Ellen Hovde: An Interview
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Ellen Hovde: An Interview

Ellen Hovde is one of the most gifted and articulate of **cinéma-vérité** *editors. Alan Rosenthal interviewed her just after she had finished work on* **Grey Gardens,** *which posed many of the murderous problems characteristic of editing work in the genre. Hovde produced NET's* **Head Start in Mississippi,** *edited Margaret Mead's* **New Guinea Journal,** *and has also directed. She is probably best known, however, for her association with the Maysles brothers. She co-edited* **Salesman (1966)** *with Charlotte Zwerin, and did the same with the Rolling Stones feature* **Gimme Shelter.** *On both* **Christo's Valley Curtain (1974)** *and* **Grey Gardens (1975)** *she is credited as co-director along with David and Albert Maysles, with Muffie Meyer as the fourth director in the latter film.*

Grey Gardens *is a portrait of two unusual women—Edith Bouvier Beale (Big Edie) and her 55-year-old unmarried daughter, Edie (Little Edie). They lead a squalid hermit-like existence in a crumbling East Hampton mansion on Long Island. The film shows the intimate details of the lives of the two women, with their strengths and vanities there for all to see; it is a beautifully wrought film. As Rosenthal puts it (the following interview will appear in his forthcoming new book on documentary),* **Grey Gardens** *"reveals more about human relationships than almost any film I can remember." But when it was first shown, it was violently criticized by some viewers as an unethical invasion of the women's privacy (though of course they had given consent to being filmed). Such questions are seldom discussed in regard to documentary, though Rosenthal regards them as pertinent and important. (In this case he "totally agrees" with Hovde on these points.)*

Since completing **Grey Gardens** *Hovde has produced and directed* **Middle Age** *for the "Woman Alive" television series. She directed (again with the Maysles and Muffie Meyer)* **The Burk Family,** *and produced and directed several films for "Sesame Street."*

Ellen, the last few years you have been associated with the Maysles brothers on various films. What were you doing before that; how did you come into films?

Well, I came into films years ago . . . through editing. I had originally gone to drama school to be a stage director, and didn't find enough work to keep me together. I then found a job in a film school as an administrative assistant, got interested in film, and soon apprenticed myself to a film editor who taught at the school.

I felt that, at least in documentary film (I haven't

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had much experience in theatrical film, though I'm producing and directing one now), the person who is doing the editing is doing something very like a mix of writing and stage directing: that person is shaping, forming and structuring the material, and making the decisions about what is really going to be there on the screen—what the ideas are, what the order of events will be, where the emphasis will be.

These responsibilities very often rest almost entirely with the editor. Some documentary directors do sit in the cutting room and take part in these decisions, but many do not. Many simply give the editor the footage and say, "when you have a cut, let me know . . .", and they go away. So the editor, alone, makes absolutely basic decisions—the sort of decisions that the director and producer, when they come back, have to base their decisions *upon.* They may have photographic memories or may have taken detailed notes about the material . . . they will say, ". . . look, there must be a better shot than that" or ". . . we must somehow make the point how poor these people are" and so on—all valuable criticisms. But the way things are structured, and whether the film is "working" to make the desired points . . . that is really done in the cutting room.

Are you talking basically about cinéma vérité *or have you worked with the old pre-structured, pre-scripted films? How do you get the balance between the director's responsibility and yours?*

I've worked with all those systems. There are documentaries that are pre-structured—some people even record a narration first and then have you go out and shoot pictures to fit it. Quite boring. Yes, I've done that. And then there are those montages that everyone used to do, usually to music . . . commercials still use that technique. It's difficult to do well, and it's certainly the editor who makes it work if it's going to. But it's in *cinéma vérité* that the editing takes on the same importance as the camera work . . . and camera work and editing combined *are* directing, in *cinéma vérité.*

What was the first vérité *film that you cut?*

Oh, boy! I suppose it was at a company called "Filmmakers," with Bob Drew and Ricky Leacock and Don Pennebaker; and the Maysles were there as well. We did many films—in fact, we all learned how to do this as we went along, by working on films like *Susan Starr* . . . then there was a film about the Aga Khan . . . then a film called *The Chair,* about a man who is about to be electrocuted, Paul Crump. And there were films with the Kennedys and so on.

What did you learn during that time about that new style of editing totally non-scripted films?

Well, first of all, speaking technically, we had to develop a whole new attitude toward how the film would *look.* The camera wasn't on a tripod anymore and was swooping around all over the place, zooming in to find focus and zooming out again (often in the middle of something very important!), running out of film at the worst possible moments —and of course nothing was repeatable, it was real life. So we would cut and patch and discard old conventions and invent new ones. On the good side the films had a kind of new vitality and energy that was very exciting; on the bad, we all sometimes tried to push footage around and convince ourselves we *had* something on film, that we didn't.

But I guess the most important thing we learned was that you have to take an enormous amount of material, shot in real time, and sift it and sort it and condense it into a "dramatically told" story. People who shoot this kind of film shoot a lot, because if you are shooting an event that doesn't have those predetermined beginnings, middles, and ends, you don't *know* where the critical moment is going to be—often you don't even know what the *story* is going to be. You think you do, because you've got to have something to hold on to when you're shooting, but unless it's a film like *On The Pole,* which was another of those Filmmakers films —a film about the Indianapolis 500, and you know there is going to be a race and there's going to be a finish to the race . . . unless it's like that, you don't actually know in a lot of these films what the outcome is going to be, or who the important character will be.

The first person who has to contribute to those decisions is the person who decides to film that particular situation; and then the cameraperson, whoever that is, has to make a constant, running series of split-second decisions about what's happening and what will happen next and how important it is . . . The person who is taking sound is often the so-called journalist or reporter, and he or she is often nudging the cameraperson, saying oh,

do that, do that, while the cameraperson is doing this, and this. (If they have a good rapport they work it out between them; if not, well, cameramen have been known not to shoot any close-ups simply because they didn't like the person they were filming, or to shoot very badly a scene they didn't want to shoot. Editors of course also do such things by making a poor cut of a sequence they don't believe in.) Anyway, I would never minimize the decisions that are made like that in the field; it is extremely difficult to know whether you "have something" or you do not. Generally speaking, people I've worked with have tried to keep shooting until they have some sense in their gut that there is a film there . . . that there was some critical scene in which something "happened."

In *Grey Gardens* that critical scene was what we called "the pink room." The scene that is placed very near the end of the film, although it happened very near the beginning of the shooting. That's the scene where Edie Beale tells a story about a man who wanted to marry her, and her mother sent him away in 15 minutes. Now Edie told that story, during those five weeks of shooting, at least three or four times on film, but the *particular* time she told it in the pink room—for some reason, it had a lot of pain in it, in fact she cried when she told her story. And when we saw that, it moved us, we thought we had something. We didn't really know what we had; we thought it gave us some kind of insight into the relationship between these two women, and what kind of pain they could cause each other.

Can we just go back to how you started working in close co-operation with the Maysles. You said that you had been working on a few films, but during the last few years you seem to have been working almost exclusively with them?

Yes. I used to have a company with my ex-husband, Adam Giffard. We made films, particularly in Mississippi during the Movement, but Adam hated producing and our company more or less dissolved. I then began working more and more with David and Albert, and Charlotte Zwerin as well. I cannot really say why we kept on working together, except that we are all fond of each other and seem to get on very well, and the films that we have worked on together have been things we all like and they've been fairly successful. I still do independent productions. I make films for "Sesame Street." I'm making right now a dramatic fiction film on a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. I'm involved in a possible feature deal, and so on . . . and none of these are Maysles productions.

What was the first you heard of Grey Gardens *—of the idea, of the concept? Do you remember its very first moments?*

Yes. While I was working on the film, *Christo's Valley Curtain*, David and Al were starting to shoot a film with Lee Radziwill about her childhood in East Hampton. The idea of the film was that they would go out with Lee and photograph her talking to a lot of people who had known her parents, had known her and Jackie, and so on. And one of the people she wanted to interview was her aunt, Mrs. Beale, because obviously she knew a lot about Lee's parents and their early life, and Lee liked her a lot, I think. And it was at that time that the Suffolk County Board of Health raided the Beale's house and tried to evict them because of "unsanitary living conditions." Lee was put in charge of renovating the house, by the Bouvier family, who of course got involved in the publicity. And so, partly because Lee wanted to talk to her aunt about the past, and partly because she had business to do there, she and the Maysles spent a fair amount of their time at that house, more than Lee would have done ordinarily.

David and Al then began to shoot what was going on, which was of course amazing. Here were these two women who were very flamboyant, very theatrical, very funny . . . in the midst of a crisis. They were trying to save their house and their way of life. The footage began to come back, and David and I looked at that footage and he said, "Come on, let's just put it together very roughly and see if we can't talk Lee into making a film mainly about the Beales."

So in a week and a half we put together a very rough hour-and-a-half film, and showed it to Lee, and she hated it. It wasn't at all what she had in mind, and she said "Please, I do not want to do this at all, I want to go back to my original idea." And David and Al said they didn't want to go back to that, because this was obviously much more interesting, and she said, "Please give me the negative and let's quit." So they had to do that, because

they didn't own it. She took the negative and went away, and we all went on to other things and thought that would be the end of it.

But no one was able to forget this incredible couple who had dominated that film; we all felt that if there was ever going to be an opportunity to make a film about these two people, we would like to do it. David, especially, felt close to Little Edie, and since he had a summer place out there near the Beale house he stayed in touch with her and talked to her frequently about making a film. And then, when a year had gone by and Lee had done nothing about the footage we had given up, the Maysles decided to go ahead and venture making a film about these two women. Big Edie didn't really want to do it, at first. Little Edie did.

At that point, did David and Al say to you what they thought they had been looking for in this film, what might come out?

No, never, they had no idea.

Just a sense that the material was there?

Just a sense of two charismatic people; that there must be a story there. They have a sublime confidence in sensing that there are people who are interesting people and leading interesting lives . . . but what the film would be "about," they had no concept. In fact, Muffie (Muffie Meyer, a co-director and co-editor on the film) and I once, during the editing, sat them down with a tape recorder and tried to get them to put into words what they thought they were doing, and they were unable to say; they really had no idea even why they were interested in these people.

Finally we suggested to Al that he was interested in Big Edie because she was rather like his mother, and that struck a chord in him . . . he was very involved with his mother, who had recently died. David said that it was maybe because he identified with Little Edie because he too was afraid of getting married, and was very attached to family. But that was as far as they could come with any reasons for making the film. The big reason was just that they wanted to do it, and so did Muffie and I.

You and Muffie are listed as co-directors of this film. What exactly does that mean? When material started coming in, what was your function; how did you work on the material?

Well, I started before Muffie did. When the material came in, I and David and Susan Froemke

GREY GARDENS

(who was then the assistant), looked at it together, and usually Al did too. And we just let it wash over us. We all made notes about what appealed to us, but what I did when I first started working on it was to go for that scene in the pink room, to see whether that was going to be the strong, pivotal scene we all hoped it would be.

The material in general was very strange; you almost couldn't tell if you had anything until you cut it, because it was very free-flowing, very repetitive—it didn't have obvious structure—there were no events, there was nothing around which a conversation was going to wheel, there were no other people in and out of the house except for Jerry, and Lois Wright. It was all kind of the same in a gross way, and you had to dig into it, try to find motivations, condense the material to bring out psychological tones.

Did you start editing before you had all the material, or did you have all the material available and then start to look at it?

I didn't start cutting until we had all the material, and I then started on scenes that simply appealed to me. I was not examining myself too closely

about that either. I was always, I guess, looking for relationship, because I felt there was no question that the film would turn around a dependency relationship in a family, and that interested me very much. When Muffie came, David and I had already cut a few scenes, and we all went over what we had, and decided which scenes we would cut next. I think we were pushing in film terms towards a novel of sensibility rather than a novel of plot.

We were still pretty much cutting things that we liked—that were funny, or had emotional outbursts from Edie, or songs from Mrs. Beale. Because the "raid" by the Board of Health had been such a traumatic experience for the Beales, they talked about it constantly, and we felt we had to deal with that and we cut a lot of material relating to it.

Sometimes when you are doing a vérité *film, the difficulty is defining what the film is about. You are going off in seven different directions till you find what it's all about. Was there that problem with this film, or were you pretty clear which direction you wanted from the start?*

No, I don't think we were clear at all. I think we all knew there was nothing in terms of "action," but what was really going on was not clear. David thought in the beginning that the issue was, would Edie leave or not. Well, for Muffie and me that was never an issue. We felt absolutely certain that Edie had no intention of leaving, and that her *talk* about leaving—which she did all the time—was simply one of the devices that she and her mother used as a kind of conveyance of feeling . . . that neither had the slightest intention of changing the balance of power, or the situation. In fact, we felt that each knew exactly how far the other could be teased or goaded or pushed, before causing an action which might actually change the situation . . . and then each withdrew, because it was the battle, and not changes, that interested them.

The main themes that Muffie and I decided to go with were the questions around "why were mother and daughter *together*—so together that they almost totally excluded the rest of the world?" And in order to build audience interest, we began to structure the material so that first, it would be possible for the audience to believe that the mother was strong, witty and charming, and was taking care of Little Edie, her daughter, who was too weak and fearful ever to have gone and lived a life of her own by herself.

Our second theme was that it was possible that Edie was there to take care of her *mother,* and that her mother was very demanding, manipulative . . . it was she who arranged that her daughter couldn't leave, because she needed someone to wait on her and didn't want to be left alone. Our third theme, the resolution of the other two, was that we wanted the audience to feel finally that the relationship was a symbiotic one, and that on both sides, the need to care and be cared for was equal . . . it was a balanced situation of dependency and strength, love and hate.

Did Al and David come in on the structuring, or was it left to you and Muffie?

Al never comes in on structure; he has never, to my knowledge, been in on the structuring of a film. David wasn't involved in the structure of this one very much, though he often is. For one thing, the editing process was very long, and they had to go and make some money to keep everything going, so they were out doing commercials, that sort of thing. Muffie and I structured the film. David came in when he could. David is always very interested in the editing process and sometimes takes part, but here the main work we did together, except at the very beginning, was at the end. Then, there were certain scenes that Muffie and I wanted to have in, that he didn't want; there were some that he wanted and we didn't want. We traded off on those. David, of course, is the producer, and if he really puts his foot down and you are unable to convince him, you give in. I would say, nothing was ever done without David's agreement.

You mentioned those scenes that you traded off, scenes you wanted and David didn't. Can you tell me about these scenes?

Yes, Muffie and I wanted a scene in, which first of all was very nice in terms of photographic variety. It was shot from the garden, looking up at Little Edie in a window—she was shouting down, talking about politics, and was complaining bitterly about the local Republican politics. And then she went into a general statement, quite a funny one, about politics in general and Republican politics in particular. It was very witty and always got a laugh, and was a lovely change from always being in that bedroom.

But the real reason why we wanted it was that it showed Edie in a moment that was not narcissistic . . . she was showing that she did read, that she was aware of public events, that she thought about them and that she had very strong opinions about them. We felt that it was a very strong card to play in presenting her character, because she does come off so easily as a completely narcissistic and dependent person who is unaware of anything outside her mirror. She is *not* like that, and so we did feel strongly that the scene should be in. In fact, we were constantly putting it in, and David was constantly taking it out.

Why did he want it out?

David was never able to explain to us satisfactorily why he wanted it out. He said that it was self-serving, that he simply didn't like it, that he didn't want Edie talking about politics. I think it had something to do with the fact that he thought it was some kind of cheap shot for a Kennedy-related person to talk about Republican politics. That's about as close as I could get to his reason, and he finally said "It just has to go, I will not have it."

What are the scenes that he wanted in and you didn't want?

Let's see. The beginning, I'm not fond of . . . the way the newspaper scene worked. I wanted to start the film (and Muffie did too) with a dolly shot down Lily Pond Lane where the Beales live; on that road are enormous houses with espaliered trees, and fancy gravelled driveways—they are very elegant. And we thought it would be wonderful to just go right past those houses and come to the Beales' house. You would be immediately saying a lot. You would be putting them in a context. Now both David and Al were adamant about that they would never do that shot. Al said, "I don't care where this house is, it could be in the middle of Harlem, and the story would be the same." Muffie and I don't agree at all; we think the story has very much to do with the society, and the place, and the contrast of the way they live with the way people live around them, the class they come from and how they deviated from that. We think it's critical.

And Al did not?

He refused to shoot it. He did do some still shots of other houses and scenes in East Hampton, and we used those, which helped a lot.

The Beale house in GREY GARDENS

Was there any material that you felt was too painful or too private to include? I want to get on to that question because many people have criticized the film for being too exposing of the women. They say that it should not have been made, and so on. What were the judgments or the self-censorship, if at all, that you used on the film?

I don't think there were any too painful or too private events that they talked about. I don't think we eliminated anything because it was too private, except certain physical scenes of Edie's partial nudity. She wore very odd, wonderful, make-shift costumes, and sometimes they were really very, very revealing. We always eliminated those.

I think we felt in the footage that there was a certain need to balance out the two women, and it was hard to do. Mrs. Beale, who was a very, very strong personality, often came off as extremely cruel and bitchy and ruthless; and in a way we almost wanted to protect her from making that kind of impression too strongly. It was partly true but it wasn't the whole story. For one thing, Edie's ways of getting back at her mother were cruel too—she handled her mother by withholding, by delaying information, food, whatever. She was just as involved, just as manipulative in her way. But her way was much harder to present on film, because Mrs. Beale's way was with wit and charm, which always attracts people. It was one of the things we really struggled with.

As for exploitation, Muffie and I worried a great deal during the cutting about exploiting them, and exposing them to ridicule from people who wouldn't understand them, and so on. David and Al never did. They felt that everything that had gone on was all right, and that if the Beales revealed themselves completely, fine. And I think that they were absolutely right.

I think that really what happens in that film is that an audience is amazed and identifies with them, and is frightened, maybe repelled. But when people say that those women were exploited, I think what they are really thinking about is themselves.

I think basically all *vérité* films are criticized on that ground that you are invading someone's privacy, just by pointing a camera at them. On the other hand I think that people are aware in our society of what a camera is, and very aware of what they ought to be doing in front of it, so unless a person is really *non compos mentis* it is pretty hard to put someone in a film with their own knowledge and consent, without them having a very good idea of what is going on.

Now the criticism in this film is that they did not have any knowledge of what was going on, but *I* think that they *did*. At the time of cutting it, I was not sure that they did, but since it was made, it is clear to me that they knew and accepted a great deal about themselves, that other people had no idea of.

The Beales themselves were the ones who really defended the film more than anyone. They saw the film at their house and loved it. I thought—fine. That just means that they recognize themselves, but when they see it with an audience, and the audience begins to pick up on certain things, and to laugh at certain things, their reaction may change. I sat with Edie at Lincoln Center when she saw it for the first time with an audience. She laughed, she cried, she enjoyed it. She treated it almost as if it were someone else, and yet she realized very well that it was herself and her mother.

And then, in the months when there was a lot of controversy about it, it was Mrs. Beale and Edie who called us and said, "You know there has been this criticism—don't worry. It's all right. We know that it is an honest picture. We believe in it. We don't want you to feel upset." That was their attitude and they never wavered from that.

Some of the things that people have said to me when I go around and speak about the film are, "Well you know, those two are not quite right in the head, and therefore they are not responsible for themselves, and therefore you had no right to expose them in this way. They had no idea of what they were revealing." Actually I've mostly heard that in New York. However, no one stops to remember they managed their own affairs all their lives. No one tried to institutionalize them, and it is presumptuous to make decisions for other people about what they do or do not understand unless they are really incompetent, and I do not think that they are incompetent. You get into the issue, well does a person *really* know what they are revealing, and I don't think that it is possible for anyone to really know what they are revealing. That is a risk that you take, but they took it gladly, and I think that they were very courageous to do it.

At what point did you know, "that's it, the film is finished." That you had it completely, when there must be a tendency to go on, to change or to play around?

Well, Mufffie and I worked it into a form where we thought we had something basically along those lines that I described, "did Edie stay to care for mother, did her mother keep Edie to protect her, or were they both involved and were both fulfilling needs of their own." That was our base line. When we had that, we had been working a long time, and we began to screen the film for just a few very close friends, to see whether *they* were getting what we thought *we* had gotten out of it, not knowing anything about the Beales.

There were confusions, and certain people were upset about certain things. The most interesting thing that happened (I think it happens always for people who edit film) is that if you invite someone to see a film that you've never shown to anyone, they don't have to say a word. Just the fact that a stranger to the film is *sitting* with you, throws you into the audience yourself. Your own perceptions of the film change completely, and you begin to see it for the first time as an audience yourself.

That is what we tried to do and it was very successful for us. We saw the film in new ways and began to really hone it down. We had a blackboard thing with three-by-five white cards with scene numbers on them, and we really spent a lot of time shoving them around, saying "Let's take this scene where Edie shows that she can swim (which means that she has a kind of style and confidence) and put it ahead of the little bit here. What will that do?" We played with that until we were almost

blind. And once it settled down, it began to lock down almost like a crystal formation, and began to be impossible to move whole blocks of scenes apart. They just seemed inevitable, and the film (quite rapidly, I think) finally got locked down.

You said that all the material had been finished before you started editing it, but did you find there were still things you would really have liked to talk to David and Al about, saying, "We need you to film this—to do some more filming—to help us with the structure and the form."

Well we did do that, and they did go back and do more filming.

Do you remember the things you asked them to shoot?

We never asked them to go back and ask the Beales to talk about anything. That is a cardinal rule with all of us. It is something you don't do. But we needed a few things technically to smooth a few transitions. Cutting around two characters in one location, changing costumes every day, really is a terrible problem, so you are always trying to think of ways to cut, and things to use as cutaways. There are certain scenic things that we wanted—certain things that Al had done but weren't quite right, like the shot of the moon at night over the house. We said "Do that again, Al, and do it better." There was also the tracking shot we wanted of the other houses in East Hampton. Al finally compromised. He didn't give us the track but he gave us a number of individual shots. They weren't quite as elegant as the simple shot, but they did the trick.

One of the other problems with the cutting was that these women talked on top of each other all the time, and there was almost no room tone—no silences. As one conversation finished and you wanted to say, "Bam, that's the end of the scene," the other voice would begin. This made for certain unsolvable problems. So we said, "Go back and try and get Edie to repeat this sentence." Edie was a pro. She could hear the original recording and then repeat it with the same emotional tone. We never asked her to say something that she had not said, but both she and her mother were able to give you a new line that was clean.

How did working on Grey Gardens *affect your general feelings about what* vérité *could and couldn't do?*

EDIE: *I got fat not wearing clothes for two years.*
MRS. BEALE: *Oh, that wasn't it—it was the quarts and quarts of ice cream. My bill was $171 just for ice cream!*

I guess it changed my feelings very much about *cinéma vérité.* I felt we were pushing it in a new direction, and so did Muffie. You know the kind of axiom of the people who invented *vérité.* They were all cameramen, and they had really objected to tampering with reality. Reality to them really means you photograph it as it happened and you do not cut it. It is just happening. You hear Pennebaker say this, and Leacock will say it, and I am sure Al will say it too.

It is just patently untrue, you know; all those films were *always* cut. The difficulty in condensing reality is that it is not written as well as O'Neill. It is not as economical. And when you try and condense it into film time, you very often find that the whole scene is falling apart. If the audience could sit there and watch for 30 hours the material would be wonderful. But they won't. So you have to condense, and it falls apart.

So the first real problem is to condense "real time" into "film time" without it losing the very quality that you liked so much about it. It was also very difficult in this film but it is was the interesting thing about it, how to make a film about *process,* rather than *events.* We were really trying to take real people's lives, and the interactions between people, and make *that* interesting because it is psychologically interesting, and not because something is going to happen that you are waiting for.

It is, as I said, a novel of sensibility, and in the end slightly Proustian, though I don't mean to be arrogant about it. What I mean is that if you can interest an audience and hold them, because you

are trying to do something psychologically revealing, that is a *new way* to think about *vérité.* One of the things we did like that, for instance, was the story that I talked to you about, in the pink room. That was one of the critical scenes where Little Edie cries about the fact that her mother sent away the man who might have married her.

Edie told that story several times. We used it twice in the film; she tells the entire story earlier in the film and she *laughs* about it, and then she repeats almost word for word the dialogue, and *cries* about it. There were many other smaller instances in the film where we did repeat information, because we were making a film about an obsessive, repetitive relationship, and what we wanted to show our audience were not the words but the emotional affect and the tone. The words were simply like Pavlov reactions. The story would just roll out, and the responses would be there automatically. But what was *really* going on, was that their relationships had different emotional tones at different times, and they were expressing their needs that way rather than by events or by varying their conversation. And they did not have to have very much conversation, a couple of topics would do.

Now all this is very risky for the film maker because you hope an audience will understand that and will go with it and will bear with it, even at times when it might seem boring. But your hope is that they are hooked enough that they will stick with you and come out the other end and not feel that they have been bored.

How did you work with Muffie? I find it very unusual to have two editors. Are your tastes very similar?

Yes. First of all I like very much working with other people. I have worked frequently with Charlotte Zwerin and Charlotte, Muffie and I edited many of the Maysles' films. Charlotte and I feel, and I think Muffie does too, that there is an advantage in several editors. There is so much footage coming in; for example in *Grey Gardens* we had a minimum of 80 hours of sync footage, and then 70 reels of wild track, and 30 to 40 reels of other stuff. One person cannot really hold all of that inside without help. If you can share that burden with someone who has sensibilities close to your own, it is just so much easier.

Then sometimes you just get tired, and you cannot think about an alternate way of doing something—you are locked into it—and then your friend says, "Well, give me that scene, and I'll try something slightly different." And we would just trade scenes, sometimes in the middle, if we were stuck, or we would do complementary scenes. We always discussed the film in the morning and tried to be pretty sure that we had the same ultimate goal. But then it is just gravy after that, delightful to have someone to bounce ideas with.

It is unusual, but not, I think, all that strange. Musicians do it a lot, Rogers and Hammerstein, Gilbert and Sullivan. And film is a kind of communal thing anyway. I have never believed in the *auteur* theory of film, with certain very few exceptions. In *vérité* I do not know of anyone who really creates the whole thing by himself, and I think it is nonsense to say that it is done by one person. All of this started, I think, because we had four directors on the film. The reason we have is that there *were* four directors on the film, and the responsibility and the creativity was shared equally. The word is a little misleading. Al hates the word "director" because he feels that it implies that he told people what to do, which is not the meaning at all. It means that we made the film, and that it would have been a different film had any of us not been there.

If the root of politics is power transactions then this is a very political film, wouldn't you say?

Yes, very much so. It is political in the sense that it is dealing with human relationships, a very modern situation, where people were living in intimate contact with maybe only one other person. Today, living in nuclear families, we expect the other person to fill all our needs, and we to fill all theirs, and people get into very bizarre situations, even in quite ordinary-looking homes. When people see *Grey Gardens* sometimes they think, oh my God, are they crazy! That may be your first reaction, but I think most of us feel that there is a lot that goes on between those two people with which we can identify. Intimate relationships are very complicated that way, they *are* power transactions. You are dependent on each other, you are trying to manipulate each other, you love each other, you hate each other. All of those things are happening on top of each other.

Now in America, which is such an open society, we claim that we admit everything, but the fact is that we admit very little. People are frightened to see another person reveal that much about themselves, apparently without shame. It is very upsetting for some people to think that Mrs. Beale does not mind having her sagging flesh out there on the screen. I have heard old women say that it is not decent, and how could you be so cruel to show the flesh hanging off her arm. Well, as a matter of fact, the flesh *is* hanging off her arm, and Little Edie's reaction to remarks like that was, "Well, if you are 58 and your thighs are going flabby, too, that is how it is."

It is hard for people to accept that you can say something that was really deeply cruel to someone, and then say, "By the way, please, pass the sugar." The sugar is passed and life goes on. And if in *vérité* you can really begin to show people that that *is* how life is lived and that people *survive* that experience, I think that is a very political thing to do, a very important thing to do.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

Invaders and Encampments: The Films of Philip Kaufman

Despite all the serious film criticism which has been published in America during the past fifteen years, important artists continue to be neglected—none more so than Philip Kaufman. During these same fifteen years, he has managed to make five distinctive movies—*Goldstein, Fearless Frank, The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid, The White Dawn,* and now *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—in the teeth of all the setbacks and agonies which the American studio establishment customarily inflicts on original film artists: indifference, blundering interference, inept distribution, firing—the lot. A European of his ability and achievements would be able to work as steadily as Truffaut or Chabrol or Fassbinder or Bertolucci or Herzog or even Rivette. But in America, as John Houseman has said, they dare you to make movies.

A Chicagoan, Kaufman spent a year at Harvard Law School, took a degree in American history from the University of Chicago, and tried novel-writing for a while during the early sixties. Along with his wife, Rose (who has worked and acted in some of his films and wrote the first-draft screenplay of his next one, *The Wanderers*), he lived in California for a time, then spent a couple of years in Europe and Israel, where he taught some English, read, wrote, studied, and saw key movies—not just the first fruits of the New Wave but early films by Pier Paolo Pasolini and two famous American independent features, *Shadows* and *The Connection*. Convinced that more movies like these could be made in America despite Hollywood's closed doors, he returned to Chicago, studied the standard film-making textbooks, shot with a hired cameraman to get first-hand experience. Then he and Benjamin Manaster wrote and directed *Goldstein* together on a budget of $50,000, after which he raised another $150,000 and made *Fearless Frank* by himself under the title *Frank's Greatest Adventure*.

Although these films were shown to some acclaim at the Cannes festivals of 1964 and 1967, neither got much attention in the United States, where major studio distribution is almost mandatory for extensive showings. A now-defunct company got a few bookings for *Goldstein*, but *Frank*

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