

"A Rose Has No Teeth"

Elizabeth Travelslight
December 15, 2006



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Two Hands

Thinking, I stretch out my hands, examining first the backs, then turning to the inscriptions in my palms, the rippled tips of my fingers, the world shining through the spaces in between.

I take into my lap: scissors, needle, these samples and a few long threads. I write: I sew. And “with these words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection.”

Barthes and Benjamin, considered together and “viewed from a certain distance”—
Two big things. A thousand little things. A mix. A mash-up. A montage. A “Man with a Movie Camera” and quilt to cover us with. Something like this.

The Shore Holds Innumerable Pieces

“The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres...” “...a work consisting entirely of quotations.” “...his own experience but no little of the experience of others...” “A text’s unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination.” “It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them...” “...everything is to be disentangled” “This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled.” “Thus is revealed the total existence of writing...” “For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories...” “...a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations...” “This is how today it is becoming unraveled...” “...the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced.” “...the golden...” “...the multicolored...” “(like the thread of a stocking)”

I consider their quotations piling up, each cut beautiful— even in pieces. Choosing them in turn, admiring one against the other, all I can think of is Nauman and “A rose has no teeth.” Because I am uncertain why, I keep that for the beginning.



Here on the shore between reading and writing, “under the open sky in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds,” I make my encounter with Roland and Walter. They walk easily together, uninterrupted by cameras or scissors. Having many shared interests, they find agreeable enthusiasm for one another’s company. Or so it appears to me. They have in common a fascination for the exploration of literacy through literacy; for the inescapable and irresistible tension this work entails; the tensions of philosophy- between language, text, mind, body, matter, time, and space; the undying tensions within and between words and letters, scenes and shots- within and between the mortal bodies that secrete and absorb them. The results are repeated, curious, careful – examinations that uncover the potential that reading and writing (and film) suggest: art’s hope of communion and our permanent interdependence within the network of biological and mechanical organs that make communication a field, a fabric, of evolving promises.



Dawn, Wind, & Work

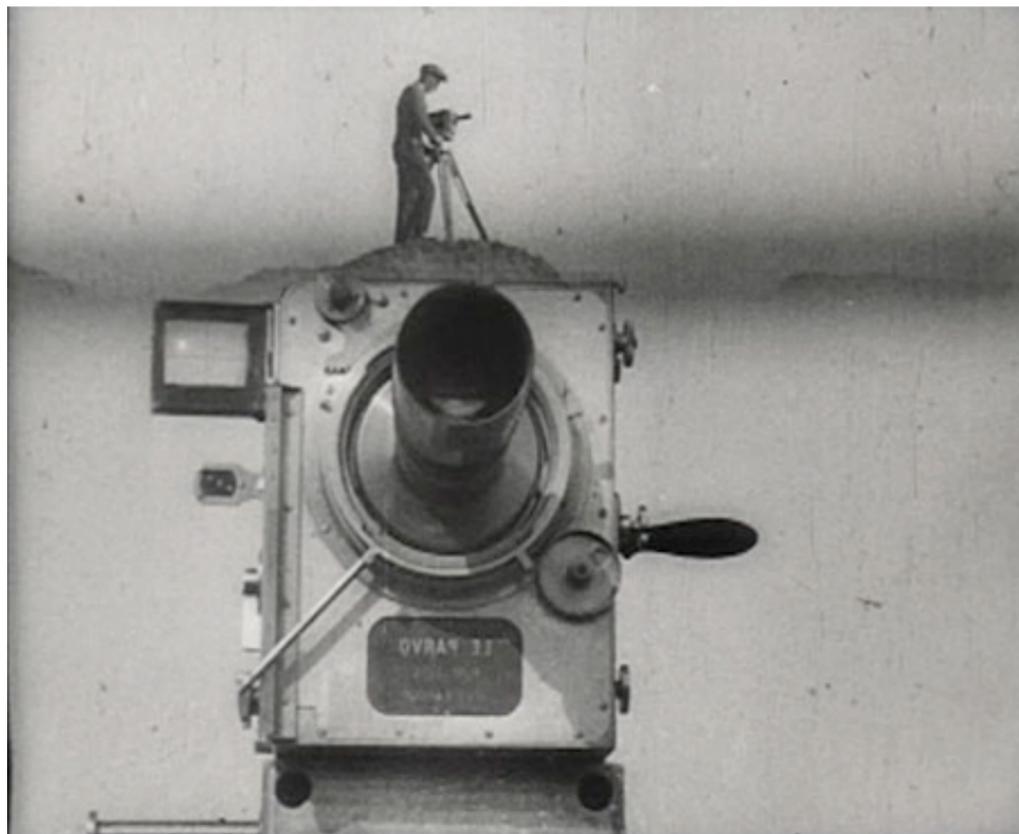
We three “tiny, fragile human bodies” (more than three, “since each of us was several”) enjoy our solitude, together on the beach, Walter and Roland having taken a break from their work while I sit excited and puzzled by the pieces gathering around me. They look over my shoulder, curious. I continue to cut, to sew, “to make language hold it together.” Hold us together. Although, I do not know where it leads, our movements leave traces in the sand. “There is no other time than that of enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now”– in “the silk embroidery” of digital space.

Looking up together, we “say the sun rises, when everybody knows it is only a manner of speaking,” then laugh with pleasure at the saying, new light warm against our many tripled, up-turned faces, the shadows of our eyelashes falling long across our cheeks.

Barthes asks, “Who is speaking thus?” And I reply, holding up his answer, the words fluttering in the air by a thread, “We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.” Walter adds, “...making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing.”

“We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided inspired, multiplied.” And looking out over the “field of force of destructive torrents and explosions”, we see “a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings...blend and clash” yet, it is strangely quiet.

This seems as good a place as any –the shore and dawn– the destruction of origins. I continue contemplating my company and my assignment, all the little pieces. Meanwhile, Roland and Walter comb the beach looking for more letters in the sand. Finding occasional moments of calm, they skip them across the silver, glassy water. Listening, we agree that the vowels work best. All I hear is a silent storm, the wind, turning pages, and the tapping of moveable type, clicking like stones, washing ashore. When the wind suddenly stirs faster, fuller, more urgently, we realize that Dziga has started his cameras. Down the beach we notice the silent orchestra and some empty unfolding chairs.



Matinée

The sky grows dark then brightens with supertitles...

“(An Excerpt from the Diary of a Cameraman)”

“This experimental work aims at creating a truly international absolute language of Cinema based on its total separation from the language of Theater and Literature.”

“Author-Supervisor of the experiment DZIGA VERTOV”

“Assistant Editor ELIZAVETA SVILOVA”

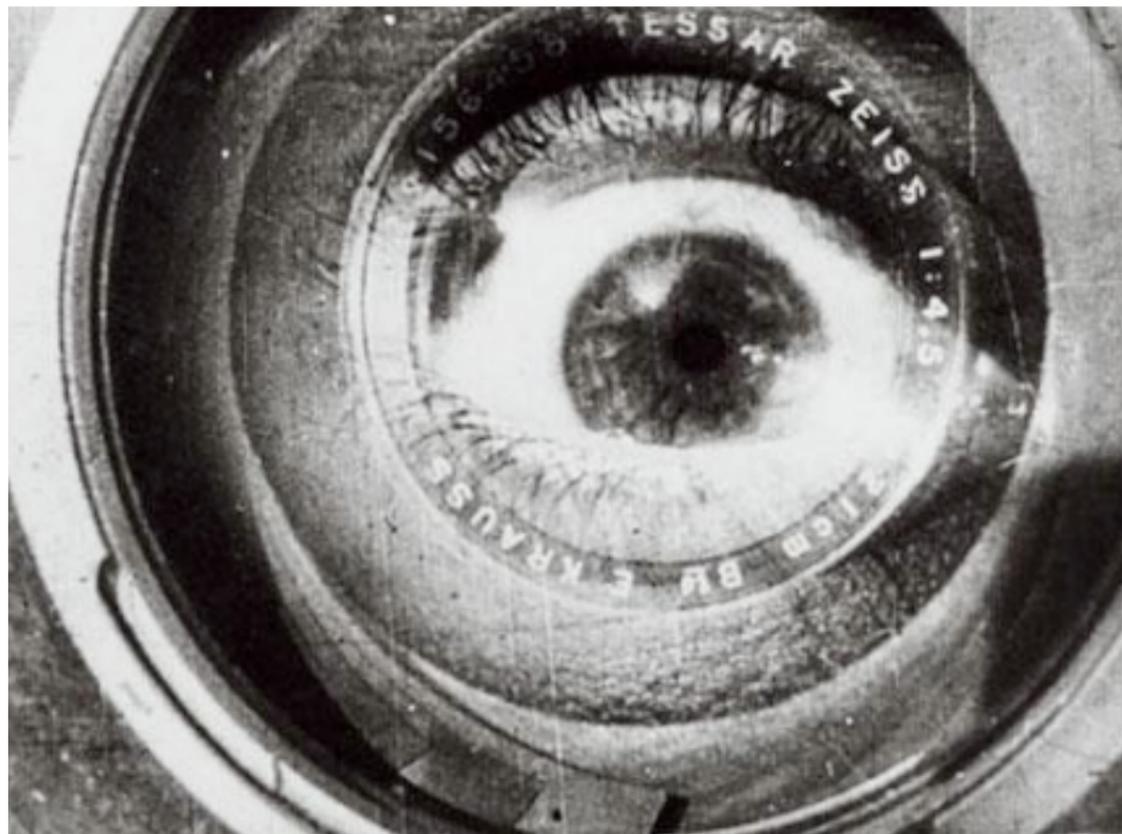
We notice for the first time the camera looking down upon us, the sky is transformed into a screen—immense, entire—consuming the shore like the vault of a cathedral ceiling. The music begins. Walter points to the empty chairs and we take our seats.

Roland and Walter are both excited by film. It is still new to them. “Man with a Movie Camera” is a film about film. Not unlike the way “The Death of the Author” and “The Storyteller” are writing about writing. We enjoy film in part for what writing cannot be. It is illuminated, not in the way of ancient manuscripts, but literally luminous— language that glows in the dark and penetrates the eyes. It is moving, not because we succumb to it, but because this is its nature. It apprehends us before we apprehend it. Even the stills move. And this is lovely. (I think how pretty those will look in my quilt.)

The still, the moving still, the movie— they participate in a grammar unique to film. The shot contains subject, verb, object, preposition —simultaneously— not a one before the other. Film not only mimics, it expands the possibilities of visual perception and consciousness. We study the instantaneous in the still, the intransitive in the moving still. The camera’s hold on motion re-visions every point of view, unacknowledged or taken for granted, our perception of ourselves.

When I ask them if they have seen this one before, they nod absorbed, not wishing to be interrupted. Walter replies, “Many times,” his face flickering in the dark. “The storyteller; he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story.” Roland mutters, “Dziga Vertov by Dziga Vertov.”

It seemed to me, despite the differences between film and writing— language is language. And language about language returns us inevitably to the same tropes: thread, spinning, weaving, eyes, mouths, hands, bodies, machinery, work, network, fabric, and the constant reflexive questioning of location and subjectivity.



Death and Weaving

How would Barthes and Benjamin analyze it differently?

Dziga has become a movie camera without a man. Walter and Roland are dead. And I am dying, these electric snowflakes pouring from my mouth. “[D]isconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin.” “The objects on which [they] fall lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems.” I sew to keep us warm somehow in death, to keep us living each within the other— how ever differently we may confront our own inevitable foreclosure.

Barthes asks me if I could read aloud Celan’s “Death Fugue”, because he thinks Walter would like to hear it.

When I am finished, I toss my project incomplete into the waves and ask them both if they would prefer to dance.

“Mouth to mouth”, “the most intimate interpenetration,” “the source from which all storytellers have drawn.” My eyes are turned to stars. I take a breath. A breath takes me. Sucking my tongue. I whisper stitches like letters with fingers: Warp. Weft. Web. Text. Mouth to mouth to mouth. Multiply. The eye. The I. The non-I. Love. Death. Birth. The “body writing,” *reading*, cutting, bleeding, drinking, spinning, spinning, spinning, spinning, spinning. And “no little”– no little “Hope and memory,” no little fairies. Valéry. Mnemosyne. Here and now. Mouth to mouth.

I “no longer believe...this hand is too slow for thought or passion.”

Finis

Citations

Arendt

“...his greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations.” (Arendt, Hannah. *Illuminations*, “Introduction.” P. 4.)

“The critic as an alchemist practicing the obscure art of transmuting the futile elements of the real into the shining, enduring gold of truth, or rather watching and interpreting the historical process that brings about such magical transfiguration— whatever we may think of this figure, it hardly corresponds to anything we usually have in mind when we classify a writer as a literary critic.” (Arendt, Hannah. *Illuminations*, “Introduction.” P. 5.)

“...’To understand Benjamin properly one must feel behind his every sentence the conversion of extreme agitation into something static, indeed the static notion of movement itself’ (Schriften I, 349)...” (Arendt, Hannah. *Illuminations*, “Introduction.” P. 12.)

“Metaphors are the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about. What is so hard to understand about Benjamin is that without being a poet he *thought poetically* and therefore was bound to regard the metaphor as the greatest gift of language.” (Arendt, Hannah. *Illuminations*, “Introduction.” P. 14.)

Barthes

“Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant... We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 142.)

“Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 142.)

“...that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 142.)

“Valéry...he never stopped calling into the question and deriding the Author... and through out his prose works he militated in favour of the essentially verbal condition of literature.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 144.)

“Proust gave modern writing its epic. By radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model...” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 144.)

“...by accepting the principle of several people writing together.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 144.)

“...just as I is never more than the instance saying I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold it together’, suffices that is to say, to exhaust it.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 145.)

“...the modern sriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with being or preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; ther is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 145.)

“Having buried the Author, the modern sriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his though or passion...” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 146.)

“For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin– or which, at least, has no origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 146.)

“We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ menaing...but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings none of them original, blend and clash.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 146.)

“The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture...” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 146.)

“His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 146.)

“Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 147.)

“In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 147.)

“Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 148.)

“A texts unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination.” (Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*, “The Death of the Author.” P. 148.)

Benjamin

“Familiar though his name may be to us,...” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 83.)

“Viewed from a certain distance,...” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 83.)

“What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 84.)

“...stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 84.)

“Experience which was passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 84.)

“The actual extension of the realm of storytelling in its full historical breadth is inconceivable without the most intimate interpenetration of these two archaic types.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 85.)

“Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 86-7.)

“...a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the real of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 87.)

“...– the fairy tale,...” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 87.)

“To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound, perplexity of the living.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 87.)

“The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 89.)

“...what the nature of true storytelling is... A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. ...But you could also say:... Or:... Or:... It resembles the seed of grain which have lain for centuries in the chambers of pyramids shut up air-tight and have retained their germinative power to this day.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 90.)

“For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 91.)

“This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unraveled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 91.)

“The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 93.)

“Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 94.)

“Read it carefully. Death appears in it with the same regularity...” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 94.)

“...it can hardly be decided whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 96.)

“Mnemosyne, the remeberer, was the Muse, of the epic art among the Greeks.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 97.)

“...(Lukács) ‘a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time... And from this ...arise the genuinely epic experiences of time: hope and memory...’ (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 99.)

“The fairy tale,...secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 102.)

“...Paul Valéry wrote in a very remote context. ‘Artistic observation,’ he says in reflections on a woman artist whose work consisted in the silk embroidery of figures, ‘can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and are derived from no practice, but get their existence and value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, the eye, and the hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in his own inner self.’..” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 108.)

“With these words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 108.)

“In fact one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 108.)

“For it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others;...” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 108.)

“His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller; he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story.” (Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, “The Storyteller.” P. 108-9.)

1. Introduction: Rhizome

7 vedi NOTE

XIV piano piece for David Tudor 4
disegno del 1969
edizione pianistica: 27.3.1959

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P

2 Basso
Muto

3 sequenza
frequenza
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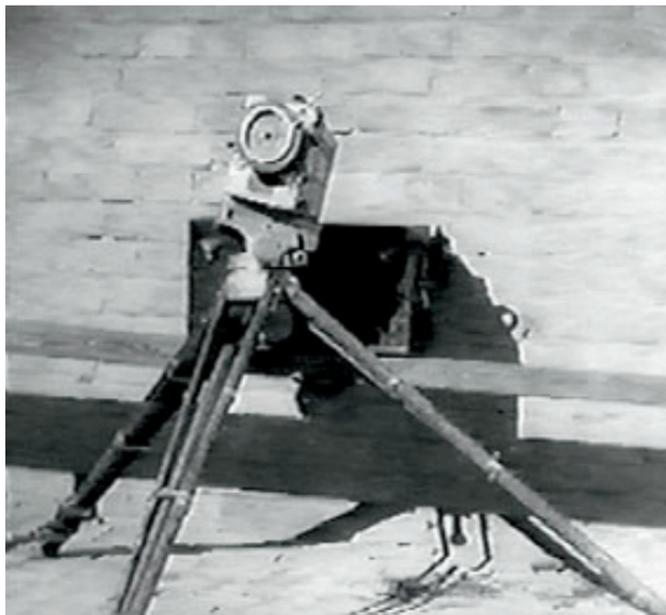
SYLVANO BUSSOTI

Nauman



Nauman, Bruce. *A Rose has No Teeth*. A ROSE HAS NO TEETH: Bruce Nauman in the 1960s
January 17, 2007 - April 15, 2007. BAM, Berkeley, California.

Vertov,



Человек с киноаппаратом (Man with the Movie Camera). Dir. Dziga Vertov. Kino-Eye, 1929.