Art Labor, Sex Politics

Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance

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We are witnessing a certain reversal of values: manual labor and art are being revalued. But the relation of these arts to sexual difference is never really thought through and properly apporitioned. At best, it is related to the class struggle.
— Luce Irigaray, *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*
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Nightcleaners
The Ambiguities of Activism and the Limits of Production

Britain's first public action in the name of second-wave feminism took place in 1970 at London's Albert Hall. The occasion was the Miss World Beauty Contest, and two of the participants, Laura Mulvey and Mary Kelly, subsequently became important feminist figures. The British protest was inspired by the feminist disruption of the Miss America Beauty Pageant in Atlantic City in 1968. A landmark in the popular imaginary of feminism, this American protest produced the stereotype of the bra-burning feminist (although no bras were in fact burned that day). After taking into account the self-critique by various American feminist groups, the British feminists shifted the focus of their action from the women in the contest to the event as spectacle, that is, its presentation as a seamless image. Coordinating with two different groups of feminist activists, they undertook a situationist-inspired attack on established norms for looking at women. The first interruption affected the televised stage show and involved a guerrilla-style attack with a number of women leaping on stage to hurl smoke and flour bombs. Echoing the televised images of May '68, this part of the protest invoked the street uprising. During the ensuing chaos, the audience's pleasure in looking was then supplanted by the suggested activity of reading, and several other women went about distributing a critical pamphlet that set this feminine spectacle into a post-colonial frame. "Why Miss World?" analyzed the emergence of the contest against the backdrop of 1950s anticolonial struggles, with feminine display as the ideological front for a new global harmony. Mary Kelly wrote the essay, but because of the political investment in collective production, at this point it did not bear her name.\[\]
After the media furor of 1970, the door security was stepped up for the 1971 contest and media expectations were high. In 1971, outside the venue, members of the London Women's Liberation Theatre Group (including Dinah Brooke, Margaret Eyre, Alison Fell, Buzz Goodbody, and Michele Hickmott), stood with opened overcoats to reveal black catsuits decorated with homemade flashing electric bikinis. With lightbulbs attached on top of their clothing, one on each breast and the other at the crotch level forming a V-shaped triangle of light, *The Flashing Nipple Show*, as it was called, literalized and parodied the archetypical male exhibitionist, the so-called flasher (Figure 1.2). The graphic clarity of the newspaper image—the only existing visual record of the protest—reveals the extent to which the protest was also addressed to its eventual representation in the media. In this grainy photograph we see the success with which the caricature of the bra burner is displaced by the electric bikini.

Despite the invocation of the romantic post-'68 idea of the street-fighting woman and critical intellectual (as collective subject) in the 1970 protest, subsequent explorations of a feminist political aesthetic would displace the situationist notion of spectacle. Later in 1970, the Pomplico branch of the London Women’s Liberation Workshop—a local chapter of the London-wide network of feminist activist, consciousness-raising, and study groups—was approached by May Hobbes, an activist for a group of night cleaning workers and a night cleaner herself, who was looking for help with the slow task of grassroots organization needed to unionize previously unrepresented immigrant and working-class women. Very early on in this activist alliance, in November of that year, the Berwick Street Film Collective was asked to make a film about the campaign. *Nightcleaners* (1972–75) began as a straightforward agitprop film, but after four years in postproduction editing, this was not what reached the screen. After the spectacular immediacy of the Miss World actions, the night cleaners’ campaign went on to become one of the most significant activist campaigns in the early years of the British women’s movement. While the earlier 1968 strike of the women machinist workers at the Ford factory in Dagenham precipitated the 1970 Equal Pay Act, the night cleaners’ campaign deals with a different political situation because these women were outside of the union structure altogether. The campaign challenged a deeper set of exclusions within the organized left. The night cleaners’ struggle met the demands of an emerging women’s movement that was grounded in New Left thinking wherein a gendered politics of class intersects with the complexities of postcolonial Britain. It sought to define a feminist politics that went beyond the confines of middle-class women’s experience to include working-class and immigrant women. This campaign thus promised to critically coordinate a political trio of terms that would become so important to feminism in the course of the 1970s: race, class, and gender. If Kelly’s “Why Miss World?” suggested a longer history of the colonial investments in women’s erotic display, *Nightcleaners* turned toward the new political landscape of a gendered postcolonial Britain. With the political stakes running fairly high, when *Nightcleaners* was first screened in 1975—after nearly four years in postproduction editing—it became controversial among some feminist audiences. On the one hand, many feminist activists harshly rejected it because it failed to deliver a straightforward campaign message: the intersections of race, class, and gender remained intractably dissonant. On the other hand, when it was screened at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in August...
1975, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen claimed it was the apotheosis of a new feminist avant-garde. They argued that Nightcleaners was exceptional because it diverged so markedly from other documentary examples and fulfilled a Brechtian aesthetic.

Much of the footage in Nightcleaners is not unfamiliar to expository documentary. The Berwick Street Film Collective spent eighteen months filming the women cleaners at work, in meetings with the feminist activists and the male union representative, in interviews with various figures involved including the cleaning company boss, and at large-scale labor demonstrations. But it is the way the parts are connected together that caused much of the outcry. The film’s documentary passages are continually interrupted by sections of black leader tape, an editing effect that makes the screen go dark. Instead of serving as a conventional spatiotemporal ellipsis—used either between different shots or directly prior to an intertitle, and permitting the smooth shift from one visual segment to the next—in Nightcleaners the black leader tape is present on-screen for much longer, and it appears between almost every segment of the film marking the editorial cuts. Understood in Brechtian terms such as by Johnston and Willemen—viewers are made aware of the film as constructed through the cut and splice of the editing process. But the film’s detractors—the feminist activists who rejected it—were confused and frustrated by the incessant interruptions to its visual and narrative flow. Rather than raising awareness about the campaign, this interruptive device alienated certain members of the feminist audience by precluding straightforward communicability. Further confusion occurred for the disgruntled activists because the filmmakers repeatedly isolated individual shots that had been processed and refiled to emphasize the visual properties of 16 mm film. These images included close-up head shots and isolated gestures, ambiguous visual details that further interrupt the expectations of documentary as a realist genre and connect Nightcleaners to the kinds of visual experimentation associated with avant-garde filmmaking.

At the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1975, the film’s avant-garde positioning was further consolidated. Nightcleaners was featured alongside Jean-Luc Godard’s Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle (1967) and Tout ca bien (1972), Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s History Lessons (1972) and Moses and Aron (1973), and Slatan Dudlow and Bertolt Brecht’s Kuhle Wampe (1932) as part of a special event, Brecht and Cinema / Film and Politics (otherwise known as the Brecht Event). Since then the film has consistently been understood as part of a Brechtian tradition of political cinema that was in fact epitomized in the United Kingdom by Godard’s collaborative work with the Groupe Dziga Vertov. The Brecht Event also included conference papers that were subsequently published in the journal Screen; Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen’s “Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on The Nightcleaners)” continues to be the dominant contemporary understanding of the film.

I use the term Brechtian to indicate that the British film studies interpretation of Brecht is particular to the post-’68 moment and oriented to film rather than theater. Not in any empirical sense is this interpretation true to the historical figure Bertolt Brecht, but rather this Brechtianism speaks to a political desire that animated the period, a desire that made it impossible to read Nightcleaners in any way other than as a repetition and feminist rewriting of the 1930s political avant-gardes. I will elaborate this film cultural milieu in light of the complex reception of the film. The investment in the staging of Nightcleaners as an exemplary feminist work of political avant-garde will allow me to establish some of the political and aesthetic stakes of this period. Then I will turn my attention to aspects of Nightcleaners that appear to contradict this Brechtian reading. What other interpretations of the film come to light when we set aside this well-established analytical framework? In deviating from the Brechtian interpretation of Nightcleaners, I argue that the conflict over the film’s reception was rooted in its ambivalent staging of affect. Two distinct but related understandings of affect shape my approach. First, the film’s staging of ambivalent affect finds it deviating from the political address of a typical activist film that, as Elizabeth Cowie has pointed out, is conventionally understood as serious in its address with a clear-cut emotional appeal that does not deviate or interrupt the viewer’s position as a subject of knowledge. Second, the film’s staging of affect produced powerful affective responses in certain feminist viewers (both those who supported the avant-garde reading and those who rejected the film because of this), and I will elaborate how such responses have continued to shape interpretations of Nightcleaners. The complexity of the film’s affective address and reception...
points to questions of (political) desire and psychical effects that reveal the deep significance of this collective project.

**Brechtian Legacies: Groupe Dziga Vertov as Model**

The Miss World action of 1970 was shaped by the political aesthetic of the Situationist International, an aesthetic made explicit in the title (and text) of Laura Mulvey and Margarita Jimenez’s 1970 account of the event, “The Spectacle Is Vulnerable.” But as the impact of the politicization of filmmaking evolved in the United Kingdom, the work of Godard in particular grew exponentially in importance. The fact that the Situationist International had nothing but contempt for Godard—famously referring to him in a May ’68 graffiti as the “biggest asshole of the pro-Chinese Swiss”—was of little concern to many in the British film scene. Moreover, until the film *Société du spectacle* (1972) by Guy Debord, who is widely seen as the Situationist International’s de facto leader, the Situationists were not particularly associated with filmmaking in the United Kingdom. Having said this, it is interesting to note that there is an echo of the 1952 premiere of Debord’s *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* [Howls for Sade] in the flour bombs used by the British feminists. The Situationists dropped flour on their audience during the screening of the film that included André Breton and other surrealist friends among the spectators. As Debord was well aware, the older generation of surrealist artists were undoubtedly drawn to the film by the violent sexual suggestiveness of the title, but any visual pleasure they might have expected was frustrated by the fact that the film’s image track was made up solely of black leader tape. Thus Debord’s negation of male heterosexual pleasure finds its feminist parallel in the Miss World protest. Despite the importance of the situationist presence during May ’68 in Paris, in the years to follow Godard was perceived in the United Kingdom (and the United States) as France’s most radical filmmaker. In 1969 he formed a low-budget film and video collective called Groupe Dziga Vertov. The reference to Dziga Vertov, the best-known Russian postrevolutionary documentary filmmaker, was seen in opposition to the fiction film of the more widely celebrated Sergei Eisenstein. Groupe Dziga Vertov was modeled on a Maoist political cell, and the film and video that they produced referenced an international array of post-’68 political groups. It is this work in particular that became the model for Brechtian film in the United Kingdom.

The period of *Nightcleaners’* production, 1970 to 1975, was also the most intense period of theoretical debate about politics and aesthetics to have taken place in British film culture. This led to major institutional transformations at the British Film Institute (BFI), the development of a critical avant-garde in anglophone film theory—previously moribund in the United Kingdom—and the elaboration of a new Brechtian political aesthetic in filmmaking. The year that the cameras began to roll for *Nightcleaners* saw the beginning of the organized women’s movement in Britain and the publication of the first English translation of Walter Benjamin’s 1934 essay “The Author as Producer.” This text was formative for the British understanding of Brechtianism as establishing a new relationship between politics and aesthetics for which, as Johnston and Willemen would argue, *Nightcleaners* was the most significant feminist example.

In “The Author as Producer” Benjamin emphasizes the political significance of aesthetic form over and against the “correct” political message. As a critical response to the emergence of the Popular Front in the 1930s, he proposes a realignment of the relationship between spectator and artwork that draws critical attention to the relations of artistic production. Speaking of Brecht’s theatrical work, Benjamin frames the relationship of audience to stage in explicitly economic terms: “The more consumers it brings in contact with the production process... the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators.” By making the spectator *work* to produce meaning, Benjamin argues that he or she is incorporated as producer into the process of the work’s production. This interwar argument about political theater was taken up and developed most vigorously by film theorists in Britain where Brecht was uniquely received principally as a filmmaker rather than as a playwright.

The reception of *Nightcleaners* at the Edinburgh International Festival’s Brecht Event continues to shape the dominant interpretation of the film as Brechtian. The work of Godard and that of Straub and Huillet had already been presented elsewhere in light of debates about Brecht. These works were well established and celebrated as exemplary Brechtian films, but it was Godard’s collaborative work with Groupe Dziga Vertov that became
the critical focus in the United Kingdom. Godard formed Groupe Dziga Vertov in 1969 with Jean-Pierre Gorin, and although the group included other participants, Godard and Gorin were the key figures.15 Peter Wollen’s 1972 “Counter-cinema: Vent d’est” established the terms of this political aesthetic. He suggests the programmatic nature of this film as “the starting point for work on a revolutionary cinema.”16 Wollen begins by affirming Godard’s new commitment to documentary over fiction film and goes on to specifically single out the seven ills of cinema, including fiction, narrative transitivity, identification, pleasure, and closure. The counter-cinema, he asserts, is defined by their negation.

The “Brecht in Britain” section of the Edinburgh International Film Festival’s Brecht Event was dominated by an implicit comparison between the work of Lindsay Anderson ([If . . .] [1969] and O Lucky Man! [1973]) and the Berwick Street Film Collective’s Nightcleaners, with the latter work being aligned more closely with the formal experimentation found with Straub and Huillet and even more specifically with the work of Godard. True to Benjamin’s analysis in “The Author as Producer,” the main emphasis was placed on the formal aspects of the film, with a particular focus on tropes of reflexivity. These included the persistent insertion of sections of black leader tape, the presentation of processed and repeated sequences, and the inclusion of the clapboard, all of which draw the viewer’s attention to the process of the film’s making, to Nightcleaners as filmmaking. These elements, Johnston and Willemen claimed, produce an effect akin to Brecht’s Verfremdungs Effekt, interruptions that disrupt the theatrical (or cinematic) spell and as a result make the audience critically aware of the representational illusion being presented. Reflexivity was thus connected to the notion of critical distance and the idea that the viewer would become an active participant, or to use the Benjaminian term, producer of the film’s meaning.

The choice of Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle and Tout va bien is also telling in that these films by Godard offer broad thematic intersections with Nightcleaners: Deux ou trois choses because of the staging of urban space and femininity and Tout va bien because of the treatment of femininity and labor. It is not simply the question of formal realization but also the way in which these Brechtian features intersect with a particular kind of political problem-
of the number of buildings and the number of offices that the cleaners are responsible for. A female supervisor, who is also involved in the unionization campaign, counts off the number of offices: one, two, three, four, five . . . twelve . . . fifty-six, concluding by telling us the number of toilets. This opening sequence culminates in a real-time depiction of the cleaning of a toilet that appears to go on for an extremely extended period (the effect produced by the presentation of everyday mundane tasks in real time), and throughout this the toilet bowl is given center stage as if it were the main player in the action. The extended focus on the cleaning of this toilet is an instance of radical empiricism and is intended to reinforce the base materiality of the work that the women perform (Figure 1.3).

Throughout these opening passages that depict cleaning labor, every editorial cut is marked by several seconds of black leader tape. The footage of cleaning is regularly intercut with sections of dark screen. Consequently, the film suggests two different forms of labor concurrently: the filmmakers’ and the cleaning women’s. These interruptions to the empirical depiction of labor serve as implicit evidence of the editorial labors of filmmaking. Placed side by side in this manner, they suggest there is a reciprocal relationship between the labor depicted on screen, and the work involved in making a film. Moreover, this interruptive device continues throughout the whole film, punctuating it rhythmically with black leader tape. In fact, the black leader marks almost every editorial cut, and it appears on screen for intervals ranging from approximately three to twenty-four seconds in length. This powerfully present withdrawal of cinematic action serves as an interruption to the documentary episodes and is a continuous reminder of labor on both sides of the camera.

A simple analogy cannot be made between the fragmented structure of the film and the fragmentary nature of the social situation described, nor does the withholding of image and sound simply imply the absence of meaning. Form and content do not correspond in such an uncomplicated way. Furthermore, the presence of the black leader tape is more than just a conventional editing device; it is a visual interruption: a cut in the flow of images. A much more positive presence in the film as a whole, this persistent jolting interruption immediately registers as a reflexive device used to provoke an awareness of the cuts and splices that make up the film. Thus the overall structure of the film was understood in Brechtian terms as demanding a particular kind of productive engagement from the spectator.

While interrupting the flow of images, the black leader tape also interrupts the sound track. Not only is sound withheld for approximately half the time that the screen is black, but when it returns the sound track has, in most instances, been replaced with a different voice or musical fragment. The black leader becomes a kind of metaphorical switching device for both sound and image that permits movement between different points of view in the drama. Throughout the film there is a persistent separation enacted between image and sound, a separation that is more explicitly marked visually by the black leader tape. Synchronized sound is used relatively infrequently. When used it is most often for non-verité—TV-style question and answer—interview footage with the cleaning workers and the company boss. Much more typically, sound is given in voice-over, and a number of different voices are used.
The multiple voice-overs are largely constituted from direct sound footage recorded during the filming process, but this sound material is most often edited together with different film footage. There is no single voice employed as the voice-over, as with the didactic voice-of-god style of documentary; instead, as an aural representation of collectivity, the different voices all belong to participants in the action.

Humphry Trevelyan has described the collective’s intentions in the film as escaping “the tyranny of sync-sound.” The film’s disruption to conventional realist approaches to sound can certainly be understood as a further instance of reflexivity. But it also suggests a comparison with Godard who was well-known for his experimental treatment of sound recording. In the Groupe Dziga Vertov films, the idea of politically devising a “correct sound” to accompany or transform the image track was particularly notable. Furthermore, as Steve Cannon has argued, “Groupe Dziga Vertov were situated at the ‘harder’ end of French Maoism” with a rigorous conformity to the “correct” political position including a practice of “recitation and self-criticism.” The clearest example of this is found with Letter to Jane (1972), and with its focus on the image of the face, this comparison will become further significant later in my argument in light of the isolation of the very same motif in Nightcleaners. Although Nightcleaners is certainly indebted to the French auteur’s work, comparing the approaches reveals two markedly different attitudes toward the reflexive staging of sound.

Letter to Jane is a clear example of Godard’s didactic political privileging of sound over and against the image track, and it also reveals his implicitly gendered understanding of the image as feminine. As Jonathan Dawson describes it, Letter to Jane is “a very long lecture (or harangue) by two filmmakers [Godard and Gorin] that is almost the purest example of agit-prop in cinematic history as well as possibly the most graceless.” Made immediately after Tout va bien, Letter to Jane is a self-excoriating response to the former film’s complicity with the Hollywood star system because Jane Fonda was the main female lead in Tout va bien (Figure 1.4). Widely considered to be the apotheosis of Godard’s misogynistic attitudes, he critically negates the feminized image by the masculine voice-over commentary. The image track is predominantly made up of a close-up head-shot photograph of the ac-

![Figure 1.4](Image)

*Figure 1.4. Film still featuring Jane Fonda from Letter to Jane. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin (Groupe Dziga Vertov), 1972.*
at the same time as we are producers." This use of voice-over as a critical interruption to what is being depicted on the image track is seen across the entire oeuvre of Groupe Dziga Vertov. Rather than the detached, seemingly objective voice of god, this voice-over narrative is an explicitly politicized and interested mode of critical analysis.

*British Sounds* (1969), Godard's first documentary film—later attributed to Groupe Dziga Vertov—is of particular comparative relevance to *Nightcleaners*. This is one of the earliest filmic depictions of second-wave feminist politics in Europe. Aside from being historically significant for this reason alone, analyzing Godard's staging of sexual difference in a Brechtian document will help to clarify some of the broader gender implications that underpin the Benjaminian idea of production in a post-'68 context. As the title indicates, *British Sounds* is set in Britain; moreover, it features the voice-over of one of the principal feminist activists in *Nightcleaners*, Sheila Rowbotham. Like *Nightcleaners*, it is addressed to the intersection between labor movement politics and new post-'68 political vanguards. In relation to two Groupe Dziga Vertov-era works, *British Sounds* (1969) and *Pravda* (1970), Colin MacCabe has argued that they "persistently pose the existence of a correct sound and a new relation between sound and image which would produce the correct image to accompany it."

As in *Letter to Jane*, sound is used didactically to interrupt the viewer's—implicitly unthinking—engagement with the image track. Although the aural and the visual attain a certain mutual independence in *Nightcleaners*, the sound track is not used to critically negate the image track. Furthermore, unlike Godard, *Nightcleaners* reveals an exploration of the visual that is not determined by a corrective didactic voice-over.

Released in the United States with the title *See You at Mao*, *British Sounds* is Godard's first fully realized experimental documentary. The film was completed the same year that he began his collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin under the name Groupe Dziga Vertov, and because of this it was released in the United States as part of Godard's collaborative oeuvre. *British Sounds* includes footage of British (male) car production workers, student radicals, and one of the first published British second-wave feminist texts, which was written and recited in the film by Rowbotham as a nude woman walks around on-screen. Feminism appears in *British Sounds* not as an assertion of Godard's own political sympathies but as part of a representation of an ongoing May '68. Sexual politics, student vanguards, the eroticized female body, and the laboring male body are juxtaposed in a six-part episodic structure that reveals a series of overlapping oppositions: male/female, collective/individual, sound/image, politics/sex. The use of disjunctive juxtaposition follows Brechtian conventions in the belief that it fosters audience participation: that the viewers actively construct meaningful relations between the different sections of the film and therefore consciously produce meaning. While there are clear comparisons here between the Brechtian structure of *British Sounds* and *Nightcleaners*, it is important to note that Godard's is a structural overview of the political whereas the participants in the Berwick Street Film Collective are concerned with how these different political interests are negotiated at a grassroots level.

Groupe Dziga Vertov's macro overview is perhaps the greatest political weakness in this Maoist work. All Groupe Dziga Vertov's films were made overseas in other countries, which can be seen to reflect a particular disinterest in the concrete political situation in France. As Steve Cannon argues:

*Groupe Dziga Vertov* addressed their films not in any way to the working class as a whole, not to the large sections of it radicalized in 1968, questioning the electoral strategy of the PCF [Parti communiste français] and the allied back-to-work machinations of the CGT [Confédération générale du travail] union leaders and thus open as never before to political alternatives, not to the mass of students and intellectuals whose view of the world was similarly shifting massively to the left in the period and not even to those amongst it who had already reached revolutionary conclusions.

Rather, he goes on to say, "The *Groupe* required of its audience that it be both politically revolutionary and impassioned by the same aesthetic minuette which enthused Godard and Gorin i.e. not at an audience interested in politics nor in political films but in 'making political films politically.'" Thus, he goes on to suggest, "One can detect in this approach a marked reduction in Godard's horizons, despite the political and cultural opportunities of the post-'68 period, from attempting to learn 2 ou 3 choses to researching 2 ou 3 images for an audience of 2 ou 3 capains." By contrast, *Nightcleaners* was
directly engaged with following a specific grassroots campaign that animated a particular feminist, New Left agenda in relation to some of the most disenfranchised workers in Britain. Furthermore, after the film's release, it was shown widely in numerous alternative venues, including high schools and factories.²²

*British Sounds* opens with a long, slow panning shot of men working on a sports car production line. This is accompanied by a male voice-over giving a political analysis of contemporary labor relations, which at times is largely drowned out by the loud factory noise. The sound track establishes a certain didactic critical distance in relation to the images of labor shown on the screen (Figure 1.5). This masculine scene of workplace interaction—a scene of collectivity—is followed by its feminine antithesis in the next section. In an extended shot, a solitary, slender, young nude woman walks around what is generally taken to be a suburban house but is in fact an independent cinema. The sound is mostly given in voice-over, and a woman's voice, Sheila Rowbotham's, reads out a text about women's oppression. The separation of image and sound is not complete since the nude woman also repeats part of the text into a telephone. This section concludes with a full frontal close-up shot of the nude woman framed so that only her torso and crotch appear on screen, emphasizing the visible bodily marks of sexual difference. It seems that the seductive power of the image—its affective appeal as erotically charged—is being put to the test in relation to the critical distance of the voice-over text. But in doing so, Godard reveals the gendered investment in his notion of the political.

The scene turns on the assumption of male heterosexual pleasure at the sight of a young nude female body that is then purportedly undercut by the extended filming and the critical feminist voice-over commentary. But Godard was no feminist. In her memoir of the 1960s, Rowbotham recounts a discussion with Godard about this scene where she questioned his “exploitative” presentation of the female body and suggested instead that he might film the placement of stickers on public advertisements by feminist activists that read, “This image exploits women.” To which, according to Rowbotham, he responded with the line, “Don't you think I am able to make a cunt boring?”²³ Boredom would be described as an ambivalent affect that Godard uses to disrupt the active affect of the arousal state typically evoked by the nude woman. He produces the effect of critical distance to disrupt the visual pleasure that this image would otherwise elicit. As with the photograph of Fonda in *Letter to Jane*, the image—seen as feminine—is invested with some suspicion precisely
because of its affective appeal. In *Letter to Jane* it is associated with commercialized sentimentality, whereas in *British Sounds* it occupies the ambivalent place of simultaneously evoking (sexual) liberation and commodification. This sentiment conforms to a typical post-'68 (particularly francophone) staging of sexual difference that is also seen in Debord’s *Société du spectacle* (1972). In this latter film eroticized femininity, because it is consistently juxtaposed with images of labor, becomes associated with its inverse, consumption: woman equals commodity. This is the other side of femininity as the figure for liberation that so preoccupied the early twentieth-century avant-gardes.

*British Sounds* announces the fundamental stakes of its engagement with sexual difference by prefacing the nude-descending-the-staircase section with a voice-over announcement: “The relation between man and man is dependent on the relation between man and woman.” While Godard’s voice-over alludes to the idea of the heterosexual family as the model for the relation of worker and capitalist, in practice he seems mostly interested in the political relation of men to men. The filming of the woman’s body is both anti-erotic and emphasizes the spectator’s voyeurism, but this, like the previous workerist scene, is fundamentally determined by male collectivity. Rowbotham gives two anecdotal accounts of audience responses to the part of the film featuring the nude descending the staircase, both from male spectators. This reveals a further degree to which male collectivity determines the film.

When *British Sounds* was shown in France, Charlie Posner told me the audience cheered as I declared, “They tell us what we are. . . . One is simply not conscious of ‘men’ writers, of ‘men’ film-makers. They are just ‘writers,’ just ‘film-makers.’ The reflected image for women they create will be taken straight by women themselves. These characters ‘are’ women.” As for Godard’s intention for making a cunt boring, I cannot say, except that a friend in International Socialism told me that his first thought had been “crumpet”—until the shot went on and on and on, and he started to listen.

The solely male collectivity of workingmen in the first section of the film corresponds to the imagined male collectivity of spectating men in the second section. Godard constructs his cinematic analysis with woman placed on the side of sexuality and with the masculine worker as the sole participant in the collective activity of politics. Thus female sexuality can interrupt and challenge politics but only when it is conceived as a masculine mode of practice. For Godard political collectivity is determined by a homosocial contract, or as Luce Irigaray has put it, “Woman thus has value only in that she can be exchanged.” This insight raises important questions with regard to the Brechtian interpretation of the audience’s role: To what extent is the spectator as producer of the film’s meaning implicitly gendered as masculine? And inversely, does this tally with a feminized notion of the spectator as consumer?

If the notion of critical distance is associated with the productive masculine spectator, the feminized position of consuming cinema is typically understood as a form of unthinking identification (one of Wollen’s seven evils of cinema). During the 1970s this latter attitude became associated with the idea of cinema as visual pleasure exemplified by mainstream Hollywood films (pleasure being another cinematic bête noire). This was a position also held by the structural/materialist filmmaker and theorist Peter Gidal, who saw narrative itself as the principal enemy. Gidal’s view was grounded in an opposition to its ideologically capacity. Furthermore, as I will elaborate more fully, for Gidal identification was also aligned with the suspicion of affective responses in viewers. In order to avoid this, he argues, filmmakers should strive to eliminate all metaphorical, allegorical, or otherwise referential dimensions and instead “the actual relations between images, the handling, the appearance, the ‘how it is’ etc., takes precedence over any of the ‘associative’ or ‘internal’ meanings.” Gidal thus also seems to endorse Wollen’s views about the cinematic traits that must be negated even if the resulting films are quite different in their subject matter. Gidal developed a radical materialism that was addressed solely to film form and asserted an iconophobic eschewal of the referential dimensions of representation altogether. Interestingly, this iconophobia would soon be reinforced by an engagement with feminist theory. As a political response to the inevitability of film’s objectification of women, in the late 1970s he publicly pledged never again to depict the female form. I will elaborate further on Gidal’s interesting affiliations with Brechtian ideas later, but, as we have seen, Godard offers the most influential model of film viewing as (masculine) hard work, and one that tends toward the politically moralistic. The audience is expected to strike a studious attitude in relation to
this cinematic "blackboard," but they are also meant to expend mental labor in doing so.40 Within this moral universe the apparently frivolous pleasures of cinema viewing—the affective experience of fantasy and identification—are to be avoided at all costs. This form of cinematic didacticism has subsequently persisted as the dominant model for political cinema, and it has had a significant influence on feminist-engaged film, particularly the work of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. The so-called feminist film essay, in name alone, gives a clear enough indication of the attitude taken.

Institutional Rupture and Repetition: The Politicization of Film after May '68

The example of Godard, Swiss auteur turned Maoist, has already figured largely, and now I would like to draw the reader's attention to another example, the feminist film theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey. Mulvey provides a useful point of intersection for our consideration of the broader institutional and political issues that shaped transformations in the film cultural milieu in the first half of the decade. In addition to being an organizer-participant in the Miss World protest, Mulvey was employed at the BFI and was directly involved in the institutional transformations that shaped the avant-garde turn in British film culture. This is not to imply that Mulvey is single-handedly responsible for these various institutional forces. Rather, she allows us to see the connections between several strands in the intersection of post-'68 political vanguardism as the groundwork for the evolution of a cultural avant-garde milieu. Furthermore, it need not be labored that her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is perhaps the single most influential text for feminist film theory and would go on to shape a whole generation of film theorists.41

Film played an unusually important role during the May '68 uprisings, and this produced a political working-through in Britain in the years to follow. During May '68 the editorial team of France's leading theoretical film journal Cahiers du cinéma, along with members of the major film technicians union and film students, organized an extensive program of film screenings in temporary screening facilities set up in public schools, factories, and other provisional venues. The idea that film critics would mobilize their film expertise within this political context set an important precedent for their BFI colleagues.42 This led Peter Wollen, at the time Mulvey's husband and collaborator on several experimental films in the 1970s, to predict a shift from art to film as the new dominant avant-gardist medium. Writing in 1972, the same year as his essay on Groupe Dziga Vertov's Vent d'est, he describes the time as a "transitional period," and using Godard as an example speculates about future "victories for the avant-garde."43 When Wollen wrote these lines, Mulvey had just participated in major institutional transformations at the BFI, Britain's national film organization, which included establishing a film archive, a public screening program, an educational facility, a library, and a press that published books and journals, including Screen.44 Colin MacCabe describes how "a series of bruising institutional battles had resulted, in 1971, in new funding for Screen, a magazine charged with the explicit task of developing a theory of film," and he goes on to point out, "I was delighted to join this intellectual endeavour and thrilled to find that Godard was the central point of reference."45

Driven by an avant-gardist impulse of revolt that was inspired by May '68, these ruptures within the state institution of the BFI are part of the long-term work of political change that Julia Kristeva named "permanent crisis."46 As opposed to the bohemian phantasm of the instantaneous revolutionary act, the slower work of institutional transformation can be said to betray the very avant-gardist logic that propelled it in the first place. Semi-independence from this state institution was thus necessary in order to sustain the political desire of avant-gardism, the dream work of the avant-garde that continued to propel the changes underway. The ongoing work of political rupture within the institution of the BFI added a considerable weight of political desire to the avant-gardist staging of Nightcleaners.

In 1971 Sam Rohdie took over as the journal's editor; he instituted a major shift in editorial policy, and from that point onward Screen began its ambitious film-educational project. At this time the education department of the BFI—called the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT)—was responsible for publishing Screen, and these institutional shifts brought SEFT into direct confrontation with the BFI governors. Consequently, six staff members resigned, and SEFT—the department where Mulvey was also employed—seceded from its host institution to become an independent organization funded by a BFI grant.47 This new institutional independence
enabled the development of a cutting-edge educational program that included workshops, weekend courses for college and high-school teachers, and course-pack publications. This was all part of a practical extension of Screen journal’s new theoretical focus.48

SEFT was also partially responsible for organizing the Edinburgh International Film Festival, which likewise saw significant changes at this time. The festival’s program included new releases in world cinema, Hollywood, documentary, and avant-garde film. U.S. and European film within the structuralist tradition dominated the avant-garde category and brought a different type of critic and filmmaker to the event, facilitating the interaction between these different aesthetic traditions. For example, Gidal (who also wrote film criticism) as well as the American film critic Annette Michelson and Noël Burch were in regular attendance. Furthermore, the role of the new type of theoretically informed film critic became even more significant with an important feminist change in festival programming. In addition to its regular program of film screenings, in 1972 the festival included a “Special Event,” organized by Claire Johnston and Mulvey, on the theme of women and film. With film screenings as well as conference papers and roundtable discussions, the special event of 1972 re-invented a festival tradition that had lapsed in the early 1960s; this new intellectual focus would continue throughout the 1970s.49 The special events were a theoretical intervention in the festival’s general program and can be understood as an extension of the avant-garde turn that had recently occurred in the film journal Screen. The Brecht Event, where Nightcleaners was screened, perhaps more so than any of the other Edinburgh International Film Festival special events of the 1970s, was part of SEFT’s broader educational project. Not only were the conference papers published in a special issue of Screen after the festival, but another special issue of the journal, dedicated to the analysis of Brecht’s work, was published prior to the festival, thus providing a theoretically elaborated intellectual context for the subsequent discussions.49

Although the Brecht Event became a point of intersection for the institutional, theoretical, and practice-based transformations associated with the BFI and Screen, this was not the only context for experimental film culture in Britain during the 1970s. In fact, Britain’s better-known experimental film movement of the period was not associated with Screen at all. The London Filmmakers Coop was more typically aligned with the European and U.S. tradition of structural film.51 While it is not generally emphasized in historical accounts of the group, they also responded to the political transformations of May ‘68 and its feminist rewriting in Britain in the 1970s. This is most immediately apparent in the theoretical writing and film criticism of Peter Gidal in the mid- to late 1970s that I, suggest, evolved in critical response to the Brechtian debates about the political significance of film form. In his 1976 essay “Theorization of Structural/Materialist Film,” Gidal argues for the political transformation of structural film by adding the term materialist. He develops a political analysis of the group’s avant-garde aesthetic based on the question of form that evokes the very same Benjaminian language adopted by the Brechtian theorists. Echoing Brechtian arguments about the political importance of reflexivity, Gidal states, “Each film is a record (not a representation, not a reproduction) of its own making.”52 He argues that these films deserve the label structural/materialist because they foreground the film’s “means of production” (6). In common with Brechtian arguments, the viewer has to work as she watches the film, and in doing so, she becomes conscious of producing meaning. This is set in explicit opposition to the spectator’s relation to mainstream narrative film that—in common with the Brechtian critics—Gidal considers to be a passive position of consumption. Gidal, however, goes further than these critics with his view that the only proper avant-garde inquiry must work from the basis that “narrative is an illusionist procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory, repressive” (4). His analysis is a direct attack on the procedures used by the mainstream entertainment commodity offered by Hollywood, and any engagement with narrative structures at all is seen as a capitulation to this dominant form. This is a further index of the influence of Brechtian ideas at the time and the avant-garde discourse that defined them.53 Gidal responded to this discourse by claiming that structural/materialist film, the formalist practice that he was involved with, was the only true avant-garde. A typically avant-gardist claim in its declaration of avant-gardist exclusivity, Gidal’s assertion of the political significance of film form ups the ante on the Brechtian debates.

All of this indicates a broader field of conflict over the political significance
of reflexivity and critical distance as the negation of affect and identification. But when the modernist trope of reflexivity was combined with a political subject, Brechtianism was the prevailing interpretative norm. Nightcleaners was not the only film subsumed beneath the Brechtian banner at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1975. Annette Michelson, in an extensive two-part review essay in Artforum, had already connected Yvonne Rainer’s Lives of Performers (1972) and her minimalist dance from the 1960s with Brecht. But the 1975 screening of Film about a Woman Who . . . (1974) in the avant-garde program of the Edinburgh International Film Festival provided Rainer with the nickname, in British film circles, of “the American Godard,” a comparison that she has strongly rejected. In 1976 when the special event was under the heading “The Avant-Garde,” Rainer was invited to participate, along with Michelson and Marc Karlin of the Berwick Street Film Collective, thus further consolidating “Brechtian” and “avant-garde” for a long time to come.\(^5\)

Avant-Garde Rupture and Repetition Redux

Griselda Pollock was the first to take up the Brechtian reading of Nightcleaners in connection with a broader political idea of “critical distance” in an art historical context in her 1988 essay “Screening the Seventies.” This perspective has since been reiterated and loosely endorsed by Mary Kelly.\(^6\) But the other members of the Berwick Street Film Collective did not adhere to the dominant Brechtian reading of the film.\(^7\) While this is not in itself a reason to discount this view, it does raise the question of artistic intentionality in the context of collective production. When the idea of a documentary film was first suggested, the Berwick Street Film Collective was an all-male group that included Marc Karlin, Humphry Trevelyan, and Richard Mordaunt. The artist James Scott, whose previous filmmaking experience was a short experimental documentary about the British pop artist Richard Hamilton, was also invited to participate in the project, further consolidating the seemingly male bias. In order to be sure of there being an advocate for the activists’ feminist agenda, it was agreed that the collective would be supplemented by one of the workshop participants, the young artist Mary Kelly. Kelly had recently graduated from St. Martin’s School of Art, was an organizer and participant in the Miss World protest, and perhaps spurred on by her friendship with Mulvey, was becoming keenly interested in filmmaking.\(^8\) In 1970 she began as the feminist liaison to the filmmakers but soon became a central participant in the making of Nightcleaners, an involvement that would lend far greater complexity to a film that her fellow feminist activists had hoped would be speedily produced and would deliver a straightforward message. While Kelly’s role in the making of Nightcleaners was pivotal, it should not (as it has in some quarters) be overplayed. As Humphry Trevelyan has noted, Karlin and Scott did most of the editorial work.\(^9\) Kelly’s perspective will be addressed independently in the next chapter, where I argue that her work on Nightcleaners fundamentally shaped her emerging solo practice. While it is much more common for women artists to be written out of the picture when art history’s traditional monographic model is applied to collaborative work, in this case the opposite would appear to have taken place.\(^10\) Having said this, my approach does not rest on artistic intentionality as decisive to the film’s historical and aesthetic significance. Rather, I am much more engaged with how the interpretation of Nightcleaners is shaped by a complex intersection of political and institutional determinations that follows an avant-gardist logic. I would thus locate the question of intentionality within a broader institutional and disciplinary framework. Kelly’s subsequent importance to feminist art history has certainly contributed to the revival of interest in Nightcleaners and to the ongoing consolidation of the Brechtian point of view. It was because of Kelly’s involvement that Nightcleaners reemerged in an art historical context in 1998 at a conference at the University of Leeds, coorganized by Griselda Pollock, “Work and the Image.” Here the Canadian art historian and curator Judith Mastai presented a paper on the film that was a development from her research on Kelly’s collaborative installation (with Kay Fido Hunt and Margaret Harrison) Women and Work (1973–75).\(^11\)

The Sunday morning screening of Nightcleaners at the “Work and the Image” conference had only a very small audience. First-time viewers like myself, Gail Day, and Steve Edwards joined some who had last seen the film twenty years earlier, such as Pollock and most significantly the feminist historian Sally Alexander, who also appeared in Nightcleaners as one of the activists. Mastai’s essay never made it into the two-volume publication that
appeared two years later. In its place Pollock presented an alternative, impassioned, and theoretically robust analysis that functioned as an implicit response to Mastai.62 Both Pollock and Mastai refer to Johnston and Willemen's article that was presented at the Edinburgh International Film Festival and later published in Screen. While Mastai rejected the avant-gardist argument presented by Johnston and Willemen—claiming that the film was not in fact true to Brecht's legacy—Pollock both endorses and updates their account. Situating Nightcleaners in relation to three other films of the period, Riddles of the Sphinx (dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977), The Song of the Shirt (dir. Jonathan Curling and Sue Clayton, with the Film and History Project, 1978), and Gold Diggers (dir. Sally Potter, 1983), Pollock seeks to establish its place along the “thread of an avant-garde poetics” of feminist film.63

Of all the feminist films Pollock discusses, Nightcleaners is the most significant. This is not just because of its avant-garde origin—a primal scene for this feminist aesthetic—but more because the film is subject to a complex modernist temporality that goes in two directions. Avant, the forward thrust into the future, is supplemented by a counterposing movement, garde, the protective backward turn to memory (or remembering) as a guarding of the past. Articulating her belief in the profound significance of the film, Pollock encapsulates the ambiguity of the double movement present in the term avant-garde:

It has taken over 20 years for what was perceptible through an aesthetic configuration (within the film) to be theoretically elaborated in such a way that a retrospective viewing of the film finds them yet again to be one step ahead, and at the same time, timely and legible in their address to current burning questions. It is as if we are, at last, and belatedly, theoretically advanced enough to comprehend the traumatic and shocking events of the revolt of women that burst upon the world in the 1970s. I call this moment avant-garde poetics.64

While Mastai's paper argued that Nightcleaners was a political failure, an alienating formal experiment, unable to be “useful” either to the women's movement or the night cleaners' campaign, for Pollock, this very failure would become a mark of its avant-garde success.65 Nightcleaners was “one step ahead,” and only now, in the future, are we able to (truly) understand the film, since “it has taken over 20 years,” for us to become “theoretically advanced enough.” The temporal fulfillment of its avant-garde promise is all the more evident precisely because of its initial failure as a political film, of our failure—and here Pollock is speaking as, and on behalf of, her own generation of second-wave feminists.

With this in mind, consider Karlin's account of one aspect of the film's reception controversy. The negative reaction to Nightcleaners on the part of some feminist activists was so vehement that a petition was even organized against it. As Karlin later remarked, “I think it was about two years after that petition that one of the people who organized it went back to see the film, and generously conceded: ‘I was really wrong, now I can see the film.’ In other words, at the time there were so many constraints operating on the vision of that film that it took two years to be able to see it.”66 This peculiar interruption to vision and cognition coupled with virulent rejection is evocative of the psychical condition of disavowal. A defensive operation that guards the ego against external reality, disavowal is a psychical response to trauma that takes the form of denial of the traumatic event. While this is not to say that the viewing of the film was equivalent to a trauma, it does suggest that psychical considerations are relevant to the broader reception of Nightcleaners. In Karlin's example the feminist activists are blinded to seeing certain aspects of the film because it deviated from documentary expectations and their own view of the political campaign. Indeed, Pollock seems to endorse such a view in her own experience of seeing the film in 1998. Likewise, at the “Work and the Image” conference the feminist historian and activist Sally Alexander, who also appeared in Nightcleaners, spoke about a similar incomprehension when seeing the film back in the 1970s that to her own deep surprise she no longer felt when she saw it again. Moreover, Pollock's reading of Nightcleaners is built on her and Alexander's latter-day viewing. Despite the persuasiveness of Pollock's position—part of which she presented off-the-cuff in the lively discussion that followed Mastai's paper—not everyone had reached the same “advanced enough” position. Mastai remained unconvinced, as did Steve Edwards, whom I overheard assuring Mastai of his confidence in the rightness of her reading of the film. Part of Mastai's argument was that the Brechtianism claimed for Nightcleaners, and for other films and theatrical approaches of the period, was not true enough to 1930s Brecht. While Pollock aims to restore the avant-garde claims of the 1970s, Mastai is
looking back to the 1930s to the way in which Nightcleaners fails to measure up to its purported avant-garde origin.

Rather than taking up a stance on one side or the other of this debate, what strikes me is the extent to which the rediscovery of Nightcleaners is shaped by a repetition of its first appearance in the mid- to late 1970s. If avant-gardism involves the fantasy of pure rupture, a new beginning, a tabula rasa, this singular moment belongs to a larger temporal structure of modernist repetition. As Jean-François Lyotard has argued, “We now suspect that this ‘rupture’ is in fact a way of forgetting or repressing the past, that is, repeating it and not surpassing it.” The Nightcleaners’ debacle seems to bring to light this modernist logic of rupture and repetition as a self-conscious process. As opposed to the forward-progressing phallicism that typifies the avant-garde fantasy of pure rupture, Lyotard suggests an alternative structure, one that also seems particularly apt for Nightcleaners: “The true process of avant-gardism was in reality a kind of work, a long, obstinate, and highly responsible work concerned with investigating the assumptions implicit in modernity...a working-through (durcharbeiteten) performed by modernity on its own meaning” (79–80).

Writing from amid the debates about postmodernism, the question of repetition and return had become all the more pressing for Lyotard who felt compelled to reflect on the temporality of modernism. He counterposes the view that postmodernism functions as a break with modernism and instead argues that “the ‘post’ of ‘postmodern’ does not signify a movement of comeback, flashback, or feedback, that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in ‘ana’-procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an ‘initial forgetting’” (80). The telling of Nightcleaners, that is, its reception, which is inseparable from the film object itself, appears to perpetually enact the rewriting of modernism as an aperetic movement. This is the contradictory logic of the revolution that moves forward, starts over, breaks through the past, wearing the well-worn clothing of the revolt, only to turn back, work through, and retell.

Reading Nightcleaners beyond the Brechtian Grid

Thus far I have presented some of the stakes in the Brechtian interpretation of Nightcleaners in terms of film form, broader institutional transformations, and how these two aspects converge so that the film conforms to a modernist logic of rupture and repetition. This latter reading is informed by the way in which the reception of Nightcleaners provoked a psychical interruption; Karlin, Pollock, and Alexander’s observations indicated a delayed ability to see the film. It also seems clear that the very features that for Johnston and Willemen satisfied the political fantasy of feminist avant-gardism were what occluded these viewers’ vision in the 1970s. Now I want to ask: What is it that the avant-gardist critics of the 1970s were themselves unable to see? What aspects of Nightcleaners escaped their Brechtian interpretative grid?

In the discussion following their paper at the Brecht Event, it became clear that there were some difficulties in the positioning of Nightcleaners as a Brechtian film. Martin Walsh, perhaps the most orthodox of the new Brechtian thinkers, contested the argument made for the film’s reflexive treatment of cinematic form. Walsh was concerned with what he described as a turn to “emotionalism” that he saw as excessive to, and in contradiction with, the more analytic approach that defined other Brechtian practice. Or, bringing to bear a term we have already used, Walsh was uncomfortable with the affective aspect of Nightcleaners, and instead he asserted the priority of the idea, the intellectual. Interestingly, Johnston and Willemen were also uncomfortable with this apparent turn to affect. But they countered Walsh by arguing that the emotionalism of Nightcleaners was successfully undone by the filmmakers’ otherwise analytic attitude. All seemed to agree that the intellectual or analytic attitude is antithetical to the emotional or affective. Walsh was able to identify the stumbling block in Nightcleaners precisely because he was immersed in a Brechtian mode of filmmaking and analysis. Moreover, he even isolates the deviant feature of the film as the recurrent use of the close-up head-shot motif without, as he puts it, “some kind of commentary to clarify the meaning.”

Walsh argues that the close-ups of the women’s faces, to the film’s detriment, align it with the humanist strain within documentary practice where the idea of an analytically oriented political critique is replaced by an emotionally driven sentimentality. But the particular example that he identifies is in fact the only instance where the depiction of one of the cleaners’ faces is anchored in a diegetically transitive manner (Figure I.6). Nevertheless, he
indicates that this critique extends to the use of the faces throughout the film. The shot Walsh specifies also becomes an aspect of Pollock’s reading where she reasserts Johnston and Willemen’s argument in a more rigorous and psychoanalytically inflected way. This particular processed head shot is preceded by a short interview with two of the night cleaners conducted during a work break. One of the women explains that even though her doctor has told her to stop night work because of the damage it is doing to her health, she persists because it is the only way she can adequately provide for her children. She cannot work during the day because she must fulfill the expected gendered labor of child care and housekeeping while her husband earns a less-than-adequate family wage. Her dilemma is expressed in explicitly gendered terms. As the children’s mother, she has the sole responsibility for her children because her husband is unable or unwilling (the latter case is strongly suggested) to properly support the children. The woman is explicit that the risks to her health in doing this work are likely to be fatal, and so the dilemma is acutely felt: her work will bring about her death. She is hemmed in by the social expectations of her gender, experienced as a moral imperative that is fatally compounded by the capitalist system. The close-up on her face that follows becomes charged with the emotional force that this tragic disclosure would suggest.

Counterposing Walsh’s dismissal of this sequence because of its emotionalism, Pollock argues that the “slowing down of the film and the prolongation of her eyes closing and reopening opens the film to a moment of trauma, of almost-encounter with the real that is death.”79 This scene was so affectively charged for Pollock that it provides the psychical kernel for her reading of the film as a whole. She argues that Nightcleaners “signifies the trauma of work for women caught in the triple bind of the capitalist relations of production, of reproduction and of gender and class as inseparable.”74 In her analysis of the film’s staging of affect, Pollock substitutes her own affective response as a viewer of the film for the film’s use of affect as a device. She elides the two different understandings of affect, and her analysis of the film is driven by her own affective investment as an interested viewer. Thus, I agree with Pollock’s analysis as it describes the manifest feminist problematic that the film addresses, and I also concur with her identification of the face motif as significant; but as an overall account of the film, this reading does not adequately address the face motif as it is deployed throughout. The staging of affect in Nightcleaners, I contend, does not live up to Pollock’s own affective investment as a feminist art historian.

The example that Pollock cites is the only instance when the representation of the women’s faces is narratively sedimented in the kind of explicit way described, and it is in fact the sole instance when this motif is directly connected to the film’s documentary message. Furthermore, it is the only instance when the close-up is used to clearly articulate a strong emotion such as pity or compassion. The other examples of faces suggest a greater diversity and a fundamental ambiguity in the emotional states depicted. The most ambiguous is also the very first image in Nightcleaners. Immediately before the title the screen starts to bleed irregular patches of light. As if occupied by a
ghostly presence, it pulses slowly but erratically until the isolated contours of a woman's facial features—mouth, nose, eyes—begin to emerge before dissipating again into an abstract haze of light and film grain (Figure 1.7). This image appears again and again during the course of the film, and the fragmentary factual narrative never offers a secure diegetic anchor for it.

In some of Nightcleaners' later scenes, where the activist meetings are shown, the face motif recurs in a slightly different way. Through a prolonged focus on the depiction of listening, the motif's interstitial relationship to the film's political narrative is further reinforced. Here there is no cutting back and forth between the speaker and the listener, as is conventionally seen in an expert interview. In a group context where one speaker is dominating, or where there is a discussion between two people, the camera does not move between the two speakers but rather lingers on a third party or a small group of listen-

**FIGURE 1.7.** Reprinted, grainy detail of night cleaning worker in Nightcleaners. Courtesy of the Berwick Street Film Collective and Lux, London.

FiguRe 1.8. Film still of Mary Kelly (left) with night cleaning workers, including Jean Mornont (second from the right) in Nightcleaners. Courtesy of the Berwick Street Film Collective and Lux, London.
of being signs of something determinate. The fact that these more ambiguous representations of the face are repeated far more frequently than the example that Pollock focuses on would suggest that the face motif is more than a psychically inflected support for the political problematic outlined in the film.

Kelly, supporting a more open-ended understanding of this motif, refers to these close-ups of the women's faces as "portraits." She describes them as indicating "something excessive," that is, the image's "affective force." The comparison for her may have been Warhol's *Screen Tests* or his other performance films of the 1960s that emphasize the face. Another important reference, most relevant to Karlin, would have been the work of Chris Marker. Marker's preoccupation with the face is seen as far back as his best-known work *La jetée* (1962), a film, Vered Maimon reminds us, that is about a man preoccupied with a woman's face. Karlin, a native French speaker, was living in Paris at the end of the 1960s during the events of May '68. He then worked as a cameraperson for Marker's *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (*Grin without a Cat*) (1977). This process was formative, and Marker's attention to body language as a vehicle for collective identification was particularly significant.

Tracing Marker's engagement with the face motif in relation to the more recent photographic project *Staring Back*, Maimon draws out the importance of this motif for tracking the shifting understanding of political collectivity in Marker's practice from the 1960s onward. This, I want to suggest, offers another trajectory for *Nightcleaners* than the dominant Brechtian pattern.

As I have already suggested, Pollock's analysis is compatible with the original interpretation of the film made by Johnston and Willemen at the Brecht Event, but she supplements their account with a more elaborate psychoanalytic approach. In fact, this psychoanalytic reading situates her even more squarely in this mid-1970s context. The first *Screen* special issue dedicated to Brecht included one of the most influential texts on the psychoanalytic strain within Brechtian film theory. Bearing the appropriately didactic title "Lessons from Brecht," Stephen Heath builds on Roland Barthes's structuralist reception of Brecht's work that began in the 1950s. More than twenty years after Heath's important essay, Kaja Silverman offers a theoretically informed critique of this still prevalent view as it relates to film theory developed in 1970s Britain. She argues that this political aesthetic is incompatible with psychoanalysis because of the question of identification. Silverman points out that a psychoanalytic model of spectatorial production draws on a theory of identification that is strongly rejected by the Brechtian approach. Although Silverman references the writing of Brecht, which suggests that her critique is directed toward his interwar literary output, it must be noted that her important insights are filtered through the lens of 1970s Brechtianism (where she uses "Brecht," I would use "Brechtian"). She describes how "Brecht seeks to excise identification, precisely that relation which psychoanalysis posits as an irreducible condition of subjectivity." Brecht, she writes, "dreams of a theater uncontaminated by the imaginary, a theater that would 'appeal to the reason,' and engage the spectator more at the level of the conscious than the unconscious."
out of the 'cave' of the imaginary into the clear light of day—released from the captation to which he or she is unknowingly in thrall, and endowed with a politically enabling knowledge about cinema and its structuring effects.\(^{80}\) This desire for political understanding and communicability, Silverman points out, is addressed to the rational conscious mind. This is a contradiction that is akin to making psychoanalysis work against the unconscious.

As I have already noted, all of the Brechtian claims for *Nightcleaners* isolate a single exceptional use of the face motif. None of the aforementioned writers, Walsh, Johnston and Willemen, or Pollock mention that all of the other ways in which this motif is staged counteract the didacticism of the Brechtian attitude. The face motif is in fact the very first image in the film, and here it appears in its most ambiguous way. It comes in and out of visibility, melting back into the grain of the film and establishing a particular kind of affective reflexivity. This opening image is repeated periodically throughout *Nightcleaners* and so are images of the other women's faces, all having been reprocessed and altered to emphasize the grain of the film. Each face is given the same refilming treatment: shot straight from the viewing screen of the Steen Beck flatbed editor, presented as a cited, repeated image, excised from the cinéma vérité footage, arrested to the point of near stasis, and devoid of sound (Figure 1.10). These haunting images function as interruptions to the film's diegetic flow. While other motifs are isolated and repeated in a similar way, for example, refilmed shots of work, isolated gestures, and exterior nighttime shots of women at office windows, it is the women's faces that are the most persistently present and the most ambiguous in their meaning. The face motif decisively disrupts the symmetrical opposition between mental and manual labor, the productive worker and the productive viewer, that is, *Nightcleaners*’ Brechtian moments. This is a disturbance that Martin Walsh immediately recognized and then objected to. Furthermore, because of the insistent repetition of this motif, it is closely identified with the persistently present black leader tape. The conjunction of the affective (image of the face) with the reflexive (insertion of black leader tape) is even more puzzling for the intellectual Brechtian respondent. Although both motifs punctuate the film with a rhythmic force, drawing our attention to the medium of film and its visual and structural properties of light, movement, editorial cut, reproduc-

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**FIGURE 1.10.** Film portraits of night cleaning workers, including activist Mag Hobbs (center) in *Nightcleaners*. Courtesy of the Berwick Street Film Collective and Lux, London.
ibility, and so on, the faces introduce an affective element that fundamentally diverges from Brechtian expectations.

**Materialism and Minor Affects in Nightcleaners**

The consideration of questions of feeling or affect is strikingly absent from materialist and semiotic analysis of the 1970s. This marginalization of affect, Sianne Ngai has argued, “stemmed from its perceived incompatibility with ‘concrete’ social experiences.” The British Marxist literary critic and cofounder of cultural studies, Raymond Williams, in his development of the concept of “structures of feeling,” stands out in this field of cultural inquiry as the exception that proves the rule. Williams’s concept is particularly significant since he goes against what Rei Terada terms the “expressive hypothesis,” where feeling is thought to flow from a centered subject. Instead, “structures of feeling” are a way of accessing the complexity of a lived social space. But even with Williams’s formulation, affect proves typically elusive for analysis since it exerts a pressure that is prior to rationalization. Or, as Lawrence Grossberg has put it, affect is so difficult “to define and describe . . . because it is a-signifying.” If materialist and semiotic critics have typically avoided considerations of affect, filmmakers from the same era have frequently demonstrated open hostility or suspicion. In the Brechtian work of Godard as well as in the structural/materialist film of Peter Gidal, an explicit attempt to delimit affect is a central critical strategy. This is particularly notable in two examples: one I have already discussed, *Letter to Jane* by Godard; the other is *Key* (1968) by Gidal. Both these films, even more than *Nightcleaners*, centralize the motif of the face. Undoubtedly this focus on the face is used precisely in order to disrupt its conventional affective functioning in film. Briefly turning to these two examples will also help to consolidate my earlier comparison between Gidal’s formalism and Godard’s Brechtianism while at the same time allowing us to clarify the different way in which this motif is put to use affectively in *Nightcleaners*.

As we have already discussed, the sound track in Godard’s *Letter to Jane* offers an excoriating critique of the expression of empathy evident on Fonda’s face, connecting this to the commercial importance of the close-up still of the face in the Hollywood star system (compounded because of her film star father). Thus Godard asserts the face motif in order to negate its conventional use. It is as if he were trying to inoculate viewers against an emotional response to the image by the political commentary. Gidal demonstrates a similar attitude in his film *Key*, and in this work the relationship between image and sound track is also decisive. *Key* is a ten-minute film that simply shows a still image coming into focus. For a considerable portion of the film’s duration, the image is not recognizable as depicting anything at all. Eventually, by zooming out from extreme close-up, the image becomes identifiable as the face of an anonymous woman. As an extended, slowed-down, and static version of *Nightcleaners*’ interruptive face, *Key* shows the process of the image emerging into recognizability—although it never reaches full clarity—and for some time it remains completely indistinguishable, aside from the registration of the effects of light passing through celluloid. After visual coherence is attained, the camera stops zooming out and slowly begins to pull out of focus until the screen becomes blank. *Key* stages a tension between the referential capacity of the image and the disinterested formal properties of film. Once you know you have been looking at a picture of a face the whole time, there is a retrospective reconstruction in which the face rewrites the (previously unreadable) sections of film precisely as having some kind of reference. In *Letter to Jane* there is a similar process of realization, but the viewer of Godard’s film becomes aware of the complex relay between the denotative aspects of the image—what we see—and the shared cultural assumptions that shape our apprehension, that is, the ideological dimensions of the image. In *Key* this process of reconstruction, or rewriting, of the image track has a corollary in the film’s sound track. For the first part of *Key* Gidal plays Bob Dylan’s song “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” in reverse. Once you recognize the song (which happens as soon as the lifting hook of the chorus kicks in, discernable even when played in reverse) the impulse is to listen for recognizable passages. The oscillation between the referential capacity of sound (music) and its self-referentiality (noise) alerts the spectator to a similar dynamic also being played out at the level of the image track. Although the sound is not synchronized with the unmoving image, there is a conceptual correspondence between the two tracks.

Gidal draws on the mainstream cinematic convention where the sound
track establishes the emotional or mood-related support for the visual image. But watching this film makes the viewer self-conscious about the process of visual cognition and about the kinds of associative affectively charged meanings that we have become accustomed to adopt. It is in this sense that Gidal shares the attitude of critical distance seen in Godard's ideological critique. The correlation between the image of the face and the association with the sad-eyed lady of Dylan's song can only be made by recourse to an act of retrospective reconstruction that, like Godard's critical voice-over, necessarily creates a distancing effect. Put another way, we know that the relationship between image and sound track is an affective one, but we feel no affect from it. Like Godard, Gidal's Key creates critical distance in the viewer, allowing us to examine the mechanisms by which cinema achieves its emotional effects. In this conceptual corollary of affect, both filmmakers rely on the foregrounding of a rational, intellectual approach that is adopted as a means of erasing affect.

Although Nightcleaners presents the same kind of motif as Key, one that has been explicitly processed to emphasize the oscillation between the materiality of film and its referential capacity, it is not used to the same end. Working with, not against, established cultural associations wherein the face is the privileged filmed vehicle for affect, the Berwick Street Film Collective deviates from both Gidal's structural/materialist approach and Godard's Brechtian attitude. Unlike Key, the face motif in Nightcleaners coexists alongside a political narrative, interrupting its temporal and diegetic flow. Contrasting with Gidal's attempt to erase affect, these peculiar and ambiguous images shift the intellectual significance of the reflexive and turn it toward something affective. But the particular emotional significations associated with these affective images, with certain exceptions—such as the one Pollock and Walsh identify—remains highly ambiguous. Moreover, the connection between the black leader tape and the images of the women's faces is further reinforced during the course of the film when the slowed-down, grainy, close-up head shots appear to recede in space and become surrounded with, and thus framed by, blackness. These images appear to become swallowed by the black leader tape physically and metaphorically embedded within it. I contend that rather than negating affectivity, these interruptive moments in the film draw the viewers' attention to the ambiguous staging of affect throughout Nightcleaners. This issue of affective ambiguity, as we will see, is central to the political problematic staged in the film.

Take the film historian Brian Winston, who has more recently reiterated the Brechtian reading of Nightcleaners in order to critique its representation of political activism. In doing so he reveals certain assumptions about the conventional way that documentary film stages affect that, I argue, Nightcleaners does not in fact deliver. Winston claims, "The collective's concerns with the nature of image production, while neither unimportant nor trivial, look impossibly sterile and irrelevant when yoked with the raw plight of a group of exploited women trying to organize a strike against the advice of their union. The result was to reduce the deconstructionist agenda to a bathetic formalism." Winston sees an irreconcilable opposition between the emotionally charged political struggle of the women that, by implication, contrasts with the cold, unfeeling experimentation of the objective technological apparatus. While this is the contrast that both Lettre à Jane and Key critically stage, the engagement with issues of affect in Nightcleaners does not in fact produce the strong emotions assumed by Winston in his reference to the "raw plight of a group of exploited women." Rather, a more ambivalent range of emotions that are attuned to the push and pull of competing desires are staged in the film.

Unlike other post-'68 activist films that address extra-union political action, such as Godard's Tout va bien and Marin Karmitz's Coup pour coup (1972), Nightcleaners is remarkable in its refusal to depict the action of political activism. Less immediately obvious, although much more significant for the psychical interruption we have already noted, is the absence from Nightcleaners of the associated emotions of anger, excitation, passion, and agitation. I find this withdrawal from the depiction of such strong emotions especially intriguing. Instead, the film consistently emphasizes what Ngai terms "minor affects." These are "far less intentional or object-driven" and "more likely to produce political ambiguities than the passions in the philosophical canon." Minor affects are neither the "grander passions" nor "ennobling or morally beatific states." Instead, they take the form, for instance, of irritation, boredom, anxiety, envy, and resentment; negative affects that "interfere with the outpouring of other emotions." This turn to minor affect in Nightcleaners is clear both in the depiction of emotion as well as with reference to camera work and
editing. At the level of film form, then, *Nightcleansers* gives us a dampening of the passionate emotions associated with activist film.

The significance of the idea of minor affects to *Nightcleansers* rests on an understanding of the distinction between affect and emotion. This demands a brief clarification of how these two terms will be put to work. Typically, “affect” is defined as distinct from “emotion” following a psychoanalytic model with the latter understood as subjectively experienced by the analyst and the former as describing what the analyst perceives. Emotions are thus associated with a first-person experience that is bound up with a subject and affects with third-person perception that floats free of a particular subject. Following this logic, therefore, many cultural commentators maintain the distinction between the terms with the assumption that affect alone is the proper term for aesthetic analysis, since this is a third-person mode of inquiry. While the distinction between the two terms is essential, I do not dispense altogether with first-person emotion in my aesthetic analysis. As we have already noted, the staging of affect in *Nightcleansers* must be read in relation to the affective responses on the part of viewers (which would typically be classed as emotion).9 Instead, I want to propose shifting between a first-person and third-person approach as an important aspect of my reading. Furthermore, following Ngai, when I talk about affect in a work of art, this is not restricted to the representation of emotions or the affective response on the part of spectators; it also includes the more general question of tone. This is something like Williams’s structures of feeling: “We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as feeling and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living inter-relating continuity.”90 Williams is principally concerned with works of art and literature as indexes of these structures of feeling, as “social experiences in solution.”91 Likewise this is a focus in my approach. But addressing the film also includes its impact on audiences who were and are particularly invested in the world it conjures up. The affective investment on the part of its viewers—their own emotional involvement in the campaign and the film—has been a significant aspect of my analysis thus far. This affective investment produced an inability to “see” the film on the part of certain feminist activists. Furthermore, this was a point of view that Pollock reiterates in her own account, and she was explicit in her mobilization of her own emotional reaction to certain scenes in *Nightcleansers*. This emotional involvement shifts the emphasis from a third-person mode of analysis to a subjective first-person reaction. Further, we can mobilize the tension between these two understandings of affect, first person and third person, as a mode of aesthetic analysis that is particularly useful for exploring the aesthetic function of so-called minor affects.

One might even say that a strong emotional response is typical of the activist film, since it seeks to incite its viewers into making an active response, being moved to get involved. But *Nightcleansers* is different from other post-68 activist films. Take by way of comparison *Coup pour coup* by Kamitz. Although its subject is similar to that of *Nightcleansers*—a reenactment of a wildcat strike by women workers that took place in the immediately post-68 period in a provincial French town—the two films could not be more different. *Coup pour coup* was made in collaboration with some of the workers involved in the original incident, who also appeared as actors in the film. This generates a fusion between reality and representation that is encapsulated by the genre hybrid docudrama. The mobility of the vérité camera work and the use of long single takes produce an internal energy and vibrancy that is matched by the urgency of the political action and fervency of the women’s discussions. The depiction of strong emotions as a component of goal-oriented action is matched by camera work and editing. The camera is used subjectively, identified with the first-person perspective of the emotionally charged action of the women workers. *Coup pour coup*’s vérité style uses long single takes, and the mobile subjective camera creates energy for scenes already driven by the depiction of impassioned emotions. By minimizing the interruption of the editorial cut—and when used, it is sutured into the action—the movement of the camera seems coextensive with the spectator’s vision, and as a result the action is naturalized as if produced for the spectator, assimilated to her subjectivity. This produces the effect of apparently seamless continuity between the cinematic apparatus and the depicted action that is driven by strong emotions enhanced because the willing participants in the film desire an ongoing May ’68 with its easy incorporation of women
into the abstract collectivity of class struggle. This point of view is further reinforced by the reality effect produced by having some of the actual workers from the original action appearing as actors in the film.

This is not the political fantasy that Nightcleaners describes. The much less mobile camera work used in Nightcleaners produces a very different experience of objective duration (an issue that I alluded to in the toilet-cleaning scene mentioned earlier). This creates an effect akin to third-person observation, and the use of an objective camera emphasizes empirical observation rather than subjectively invested action. Nightcleaners uses cinéma vérité real-time duration to produce an experience akin to inertia, a slowing-down of the temporality of political action and consciousness. In this regard the film attempts to describe the temporality of a present without any clear resolution or implied blueprint for the future. Nightcleaners depicts the movement of time, thought, and decision in a decidedly nonmotive way. This becomes particularly clear in the contrast between the vigorous and impassioned political debates in Coup pour coup and the numerous scenes in Nightcleaners showing subdued meetings without a clear sense of what is actually taking place.

Furthermore, it is here that the close-up shots of the women’s faces appear in the most ambiguous way. In contrast to the impassioned action of Coup pour coup, these close-up shots of the women’s faces are extremely difficult to read.

Rather than the new class unification of Coup pour coup, Nightcleaners points to the conflicts of race, class, and gender that persist within this post-’68 activist alliance: between the working-class, white male union movement; the middle-class, white feminist activists; the middle-class, predominantly white, male filmmakers; and the working-class, racially divided cleaning women. An awareness of the tensions in these different positions is woven throughout the film, not, however, through the strong emotions typically associated with political activism and conflict, but in much more subtle and ambiguous ways. Indeed, the following insight by Heather Love seems particularly apropos here. She suggests that the “persistent attention to ‘useless’ feelings is all about action: about how and why it is blocked, and about how to locate motives for political action when none is visible.” In fact, at a larger structural level, the segmentation of the film into discrete, often incomplete passages facilitates the various shifts in the relations between the parts. The black leader tape produces a rhythmically controlled juxtaposition between different scenes and therefore also between different points of view and socio-political positions.

In addition to the various parties depicted on screen, the position of the viewing audience must also be considered, particularly because of the Benjaminian claims made for Nightcleaners. The viewers’ activity of watching is most clearly figured through a frequently repeated motif of medium and long shots, taken from the street, of cleaning women seen at night against the lit-up windows of office buildings. The first appearance of this kind of shot shows a bright oblong window that resembles the letterbox dimensions of the cinema screen (Figure 1.11). On/behind this screen/window is a night cleaner working, and while she works she acknowledges the audience watching her work by a small wave of her hand. This glancing gesture of acknowledgment invokes the spectating audience watching her at double remove, but at the same time it draws attention to the predominantly male film crew and, together with the voice-over commentary, this suggests a gendered reading of this motif. The first time this shot appears—it is repeated throughout the film with several different women at different windows—it is juxtaposed with a voice-over commentary by Rowbotham talking about the role of sexuality within capitalism. Rowbotham’s voice-over is free-flowing, casual, and exploratory as opposed to the didactic recitation of the Groupe Dziga Vertov’s British Sounds. Her open-ended probing tone is due to the fact that her remarks derive from an interview with a sympathetic interlocutor. Moreover, the rather strident staging of Rowbotham’s voice in British Sounds must also have affected the way in which her voice was, contrastingly, presented in Nightcleaners. The juxtaposition of this speculative analysis with the image of the cleaners invokes the question of the voyeuristic nature of this scene and by implication the voyeuristic nature of film itself. This scene uses the visual rhetoric of the sexual voyeur to raise the issue of class voyeurism, but the position of the voyeur as separate and at a distance is also strongly marked. This comparison is further reinforced by the visual resemblance between the lit-up window and the cinema screen. Because the camera quickly zooms in on the scene and frames the illuminated window, both the speed and the slight clumsiness of the zoom suggest intrusiveness, as if the woman were being
cations of sexual difference are largely unexplored. The fact that the workers are women does not fundamentally alter their struggle; it merely makes for an additional set of background details: men with strollers. Because of the alliance between the cleaners and the feminist activists, the question of sexual difference emerges as a central issue, and by way of the cleaners' affective ambivalence it becomes a central feature of the filmic representation of their struggle and, moreover, the very reason for the lack of an adequate political resolution. The film demonstrates that the circumstances of the women's paid work are inextricably bound up with their (unpaid) domestic work. With the inclusion of footage showing domestic labor, Nightcleaners makes clear that almost all the cleaners have children, and despite working all night, during the days they are still fully responsible for child care, cooking, and cleaning. It is because of the responsibility they feel toward their children (also depicted in the film) that they take on the paid work even though it is extremely physically demanding. Over and over again, the women interviewed describe how they are only able to catch a very few hours of sleep and frequently none at all; their daytime hours are almost as busy as at night. It becomes immediately apparent that the political issue here is not only the working wage but also the sexual division of labor. Nightcleaners explores how sexual difference determines the mutually dependent relationship between paid employment and unpaid domestic work and how the women's capacity as political agents is seriously constrained by this situation. Undoubtedly, many of the feminist activists felt particularly passionate about this issue, but the film is not able to offer any solutions; it can only indicate the limitations to conventional labor union activism in dealing with the women's wage-labor issues and point toward the necessity for a radically different approach to political change.

In Coup pour coup, the unofficial strike by the women is precipitated by the ineffectuality of the male union representative, and thus their self-directed collective action is contrasted with the formulaic and meaningless rhetoric of the union man. The contrast suggested is between the genuine struggle of the workers (who happen to be women) and a corrupted union representative who is presented as a lackey for the bosses. But the night cleaning workers persist in their attempts to work within the union structure. And the ineffectuality of this institution is linked both to endemic sexism and veiled
racism. For example, a fragment of footage from a demonstration describes the problem in three words, rendered in uppercase letters: FREEDOM, UNITY, BROTHERHOOD. This slogan, which appears in bold type on a labor union banner, indicates the extent to which male collectivity is the basis for organized political agency. This point of view is humorously illustrated in an extended sequence showing two miners who break from their (all-male) union ranks at the same political demonstration, and in a performance explicitly staged for the camera, they dance with each other. This playful staging of homosociability only reinforces the gender asymmetry of the labor slogan Freedom, Unity, Brotherhood.

In the very next scene, the film suggests that this notion of fraternal unity is also racially coded. In a gesture of camaraderie, the union representative tries to establish the basis on which they can communicate by his claim that "we’re all Cockneys here." No doubt this attempt to consolidate a common working-class identity is also intended to marginalize the middle-class feminist activists, but it is also a blatant (and implicitly racist) misrepresentation of the women involved in the campaign. The union representative is drawing on the nationalistic stereotype of the Cockney as a figure for the white working class, since to be considered a genuine Cockney requires being born within the sound of the Bow Bells, a church deep in the East End of London, as opposed to being one of the many immigrant East End residents. The significant number of immigrant women working as cleaners and involved in the campaign as activists makes the union man’s invocation of some mythically authentic British white working-class identity all the more stereotypical and ridiculous. It nonetheless suggests a much more complex set of exclusions that lie behind the claims to Freedom, Unity, Brotherhood.

The question of racism among the British working class and its ramifications within the labor movement were emerging as important issues in the 1970s, but aside from a few scenes like this, the problem of racism lies somewhat beneath the surface in Nightcleaners. The relative lack of attention to racism contrasts with the political literature produced by the women’s movement about the night cleaners’ campaign that in fact centralized this concern. Moreover, this racism was expressed by some of the white cleaning women as well as by the union structure, thus revealing entrenched conflicts in this postcolonial scenario. Another brief interview scene seems intended to allude to such issues. In response to the interviewer’s suggestion that the cleaners could “get together” to form a power base from which to organize—an explicit call for action—a Caribbean woman flatly responds, “There’s no ‘get together’ here.” A feminist voice-over commentary suggests that this seeming refusal to contemplate collective action is also a simple statement about the lack of opportunity for them to even meet and talk. But this terse riposte from the black cleaning woman, I feel, suggests a more profound diagnosis of the problems faced. For those directly and indirectly involved in the campaign, this would no doubt bring to mind some of the racial tensions made more explicit elsewhere. Indeed, the British neofascist movement—on the rise in the 1970s—drew much of its support from the working class. While this has been well charted in cultural studies literature, an anecdote offered by the artist Ian Breakwell in his published diaries of the period vividly illuminates the brutal public nature of British racism at this time. He describes witnessing an anti-immigration demonstration in Smithfield market that featured mothers, with children in tow, chanting, “Castrate black men! Castrate black men! Castrate black men!” The emotive power suggested by Breakwell’s example only further highlights the tendency in Nightcleaners to focus on minor affects and the way in which such emotions contrast with the call to action typically associated with—and embedded in the very word—activism.

Postcolonial Rewritings: The Black Audio Film Collective

The idea of minor affect as a political aesthetic that permits the exploration of contradictory and competing positions has not been completely overlooked in subsequent experimental film in Britain. The work of the Black Audio Film Collective has taken this strategy as something of a modus operandi. In the 2007 retrospective exhibition at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, England, the group makes their debt to the Berwick Street Film Collective’s film explicit. Alongside the key works from their oeuvre, produced from 1982 to 1998, the collective included a 2007 sculpture made out of colored Perspex and light. As a reflection on the memorializing function of the retrospective exhibition as an idiom, this sculpture took the form of a broken and truncated obelisk, a modest monument to the films that had influenced them. Alongside works
by great European auteurs such as Godard, Antonioni, and Tarkovsky is the Berwick Street Film Collective’s Nightcleaners, a much less well-known film addressed to a comparatively obscure subject. The broken form of the sculpture declares that this group understands its relation to past models of politicized experimental film as incomplete, inadequate, and fractured. Although this is a monument that declares its own flaws, in adopting the monumental form, with all of its associations with genealogical modes of descent, the Black Audio Film Collective acknowledges the dominance of this as an approach to history. But the epistemic violence of colonial history and the ongoing rupture of postcoloniality decisively shape this group’s disjointed and ambivalent relation to their historical forebears. In films like Handsworth Songs (1986), Testament (1988), and Twilight City (1989) in particular, they emphasized the unreliability of diasporic memory and offer a reflective attention to the way that psychical questions of loss and separation were entwined with historical representation.

Members of the Black Audio Film Collective met in the early 1980s as art students at Portsmouth Polytechnic, England (the same backdrop, incidentally, for the central work discussed in the next chapter, which features the first, though not final, presentation of Mary Kelly’s film-loop installation Antepartum). By the 1980s, the political debates of the previous decade that I have been tracing in this chapter had been significantly refocused by the politics of the postcolonial diaspora. The influence of the Birmingham school of cultural studies was at its peak, and while the Black Audio Film Collective inherited the reinvention of the documentary tradition seen in Nightcleaners, postcolonial concerns became much more central. The political landscape of a postcolonial Britain was coming into all-too-sharp a focus with the bloody inner-city street riots in Brixton and Handsworth that were provoked by state-sanctioned racist violence and intimidation. The postcolonial backdrop that remains latent and largely unarticulated in Nightcleaners emerges in full form in the work of this next generation of filmmakers.

Thus while Nightcleaners is an early sketch of the new social landscape of a postcolonial Britain, it certainly would not be accurate to describe it as a postcolonial film. Nonetheless, the filmmakers seem to acknowledge this as a failing, and the film declares its own inability to bring the gendered postcolonial-
This exhibition, titled *Goodbye to London*, included several works that are discussed at length in my book, namely, the Berwick Street Film Collective’s *Nightcleaners*, the Hackney Flashers’ *Women and Work* (1975), and Jo Spence and Terry Dennett’s *Remodelling Photo History*. There is also an exploration, by Jon Savage, of the political aspects of the British punk scene. See Proll, *Goodbye to London*.


27. It was in fact controversial in the early 1970s to take Freudian ideas seriously, especially after the reception of U.S. feminist writing on the topic. All of the key early feminist texts from the United States characterize Freud’s work as strongly antifeminist. Cf. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*; Millet, *Sexual Politics*; and Firestone, *Dialectics of Sex*. This pattern is also followed in the first book on feminism published in Britain; see Greer, *The Female Eunuch*. For a critical reaction to all of these authors’ work from a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective, see Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 295–363.


30. The fact that there is no entry for “sexual difference” in the most comprehensive dictionary of Freudian concepts is evidence enough of its absence from Freudian discourse; see Laplanche, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*. The earliest feminist mappings of this term are Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference*; Eisenstein and Jardine, *The Future of Difference*; and Brennan, *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Also see E. Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, 402–5.

31. As Kelly points out, the History Group, part of the London Women’s Liberation Workshop (the overarching nonhierarchical structure for individual geographically defined activist groups) was the only workshop that was not named after its location. She explains the thinking behind this in the following way: “We called it the History Group because we wanted to make sexuality pass into the grand narratives of social change.” Carson, “Excavating *Post-Partum Document*,” 190.

32. Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” An earlier popular account of the gendered nature of looking is John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*. It was also produced as a BBC television series in 1972, and this must have influenced Mulvey’s feminist text. See Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.


35. Harris, *The New Art History*. For a good art historical explication of the intellectual currents that defined the 1970s, with a particular focus on the journal *Screen*, see Pollock, “Screening the Seventies.”


37. This is also the same year as the first popular feminist book in Britain, Greer, *The Female Eunuch*. By 1971 it was an international best seller, and Greer was a media celebrity.

38. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 32.

39. Now widely deployed in the context of contemporary art, this term was first used in relation to photography in Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969.”

40. This term first appears in Wall, “‘Marks of Indifference’,” 248.

1. *Nightcleaners*

1. For a discussion of the American protest, see Echoles, *Daring to Be Bad*. In a recent interview, Mulvey has reflected on the British protest; see Pollock and Mulvey, “Laura Mulvey in Conversation with Griselda Pollock.”

2. “Why Miss World?” was first published as an anonymous pamphlet in *Seven Days*. The essay has since been reprinted in the catalogue for the 1997 exhibition *Social Process / Collaborative Practices*. See Kelly, “Miss World.”

3. For an account of this protest together with the gay liberation front’s *Gay Street Theatre*, see Seven Days, “Miss World One Year On.” The latter staged a mock *Miss World* contest featuring two men in drag playing the parts of Miss Laid and Miss Used. Miss Used received the winning prize of a large phallic. For a retrospective account of the events that took place at the previous year’s Miss World in 1970, see Seven Days, “Why Miss World?”

4. Kelly has recently used this newspaper photograph as the source image for another work, a series of large-scale photo light boxes, *Flashing Nipple Remix* (2005). (Also see her performance of the same title in the 2007 Documenta.) For two excellent critical accounts of Kelly’s work, see Deutsche, “Not-Forgetting”; and Grant, “Fans of Feminism.” None of the published accounts, including Kelly’s own statements,
reference the original protest as a staged performance by the Women's Liberation Street Theatre Group. I am grateful to Margaret Harrison for telling me about the origin of this performance and to Alison Fell for her firsthand account of it.

5. For the best account of the organizational structure of the London Women's Liberation Workshops, see Setch, "The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain."

6. For an excellent overview of left documentary film in 1970s Britain, see Dickinson, Rogue Reels, and Winston, Claiming the Real.

7. My understanding of the particular issues that some feminist audiences had with the film is drawn principally from two unpublished sources: Humphry Trevelyan in a telephone interview described the reception history at length (November 6, 2003), and Sally Alexander reiterated many of the same issues at the "Work and the Image" conference in Leeds, 1997. Also see Karlin et al., "Problems of Independent Cinema" and "Making Images Explode."

8. Johnston and Willemen, "Brecht in Britain."

9. Cowie, Recording Reality, 8. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Cowie is complicating this long-held view of documentary film as uninvolved with psychical issues.

10. For a more elaborated situationist critique of Godard's films prior to the formation of Groupe Dziga Vertov, and for the original published instance of the insult against Godard's Maoist politics, see Viennet, "The Situationists and New Forms of Action," 185. Peter Wollen, who was a great supporter of Godard's work, later went on to organize an important retrospective exhibition of the Situationist International; see Sussman, Wollen, and Francis, On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time. This is evidence enough that the Situationists and Godard were not seen as politically irreconcilable for many in Britain. In contrast, however, the negative, polemical response to this exhibition from T. J. Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith, both of whom had been closely associated with Debord's circle in the 1960s, indicates that such divisions remain important in more orthodox situationist quarters. See Clark and Nicholson-Smith, "Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International."

11. The marginalization of their practice was exacerbated by Guy Debord's decision to withdraw all of his films from distribution in the late 1970s, relegating his status as a filmmaker to the domain of cultural obscurantism. This contributed to a later fetishization of his work, particularly in the United States. See Debord, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle; Blazwick, An Endless Adventure; Wark, 50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International; and McDonough, The Beautiful Language of My Century.

12. On the use of the proper name Dziga Vertov, see Cannon, "Godard, the Groupe Dziga Vertov," 74. In response to Godard's use of Vertov's name and as a means of marking their own documentary aesthetic, the film collective SLON (Société pour le lancement des œuvres nouvelles)—which included Chris Marker—changed its name to Groupe Medvedkin, a homage to Alexander Medvedkin. On SLON (and Groupe Medvedkin), see Lee, "Red Skies"; Alter, Chris Marker; and Lupton, Chris Marker. 13. W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 777. For a contextual discussion of Benjamin's essay, see Gough, "Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde."

14. References to the work of Brecht appear in Godard's films, most notably in La chinoise (1967). In this film Brecht is the only leftist figure who is not criticized by the Maoist youth. Also, Godard claims to have used Brecht's The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany as the basis for Tout va bien. See Lellis, Bertolt Brecht, Cahiers du Cinema and Contemporary Film Theory; Groupe Lou Sin, "Les luttes de classe en France"; Walsh, "Political Formation in the Cinema of Jean-Marie Straub"; Roud, Straub; and Walsh, The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema.

15. Other members of Groupe Dziga Vertov included Paul Bourron, Armand Marco, Gérard Martin, Claude Nedjian, Isabelle Pons, Jean-Henri Roger, Raphaël Sorin, and Anne Waizemsky. For an extended discussion of Groupe Dziga Vertov, the nature of the collaboration, and the reasons for its termination, see MacCabe, Godard: A Portrait, 216-38.


17. Ivone Margulies, in her definitive study of Chantal Akerman's filmmaking, uses the term hyperrealism to describe Akerman's use of duration. See Margulies, Nothing Happens.

18. In a telephone interview with the author, November 6, 2003. On the use of voice-over in the documentary tradition, see Nichols, Representing Reality.


20. Ibid., 59.

21. Cannon, "Godard, the Groupe Dziga Vertov," 80, 79.


23. Perhaps the most interesting counterpoint to the misogyny of the film is a queer reading of Jane Fonda's career as an actress (and activist); see Wlodarczak, "Love Letter to Jane." For another interesting account of the relationship between Jane Fonda the activist and the characters played by the actor, see Anderson, "Treacherous Pin-ups, Politicized Prostitutes, and Activist Betrayals."

24. Letter to Jane includes production stills of Jane Fonda from Klute and Tout va bien and of Henry Fonda from Grapes of Wrath. The comparisons with her father, the movie star Henry Fonda, are part of a critical elaboration of Hollywood's marketing of empathy.
25. Quoted in A. Williams, Republic of Images, 19. The analytic strategy used in the voice-over is particularly indebted to the semiotic analysis of photojournalistic and advertising imagery developed by Roland Barthes in Mythologies (1957).

26. As well as being a seasoned activist, Sheila Rowbotham had an impressive list of publications. During the production period of Nightcleaners she published her first two books, thus establishing her status as a significant feminist figure when Nightcleaners was finally released. See Rowbotham, Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World and Women, Resistance, and Revolution. Rowbotham also wrote regularly for New Left magazines such as Black Dwarf and Seven Days, and it is because of her feminist contributions to these publications that Godard sought her for the role in British Sounds.


28. Other films made prior to British Sounds (but post-May ’68) are Film-tracts (anonymous, 1968), Un film comme les autres (1968), and the unfinished One A.M. (One American Movie) (1968). For the latter film Godard worked with the American documentary filmmakers D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock. With the unused footage Pennebaker went on to make One P.M. (One Parallel Movie) (1971). The punctual date of May ’68 as a marker for the shift in Godard’s work is a little too neat as a historical categorization. The shift in his practice was in fact much more gradual. See MacCabe, Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics, and Bordwell, “Godard and Narration,” 31–34.

29. The text is Rowbotham, “Women and the Struggle for Freedom.”

30. Cannon, “Godard, the Groupe Dziga Vertov,” 81. Italics in the original unless stated otherwise.

31. Ibid.

32. In an interview with Margaret Dickinson, Dave Douglass, a miner and activist for the National Union of Mineworkers who began working with the political film collective Cinema Action in 1971, describes seeing Nightcleaners at a mid-1970s screening:

MD. Did you see Nightcleaners?
DD. No. But then again no one else was dealing with the subject. The very fact that it was being dealt with, on the screen in a debate situation, was important. You were being presented with political questions about your own working life in the images of other workers. It wasn’t expected that watching it would be like watching a cartoon.

As Douglass points out, it was precisely the perceived political relevance of the film’s subject to the lived experience of this particular audience that allowed for their engagement with it. See Dickinson, Rogue Reels, 274. For another interesting account of the initial reception of Nightcleaners that confirms Douglass’s insights, see Trevelyan, “Humphrey Trevelyan in Conversation.”

33. Rowbotham, Promise of a Dream, 220. When MacCabe interviewed Godard more recently about this discussion with Rowbotham, he could not remember using the phrase; see MacCabe, Godard: A Portrait, 401. To contemporary readers the use of the crude slang term cunt will generally be understood in a derogatory way, but this is not necessarily how Rowbotham understood it at the time. Like the reclamation of the negative term queer in the gay and lesbian community and the still controversial use of the term nigger by blacks, there was a (now decisively failed) feminist effort made to reclaim the word cunt in positive terms. A great U.S. example of this would be the “cunt cheerleaders,” students from Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro’s Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts, who would turn out at the local airport in cheerleading costumes that spelled out the word cunt to greet feminists visiting the program. See Broude and Garrard, The Power of Feminist Art.

34. Rowbotham, Promise of a Dream, 220. British Sounds was commissioned by London Weekend Television, and Rowbotham describes an unexpected result of the scandal around Godard’s use of full frontal nudity: “Humphrey Burton, then head of arts at London Weekend Television, refused to show it. The ensuing row fused with the sacking of Michael Peacock from the board of LWT [London Weekend Television] in September 1969. Whereupon Tony Garnett and Kenith Trodd from Kestrel, along with other programme-makers, resigned in protest. LWT decided to go for higher ratings and brought in an Australian newspaper owner called Rupert Murdoch. The last thing he wanted to do was to make a cunt boring” (ibid., 221).

35. Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 176.

36. The classic text on the relationship between consumption and femininity is Bowby, Shopping with Freud. Also see Bowby, Carried Away.

37. This view was presented in explicitly feminist terms in Laura Mulvey’s widely influential essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” first published in 1975.

39. See Lehman, “Politics, History, and the Avant Garde.” Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” must surely have been a contributing factor for Gidal. I address Mulvey’s essay more fully in chapter 2.

40. For example, at one point in British Sounds, commenting on the film’s logic, the voice-over tells us: “During the screening of a militant film the screen is no more than a blackboard offering a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.”

41. Key examples of the development of Mulvey’s position are Doane, The Desire to Desire and Femmes Fatales. There are numerous texts that offer substantive critiques of Mulvey’s position and propose an alternative view; notable examples include Sobchack, The Address of the Eye and Carnal Thoughts; and L. Williams, Viewing Positions.

42. Initially the French film critical context provided the parameters for Screen’s intellectual shift in focus. A series of polemical conflicts between the editors of Cahiers du cinéma and Cinémathèque were quickly translated and published in Screen. Moreover, the renewed theoretical focus seen in the French journals was primarily responsible for a similar transformation in British film journals such as the short-run journal Cinemantiques and Cinema Rising. The first issue of the intermittently published British journal Afterimage, which grew out of the student magazine Platinum, began as a critical response to Cinémathèque. For more on the British context, see Johnston, “Film Journals in Britain and France”; and Ellis, “Introduction.” For an account of the development of the journal throughout the 1970s, see Easthorpe, “Screen, 1971–1979.” For a full elaboration of the French film scene at the end of the 1960s, see Harvey, May ’68 and Film Culture.


44. For a recent account of the history of Screen and Screen Education, see Bolas, Screen Education.

45. MacCabe, Godard: A Portrait, 265.

46. Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 42.

47. MacCabe, Godard: A Portrait, 265. Also see Bolas, Screen Education; and Merck, “Mulvey’s Manifesto.”

48. Screen journal began in 1969 as a continuation of the newsletter Screen Education. The 1970s revival of the companion journal Screen Education was, however, in name alone. This incarnation of the journal was quite different. Examples of SEFT weekend schools, from 1974 to 1977, indicate the breadth and scope of SEFT’s educational work: Godard and Documentary; Narrative and the Cinema; Mise-en-scène; Women and Film; Television Fiction: The Series; The Searchers; Pleasure, Entertainment, and the Popular Culture Debate; Realism and the Cinema; British Independent Cinema / Avant-Garde; and Hollywood Melodrama. It strikes me as appointingly significant that when I was doing research on the educational outreach programs organized by SEFT, the BFI librarians were all completely ignorant of the topic. When I eventually tracked down the extensive papers of the organization, they had long since been given to an educational archive in Yorkshire (the Lawrence Batley Centre for the National Arts Education Archive, Bretton Hall, West Yorkshire), and no trace of these records remains in the BFI holdings. Terry Bolas’s Screen Education is the in-depth historical account of this period that has long been needed. My feminist engagement with SEFT emphasizes somewhat different aspects.

49. The special event was discontinued in the 1960s but had been a regular part of the festival’s program throughout the 1950s.

50. The first Brecht issue, published in the summer of 1974, established the theoretical groundwork with articles published (for the first time in English) by Barthes, Benjamin, and Brecht as well as other papers specifically addressed to Kuhle Wampe and other film projects. The editors qualify the importance of Brecht’s work for cinema today, since he is generally celebrated not as a modernist filmmaker but rather as a playwright: “It is above all his reflections on his own work in literature, theatre and cinema and on the politico-aesthetic controversies of his day that provide the framework within which it is possible to begin to think of a revolutionary cinema. It is in this sense above all that Brecht is exemplary for a magazine like Screen, and it is to this project that we devote this special number” (Brewster and MacCabe, “Brecht and a Revolutionary Cinema?” 6). The Brecht Event also included a question-and-answer session with Straub and Huillet convened by Martin Walsh and a dramatized reading of Brecht’s Messingkauf Dialogues by the CO-AX theater company.

51. This alternative British film production and screening facility saw itself as the London outpost for the structural film movement that emerged in New York in the 1960s.

52. Gidal, “Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film,” 2. Subsequent page numbers are included in the text. The first elaboration of the idea of structural/materialist film can be found in Gidal, “Un cinéma materialiste structurel.”

53. As David Curtis explained, Screen was perceived at the time as being particularly problematic precisely because of its academic commitment to publications about Hollywood film. Interview with the author, November 2003.

54. See Michelson, “Yvonne Rainer, Part I” and “Yvonne Rainer, Part 2.”

55. Rainer’s discomfort with the Brechtian label is apparent in an early interview by Camera Obscura Collective, “Yvonne Rainer: Interview.” I offer an alternative reading of Rainer’s Film about a Woman Who . . . in Wilson, “Structures of Feeling.” Also see Glahn, “Brechtian Journeys.” Rainer told me about her appellation, “the American Godard,” in an interview, December 13, 2002.

57. This is a point that Humphry Trevelyan made in an interview with the author (November 6, 2003). Marc Karlin had unfortunately passed away before I began to research Nightcleaners in earnest.

58. An excellent narrative of this period can be found in Carson, “Excavating 5,” 181–234. Kelly also appears in Mulvey and Wollen’s Riddles of the Sphinx.

59. This was relayed in a telephone interview with the author (November 6, 2003). Also see the discussion of the personnel involved in Karlin, “Making Images Explode,” 152–55.

60. Margaret Harrison, in an e-mail correspondence (October 19, 2013), has also endorsed the view that the male involvement during this period has not been fully acknowledged. She notes the decisive role played by Conrad Atkinson in organizing an influential early exhibition related to women’s labor activism, Strike at Bremans, at the ICA in 1972. See Walker, Left Shift, 82; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Conrad Atkinson: Picturing the System, 35–38.

61. Women and Work was first exhibited at the South London Gallery in 1975 and was restaged in 1997 at the Charles Scott Gallery in Toronto, Canada, together with a significant catalogue. See Mastai, Social Process / Collaborative Action. I discuss this project in chapter 4.


64. Ibid., 206.

65. See note 32 for at least one example that complicates Mastai’s view.


67. Lyotard, The Postmodern Explained, 76. Subsequent page numbers are given in the text.

68. For some brief but suggestive remarks on the phallic logic of the avant-garde, see Derrida, The Other Heading.

69. Walsh’s comment is included in the transcription of the question-and-answer session that is printed along with the essay; see Johnston and Willemen, “Brecht in Britain,” 115.


71. Ibid.

72. I have identified this figure as Jean Mormont based on a reference given in “The Papers of Sheila Rowbotham” in the Women’s Library in London. In her essay on Nightcleaners, Pollock identifies a different female figure as Mormont, but I believe that she is mistaken in identifying the woman she illustrates. Also see, for further confirmation of this, Karlin, “Making Images Explode,” 153.


74. Kelly’s specific engagement with Warhol’s film works is discussed in the next chapter. There is a good deal written on Warhol’s treatment of the face; see Flatley, “Warhol Gives Good Face”; Crimp, ‘Our Kind of Movie’; Angell, Andy Warhol Screen Tests; Gidal, Andy Warhol: Blow Job, and Baume, About Face.

75. Maimon, “Towards a New Image of Politics,” 95. For another important account of the face motif in Marker’s work, see Lupton, “Imagine Another.”

76. See Karlin, “Making Images Explode.” Marker also used footage from the Berwick Street Film Collective’s Ireland behind the Wire (1974) in Le fond de l’air est rouge.

77. Marker and Wexner Center for the Arts, Staring Back.

78. Another powerful art historical critique can be found in A. Jones, Body Art / Performing the Subject, 24–29; and A. Jones, Postmodernism, 24–26.

79. Silverman, Threshold of the Visible World, 84.

80. Ibid., 85.


82. R. Williams “Structures of Feeling.”

83. Terada, Feeling in Theory, 11. Also see Berlant, “The Subject of True Feelings.”


85. In the BSFC’s Ireland behind the Wire (1974), an incredible film about the torture of detainees in Northern Ireland, this black framing device is also used but in a much more limited way and to a very different effect. Trevelyan and Mordaunt were chiefly responsible for the editing of Ireland behind the Wire, which overlapped with the editing of Nightcleaners, done primarily by Karlin and Scott. The principal use of this device in Ireland behind the Wire is to indicate the historical nature of certain images. One such example shows footage of the Derry civil rights marches of the late 1960s. The refilming effect in this context demonstrates a separation of these (quite recent) historical events from the more immediate experience of internment that is recounted in remarkable close-up head-shot interviews. Also, Ireland behind the Wire was specifically made for a British audience who had been kept in ignorance about the situation in Northern Ireland because of British government censorship of the news media. The refilming device in this context has the effect of drawing attention to the process of representation as a reminder that images of Ireland have been used by the state for propagandistic reasons. In this film the slowing-down of certain sequences is largely for dramatic effect; in one such instance it is used to emphasize the intensity.
of a riot situation. But the refilmed footage in *Ireland behind the Wire* remains visually intact and narratively functional; the image is never distorted beyond recognition, becoming only film grain, nor is it slowed down to near stasis. Its integrity as a moving filmic image is retained and does not disrupt the film's conventional narrative continuity.

88. Ibid., 6, 6–7.
89. Other writers, following the influential work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, use the term *feeling*; see Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*; and Love, *Feeling Backward*.
91. Ibid., 133.

There is one contrasting response to being watched that only further serves to highlight the sympathetic attitude that is otherwise suggested in the film. Viewed in a long shot, one of the cleaners works in a glass-fronted lobby of an office building; a middle-aged man in business attire walks up to the windows to openly observe her. With his face pressed to the glass, the cleaner, when she notices him, is clearly shown cursing at him and shooing him away.

94. The exception here might be Jean Mormont, who became more seriously engaged with feminism as a result of working on this campaign. See her oral history account, Mormont, “Jean Mormont.”
95. The question of racism is discussed at length in the special issue, “Night Cleaners,” *Shrew* 3, no. 9 (1971). Also see Wandro, *The Body Politic*.
97. For a full, theoretically rich account of the whole oeuvre of the Black Audio Film Collective, see Eshun and Sagar, *The Ghosts of Songs*.
98. The figure that connects Kelly and the Black Audio Film Collective is art historian Adrian Rifkin, who worked at Portsmouth Polytechnic at this time.

2. The Spectator as Reproducer
1. As a reflection on the significance of the mine workers, it was the arrival of a young Arthur Scargill with a group of miners from Yorkshire to support the Asian women strikers at the Grunwick factory in London in 1977—after they had already been picketing for a year—that brought this landmark action to national prominence for the first time. See Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 358–403.
2. Ibid., 464–97.
3. For a good scholarly account of the 1968 exhibition, see Boettger, *Earthworks*, 8–9.
5. *An Earth Work Performed* was restaged in 2012 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; see Plate I. For an illustration of the photograph and typeset text combination that previously circulated as the sole record of this piece, see Kelly, *Mary Kelly*, 30–11.
6. See Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, for an excellent account of issues of labor in 1960s American art. Although the term “art worker,” used in her title, is drawn from the New York–based group, the Art Workers’ Coalition, Bryan-Wilson’s account deals with a broader set of practices and issues.
9. The politicization of labor and industrial production in 1960s sculpture owes a good deal to the publication in 1962 of the first significant study of Russian avant-garde art in English; see Gray, *The Great Experiment*. For a discussion of the influence of this Russian moment, in relation to the work of Frank Stella in particular, see Gough, “Frank Stella Is a Constructivist.” The question of labor as an aspect of minimalist art is assumed in much of the literature on the movement, but it is addressed to its fullest extent in Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 41–82. On the significance of the studio as a space of labor during the 1960s, see Jones, *Machine in the Studio*.
For a critical feminist account of masculine tropes in minimalist art, see Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power" and "Minimalism and Biography."
10. Cited in Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 86. In art historical scholarship on Warhol there has been for some time a refusal to engage with the all-pervasive camp aspect of his work. The key volume to readdress this oversight, interestingly, does not come from the discipline of art history; see Doyle, Flatey, and Muñoz, *Pop Out*. For other important art historical treatments of Warhol in a queer studies framework, see R. Meyer, *Outlaw Representation; But, Between You and Me*; and Crimp, *Our Kind of Movie."
11. Also see James, *“The Producer as Author."*
12. Art historians have typically understood Warhol's parodic embrace of the