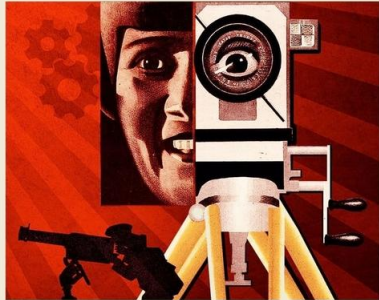




MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

DOCUMENTARY

Man with a Movie Camera

1929 · Directed by Dziga Vertov

Silent Cinema

Soviet Montage

Art Cinema

A cameraman and his camera travel through a single day of city life, from waking streets to factories, beaches and theatres. There is no story and no actors in the usual sense: the film is an argument about what cinema can do, made out of everyday reality.

DIRECTOR Dziga Vertov

YEAR 1929

RUNTIME 1h 08m (68 min)

COUNTRY Soviet Union

GENRES Documentary

CAST Mikhail Kaufman

IMDB 8.3 / 10 (30,786 votes)

ROTTEN
TOMATOES 98% (critics)

METACRITIC 96 / 100

TMDB SCORE 78 / 10 (833 votes)



WHERE TO WATCH
Free: [Search YouTube \(restored / 4K\)](#)
Free: [Search YouTube \(all versions\)](#)
Free: [Search Internet Archive](#)
Stream (US): Brew, GuideDoc
Rent: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Fandango At Home
Buy: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Fandango At Home

Part one is spoiler-free. Part two, "After watching", reveals the story, scenes and ending.

Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 The most radical experiment of Soviet montage

Dziga Vertov's best-known work pushes the montage movement to its limit, using superimpositions, split screens, freeze frames and rapid cutting to treat film as a language of its own, free of theatre and literature.

2 A film about filmmaking itself

Cameras, editing tables and audiences appear on screen throughout. It is among the earliest and boldest films to show its own making, which makes it a lasting reference for self-aware cinema.

3 A city symphony with no script

Footage from several Soviet cities is woven into one imagined day. It reads as both documentary and visual poetry, and it still feels fresh in its energy and invention.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A defining film of the 1920s avant-garde and of the city symphony form, it set out a vision of non-fiction cinema as formal experiment that documentarians and video artists still return to.



WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a demonstration of what only cinema can do, not as a documentary about a place.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How often the film reveals its own making: the cameraman with his tripod, the editor at her table, the audience in the theatre.
- The rhythm of the cutting: when it speeds up, when it slows or freezes, and how movements in one shot answer movements in the next.
- The visual tricks: double exposure, split screens and unusual angles, and what each makes you notice about ordinary things.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

If a film has no story and no characters to follow, what holds your attention, and what is it asking you to see differently?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Soviet context:** After the 1917 revolution, the state backed film as a tool for educating and mobilising a huge, partly illiterate population. Montage was treated as both an art and a political method.
- **Vertov's position:** Vertov led the Kino-Eye group, which rejected staged drama as bourgeois and wanted the camera to record life as it is, then reorganise it by editing. He also ran an ongoing quarrel with Eisenstein's fiction films.
- **City symphonies:** Films such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) used a day in a city as a structure. Vertov's film shares the form but is far more radical in technique.
- **Technology:** Silent film was at its technical peak, just before sound took over. Lightweight cameras and fast stock allowed filming in the street, in motion and from unusual angles.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

MOVEMENT

Soviet Montage

Eisenstein, Kuleshov and Pudovkin treated editing as the core of film art. Vertov shared the premise but applied it to non-fiction.





FILM

Berlin: Symphony of a Great City (1927)

Walter Ruttmann's film established the city symphony as a form, organising a day in a city by rhythm. Vertov's film is a more radical version.



FILMMAKER

Kino-Eye

Vertov's own theory and newsreel series, which called for the camera to record unstaged life and use editing to reveal its meaning.



THIS FILM

Man with a Movie Camera (1929)

NEW AT THE TIME *It showed the full machinery of cinema (camera, editor, projector, audience) as part of the subject, and used trick effects on real footage as a form of argument.*

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Very fast and dense. Shots are often only a second or two long, so the film rewards attention more than patience.
- **Format:** Experimental non-fiction with no plot, no characters and no intertitles in the usual sense. It is built like a piece of music.
- **Sound:** Silent. Scores vary by release; the best-known modern accompaniments are by the Alloy Orchestra and the Cinematic Orchestra.
- **Colour and ratio:** Black and white, in the standard silent-era 1.33:1 frame.
- **Language:** Almost no text. A title card at the start states the film's aim, and no knowledge of Russian is needed.



After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film proposes cinema as a new way of seeing, more capable than the human eye, which can join scenes from different places into one reality. It can be read as a manifesto for the camera as a tool of both knowledge and revolution.

THEMES

- **The camera as a superior eye:** Vertov holds that the camera can see and connect what the eye cannot, and the film keeps testing that claim through speed, angle and superimposition.
- **Modern life and machines:** Trams, factories, telephone exchanges and the human body at work are shown in the same rhythm, so people and machinery appear as parts of one system.
- **Work and leisure:** The imagined day moves from labour to rest and play, presenting the new Soviet society as a collective organism.
- **Filmmaking as labour:** The cameraman and the editor are shown as workers like any other, and the audience is shown reacting. Cinema is a process of making and watching, not a finished illusion.

Key scenes

The editing room

Footage of the editor, Elizaveta Svilova, handling film strips and freeze frames shows how the images are assembled. It reveals the film's method and honours editing as a creative act.

The camera at the heart of the city

The cameraman is shown filming from rooftops, vehicles and unlikely places. The sequences show the film's belief that the camera can go anywhere and change what is seen.

The accelerating finale

The cutting speeds up as shots of work, play, traffic and machinery intercut. The result is a compressed demonstration of montage as rhythm and meaning.

The theatre curtain and the audience

The film begins in an empty cinema that fills with viewers, and the film within the film begins. It frames the whole work as a conversation between screen and spectator.



Filmmaking

- **Editing:** Vertov and Svilova cut on movement, shape and rhythm rather than story. Matching actions across different places and times builds a feeling of unity from scattered footage.
- **Camera work:** Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov's brother, shot from trams, cars and heights, with tracking, low angles and extreme close-ups. The camera is an active participant rather than a neutral observer.
- **Special effects:** Split screens, double exposures, stop motion and slow or reversed motion are used on real material, as part of the argument that film can reshape reality.
- **Structure:** The film is arranged as a day from dawn to night, but the places are drawn from several cities, notably Moscow, Kyiv and Odessa. The unity is constructed by editing.
- **Music:** No original score is credited. Vertov left detailed notes about intended rhythm, and modern scores vary a great deal in how they interpret them.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

There is no plot. The film opens in a cinema, where the projectionist prepares the show and an audience takes its seats. The screen then fills with images of a city waking up: closed shop windows, a sleeping woman, empty streets, and machines slowly starting up.

As the day goes on, the film moves through trams and traffic, factories and mines, telephone operators, marriage and divorce offices, street vendors, and a birth. Throughout, the cameraman is shown at work, climbing, riding and lying in the road to capture what he sees.

Midway, the editor appears at her table, cutting the same footage we have been watching. The film then shows the footage reaching its audience, who react to the images on screen.

In the later sections, the city turns to leisure: beaches, sports, sunbathing and games. Pace quickens until factories, athletes, vehicles and crowds are intercut at great speed. The film ends with a famous image of the camera lens, seen through an eye, as the movie finishes. The audience leaves, and the cinema empties.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **A family project:** Vertov directed, his brother Mikhail Kaufman shot, and his wife Elizaveta Svilova edited. The credits are unusually clear about the three roles, which suits a film that treats camera work and editing as equal creative acts.
- **Against fiction:** Vertov belonged to a group that rejected scripted drama. The film was released with an intertitle stating that it is an experiment in conveying visible events without intertitles, scenario or theatre, so the manifesto is built into the film.
- **Made for VUFKU:** The film was produced by the Ukrainian film studio VUFKU, which is why Kyiv and Odessa feature so prominently alongside Moscow. The city on screen is a composite, not one place.



- **Reception in Russia:** Critics in the Soviet Union were divided. Some thought the film's formal play was too hard for ordinary audiences, and Vertov's relationship with film authorities grew increasingly difficult in the years that followed.
- **Myth:** It is a straightforward documentary of one day in a Soviet city. **Reality:** The footage comes from several cities and was shot over a long period. Vertov arranged it into an imaginary single day, and staged or manipulated several scenes.
- **Myth:** Kaufman and the cameraman on screen are simply the film's documentary subject. **Reality:** Mikhail Kaufman is both cameraman and performer, and many shots of him were arranged for the film. His presence is part of its self-aware design.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

MOVEMENT

Soviet Montage

Eisenstein, Kuleshov and Pudovkin treated editing as the core of film art. Vertov shared the premise but applied it to non-fiction.



FILM

Berlin: Symphony of a Great City (1927)

Walter Ruttmann's film established the city symphony as a form, organising a day in a city by rhythm. Vertov's film is a more radical version.



FILMMAKER

Kino-Eye

Vertov's own theory and newsreel series, which called for the camera to record unstaged life and use editing to reveal its meaning.



THIS FILM

Man with a Movie Camera (1929)



MOVEMENT

Cinéma vérité

Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin took the name from Vertov's Kino-Pravda and used light cameras to observe real life.



FILMMAKER

Jean-Luc Godard

Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin formed the Dziga Vertov Group, drawing on his politics of film form.





TRADITION

Essay film and experimental documentary

Filmmakers like Chris Marker later explored reality through montage, commentary and self-reflection, extending Vertov's ideas.

Reception and reputation

Reception was mixed. The film had admirers in avant-garde circles abroad, and was shown in Europe and the United States. In the USSR some critics thought it too formalist and hard to follow, and it was not a popular success with ordinary audiences.

Its reputation grew steadily from the 1960s, as filmmakers and scholars rediscovered Vertov. It is now regarded as one of the key films of silent cinema and a standard reference for experimental and essay filmmaking. In the 2010s, a critics' poll placed it very high.

Its lasting influence

Vertov's ideas fed into cinéma vérité, Jean-Luc Godard's Dziga Vertov Group, and later essay films and experimental documentary. Its mix of observation and visible technique anticipates modern video art and music-video editing.

WHAT NEXT?

EXPLORE THE ERA OR MOVEMENT

Battleship Potemkin (1925)

The other great Soviet montage landmark. Eisenstein uses editing for dramatic emotion, which makes a revealing contrast with Vertov's non-fiction approach.

COMPARE ANOTHER APPROACH

Sunrise (1927)

Another late silent film that pushes camera movement and visual invention, but in the service of a story. It shows what fiction cinema could do with similar freedom.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

Sherlock Jr. (1924)

Buster Keaton's comedy about a projectionist who enters a film is another silent work about cinema's own illusions.

JUMP FORWARD

Breathless (1960)

Godard's New Wave debut treats editing and the camera as visible, expressive tools, in a spirit close to Vertov's.



Cinespective

FILM SHEET

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (1929)

FULL CAST AND CREW



Dziga Vertov

DIRECTOR



Mikhail Kaufman

ACTOR

as The Cameraman

Draft content generated for Cinespective and subject to review; awards and dates should be verified before being relied upon. This product uses the TMDB API but is not endorsed or certified by TMDB. Streaming availability by JustWatch via TMDB.