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## Yo Soy Cuba

Crying foul on director Mikhail Kalatozov's deliriously unhinged, masterful slice of post-Bay of Pigs agitprop for its unapologetic commitment to ideology would be tantamount to artistic heresy and shortsighted emphasis on the political over the artistic if the film weren't such a bold and brazen reclamation of that age old fact that art is innately political no matter what.

Plunging into the revelry of fantastical space as obviously euphoric as Lang's Metropolis city was demonic, and as bodaciously animated as Lang's vision to boot, Yo Soy Cuba is an aesthetic vision primarily. But with these aesthetics, the proof is in the proverbial politics to begin with. Separating this far-out vision of a largely fictive representation of Cuban life from its animated muse – its Soviet morality – is at some level impossible: like Eisenstein's utilization of montage to stage ideas of collective conflict, cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky's aesthetic revolutions aren't apolitical.

Yo Soy Cuba is a vivacious workout, a Communist high palpably star-struck by the wave of political revolution it presumed (or hoped) was on the horizon, a film bathed in all the passions genuine belief can muster, and a work that marshals an unmediated, even crazed support for Cuban life into a catalyst for unbridled cinematic experimentation positively running wild with screw-loose charisma.

Revolutionary cinema, Yo Soy Cuba isn't merely a narrative of communist propaganda or a neutered, neutral-styled narrative of social upheaval that still caters (like almost all politically "radical" American films) to the broadly individualistic cinematic style it purports to redress. Instead, Cuba is a unilaterally adventurous, fiercely aestheticized, stylistically contentious rebuttal to the staid capitalist style of production-line American cinema. It's a glove to the face of not only American politics but American film, weaving between and fluidly intermingling people, places, and objects without privileging any in a distinctly anti-capitalist milieu. Wryly anthropomorphizing the angry island itself with a deadpan melodrama voiceover from the island's perspective (a voice that cheekily pays homage to Columbus and then throws him to the wolves within seconds) is an early key-in to the film's desire to explore space rather than simply depict it like most Hollywood pictures. From there, the luxuriant whirlpool of mise-en-scene and cinematography suggests a subjective, revisable sense of place that defies and defeats Hollywood understandings of a stable world sitting by so only people can focus our attention. The camera exhibits a runner's high, except it doesn't run so much as glide and saunter through a locale it observes like the camera is one of the island's limbs.

Ultimately, the ever-motile camera adopts a rapturous search for new meaning more akin to a

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documentary's active, present-tense quest to brave the unexplored caverns of the world with every shot. Unlike most American films, where locations and material items are background props – manufactured objects utilized only for protagonists to conquer or otherwise pay no attention to – the frames of *Yo Soy Cuba* cannot so easily be compartmentalized into “focus” and “backdrop”. The camera doesn't center lone people, individualized in the frame as foregrounded subjects for whom the rest of the world is merely an obstacle to triumph (thus feeding into the Western liberalist logic of individualism). Instead, Kalatozov comingles not only individual stories of different people but interweaves people with environment in deep-focus shots to tie humanity to the land and individuals to their broader social contexts, to the collective. In contrast to the hyper-directed, linear, pseudo-objective Western film style of America at the time, Cuba borrows French poetic realism and German Expressionism along with Soviet realism to brew up a reflexive, subjective head-space where people are if not one with the world at least part of it rather than totems who rise above it; the way the camera flows between people and moments is a visual approximation, in spirit, of that oft-unclarifiable idea of “collective consciousness” trumpeted by leftist scholars.

Like the early Soviet epics of the '20s, *Yo Soy Cuba* is fiercely reticent to accept the American narrativization of cinema; rather than wrapping around the world of an individual in conflict, the film shifts with almost free-wheeling, baroque abandon between stories and angles to suggest, like Eisenstein, that the world is too messy and bedeviling to be compartmentalized into a concise narrative of personal, individual psychology and progress.

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