yo is never going to succeed, and I think that is part of the problem when you have a disabled child: that you, as a parent, become too frightened for them if they go out into the world.

Generoso Fierro: I think that you exemplify that point visually about halfway through in the film. There is a great shot where Yo is playing on the floor of his mother's restaurant when Pady brings in the construction workers who Yo will eventually work for as Yo's role in the restaurant has changed now that a machine has been brought in to pluck the chickens.

Matías Meyer: Yes, there is a position in nature, and there is also a place for human constructed spaces like the beautiful land near the restaurant that is violated by the highway with its cars and loud noise. There is this element of man against nature that I wanted to show: how the world that man has created is so noisy, which conflicts with nature, and how by immersing yourself in a natural setting we can find a more original state where we can live harmoniously.

Lily Fierro: Given your fascination with Mexico's culture and your desire to depict it on screen, we have to address the non-secular elements of Yo. Specifically, Yo's Madonna-Whore complex that plays out between the four main women of the film: his mother, Elena, Jenny, Luisa. You avoid idolatry in all of the settings, but elements of Catholicism are subtly portrayed through Elena's parochial school uniform and in the music you use, especially in the club scene where a disco version of "Ave Maria" plays in the background. Do you see organized faith (or its integration into society) as being as much in conflict with the natural environment as rapid mechanization?

Matías Meyer: That disco version of "Ave Maria" is in the book, actually. There are some people who say that Roman Catholicism is a lie because the day that Christ is born is actually the shortest day of the year, so by doing that, they are associating astronomy with religion. And I respond with, "Well yes, but is that is the opposite of religion?" I personally don't think so as Christ is the son of God, and you can see this with the use of icons, which only help us to identify more

say that faith or religion is bad; it is what we make of it, the same as science, which you should never say is a bad thing. I come from a religious family, but I never went to church. In terms of faith, my father would read the Bible to us on Sunday night before we went to sleep, and for me this was perfect, and that is why I don't have any issues with Catholicism because I was never forced to go to church, which I think is a terrible way to introduce faith to a child. It is better for your children to discover God in their own way.

• •

We would live to give special thanks to Matías Meyer for his time and for his generous responses during our interview with him, and to Shannon Kelley, the Head of Public Programs, UCLA Film & Television Archive, who made this series possible.



Official Trailer: vimeo.com/151978177

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Review by Vanessa Bormann.

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Music Reviews December 18, 1998

Florida Ska, Volume 2 (Citrus).
Review by **Andrew Chadwick**

Dragon Con 2000
Event Reviews August 3, 2000

Dragon Con 2000, Atlanta, GA
(event review and photos by Frank Mullen).



Unsound
Music Reviews December 4, 2006

Unsound (Epitaph). Review by David Barker.



Ryan and Pony
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Moshi Moshi
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