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Midterm Paper:

The Relationship Between Documentary and Fiction

Documenting events is a way to construct an experience for the audience through a particular perspective.

Documentary films are often regarded as reality, since the material is a creative capture of the real world. However, it is misleading to interpret the film's content as empirical evidence that supports a specific viewpoint. The creative decisions made in constructing a message render the film fictional.

In cinema, the whole emerges from a fusion of details through use of visual techniques. The way in which these elements are combined has an effect on the message and its reception. Specifically, film editing creates relations between shots—relations that are graphic, rhythmic, spatial, or temporal (Bordwell, p220). Although documentary entertains a relationship with the real, the fact that this “real” only exists as an assemblage of parts seems to make documentary a fictional enterprise. This can be seen in the documentary film, *People on Sunday*, as well as in a handful of Michel Brault’s documentary films.

The relationship between shots can be manipulated to create illusions of time and space; "[space] may be condensed or expanded by...editing"(Mascelli, p156). Take a look at the scene from *Les Enfants Du Silence* where doctors from different disciplines are having a round table discussion about one of the deaf children. The scene fades into a medium shot of a doctor without any clue as to where this new scene takes place (figure1). Briefly, a wide shot establishes the setting as a professional meeting. Other than two quick moments, each cut jumps from doctor to doctor close-ups as if the audience is sitting at that table (figure1). A whole scene is constructed from its parts as we move around the table conversing with each doctor.

As the doctors discuss the child, it becomes clear that each contribution is a subjective narrative based on an observation. The sequence echoes the fictional aspect of documentary in microcosm. Documentary structures one perspective of an event predicated on the notion that it is one of many truths.

Alternatively, scenes sometimes begin with a wide shot setting the scene and proceed to a close shot focusing in on a part of that whole. *People on Sunday* uses this technique in the scene of the big kiss. A wide shot from an objective angle captures the push and pull of sexual tension building between the two characters as they near their kiss (figure 5a, 5b). Once they embrace, the shots become tighter and longer. The two people are the sole subjects of the frame—nothing else matters in that moment. Pacing continues as the shot opens to the landscape, where the viewer's imagination can fill in the rest.

Camera angles can also be used to provide a subjective view (Mascelli, p13–18). *Les Enfants Du Silence* uses a subjective angle throughout most of the film, putting the viewer in the shoes of the deaf children, making real their struggle to overcome adversity. Eye-level shots reinforce this change in perspective (figure 2). Multiple close-shots of the children's faces establish a more personal relationship between the viewer and subject. In the classroom scene, crosscutting takes place between the present moment and a flashback to earlier that day. Narration ties these two seemingly unrelated shots together as it illustrates the temporally related information.

Framing plays a large role in how the viewers receive and interpret visual information. In *Le Temps Perdu*, the scene where the girl is talking with her admirer demonstrates careful framing and emphasizes the boy's teenage lust. While the shot is framed over boy's shoulder, this girl is the focus of the scene (figure3). The teenage boy is introduced from behind and with close-up shots of the girl, the viewer sees her through his eyes. Upon her exit of the frame, we are introduced to the character with close-up of him in that moment of pensive thought.

Continuity is essential when it comes to captivating an audience. One way to create continuity across shots is to have them align graphically. The picnic scene in *People on Sunday* uses this "graphic match" technique beautifully (Bordwell, p221). Furthermore, it uses the technique to transition seamlessly into the proceeding montage sequence. In addition to visual matching, there is an emotional continuity flowing across scenes. The sequence of shots maintains a carefree, child-like quality (figure 8). The audience has been conditioned not to question the relation, because the transition seems natural.

Pacing is another way for film to comment on a series of events. The movement from shot to shot combined with the duration of sequence establishes the beat of the scene.

Pour La Suite Du Monde crosscuts back and forth between men working in a workshop and sailing the sea before moving into the sea setting (figure 10). This sequence is an effective way of transitioning from one location to another while maintaining subject continuity. Although we are shown one character in two different places, we have come to understand the temporal relation between shots.

People on Sunday uses cross cutting to show the progression of events that "occur simultaneously, but [are] separated in space" (Mascelli, p153). In a montage of people moving through the city, we navigate through the various spaces, while time is frozen (figure6a, 6b). Editing in this manner allows the viewers to read these shots as a simultaneous occurrence.

In an earlier part of the movie, a spatial and temporal relationship is established between shots with crosscutting. While getting ready for Sunday, a man is shown active within the room while the girl remains in bed asleep (figure4a, 4b, 4c). The camera follows the man as he moves within this space, and is contrasted with the static framing of the girl. The girl functions as a reference point for grasping the location of action, as well as to emphasize the passage of time.

Using a combination of film and editing techniques, the creative possibilities are endless with motion pictures. Furthermore, this allows for precise detailing in constructing how the information is going to be received. Regardless of how 'real' the content, when a film is constructed and forms a narrative, it has become a fictional endeavor.

Works Cited

- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. N.p.: McGraw Hill, 2008. 218-60. Print.
- Mascelli, Joseph V. *The Five C's of Cinematography: motion picture filming techniques*. N.p.: Silman-James Press, 1996. 13-18, 153-156. Print.
- Manovich, Lev. "Guide to Visualizing Video and Image Sequences." . N.p., 30 Mar. 2012. Web. 10 May 2013. <<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PqSZmKwQwSIFrbmVi-evbStTbt7PrtsxNgC3W1oY5C4/edit>>.

Montage sequence of entire films, every 10 frames.

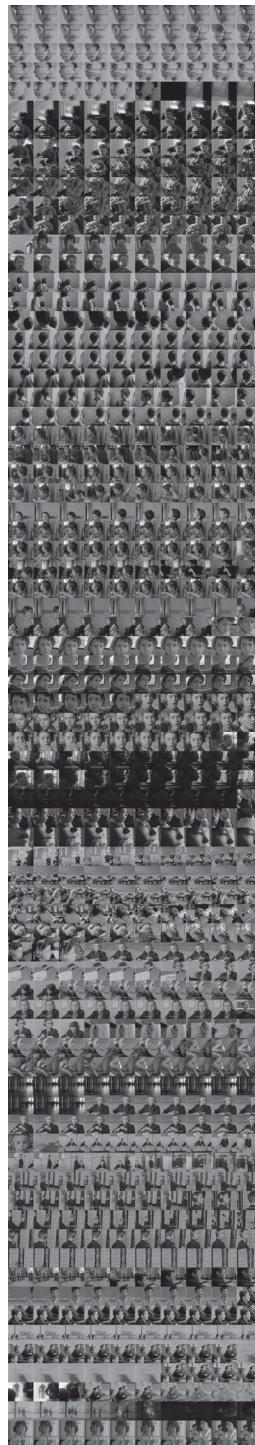


Figure A
les enfants du silence-montage.tif



Figure B
le temps perdu-montage.tif

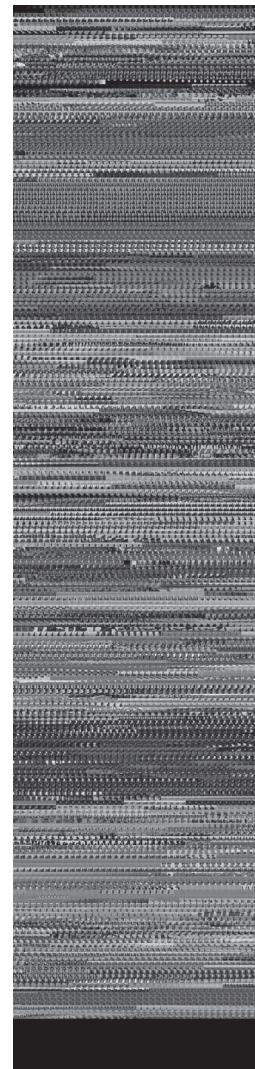


Figure C
pouls au sud du monde-montage.tif

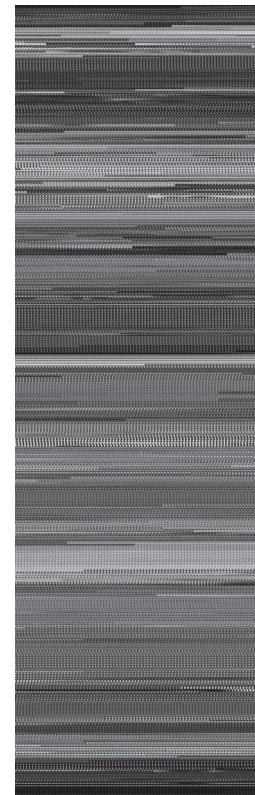


Figure D Gene-
vieve-montage.tif



Figure E People on
Sunday-montage.

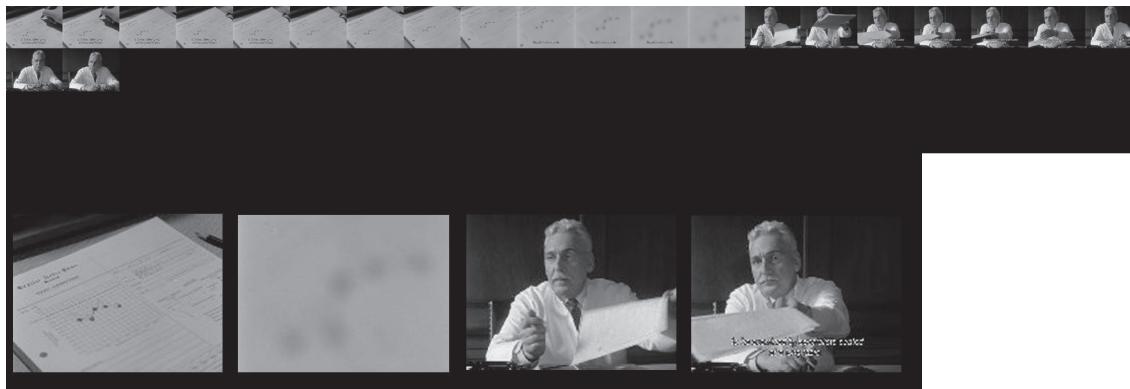


Figure 1. *Les Enfants Du Silence*, transition from one setting to the next

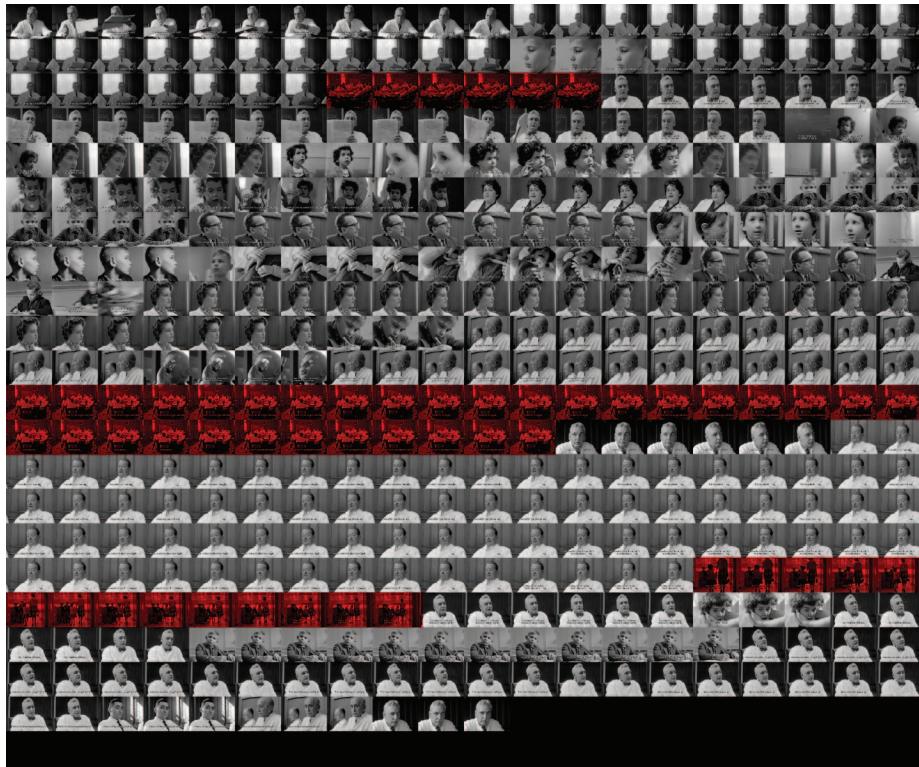


Figure 2. *Les Enfants Du Silence*, table scene. Red indicates wide shots of room

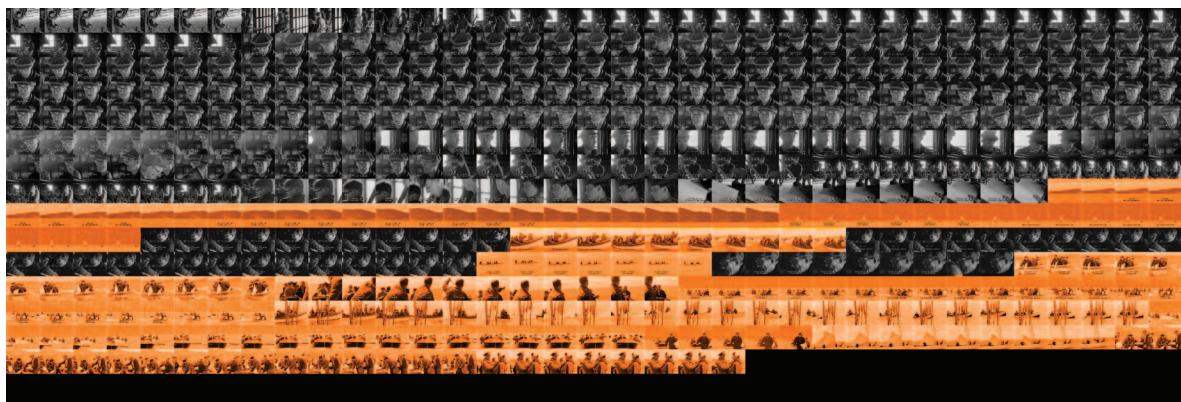


Figure 10 Pour La Suite Du Monde, black is shop scene and orange is sailing scene.



Figure 3, Le Temps Perdu Scene

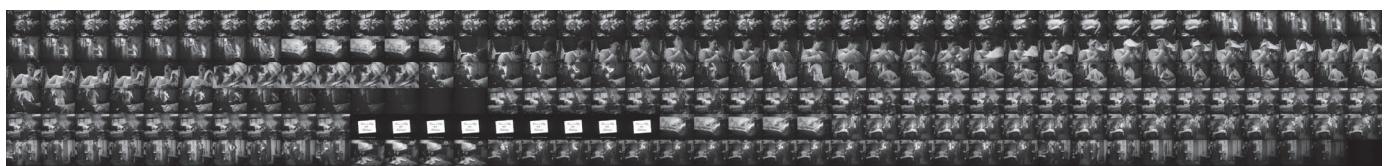


Figure 4, People on Sunday, wake-up scene



Figure 4.a, wake-up
scene enlarged



Figure 4.b



Figure 4.c

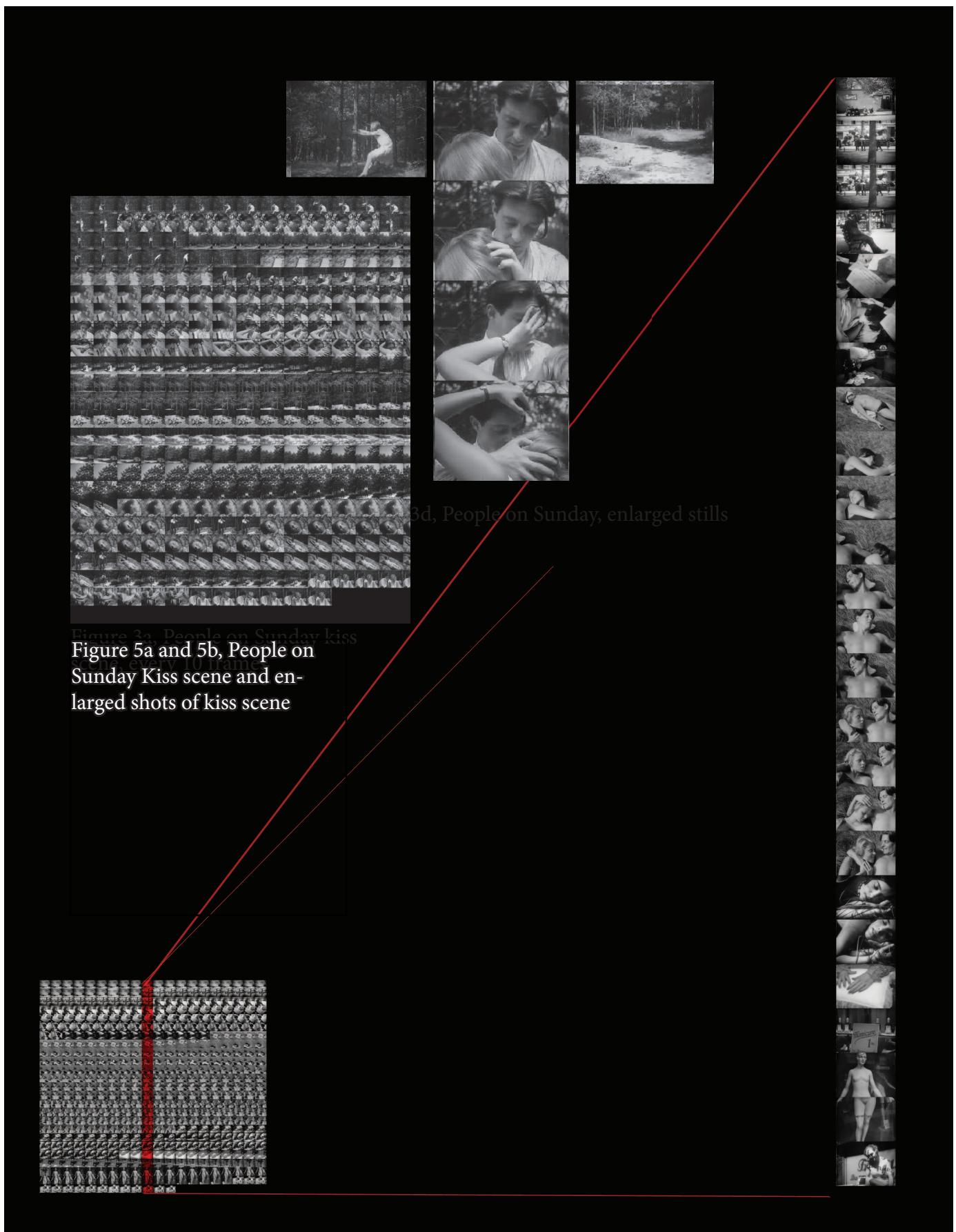


Figure 6a and 6b, People on Sunday montage scene and enlarged shots of montage scene

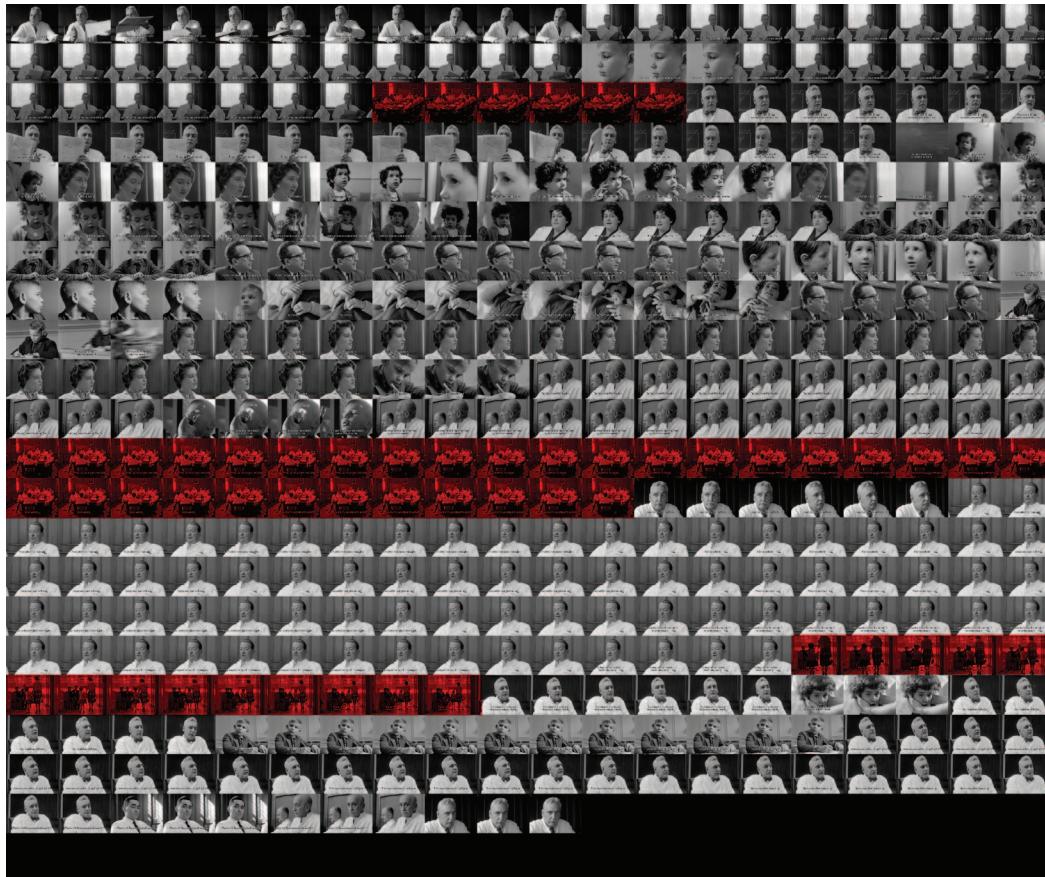


Figure7 lesenfantsdusilence-table-scene-montage2.psd

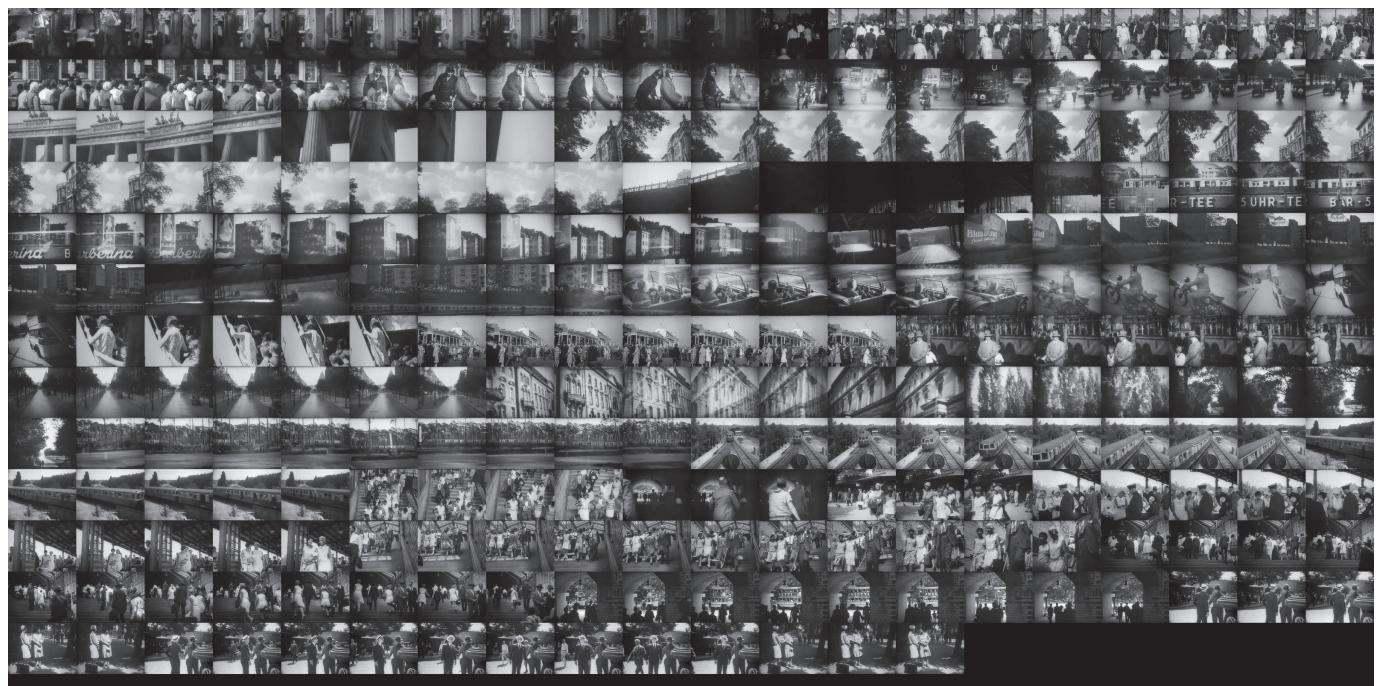


Figure 8 peopleonsunday-people.jpg

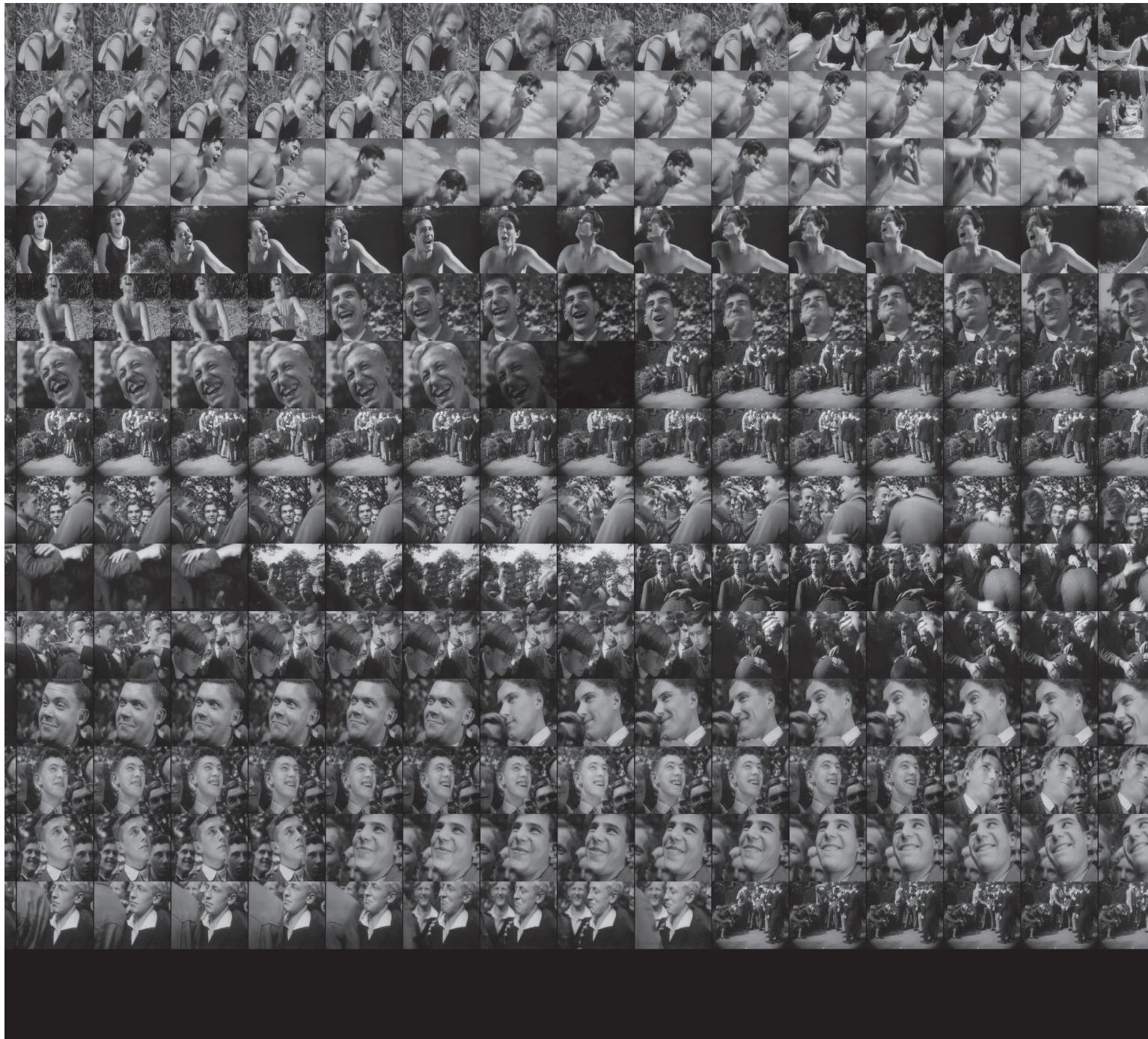


Figure 9 peopleonsunday-weenie-laughter-continuity.jpg

