

The Beales were from a family of New York aristocrats and socialites, and Edith “Big Edie” Bouvier Beales’ husband, Phelan Beales, purchased the Hamptons estate, Grey Gardens, in the early 1920s. After a decade of living there together, their marriage fell apart. Phelan left Edith in 1931, with Edith retaining the estate. In 1946, Phelan moved to Mexico where he notified Edith of their divorce via telegram. Edith remained in the estate, relying on financial support from her family, the Bouviers, to raise her three children: her attempt at a singing career hadn’t been lucrative. Years later, “Big Edie” arrived at her son’s wedding dressed as an opera star, and her father, ‘Major’ Bouvier, tired from his daughter’s eccentric behavior, all but disinherited her from his will. After Major’s death in 1948, Edith’s health declined. Edith’s daughter Edie, by this time in her thirties and unsuccessful at pursuing an acting career in New York City, went to live with her mother in Grey Gardens.¹

After being abandoned by Phelan, Edith and Edie were left to the not-so-tender mercies of Big Edie’s brother, ‘Black Jack’ Bouvier, a philandering Wall Street stockbroker. Edith’s brother was the father of Jacqueline Kennedy and Lee Radziwill, who, by Edie’s account, promptly appropriated their inheritance for his own daughters and left them to decay in an ever more dilapidating Grey Gardens. Edith and Edie came to the Maysles’ attention after a local news item in 1971 described “two cousins of Jacqueline Kennedy” living in “a garbage-infested, filthy, 28-room house with eight cats, fleas, cobwebs and no running water – conditions so unsanitary that the Suffolk County Health Department ordered them to clean up or face eviction”. Jacqueline, (by this time Jackie O’), came to the rescue with a \$32,000 donation and a cleanup crew who removed 1,000 bags of trash from the premises.²

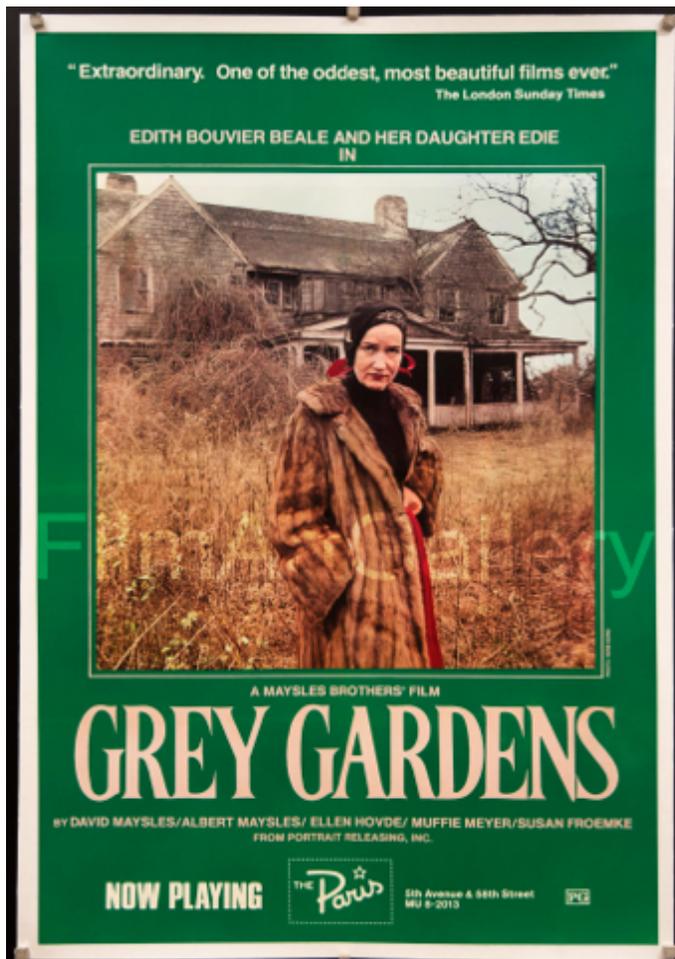
In 1972 Lee Radziwill set out to shoot her own documentary about her family, including her aunt and cousin, Edith and Edie, who by this time had been living together for over 20 years. The photographer Peter Beard, a friend of Radziwill’s, joined the project. He introduced Radziwill to the Maysles brothers, whom she hired for the shoot. Several reels were shot, but the project was eventually shelved, and the footage lost until recently. However, the Maysles had found their subjects in the Beales, and returned in 1974 to shoot *Grey Gardens*.³

¹ “It’s All In The Film: Direct Cinema, ‘Grey Gardens’ and ‘That Summer’.” The White Review. accessed December 15, 2019, <http://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/film-direct-cinema-grey-gardens-summer/>

² Love and squalor

³ “It’s All In The Film: Direct Cinema, ‘Grey Gardens’ and ‘That Summer’.”

Grey Gardens was made in 1974 and released in 1976 (Figure 1). The film follows the lives of Edith “Big Edie” Bouvier Beale and her adult daughter Edie, also known as “Little Edie,” within their East Hampton mansion. The women lived in an overgrown, crumbling estate near the sea, which they have shared for decades. Edith, nearing the end of her seventies, is crippled with arthritis, while Edie is in her fifties, unmarried, and childless. Their home is filled with assorted cats, fleas, raccoons; faded images, filth, and scattered memories of a privileged past they once occupied.⁴



During the course of the film, the ladies discuss their habits and desires. Since they rarely leave the estate, much of the documentary centers on the women’s past. The film contains tragedy and tenderness, eccentricity and distress all at once. The mother-to-daughter dynamic is a fascinating spectacle to watch. They bicker endlessly about opportunities missed and lovers lost. When they aren’t quarrelling with one another, Edith sings top hits from her youth like a vaudeville singer, while Edie dances and creates innovative “costumes” from old clothes. The diet that sustains them consists of boiled corn, which is cooked on a bedside sterno, canned liver with crackers, and ice

Figure 1: “Grey Gardens,” Film Art Gallery, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://filmartgallery.com/products/grey-gardens-5616>)

⁴ “The Documentary.” greycastlesonline.com. accessed December 15, 2019. <http://greycastlesonline.com/the-documentary/>)

cream. When Edie isn't peering out the window at passersbyes, she's feeding the voracious raccoons in the attic whole loaves of Wonder Bread and full boxes of cat food; the animals having mostly eaten through the plaster walls of the home.⁵

This paper will examine, through three specific scenes from the film, the complexity of Edith and Edie's relationship. I am particularly compelled with the manner of their relationship that forms through the film, the duality behind it, and their desire to be seen. Additionally, I will examine the use of direct cinema, the notion of scopophilia in cinema, and how these two methods create the effect of visual pleasure to the audience.

Three Scenes

These scenes, which I have aptly named by choice words spoken in the moment, include "tea for two," "try, really try; think, really think; believe, really believe," and "the Bouvier money." I have found that all of these scenes unfold within the ladies bedroom, a part of the house that was most seen in the film. This is likely due to the home being nearly uninhabitable, and their bedroom was the most accessible to the filmmakers over the other areas of the home.

The first scene I will begin analyzing is "tea for two." In this setting the viewer sees Edith and Edie in their bedroom. The walls of the room are painted a pale shade of yellow and contain two twin beds where the ladies sleep. In between the beds is a single, shabby nightstand with a lamp on top with no lampshade. Edith's bed contains more objects and mementos than compared to Edie. This "stage" rarely changes except for the inclusion of cats or other objects brought into the camera frame. The nature of the bedroom throughout the film, and the scenes that I've chosen, speaks to the intimacy of the mother-to-daughter relationship, an experience of a shared personal space. The women are talking about their lives, fortunes missed, and the home. Edith states how she "took care of this house, and lived on no money." Edie responds, in an annoyed tone, to her mother, as well as the viewer, "You were able to save the house on account of me. I didn't want to live in East Hampton, but I had to on account of mother's health." The camera then focuses on Edith, who is looking down, and fiddling with her glasses. A record begins to play the hit song from Edith's youth, "Tea for Two," originally written in 1924. Edith begins singing the song in a way much like that of a vaudeville singer, but terribly off key, while sitting in her bed (Figure 2.1). Edie sits on the adjacent bed, looking uncomfortable, disassociated with

⁵ "The Documentary."

the moment, while her mother waves at her to dance. “How can you resist it?” she exclaims (Figure 2.2). Towards the end of the song, Edith begins combing her hair. The scene then cuts to a close up of a painted portrait of Edith, a reminder of her status; this becomes a reoccurring moment through the film.



Figure 2.1: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.



Figure 2.2: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.

This part of the film speaks heavily to the notion of family, but even more so to the duality between a man and a woman in a relationship. This can be found when listening closer to the lyrics of the song. For this analysis, I am speaking specifically to the last part of the lyrics, which are as follows,

“Day will break and you'll awake
and start to bake a sugar cake,
for me to take
for all the boys to see.
We will raise a family,
a boy for you, a girl for me.
Oh, can't you see
how happy we would be?”⁶

The sentiment of the lyrics, written by Irving Caesar and Vincent Youmans, not only conveys the failure of Edith and Edie’s dreams and happiness, but also speak to an ideology that Edith holds onto when singing this song, becoming louder and more pronounced during these moments; the raising of a family, a boy for you a girl for me, how happy we would be. It is through this scene that communicates to the viewer Edith’s loss of her husband, which was, for her, the loss of family, as she could not be a provider and was essentially taken care of by her family, and the wealth the Bouviers had attained before Edith’s marriage to Phelan.

Susan Griffin states in her “Feminism and Motherhood” essay that, “The definition of motherhood in our culture is one in which the mother sacrifices herself to the child. She sacrifices her self. Her self is lost.” Thus making her loss absolute. Furthermore, Griffin writes “and we pretend that this sacrifice of years of the mother’s life is for the child’s benefit. But who benefits? Most children grow up to find their families are strangers, that they are people to visit out of a sense of obligation at best, or at worst, to hate and fear as destructive, and we have grown to accept this relationship between the adult child and the parent. We call this alienation natural.”⁷ When considering the imagery of *Grey Gardens*, this quote from Griffin speaks to the nature of motherhood and the idea of family in American culture. Edith gave up her life and

⁶ Irving Caesar and Vincent Youmans. “Tea for Two,” 1924. © *Warner Chappell Music, Inc*

⁷ Moyra Davey. “Feminism and Motherhood.” *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001). 37

dreams for her children and her husband, and ultimately ended up with nothing. However, it is also important to note how this often flips between the mother and daughter. How Edie gave up what she wanted in a sense of false obligation to take care of her mother. It is through these notions that the sense of alienation, entrapment, and resentment becomes present.

The next scene I will examine is “try, really try; think, really think; believe, really believe.” In this moment, the viewer returns to the women’s bedroom as they finish their conversation about the Catholic Church. Edith and Edie, both sitting in their respective beds with their cats and objects surrounding them, turn on the radio to a channel they are familiar with. A strong man’s voice presents itself with the statement “to get on top of things, and stay there.” As the man preaches, Edie looks to the Maysles and proclaims, “isn’t he terrific?” The scene continues, with both women in their beds, being distracted by other things and objects nearby. The man continues on the radio with a simple formula for the listener. This formula he conveys states that one should “try, really try; think, really think;” and lastly “believe, really believe.”

The scene progresses with the man continuing to speak while the camera shifts from close up to close up between Edith and Edie. These close ups break with a wide shot of both laying on their beds, lost within their own thoughts; Edie looking down at her “costume,” while her mother Edith looks away, most likely towards one of the Maysles brothers (Figure 3.1). As the scene continues, and the man on the radio begins to finish his segment, he laments that one should look in the mirror and ask, “Who am I? Am I a weak person, am I a defeated person, am I an inferior person? Not at all. I am a child of God. And I was intended to get on top of things, and I was intended to stay there.” While watching this scene, I found myself questioning what this formula actually gives. It has no real value and gives the listeners no real guidance as to how to succeed in the world.

It is at this point where the scene becomes heavy, as the camera slowly zooms in and focuses on Edith’s face (Figure 3.2). The things the man was saying towards the end of his segment struck a chord within Edith. The light that was present in her face at the beginning of the scene has slowly dissolved, while we the viewer watch as she thinks how she is a child of God, how she was on top; when she had her marriage, wealth, status, and privilege. But she didn’t get to stay there, and she hasn’t been there for nearly thirty years. The scene ends with a cut to a wide shot of Edith and Edie still laying in their beds. Proclaiming their satisfaction with

the radio man's segment. This display becomes a moment of irony as Edith and Edie lay in their beds with no attempt at what the man on the radio is suggesting. There is an expectation, especially after having been on top, that things should be done for them. This choice in editing signifies both their pride and ignorance to their situation.



Figure 3.1: Film Still, "Grey Gardens." *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.



Figure 3.2: Film Still, "Grey Gardens." *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.

The most unnerving scene within the film is "the Bouvier money," where Edie begins losing her temper with not only her mother, but the Maysles as well. This setting starts off with a

close up of Edie looking away, presumably at her mother. Edie begins speaking towards the Maysles declaring, “The point is I came down here to take care of my mother. I was sick and tired of worrying about her night and day. I was away from her for five, six years and I was sick and tired of lying awake at night wondering what was happening with my mother.” While Edie is talking, Edith talks over her in the background. Edie then looks to the camera, and in a sense to the brothers and the viewers, in distress. The intervention of the camera, still fixed in a close up position on Edie’s face, makes the moment all the more uncomfortable.

The scene continues with Al Maysles asking Edith “Who was the man that took care of you for twenty-five years?” It is here in the scene that Edie loses her sense of control, stating “nobody took care of my mother for twenty-five years, I took care of this damn house!” The camera is now present within the frame, in the mirror, zooming in on Edith in the background while she sits on her bed (Figure 4.1). The camera then zooms out as Edie enters into the frame, continuing to shout, “I dare you, say my mother was taken care of by any man but my father and I’ll push you under the goddamn bed!” (Figure 4.2). David Maysles, in an attempt to diffuse the situation, explains that Al was referring to Gould; George Gould Strong was Edith’s accompanist, songwriter, social companion, confidante, and soul mate.⁸



Figure 4.1: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.

⁸ “The Documentary.”



Figure 4.2: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.

It is within this scene that The Maysles have become fully implicated into the scene, causing Edie’s reaction. Edie continues that no one took care of her mother, that she had her father’s money and her own money, the Bouvier money. Edie ends her rant, exclaiming “And another thing, Mrs. Beale wasn’t taken care of sexually!” The frame then breaks, coming back to the close up of Edie, who then walks away from the camera. Edith begins speaking about this man, Gould, and affirms that Edie didn’t have to worry about her. The scene ends with a medium shot of Edith looking down, and a close up Edie in profile (Figure 4.3 and 4.4), then cuts to one of their several cats balancing on the stair banister.

There is both a sense of purpose and yet denial, a feeling of entrapment and yet acceptance on Edie’s part within this scene. It seems as though there is an attempt at rationalizing failure as duty; moving back home to take care of her mother Edith and the house, yet it is apparent to the viewer that neither has happened. A false sense of reality. Edie couldn’t take care of herself, even as she lived at the Barbizon Hotel for Women. It is within this scene where the viewer begins to understand the complicated mother-to-daughter relationship between Edith and Edie. The complication of their relationship feels heightened, as the film seems to make light of it, or present it superficially. The duality they share with each other and the home offers a kinship, and their desire to be seen and understood; because if they didn’t have each other, or this moment to be recognized, they would have nothing at all.



Figure 4.3: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.



Figure 4.4: Film Still, “Grey Gardens.” *YouTube*. Accessed December 15, 2019.

The three scenes that I have explored and examined only suggest a small gesture to the large mass of information and content that this film contains. Through these scenes, I begin to question the method of direct cinema and how it represented the Beales. Especially in the last scene analyzed, “the Bouvier money.” It is from here that I will now consider what direct cinema is, and its impact on this film.

Direct Cinema

The making of *Grey Gardens* came into being by accident. As mentioned previously, Lee Radziwill and her sister, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, were impressed with the Maysles work and approached them about doing a documentary about their lives growing up in the Bouvier family. This family included their aunt and cousin, Edith and Edie. The Maysles agreed to do the film, but quickly found the charm and eccentricity of the Beales would make for better film subjects over Jackie and Lee.⁹

But why is it that Edith and Edie made for better film subjects? Was it because of their eccentricity? Was it because of the ironic nature of wealth, time, and status? Was it because of their fall from socialite status to the mother-daughter couple that lives in a crumbling estate? Did the Maysles find that the lives of Edith and Edie were more “truthful” in comparison to their aunt and cousin? Perhaps. Or, the more likely, they saw an opportunity that would be able to pull viewers in. Teresa de Lauretis states that, woman’s skepticism, as Nietzsche suggests, comes from her disregard for truth. That the truth does not concern her. Therefore, arguably, the woman becomes the symbol of truth, of that which constantly eludes man and must be won, which lures and resists, mocks and seduces, and will not be captured.¹⁰ The truth did not concern Edith or Edie, but rather, the act of being seen from those other than each other. An attempt at reclaiming the bourgeoisie existence that has been long gone from them.

How is direct cinema important to the nature of this film, and its reputation? To start, one must understand the context of what direct cinema is. Direct cinema is a film genre that is characterized by a desire to directly capture reality, represent it truthfully, and to question the relationship of reality with cinema. One can say that it is to rely on an agreement among the filmmaker, subjects, and audience to act as if the presence of the camera does not heavily alter the recorded event.¹¹ The Maysles Brothers were the most well known for the development of direct cinema. Instead of planning a scene they wanted to shoot, the brothers would allow the story to unfold organically as the camera records. It is believed that the documentarian was an objective observer, a completely invisible pacifist as opposed to a director or participant.¹²

⁹ “The Documentary.”

¹⁰ Teresa De Lauretis. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. (Houndmills: MacMillan Press, 1987). 31

¹¹ “The Documentary.”

¹² Yoommy Nam. “Cinéma Vérité Vs. Direct Cinema: An Introduction,” Student Resources, April 16, 2018, <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/>

I am interested in the concept of an “objective” observer, and question if it is actually possible to be passive and invisible. Throughout the film, both Edith and Edie were very aware of the camera, and the brothers being present. Even during their moments of bickering, the brothers are often implicated into the scenes. Therefore, it can be deduced that the Maysles were not completely invisible or objective in their attempt in using direct cinema as their method for this film. Their presence and their involvement within the action are clear: both Edith and Edie frequently address the Maysles directly, and involve them in their arguments, looking to them for reassurance. Edie often speaks to Albert and David in a stage whisper, as though the camera, rather than recording her for the purposes of a commercial film, were a reliable confidant. Furthermore, Albert pans towards a mirror twice, recording himself— a reflexive directorial flair that enunciates the Beales’ cyclic scrutinizing of their pasts, as well as Edie’s compulsive monitoring of her self image. Additionally, in doing this, it emphasizes the sense of entrapment that permeates the film, speaking to Edith’s denunciation of Edie’s craving for freedom.¹³

Given the Maysles’ self-aware involvement, it’s easy to see where charges of voyeurism and exploitation come from. Adrienne Rich writes, “The idea of power thus becomes the power of an idea, which saturates all other notions of power,” and that, “The language of patriarchal power insists on a dichotomy: for one person to have power, others-or another- must be powerless.”¹⁴ The main focus of “documentary” is to offer the viewer a sense of a factual reality. However, the form of *Grey Gardens* takes on a hybrid of two disparate and cinematic forms: the melodrama and the documentary.¹⁵ The Maysles were acting in bad faith: they gained the Beales’ trust, maneuvered into their private lives, and acted innocently curious, when, in actuality, they were wise to the documentary “gold” in front of them.¹⁶ Vivian Sobchack, an American cinema theorist and cultural critic, who wrote on another direct cinema film, stated cuttingly on the viewer’s temptation to ‘donate our pity from the largesse of our cultivated sensibilities’ to the filmed subjects of direct cinema. She continues, ‘we remain voyeurs of the action on the screen, distanced enough to appreciate our own perceptiveness’. In believing the subjects have been exploited and pitying them for this – while nevertheless consuming the film –

¹³ “It’s All In The Film: Direct Cinema, ‘Grey Gardens’ and ‘That Summer’.”

¹⁴ Adrienne Cécile Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1997) 67

¹⁵ Matthew Tinkcom. “Grey Gardens.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol. 32 , no. No. 2 (2011): 295–354

¹⁶ “It’s All In The Film: Direct Cinema, ‘Grey Gardens’ and ‘That Summer’.”

the viewer is 'seduced into a sense of smugness, of self-congratulation'.¹⁷ Thus, the ideas that direct cinema captures a reality and truthful representation challenges me. It does not capture a reality, but instead deceives it, while tempting the viewer. This is from the way the film is shot, and the Maysles being aware of themselves and their performers, but more importantly how it has been edited.

It took Ellen Hovde, Muffie Meyer, and Susan Froemke two years to edit the over 70 hours of film the Maysles recorded into a coherent narrative. The importance of editors is obvious, but they are often overlooked, as film editing can make or break a film. It is important to note the dynamic and creative roles of these three women, who are responsible for pulling together the complex elements of this unscripted life. A collaboration of any other editors would have certainly produced an entirely different film. Furthermore, a combination of other editors that were not all or mostly female, would have represented Edith and Edie quite differently as well.¹⁸

The female gaze within the editing is perhaps one of the reasons as to why this film ended up being successful later in its revival. However, I question if the notion of the female gaze is a good thing or a bad thing. There is a difficulty in portraying an autobiography that is not one's own life. And in this case, there is a class bias between the women editors and the mother and daughter. However, these three women were able to edit the film down into a cohesive, jarring, but tender film that allowed for both Edith and Edie to develop a language of their own.

In regards to language, the style that the Beales created for the viewer allowed for a narrative to unfold. However, I am concerned with how this narrative is presented and consumed by the viewer. Teresa de Lauretis writes, "I want to explore how narrative and narrativity, because of their capacity to inscribe desire and to direct, sustain, or undercut identification (in all the senses of the term), are mechanics to be employed strategically and tactically in the effort to construct other forms of coherence, to shift the terms of representation, to produce the conditions of representability of another-and gendered-social subject. Obviously, therefore, much is at stake in narrative, in a poetics of narrative. Our suspicion is more than justified, but so is our

¹⁷ "It's All In The Film: Direct Cinema, 'Grey Gardens' and 'That Summer'."

¹⁸ "The Documentary."

attraction.”¹⁹ It is this that brings me to the notion of visual pleasure. The following is a brief reference to what scopophilia is.

“Pleasure in looking; in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, an infantile instinct. In relation to the dominance of the male gaze in classical Hollywood cinema, Mulvey refers to scopophilia as the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies as (particularly, erotic) objects without being seen either by those on screen or by other members of the audience. Mulvey argues that cinema viewing conditions facilitate both the voyeuristic process of the objectification of female characters and also the narcissistic process of identification with an ideal ego seen on the screen.”²⁰

There is something to be said about the dominance of the male gaze within cinema, and how this has been conditioned into our society and culture when viewing film. It is within Mulvey’s assertion that this voyeuristic viewing facilitates the objectification and subjectification of female characters.

Scopophilia and the Effect of Visual Pleasure

To access a narrative is an affecting experience: it asks one to confront the bewildering permutations of a life, any life for that matter, might take. So it is realistic to ask, is this what the Maysles intended to capture? And, is this how the Beales wanted to be captured?²¹ Did either of these things cross the brother’s mind in the moment? It is unclear. However, what is clear is what this film offers to the viewer; an opportunity to look into the lives of two women, women who were eccentric, perhaps one may even say “nuts,” by the way in which they presented themselves to the camera. Their loss of status, ultimately presented as if they are “like us,” yet their acceptance of this matter is lost as well. This is what often makes people turn around and look, unable to turn away from the spectacle unfolding in front of them. Laura Mulvey writes that, “The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances

¹⁹ De Lauretis, 109

²⁰ “Scopophilia - Oxford Reference,” *Oxford Reference*. November 3, 2019, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100448183>.

²¹ “It’s All In The Film: Direct Cinema, ‘Grey Gardens’ and ‘That Summer’.”

in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is a pleasure in being looked at.”

Mulvey goes on to state, “Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exists to drive quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.”²² The Beales were taken on not just as subjects, but as objects, who were then subjected not only to the curious and controlled gaze of the Maysles, but also to the viewers who would watch in awe of their antics. Perhaps as a sense of owning one's privilege through viewing?

Laura Mulvey discerns that, “The function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology and camera movements, combined with invisible editing all tend to blur the limits of screen space.”²³ Furthermore, she writes that, “the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of the exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer, or performers.”²⁴ We as a society have been cultured to believe that what is caught on camera is a realistic representation of what occurred, playing with human perception. However, this is not true. It is rather an illusion to consume audiences; the illusion of visual pleasure.

Therefore, the viewer chooses to go along with the narration, and swallow this singular interpretation of Big and Little Edie or, the footage shows us the beginnings of the collaboration, or arguably a duel, between the Maysles as interpreters and the Beales as performers. Albert's camerawork is impulsive, gorges itself on what it sees; searching, examining, trying to map the domain of the Beales' lives while it still has the chance.²⁵ What one sees in *Grey Gardens* is neither a notion of reality nor footage of pure exploitation, but rather an intricate joint effort

²² Laura Mulvey, Rachel Rose, and Mark Lewis. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema 1975*. (London: Afterall, 2016). 11

²³ Mulvey, 18

²⁴ Mulvey, 12

²⁵ “It's All In The Film: Direct Cinema, 'Grey Gardens' and 'That Summer'.”

between the Maysles and the Beales. A constructed, co-authored reality, a kind of proto reality TV. Any mixed feelings about the Maysles' interaction with the Beales, the lingering sense of their exploitation, and our own complicity in it, ought to acknowledge the collaborative nature of that interaction, and the role the Beales played in both creating and curating a representation of their own lives.²⁶

Together Forever

After the film, the estate became famous. The house was a place of domicile and status. Shortly after the filming of *Grey Gardens* Edith died, and Edie was forced to sell the mansion. However, she only sold the estate to a buyer who would restore the mansion and grounds. Thus securing both the Beales legacy and the promise she made to her mother to take care of her and the house.

The revival and legacy of this film has come through in many forms. It has become a musical, a play, a book, and a film starring Drew Barrymore and Jessica Lange. Much of the other films by the Maysles brothers, such as *Gimme Shelter* and *Salesman*, have not had as much recent significance as this film. *Grey Gardens* is a highly notable film, especially in this current political climate. Rich writes, "Like intense relationships between women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter had been profoundly threatening to men."²⁷



Figure 5: Edith and Edie, Bowery Boys, "Journey to Grey Gardens: A Tale of Two Edies," The Bowery Boys: New York City History, May 20, 2019

²⁶ "It's All In The Film: Direct Cinema, 'Grey Gardens' and 'That Summer'."

²⁷ Rich, 226

I find myself questioning, what is the attachment to the interpersonal dyad? What does it mean to look into a conversation between two people, in this case a mother and daughter, which we are not meant to see? How does the representation of this intimacy, tenderness, and humiliation play into the audiences' perception? The women lived together for over twenty years, longer than most relationships ever last. The form that Edith and Edie take on is that of a kinship (Figure 5). They both sleep in the same room together, they eat together, and they constantly bicker. They've grown old together, have had men leave them, and both face tragedies together. Adrienne Rich writes in her book, *Of Woman Born*, "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy."²⁸ Even when Edie came back to live with her mother Edith, she was still lost, but frankly, so was Edith. Thus, it is the female friendship that kept them going. And at the very least, they had each other, as the mother-to-daughter relationship is one that lasts forever.

²⁸ Rich, 237

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