

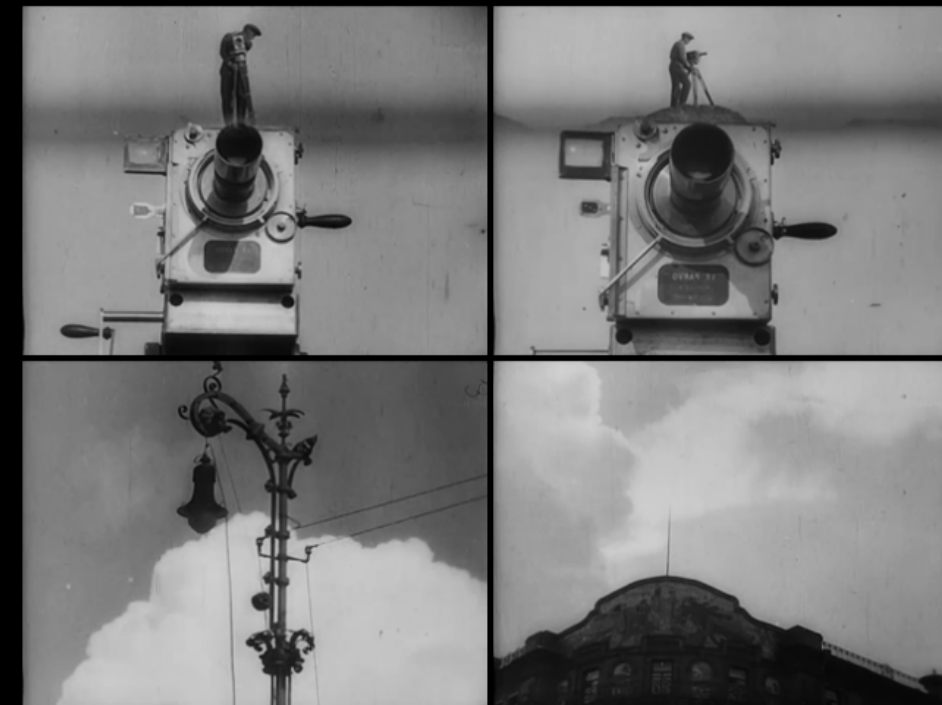


RENEE LEAR  
*Every Shot from Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera as an Animated GIF*  
 March 10 to April 28, 2017

Renée Lear is a video artist, performer, photographer and filmmaker. She holds a BFA in New Media from the School of Image Arts at Ryerson University, Toronto and received an MFA from York University, Toronto. Her latest work includes experimental video, site-specific video installation, video performance and video mixing in live environments, and most recently she has been working with GIF montages. She works both solo and in collaboration with other artists including musicians, DJ's, chefs and dancers. Her work has been shown in art galleries, festivals, underground cinemas, performance spaces, dance clubs, music venues, ad hoc public spaces and has been exhibited in Canada, the United States, Europe and China. Renée Lear lives and works in Toronto, Canada.  
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# RENEE LEAR



## EVERY SHOT FROM DZIGA VERTOV'S MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA AS AN ANIMATED GIF



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video, but a series of HTML-coded animated GIF montages, connecting the original materiality of film to the immateriality of imagery within which we find ourselves today. It is not framed as homage, but homage remains implicit in the treatment. By extending, even by just a few more seconds, the shots that comprise the original film, Lear is drawing out a fuller appreciation for a piece that still remains a relevant work of cinematic history a hundred years after its creation. The simplest gesture of greater time with Vertov's individual shots clarifies how exemplary they were and are. While much of the film's original effect can be credited to Svilova's exploratory editing techniques and much of Lear's treatment can be credited to her own lively interventions, the raw, source material is remarkably fulsome. One could argue that there are no bad shots in Vertov's film.

Lear wisely follows a poetic path when dealing with her source material, rather than replicating Vertov's images in the order originally sequenced. She collates her montages based on cues in both the visual and the subject matter. Sets and subsets of like-things or like-actions or like-ideas are brought together in both symmetrical and assymetrical montages, bringing Vertov's original panoply of 1,775 shots to just over 300 in Lear's hybrid. None of these new montages are forced; rather, they demonstrate and amplify—better than any critical film theory text ever could—the thematic elements present throughout Vertov's film. Formal and architectural themes around urban life; the vast quantity of individuals that comprise a population; and even the persistent idea of looking, photographing, and documenting are all given greater clarity and emphasis through the means Lear employs.

Beyond this, the work achieves its own iconoclastic and eloquent presence. Lear's unpredictable manner for recontextualizing these shots keeps the viewer invested, as her tableaux range from a pair of animated gifs, to a quartet, to an unexpected full screen cacophony. Her varied montages keep the work lively, the viewer's eye moving around the space of the screen, and the viewer's brain locked in a state of perpetual anticipation. A pair of images might evoke a delicate mini-narrative, followed closely by a gridded repetition of images that take the subject and dissolve it into a hypnotic patterning that, despite the pictorial reality of all the shots, nonetheless edge Lear's piece momentarily into realms of abstraction. And no matter the configuration of Lear's montage shots, there is no consistent duration within her treatment. Her GIF montages are not of equal length and this detail plays well with the irregular compositions she devises—eschewing predictability guards against lulling the viewer into a state of sameness and banality. She is not plugging the source material into an inexorable and trite equation, but is dealing with the material with thoughtful specificity, frame by

individual frame.

Vertov's theory of the interval—the movement between shots as determined by their visual correlation—remains an essential consideration for Lear's constructed montages. By applying this notion within a different visual aesthetic—and it's worth noting what a subtle, impactful gesture the GIF is vs. “the shot”—Lear arguably achieves outcomes the Vertov had in his sight, but to greater effect. Part of the original film was an effort to excise narrative and establish a new documentary form (Vertov's opening title cards are pretty explicit in this regard) though it's also readily apparent that Vertov's film has a distinct narrative, given how many times we see the actual man with his movie camera—it is a story about a man filming the world. Lear's extended remix seems more like the hypothesized new form pursued by Vertov's man. Using a direct and simple formal gesture, Lear realizes qualities not fully achieved in the original.

A perceptual framing of the world is a constant and obvious idea in Vertov's piece, the question of looking coupled with the question of meaning, as well as the position of art-making as a social mechanism that reflects upon itself as it reflects upon the world. Interestingly, Lear also probably explores this theme to greater effect. The repetition inherent in her method enables a deeper and longer (even if only measured in seconds) consideration between visual art making and labor, the shared effort in both and the essential place of both within a larger social fabric.

Lear's piece is not a dismantling of Vertov's. Nor is it a pointed critique. There are elements of each in the process adopted here to reconsider the source material. But the prevalent questions remain perceptual—what are we looking at, how do we look at it, and what meanings are derived from this looking. As blunt as we might find Lear's title for the work, what we might presume to be a comically-obvious description slyly hides its multiple layers in plain view. Its depths and profundities are revealed perpetually through the slightest of forms, a method we may have presumed was reserved for the self-referential pop culture snake feasting on its own tail.

The truth is that even the slightest of means can blossom into multiple universes of visual impact, poetic connections, and deep, resonant meaning.

John Massier  
Visual Arts Curator



In a field of creative endeavor within which one is free to be as oblique, poetic, and allusive as one likes, Renée Lear's *Every Shot from Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera as an Animated GIF* arrives precisely as described. Vertov's original 1929 film runs just over an hour but contains within it 1,775 individual shots in a montage style that describes a “day in the life” in a few Soviet cities of the era. Ostensibly a documentary, the film has held on to its iconic space in cinema history for its sheer inventiveness—it is as much about the process of seeing as it is about its subjects—and the bravura editing of Vertov's wife Elizaveta Svilova.

Much of Svilova's editing appears to us today to presage not only techniques that would become more commonplace throughout the twentieth century but even the post-cinematic internet space—the connection between visual effects created in the film and the GIFs we know today primarily as moments of temporary distraction are impossible to ignore. While there are no actual GIFs in the original, repetitive imagery abounds through its editing techniques and it is this element that Lear pays assiduous attention to as a point of departure for her specific explorations.

Lear's piece—which extends the original's 68 min running time to 3 hrs 43 min—is not a film/