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A Critical Reflection on the Importance of Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera

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Abstract. Giga Virtov's The Man with a Movie Camera is a 68-minute experimental silent documentary of the Soviet period of innovative art. Although it has been criticized for its strong experimentality, insufficient emotional depth and over-reliance on technology, it is still of great significance in the current digital media environment. This article believes that the film uses montage to break the linear narrative, integrate different space-time images, and lay the foundation for the modern digital visual information architecture. This core contribution has a far-reaching impact. Nowadays, short video platforms often use montage to attract audiences. In addition, the "Kino-Eye" theory provides a reference for immersive interactive visual perception, and the transparency of the media production shown by the film also enhances the audience's trust. In summary, it not only shapes the current digital media design, but also provides a classic analysis model that emphasizes visual appeal, immersion and transparency for future digital experiences.

Keywords: Dziga Vertov, Man with a Movie Camera, montage technique, Kino-Eye theory, digital media transparency

1. Introduction

Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera (1929) was a milestone in Soviet avant-garde cinema, completely out of the traditional documentary framework. This film was born during the Soviet art experiment period. There is no script, dialogue and protagonist, and it shows the rhythm of urban life by visual language alone. The following poster vividly summarizes the core theme - mechanical gears symbolize the innovation of the industrial era, the "Kino-Eye" style camera and industrial aesthetics highlight the characteristics, and also show the live music performance of Montopoulos, reflecting the vivid artistic interpretation of the film in contemporary times.Although it was criticized in the early days for its focus on formal innovation, weak emotional expression, and addiction to technical gimmicks, it has long surpassed the times and become a classic of media theory and practice. In the current digital era dominated by short videos and immersive technology, its technology is particularly forward-looking. This article will discuss its three major contributions to modern digital media: montage reconstructs the visual narrative, the theory of "Kino-Eyes" lays the foundation for immersive interaction, and emphasizes media transparency to cultivate audience trust, so as to highlight its lasting significance for current and future digital media design.

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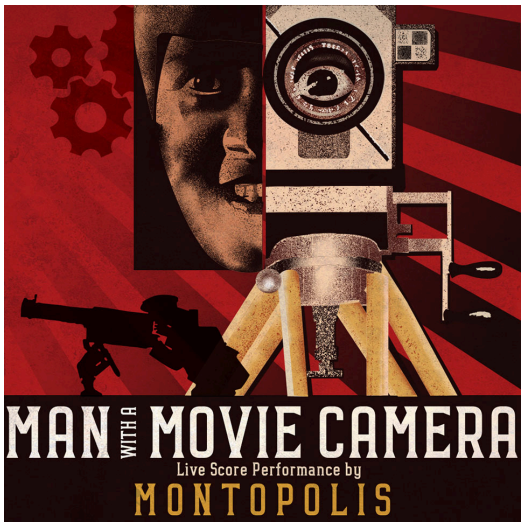

Figure 1. Poster of Man with a Movie Camera illustrating core themes

2. Refection

The montage in The Man with the Camera is a pioneering form of visual communication, laying the foundation for modern digital visual information architecture. Vyrtov used it to creatively show Soviet life, recording birth, marriage, sleep and other scenes. As Azérad and Schmid said, the montage breaks the time boundary and weaves different time and space [1]. It does not follow a linear sequence, but integrates images from different periods into a coherent visual flow, forming contrast and resonance, and realizing non-linear narrative.For example, after filming a crowded square and a baby's birth, Vertov edited the footage using speed changes and double exposures, then transitioned to the birth scene with overlapping frames, freezes, and rotations. By combining macro and micro imagery, he created a collage of urban daily life. Jacobs et al. note that the film, upon its release, was criticised for prioritising form over content and for recording meaningless photographic acts [2]. However, Vertov deliberately filmed without a script, dialogue, or a protagonist, instead conveying language and plot through visual design. Montage produces powerful visual rhythms that stimulate interest. At the same time, it triggers free association, encouraging the audience to create different understandings of the film due to its open-ended approach. For example, the film combines factory machines and the birth of a baby, which has been interpreted as symbolising industrial progress, the continuation of life, and the pressure of machines on people.

The sharpness and mechanical movement of the gears contrast sharply and harmoniously with the soft and organic rhythm of birth, which shows Vertov's ability to compile different time and space elements into meaningful narratives. This is very similar to short video platforms such as TikTok. Creators often rely on montage to stack rhythmic music, jump clips and theme comparisons (such as "before and after" changes and city fragments) to capture the audience's attention in a few seconds. Unlike traditional linear narratives, these digital montages use non-linear logic, which, like Vertov's technique, can make the audience resonate with the fragmented information.Reese believes that montage is the core principle of aesthetic editing and film significance [3]. The relevant technologies in "Man with a Movie Camera" have futuristic characteristics and are still shaping the aesthetics of digital media. Short video platforms such as TikTok use montage to realize the side and stratification of videos, so as to attract and guide the audience's attention.

The influence of this film is not only on visual communication, but also extends to contemporary interactive media design. Although some critics point out that it is overly dependent on technology

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and lacks emotional depth, its "Kino-Eye" theory provides a reference model for perception and interaction logic in contemporary interaction design. Interactive design focuses on the user's digital scene experience, strives to make technology fit human perception and behavior, and improves the efficiency and comfort of users when operating digital devices [4].In Man with a Movie Camera, interaction design is reflected through the Kino-Eye, in which the camera functions as an 'eye' that seems to blend into the crowd, capturing spontaneous moments of character activity and interacting with reality. As Lee notes, Kino-Eye transforms truth by actively capturing life, not just passively recording it [5]. By integrating the machine with himself, Vertov produced immersive shots, such as lying on the railway tracks and filming under a moving train. The resulting images convey spatial relationships, stimulate the senses, and heighten tension.

The unusual perspective makes the audience feel like "present", not only passive, but also feel a sense of tension and immersion.This method has long foreseen VR, AR and other modern immersive technologies, as well as first-person vlog - the creator imitates the "Kino-Eye" effect with a sports camera, bringing the audience into real scenes without script, such as extreme sports and daily clips. Xu said that multimedia interaction technology now allows users to interact through sound, action, touch and media, and Vertov's Kino-Eye theory regards the camera as an extension of human perception and brings the audience closer to the real world, which has long foreshadowed this.

By fusing photographer and camera, Vertov enabled a dynamic relationship between camera, environment, and audience. When viewers engage with the film, they may mentally enter the images created by the camera's perspective. As Xu observes, traditional digital media design is limited to static visual presentations, but with the introduction of multimedia human-computer interaction technology, the user can interact through sound, motion, and touch, which not only enriches the interest but also significantly changes the production mode [4]. The "Kino-Eye" theory foreshadowed today's augmented reality, virtual reality and other immersive technologies. These technologies use aerial photography, slow motion, virtual space and other unconventional perspectives to allow the audience to freely explore and think in a well-designed environment.

The film combines montage with the theory of "Kino-Eye", and also highlights the importance of transparency and user trust in contemporary digital design. This is obvious in the film: unlike invisible editing, Jiga Virtov disclosed his creative method, not only directly using montage techniques such as double exposure and jump editing, but also showing the process of adjusting the camera and tripod in the film.This approach shows the viewer the impact of raw tools and elements such as the camera, angles, and frames on the picture, creating an early example of media transparency. Hielscher's study found that Man with a Movie Camera contains 56 "real" crowd shots (3.3%) and 705 single-person shots (41.1%) [6], woven together through montage to depict a cinematically constructed Soviet cityscape, blending Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev. The crowds and figures presented in the film also deepen the viewer's understanding of the plot and the Soviet city presented in the film.

Vertov (in the middle) adjusts the camera on the tripod, and the film's own lens is placed in the background. This self-reference lens reveals the "production process" of the documentary, so that the audience can clearly see the operation behind it.Now in digital media, this transparency has become algorithmic transparency (such as TikTok's "recommendation page" interpretation tool) and user-controlled content screening (such as social media "preferences" settings). These platforms, like Vertov, tell the audience how the content is created and selected, so as to build trust. Boyd Davis and others said that this kind of transparency allows the audience to actively interpret the media, not just passively receive it, which is also the core of digital design now.Boyd Davis et al. believed that if

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creators disclose their creative methods, audiences can understand the logic behind the work, which not only fosters a sense of critical participation but also enhances mutual trust [7].”

Boyd Davis and others believe that if the creator discloses the creative method, the audience can understand the logic behind the work, which will not only cultivate the sense of critical participation, but also enhance mutual trust. Virtov has always been open to data, technology and tools, which has bringed the audience and the movie closer. This method has also inspired modern digital design. For example, social platforms rely on visual algorithms to push content. Users can choose the parts they are interested in and decide the data flow, which will make users more trusting and willing to use the software. Obviously, the concept of transparency, credibility and encouraging user participation embodied in "Man with a Movie Camera" is the core principle of modern digital design.

3. Conclusion

In a word, although this work was criticized for being too experimental in the early days, it completely changed the visual narrative with the montage technique and the "Kino-Eye" theory. It not only inspired interactive design, but also provided ideas for the practice of media transparency: montage technology has opened up a new path for digital visual communication, and the "Kino-Eye" theory has laid the conceptual foundation for interactive design, and the open creative mode has also revealed the relationship between transparency and trust in digital design in advance. These innovations still affect the design of short videos, social media and other digital media, and will also be a classic reference for analyzing and designing immersive and transparent digital experiences in the future.

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