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Fabulous folds: revolutionary costumes in *Grey Gardens* (1975)

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the material agency of clothing in the celebrated documentary classic *Grey Gardens* (David and Albert Maysles, USA 1975). Drawing on the extraordinary relationship between the protagonists, their clothing, the filming location, and the filmmakers, the essay shows how the protagonists of the documentary "think up" costumes that enable them to temporarily exceed difficult living conditions. The essay names the thought-up costumes fabulous folds and accounts for the ways in which costumes activate novel possibilities in the body's relationship to its environment.

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In a 2013 episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, one of the queens wins the infamous Snatch Game challenge with a celebrity impersonation of Little Edie of *Grey Gardens*. Unparalleled in camp perfection, Jinkx Monsoon takes the stage clad in a headscarf, fur coat and heritage jewelry, sporting a magnifying glass and speaking in an exaggerated cultured accent about cats, her mother and famous acquaintances. Four years prior, in a 2009 HBO feature titled *Grey Gardens*, Drew Barrymore plays the role of Little Edie wearing coats, scarves, and pins, albeit in a more housebroken manner. A year before, John Galliano fills the runway of his Spring 2008 ready-to-wear collection with luxurious headpieces, swathed cardigans, knotted skirts, hair pins and brooches. The collection is inspired by the eccentric cat-loving aristocratic decay that Monsoon's celebrity impersonation and the HBO feature reference directly. Little Edie's clothing and accessories, her unconventional poise and style of communication have circulated in popular culture and media for almost half a century.

Edith "Little Edie" Bouvier Beale (1917–2002) and her mother Edith "Big Edie" Ewing Bouvier Beale (1895–1977) became cultural icons after appearing in Albert and David Maysles's documentary *Grey Gardens* (USA 1975). In the documentary, the mother and daughter talk about their lives and perform for the camera while dealing with social seclusion and poverty in an East Hamptons mansion that is falling apart. The documentary is edited into a non-linear "crystal formation" (Robson 1983) to the effect that Little Edie seems to change dresses, scarves and brooches several times a day. She calls her inventive outfits "revolutionary costumes" and points out that she has "to think these things up" (see figures 1–2). Contrary to general expectations of documentary films of the time, the filmmakers actively encourage Little Edie's parade of costumes and participate in it. It is as if the presence of the filmmakers and the editing of the film pushed Little Edie's dreams of being a performer to actualize.[1]

In this essay, we are interested in the documentary's energetic performative bursts that come about in the dynamic relationship between the protagonists, the location, the costumes and the filmmakers. For us, it is precisely the singular energy in these moments that continues to attract performers, filmmakers, fashion designers, musicians and fans even after both the protagonists and the filmmakers have passed away.[2] Our focus will be specifically on Little Edie's revolutionary costumes and the "relational field" they fashion in the documentary. We locate Edie's costumes within the unique participatory dynamics of the film and discuss the conditions, connections and possibilities the costumes bring about. We name the costumes Edie thinks up *fabulous folds* with the intention of highlighting their performative scope as well as the relations they articulate.

Conceptually, the terms "fabulous" and "fold" connect our discussion to specific debates in Fashion Studies. We take our first cue from madison moore (2018) who defines fabulousness as a queer aesthetic with which marginalized people and social outcasts can regain their creativity and sense of self. Our usage of "fabulous" follows this line of thought in that we see the importance of the film being precisely in giving the two women

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Images 1–2. A revolutionary costume. Frame enlargements of video.

a stage to surpass seclusion. The filmmaking process makes space within the squalid mansion for the women to enact fabulousness. Our use of the term "fold" enters into conversation with debates on the agency of clothing. We draw inspiration from Gilles Deleuze's (1993) definition of the fold as a pleat the extends the scope of the finite body and approach revolutionary costumes in *Grey Gardens* as fabulous folds that extend the everyday possibilities of the Beales. Here, we share Anneke Smelik's (2014) view of the fold as a relational formation that regulates the relationship between the interiority and exteriority of a body. In *Grey Gardens*, this translates into how revolutionary costumes regulate the relationship between internalized traumas and the social environment. Finally, our focus on fabulous folds contributes to re-readings of the Maysles's body of work as well as re-evaluations of the documentary impulse in *Grey Gardens*. By intertwining Fashion Studies with Film Studies, we hope to shed new light on both the documentary and its revolutionary costumes.

The Maysles and fashion

Grey Gardens is interesting in the Maysles's body of work because it comes with a transition from observational cinema to a more participatory style of filmmaking as well as fosters a sensibility to art, performance and fashion that has not typically been seen as a key tendency in their films. Instead, the Maysles have been written into film history through their genre-defining observational documentaries on celebrity culture (*What's Happening! The Beatles in the U.S.A*, 1964; *Gimme Shelter*, 1970) and the struggles of American families (*Salesman*, 1968; *The Burks of Georgia*, 1978). *Grey Gardens* rearticulates these parameters and opens a fresh pathway in scholarship dedicated to the Maysles.

Just before the making of *Grey Gardens*, the Maysles documented the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude erecting a curtain between two Colorado mountains. *Christo's Valley Curtain* (1973) follows the course of the art project as it entangles with engineering, building permissions

and forces of nature, and captures the passage from original sketches to the heavy, meticulously pleated orange curtain that flutters dangerously in the wind. *Christo's Valley Curtain* is a precursor to *Grey Gardens*, where the material folds of fabric relate to human bodies instead of mountains. Although the films are different in topic, aims and focus, they share an interest in the processes of "thinking these things up" and the material pleats that emerge as a result.

Of the thirteen films Albert and David Maysles made, the documentary of the two aging reclusive socialites remains the most controversial and the most loved. Despite contemporary consensus on the remarkability of *Grey Gardens*, the filmmakers were accused of taking advantage of the two women when the film first came out. For many, the eccentric outfits, erratic behavior, and various states of physical and psychological undress were signs of the women's incapability to represent themselves properly. Critics dismissed the film for exploitation, invasion of privacy, impassive cruelty, and tastelessness—some calling the Beales "travesties of women", "trained seals with half a lobotomy" and pointing out their "ludicrous poses" and "sagging flesh" (Vogels 2005, 146; McElhaney 2009, 95–96).

Joe McElhaney compares the criticism to John Cassavetes's feature film *A Woman under the Influence* (1974) that received similar backlash especially from female audiences. McElhaney notes that both films came out at a time when representations of women in American films were at their lowest historical point. The feeling that these films did not offer empowering representations of women, at a time when such figures were desperately needed, made them politically dubious. (McElhaney 2009, 95–96.)

New scholarship in Film Studies has, however, redeemed both works from such accusations and discovered empowering potentials and feminist sensibilities in them. *Grey Gardens* has been rehabilitated as a groundbreaking film in the tradition of direct cinema with, for example, analyses of its modernist self-reflexivity, performative structure, melodramatic tenor and powers of fabulation (see for example Backman Rogers 2015; Hongisto 2015; Tinkcom 2011; McElhaney 2009; Vogels 2005). Most importantly, these analyses point out the Beales's participation in the making of the documentary, which we interpret as their active embodying of fabulousness for the camera.

The collaborative dynamics of the documentary sets the scene for the details, layers and textures of Edie's outfits. Her revolutionary wardrobe consists of golden scarves, household textiles and heritage pins, and Albert Maysles's camerawork captures the combinations in her costumes with the meticulousness of a fashion enthusiast. This continues in his penultimate solo work *Iris* (2014), where he follows the New York fashion icon Iris Apfel—a self-described "geriatric starlet" and "First Lady of Fabric"—about town creating outfits and interior designs. Known for her idiosyncratic mixture of haute couture and flea market finds, Apfel's combinations of bright colors, bulky jewelry and eclectic glasses paved her way to mainstream fame in 2018 when she, at 96, became the oldest person to be turned into a Barbie doll. Both *Grey Gardens* and *Iris* bring out the processual nature of "thinking these things up" and the productive role of the pleats thought up by their subjects. For both Little Edie and Iris Apfel, the documentary films contend, revolutionary costumes are much more than mere clothes; they are a manner of being, of exploring the limits of one's body.

Enabling constraints

At first glance, however, it would be easy to define *Grey Gardens* as a documentary about multiple restrictions—some imposed on the women from the outside, others already internalized. Most explicitly, Little Edie complains that she was removed from the life she wanted to lead in New York City. Her social life, singing and dancing careers, and marriage prospects were taken away as she had to return to Grey Gardens—the film is named after the mansion—to take care of her mother. She is particularly annoyed that her mother prevented her from marrying into royalty: "I could have been a countess … Countess Edith", she says. Grudges and regrets crystallize in the crumbling property that is a restricting grid in her life: it imposes behavioral norms and expectations on how life should be lived ("They can get you in East Hampton for wearing red shoes on a Thursday", Edie exclaims). Reminiscent of a melodramatic cinematic setting, the house appears as a private space shaped by larger forces such as sexual desire, social duty, and reproduction (Tinkcom 2011, 24).

The documentary captures the deterioration of the house in its visual expression. The camera follows the crumbling textures—perforated walls, peeling wallpapers and cracking paint—creating a tactile sense of the grid that determines the women's situation.[3] This is contextualized in the opening scene of the film, where a montage of manicured lawns and impeccable houses is connected to newspaper articles describing the Beales's eviction threat and the squalid state of the mansion. However, instead of taking these as signs of the women's abnormality or incapability, the documentary adopts a more open approach and captures the details of the mansion with affirmative curiosity. Amidst the crumbling details, the camera wanders from room to room, following Little Edie's lead, and zooms in on the faces, photographs and paintings of the two protagonists, as if waiting for them to start telling their story.[4] The camerawork does not make presumptions based on what it depicts; rather, by drawing in on vivid details it expresses interest in the past and present of Grey Gardens.

In this way, the filmmakers avoid replicating the marginalizing claims voiced by others and turn the focus on what comes about in the mansion. Their chosen approach gives the floor to the two women, who embark on convoluted stories of marriage, relationships, family, talent and success. The women speak for, with and against each other, and facts merge with memories and desires in their life stories. The presence of the filmmakers activates a storytelling impetus that turns into performative monologues, singing and dancing.

In the filmmaking process, also the mansion takes on new dimensions. Paradoxically, the house that imposes restrictions on the women also provides them with an opportunity to perform for the camera. Its spaces turn into runways and theatre stages, where the "grey" in Grey Gardens turns into a plethora of colors, outfits, roles and songs. This resonates with Erin Manning's (2015) concept *enabling constraint*, which describes the ways in which architecture can activate novel ways of bodily existence, minor tendencies in the heart of habit. This means architectural structures that break with conventional proprioception thus refusing to predetermine what the body can do in these spaces. For instance, tilted floors and unusually low ceilings call the body to do otherwise, consequently, Manning argues, "opening habit to its subtle multiplicity and exposing the fact that habit was never quite as stable as it seemed" (Manning 2015, 151).

In *Grey Gardens*, the process of documentary filmmaking intervenes in the women's lives in a way that activates minor tendencies in the Beales's habitual setup. With the arrival of the Maysles, the location transforms from a restricting grid to a house of quirky performative bursts. Little Edie performs a marching band routine in the spacious hallway where the floorboards have lost their polish, she sings a Marlene Dietrich song in the crammed bedroom, and dances on the sun-bleached porch that has seen better days. Big Edie listens to her old recordings and sings along to her favorite musical numbers in bed, surrounded by cats, newspapers and empty containers. With the filmmaking process, Grey Gardens turns into a multitude of spaces where the women can do what they love the most in life.

The crumbling mansion as an enabling constraint establishes the setting for fabulous folds in the documentary. Whereas the house initially locates the two women into seclusion and abnormality, the intervention of the documentary camera transforms the mansion from a restricting structure to a stage replete with potential. On this stage, revolutionary costumes become the material companions with which Little Edie in particular renegotiates her relationship to the social environment. Here, our analysis differs from one of the very few academic takes on Edie's revolutionary costumes. Adair and Boyd (2013) discuss them as products of Little Edie's extraordinary talent to create strange beauty out of basically nothing. For Adair and Boyd, Edie's costumes are signs of her inventive personality that struggles to express itself in difficult conditions; they are "transgressive solutions to her diminishing wardrobe" (ibid. 39). Whereas Adair and Boyd see Edie's revolutionary costumes as signs of her personality, we understand the costumes as material companions in testing what the body can do. They belong to Edie's process of self-invention—from her mother's caretaker to a performer—enabled by the film. Our argument is in closer proximity to Matthew Tinkcom view of Edie's wardrobe existing at the intersection of utilitarian necessity and performance (Tinkcom 2011, 47).

Manning detects enabling constraints both in Arakawa and Madeleine Gins' procedural architecture and the fashion label *Comme des Garçons* owner and head designer Rei Kawakubo's sculptural creations. She suggests that Kawakubo's designs echo a propositional stance where the body co-constitutes with its environment (an architectural structure, a dress) (Manning 2015, 148–150). The key point in this argumentation is that a body inhabiting a space or wearing a dress is not considered pre-constituted. The body becomes with its environment, with the social, natural, cultural, and material fabrics that envelop it.

This is crucial for understanding fabulous folds in *Grey Gardens*. As noted above, the documentary refuses to locate the women within the norms commonly imposed on them. These norms come with pre-constituted ideas of how one should conduct and carry one's body. It is clear from the women's verbal accounts that these restrictions are deeply gendered and class-bound, and that they assign the female body with such functions as marriage and reproduction. The revolutionary costumes, however, gnaw on the bounds of these constraining structures and propose that it is not yet known what bodies clad in these costumes can do (see figures 3–4). The women's elaborate combinations—a terry towel becomes a bathing suit without a backside, and a lace curtain works as a dress—are material folds that activate agency in a minor register. Manning finds a similar dynamic in Kawakubo's use of fabric where "the materiality of the proposition" orients the designs toward new modes of existence that "activate a bodying not yet defined" (Manning 2015, 157). Most importantly, the material folds do not simply ascribe meaning to the bodies that wear them but enable them to inhabit space differently. In *Grey Gardens*, Edie in her revolutionary costumes moves between being a youthful marching band member, a cabaret singer and a stage diva—thus opening habit to its multiplicity. Fabulous folds address the limit of what bodies can do in a given space and time.

Images 3–4. Fabulous folds. Frame enlargements of video.

Scarves, knots and what clothing can do

Edie's revolutionary costumes and the looming presence of social norms connect the documentary to an emerging debate in studies of clothing and fashion: material agency. In a theoretical move that goes beyond Roland Barthes's (2006) once indispensable postulation of fashion as language-like cultural coda, scholars such as Anneke Smelik (2018) have begun advocating material agency and arguing for an understanding of clothing that goes beyond cultural meaning-making. Instead of asking what clothing means, focus should be on "what clothing can do" (see also Smelik 2014; Manning 2015; Seely 2013). While Smelik and others mostly discuss the material agency of clothing in the context of contemporary techno fashion where "smart materials" and 3D printing are part of the production process, these ideas can be extended and elaborated with less tech-oriented examples as well.[5] *Grey Gardens* is a wonderful companion in this respect because it connects clothing to complex social and psychological conditions, and uses the medium of film to express how clothing operates as a material fold in these conditions.

Smelik (2018, 34–35) argues that the material agency of clothing never resides in the cloth only; it is a question of a complex body-fabric assemblage in movement and the imbrication of the fabrics' material-technical qualities in that movement.[6] It is this assemblage that *Grey Gardens* captures and expresses so outstandingly, which makes the documentary a suitable companion for a discussion on the material agency of fabrics. Smelik (2018, 37–38) confirms this when she argues that for studies concerned with how clothing works or performs in relation to its wearer, direct contact and interaction with the material object is not most crucial. She maintains that secondary sources that provide information on how clothing is used is much more important. In this sense, *Grey Gardens* is optimal in mapping the material

Image 5. "There isn't anything I can't do." Frame enlargement of video.

workings of fabrics, especially since it is so attuned to capturing and expressing the social and psychological conditions in which the Beales live.

A particularly interesting feature in this regard are the tightly knotted scarves Little Edie covers her head with throughout the documentary. She wears at least a dozen of them—different shapes, colors, patterns and textures—and the camera captures the variety in detail from different angles. Edie's headscarves are juxtaposed with photographic portraits from her youth, where in place of sleek fabric wavy coiffures frame her face. Although it is not addressed or explicated in the documentary, it has been suggested in extensive debates in the blogosphere that either Edie suffered from an illness resulting in hair loss or that she voluntarily burnt her hair (see also Tinkcom 2011, 52–53). Following this line of interpretation, the scarves could be given the utilitarian function of covering her bald, hairless head, protecting it from outside attention. Similarly, the scarves could be read as signs of her illness, perhaps even as signs of her outcast social position and related humiliations.

However, within the participatory tenor of the documentary, the scarves assume a more material, even an agential role, becoming co-stars in Edie's cheerful insistence and gloomy contention. Rather than signaling poor health and social degradation, the scarves co-compose Edie's performances for the camera. This happens for example in the Virginia Military Institute sequence. First, Edie holds the Virginia Military Institute LP in her hands and expresses her excitement (see figure 5). Her mother responds by belittling her marching skills. Edie responds in a dead-pan manner: "Are you absolutely crazy, there isn't anything I can't do." In the next scene, the LP is playing, and Edie's head is wrapped in a navy blue and bright red scarf that falls down her back like a cape. She holds the national flag in her hand and enters the stage through a golden curtain. The firmly tied scarf, that matches the colors of the flag, upholds her military posture and affirms her will to march. The cape-like back of the scarf gives energy to the marching and enables her to take over the hallway in a manner that associates with superheroes.

Instead of subjugated bodies covered in torn, moth-eaten fabrics, the documentary shows fabulous folds—assemblages of bodies, fabrics and accessories—that tend to their own limits, exploring what they can do. The layered materiality of the scarves activates new relational tendencies particularly for Little Edie, letting her exceed the habitual norms of grey days. In one scene, she sings *Lili Marlene* wrapped in multiple delicate layers of chiffon, lace and fishnet. Once again, the mother questions the show, but Edie continues with stubborn and powerful vigor. The camera focuses on the subtle yet supportive materiality of her outfit, cherishes it—to the extent that Edie's head gets cut out of the frame—and finally responds to Edie's invitation as the filmmakers join her flirtatious singing from behind the camera (see figure 6).

Folds as thresholds

Edie's revolutionary costumes warrant a closer look at the notion of the fold. Given the documentary's affirmative participatory tone, her costumes cannot be taken as simple signs of Edie's inner turmoil or of her socially outcast position. Nor do they have a utilitarian function in the dramaturgy of the mansion. Rather, the material layers and complex pleats of her outfits posit a threshold. Here, fabulous folds articulate both individual distress and the social field as malleable.

Perhaps the most prominent take on the fold in visual culture is Gilles Deleuze's account of the Baroque and Gottfried Leibniz's philosophy. Deleuze affirms the transformative nature of the fold and explains how voluminous Baroque pleats broaden the scope of the body, exceeding its presence and finity. The religious context

Image 6. Layers in close-up. Frame enlargement of video.

of seventeenth century Europe is obvious in Deleuze's language, but the dynamic he lays out echoes the one in *Grey Gardens*. For one, he notes that fabrics remain "truthful to the body beneath" but they nevertheless extract their own folds irrespective of the finite body they cover (Deleuze 1993, 121). This is easy to imagine with voluptuous Baroque fabrics—sculpted in marble or pleated in clothes—that have a force of their own and that operate according to different rules of gravity to the finite body. In *Grey Gardens*, however, the fabulous folds Edie thinks up for the camera do not take her to high heavens but instead enable a negotiation between the self and the environment, the past and the present without pinning her body down to trauma or nostalgia. For example, a heritage brooch that graced the bust of a dress in one of the photographs from her youth now holds up a scarf around her head. Edie notes that the line between the past and the present is hard to keep, and the fabulous folds she thinks up become the threshold where this negotiation takes place. Old pieces of clothing are layered in compositions that remain truthful to the history of the body they cover but simultaneously take leave from it, creating folds that articulate a less determined lifeline to the one suggested by the past. A brown skirt worn upside down and held together by pins might be taken to signal an age when it was worn "properly", but in the documentary the skirt articulates a threshold to living differently in a minor register.

For Deleuze, a fold is a surface texture that expresses the forces impinging on the body, while it also turns the body inside out "to mold its inner surfaces" (Deleuze 1993, 123). This makes the fold a texture that expresses dimensions not necessarily visible as such and a material that is capable of working what it covers. Fabulous folds, in other words, express the conditions and regulations exerted on the body, but they also open the body up for tendencies not yet defined.[7] According to Giuliana Bruno, a fold is "the fabric of this inner-outer transformation, the manner in which a psychic world becomes 'architected' in time and expresses itself materially as a landscape, on the surface of things, in the language of film, art, fashion, and architecture" (Bruno 2014, 16). The fold is the fabric of psychic interiority and a material surface prone to fabrication.

In *Grey Gardens*, fabulous folds are the fabric that connects the Beales to their past and that enables them to work the ramifications of the present. In particular, Little Edie's perpetual costume changes activate a multiplicity of moods and roles in which she communicates with the Maysles and the occasional visitor. The series of costumes—highlighted in the editing of the film—enables her to overcome the conditions of the run-down house and the constantly interfering mother. For the mother, the huge tattered red-brimmed hat is a similar enabling fold: it creates a comforting stage for her singing as it opens her narrowed-down, bed-confined life to a joyful revisitation of the past. In the participatory dynamic of the documentary, these folds cannot be explained by the women's misfortunes or even by their peculiar characters or styles. Rather, they are brought forth in the filmmaking process that activates a new tendency in their lives. In Deleuze's Baroque phrasing, "folds … cannot be explained by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze" (Deleuze 1993, 122).

In a sense, then, the fabulous folds thought up and created in the filmmaking process are autonomous in relation to finite bodies. They do not refer back to the body in a semiotic gesture of identification; and they refuse to mark finite bodies with signs of abnormality or inferiority. And it is precisely because of the relative independence of the folds that they can enable the Beales to turn their detrimental situation into energetic, life-affirming bursts of joy. These bursts do not necessarily promise a better future, but they enable the women to inhabit their bodies in an affirmative way,

at least momentarily. With the pleats, layers and cuts of fabric, the women access vestiges of performative energy that had already fallen out of their reach.

What makes *Grey Gardens* such a noteworthy film in the history of documentary cinema is the acute awareness of and sensibility to these folds in the lives of the Beales. Folds, as Deleuze (1993, 122) notes, express the contours and possibilities of the body far better than nudity. They note ramifications and mark transgressive passages. Accordingly, the film is not content with simply documenting an array of costumes—one more revolutionary than the next—but it actively captures the conditions and expresses the thresholds of the Beales's fabulous folds. In doing so, it not only shows how documentary film can depict the relationship between bodies and clothing in a particularly dynamic manner, but it also initiates conceptual work on what bodies clad in fabulous folds can do.

Curtain

Autumn has arrived in East Hampton. Little Edie sits on the grey somber terrace surrounded by bare trees. A green flowery scarf tightly wound around her head she explains bitterly how she can't stand another winter at Grey Gardens: "Any little rat's nest in New York, any little mouse hole, any little rat hole, even on Tenth Avenue, I would like better."

Then she suddenly stops, turns her back to the camera and walks inside the house slamming the door behind her. The resentful monologue and the dramatic exit locate Edie within a landscape of forbidden desires and lost opportunities. The mansion houses bygone dreams and seeds of bitterness, thus mapping a melodramatic setting of repression. However, as Edie turns, the grandeur of the bright green scarf cuts through her abrupt burst of emotion, as if to remind the spectator of her previous entries and exits to and from the stage (see figure 7). The long scarf is meticulously knotted to prevent it from touching the ground, and it sways voluminously as Edie heads back to the house. The green fabric, knots, pleats and pins fashion a fabulous fold for Edie's continuous exploration of her limits. Dressed in revolutionary costumes, she enters and exits the roles of a lifetime through the multiple doorways of the rundown mansion.

After her mother's death, Edie sold the mansion and moved back to New York City. Her career as a cabaret performer did not take off and following a short spell in Montreal, she retired to a seaside resort in Florida. At regular intervals, filmmakers, designers and artists revisit Edie's costumes and performances in *Grey Gardens*, seeking to capture the energetic bursts that mark the Maysles's documentary film. In doing so, they confirm that the film in itself functions as a fabulous fold that transformed Edie's relationship to the outside environment. It gave her a stage and an audience, making her revolutionary costumes resonate far beyond failed careers, lost marriage prospects and a derelict home. The Maysles's documentary film enabled her to take on the role of Countess Edith, a legend whose journey in the arts, media and popular culture seems far from over.

Notes

1. Ilona Hongisto has argued elsewhere that the filmmaking process has an affirmative effect on the Beales's self-invention. With a focus on the speech acts and performances the two women set up for the Maysles, she notes that the documentary enables the Beales to *fabulate* their lives beyond the grim conditions of their actuality. Her analysis draws on Gilles Deleuze's postulation of *the powers of the false* and Erwing Goffman's take on

Image 7. A bodying not yet defined. Frame enlargement of video.

a working consensus, and relates these to the tradition of observational documentary cinema. (See Hongisto 2015, 64–82.) This essay builds on Hongisto's argument and extends it to a discussion of the shooting location and revolutionary costumes.

2. When Albert Maysles, the last of the four, passed away in March 2015, *Grey Gardens* celebrated its fortieth anniversary. The milestone in American documentary cinema was commemorated with a new digital restoration of the gritty 16 mm original that opened at Film Forum in New York City on 6 March 2015, the day following Albert Maysles's death.
3. Following is a methodological approach used and elaborated in the context of new materialisms; it comes with a sensibility to material specificities and processes, and foregrounds perception that does not presume identities for what it beholds (ee Kontturi 2018a, 2018b; Tiainen, Kontturi, and Hongisto 2015, 25–31).
4. For an extended discussion of the zoom-ins and close-ups in the film, (see Hongisto 2015, 72–78.)
5. An intriguing strand in the discussion on clothing and agency is the veil debate. In this context, scholars such as Leila Ahmed (2014) and Sara Mahmood (2014) have reworked the notion of agency in Middle Eastern contexts beyond the progressive politics of Western feminism. Mahmood (2014, 198) insists on separating agency from the struggle against dominating modes of power and argues that this enables analyzing the trajectories of bodies and subjectivities that do not follow the "entelechy of liberatory politics" (ibid., 199). Although there are intriguing possibilities in following Mahmood's non-emancipatory empowerment in relation to *Grey Gardens*, the cultural, historical and material differences between the cases are too complex to account for in the context of this article.
6. This co-composition could be conceptualized as a cloth-body assemblage. Kontturi and Jalonen (2018, 1) suggest that the concept of cloth-body "highlights the material-relational qualities of the cloth" and "the affective relation of cloth and body that is essential in understanding what clothing is and how it works". See also Karaičić (2018) who employs the concept of body-clothes to describe how bodies can relate to each other and their respective spaces through clothes in her art project Incorporeal Architecture.
7. Anneke Smelik (2014) argues that folds open the subject up to a process of infinite becoming. Hence, fashion can suggest new futures for bodies beyond their actual confinements.

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