At Portsmouth Polytechnic, England, in 1974 the American artist Mary Kelly presented her first film as a solo artist. In fact, it was a dual screen 8 mm film loop installation – two films – and the work would only be given the title *Antepartum* much later. The two 8 mm projectors with continuous loop attachments were placed side by side and in the same space as the spectators. The visual and aural presence of the filmic apparatus was an immediately recognizable device within the art/film world at this time, indicating the idea of the spectator-as-producer. The spectator’s position ‘within’ the work alongside this filmic apparatus interpellates her as part of the ongoing process of the work’s production. Except for the whirring and clicking of the two projectors, the double image track had no sound. There are no known reproductions of *Antepartum* as it appeared in 1974, and the artist herself recalls little else beyond its having taken place. In 1974 *Antepartum* was simply an untitled work-in-progress. Nevertheless, both films do still exist and they have each been shown again more recently, although not side by side in this earlier format.

A juxtaposition of two images is implicitly comparative. The student-spectators familiar with the art history slide lecture would immediately have recognized the film installation as replicating this didactic form. On one screen a woman’s hands operate an industrial machine; this is a factory worker presented in partial view. Her labouring action is repeated on screen and then repeated *ad infinitum* by the film loop. The other screen shows a truncated view of a woman’s torso, nude and heavily pregnant. (This is the artist’s body though there is no way of knowing this from the image alone.) The camera frames a partial view of a swollen belly cropped just above the pubis and part way across the bottom edge of the breasts. This image offers a female nude redrawn through the antepartum maternal body. The only action on this screen is a brief self-caress. The woman’s hands enter the frame for a few seconds and gently stroke her own enlarged belly. Thus, the factory worker’s hands on one screen are echoed by the pregnant woman’s hands on the other. In this compare and contrast exercise, the elements of contrast are more immediately apparent than those of comparison. Nevertheless, the side by side format is didactic inasmuch as it demands that the viewer perform the comparison. The sequence of ideas provoked by this juxtaposition might run something like this: one woman is labouring, the other will...
go into labour; one woman works a machine, the other ‘works’ her pregnant body; one woman’s labour is productive, the other’s is reproductive.

Antepartum did not appear again until 1999 when it was titled for the first time and presented in a slightly different format. Here, at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, Kelly presented Antepartum as a single screen installation showing only the footage of her pregnant body. The footage of the factory worker was used in 1975 and then again in 1997 as part of a multi-media installation called Women and Work that Kelly produced along with Margaret Harrison and Kay Hunt. Although Kelly finally abandoned the two-screen comparative format, it is my view that this work is a crucially important synthesis of Kelly’s early concerns. I argue that her development as a mature solo artist is defined by the tension between production and reproduction. The shift from double to single screen format indicates that these two etymologically related words do not offer a simple comparison, but are interconnected in more profound and troubling ways.

RE/PRODUCTION: NIGHT CLEANERS AND WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA
Kelly’s introduction to the technical dimensions of filmmaking began with her participation in the experimental documentary Night Cleaners by the Berwick Street Film Collective. The film follows a group of immigrant and working-class women workers who combine forces with a group of feminist activists in an attempt to form a union. Kelly’s participation in the film was unique: as well as being part of the filmmaking team – working as a sound recordist and being party to shooting and post-production discussions – she was also a feminist activist involved in the night cleaners’ campaign. As such, she is present in the film in front of the camera, at meetings with union officials (plate 1).

Kelly became involved with the feminist movement while she was completing an MA at Saint Martin’s School of Art, which she remembers as a hotbed of drug-fuelled radicalism. Like many of her contemporaries, Kelly understood film to have a newly radical potential, and her four-year involvement in Night Cleaners was formative in both a political and an artistic sense. Before Night Cleaners was completed, Kelly produced a photo-sequence artwork, using stills from the film, to illustrate the cover of the feminist magazine Shrew (plate 2). In the completed film this short sequence shows the cleaning of a single toilet in real-time duration to emphasize the most materially abject aspect of the women’s work. Kelly’s artwork was produced and published in 1971, four years before Night Cleaners was eventually completed and released. Around this time Kelly suggested that the collective make a durational
film rather than the planned documentary. This version of Night Cleaners was supposed to be an eight-hour real-time sequence simply showing the cleaning of a toilet. This, Kelly has indicated, was a response to Andy Warhol’s durational films of the early 1960s, such as Sleep (1963), Empire (1964), Eat (1964), and Blowjob (1964). The most appropriate comparison for Kelly’s proposed durational film is
with Warhol’s *Sleep*, which was initially advertised as an eight-hour film. The solitary sleeping male figure, who remains inactive during the six hours of the film’s duration is reversed by Kelly’s proposal for this eight-hour sequence of female labour (plate 3). The social disjunction between the two realms is a key dimension of the shift that takes place in Kelly’s example. With a bodily temporality circumscribed and defined by labour, the working-class women cleaners are a far cry from the seedy glamour of Warhol’s bohemian subculture.

In the magazine cover, the six narratively organized film stills suggest a template for future repetitions. The images read in sequence from top to bottom on the left, and then again on the right. In relation to the proposed eight hours of toilet cleaning, this photo-sequence of film stills represents a single cycle in the potentially endless, repetitive, activity of cleaning the remains of office workers’ faeces. This implied structure of repetition is also comparable with Warhol’s *Sleep*. *Sleep* was edited from a series of thirty-minute sections that were shot over a period of six months. The final edit is heterogeneous, with the splicing of different views, varied film quality, and the use of repeated sequences. These might be said to function as edited in film loops.

This comparison is not simply one of work (Kelly) to leisure (Warhol), since in naming his studio the Factory, Warhol replaces the idea of the artist as specialist artisan with the artist as capitalist manufacturer. Warhol’s ironic mimicry of labour and mass production is taken in a different direction in Kelly’s proposed version of *Night Cleaners*. Spectating becomes the equivalent of a gruelling night shift in a coercive staging of the spectator-as-producer. While Kelly’s durational film was never realized, the intersection of women’s labour and the trope of production remain central concerns for her work of the period. Kelly was far from being alone in this preoccupation, and her ongoing artistic practice was bolstered by her involvement in activism and collective theoretical enquiry.

Kelly’s involvement with feminist debates about sexual difference and production was further informed by the international feminist movement ‘Wages for Housework’. Theoretically, ‘Wages for Housework’ analysed women’s unpaid work in the home as an important and unacknowledged part of the capitalist economy, a hidden space of the production of value. It was therefore an effort to politicize women’s work within an expanded Marxist framework. This theoretical analysis took a practical activist form with the demand that housewives be waged either within an expanded welfare state or through free market structures. Although few real measures of material change were achieved, it was an important challenge to conventional Marxist models of production. The ‘Wages for Housework’ movement and its political analyses were also particularly important for another documentary film that Kelly worked on at this time.

Earlier in 1971, using skills she had learned from *Night Cleaners*, Kelly was a crew member for the London Women’s Film Group’s short documentary *Women of the Rhondda* (1973). A group of art students from the Royal College of Art founded the group out of a belief in the political potential of film, a view also shared by Kelly. The group was formed after a screening of recent feminist films from the United States. *Women of the Rhondda* was their first film and they enlisted Humphry Trevelyan of the Berwick Street Film Collective to help with the camera work, and Kelly as the sound recordist.
3 Still from Sleep, directed by Andy Warhol, 1963. 16 mm, black and white, silent film, 5 hours and 21 minutes, 16 frames per second. Photo: Andy Warhol Museum.
Completed in 1973, *Women of the Rhondda* is a short documentary film featuring four women from the Rhondda Valley mining community in South Wales. The women are defined in the film almost exclusively by the work they do. In a combination of voice-over and talking head commentary, and without the interjection of an interviewer’s questions, they describe their working lives (plate 4). They discuss the crucial part played by women in the local economy because of their role in the maintenance of the miners’ bodies. This unpaid labour of cleaning and care, which is a full-time job in itself, is shown to be the unacknowledged infrastructure for the economic functioning of the community. The working-class women featured in this film present the relationship between women’s reproductive labour and wage labour as an equivalence.

In Marxist terms, the film depicts the part played by women in the reproduction of ‘that peculiar commodity, labour power’, that is, the worker’s capacity to work. The ‘social reproduction’ of the worker – the reproduction of ‘his’ capacity to work – through nourishment and care is an acknowledged part of Marx’s analysis of capital even though the gendered aspects of this process are not developed by him. By this I mean that Marx does not give an analysis of the reasons why women are primarily responsible for this kind of work, but he simply indicates the way in which it relates to the ‘reproduction’ of capital. The film develops this Marxist enquiry in relation to the sexual division of labour. It focuses on social reproduction in a multi-generational narrative of the women’s lives as daughters, wives and mothers, which also emphasizes the socio-genetic dimensions of women’s labour.

*Women of the Rhondda* details the elaborate physical maintenance required for the daily ‘reproduction’ of the miner’s body, not only through nourishment (shopping, cooking, etcetera), but also by the labour of cleaning his body and clothes blackened with coal dust, and maintaining and repairing knee pads, boots and other work paraphernalia. The maintenance of the worker is presented through oral description by the women; it is not shown on screen. In contrast to the long tradition of British documentary film, *Women of the Rhondda* foregrounds the women’s work, not the miners’ bodies. The women’s eloquent descriptions of this process make literal Marx’s own analogy of the ‘reproduction’ of the worker’s body as structurally equivalent within capital to the cleaning of the machinery of production. Marx’s analysis of this issue within his theory of capital is worth citing at length, since these compelling and eloquent passages were certainly closely scrutinized by many feminists at the time.

The capital given in return for labour-power is converted into means of subsistence which have to be consumed to reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers, and to
bring new workers into existence. Within the limits of what is absolutely necessary, therefore, the individual consumption of the working class is the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in return for labour-power into fresh labour-power which capital is then again able to exploit. The production and reproduction of the capitalist’s most indispensable means of production: the worker. The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital, just as the cleaning of machinery does, whether it is done during the labour process, or when intervals in that process permit [...] The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital.\textsuperscript{11}

The final sentence of this quotation indicates that social and genetic reproduction are the substructure for capitalist reproduction. They are a ‘necessary condition’ for capital’s own remarkable process of reproduction, but this relation is not something that Marx remarks upon much further. For Marx this socio-genetic substructure is located outside history, available to be appropriated for capital’s own historical process of ‘reproduction’. One of the film’s subjects, Beatrice Davies, formulates this relationship in her own terms: ‘one realizes that not only were we a slave because we were in a miner’s home but also because my father and brothers were miners but that they also were slaves, and we were slaves because they were slaves to the mine owners’.

This analysis of socially necessary labour allows for a more nuanced understanding of Kelly’s engagement with Warhol. In comparison with Kelly’s durational grid, Warhol’s ‘natural’ bodily activity of sleep is rewritten as ‘necessary’ for the reproduction of a labouring body. The worker needs physical replenishment in order to maintain her capacity to work. Thus ‘leisure’ is no longer simply opposed to ‘work’, but is part of a continuum. The component of social reproduction described in Warhol’s \textit{Sleep} is particularly relevant for Kelly’s proposed durational response. Part of the political point of \textit{Night Cleaners} was to show that the women’s labour was all consuming. Because of the sexual division of labour, their ‘leisure time’ was spent performing housework for their husbands and care of their children, rather than engaging in their own ‘necessary’ social reproduction as workers through sleep. Kelly’s invocation of Warhol’s \textit{Sleep} is particularly poignant because sleep was precisely what the night cleaning workers could not get, however ‘necessary’ it may have been for their subsistence.

Both \textit{Night Cleaners} and \textit{Women of the Rhondda} analyse the position of ‘woman’ in critical relation to a traditional Marxist understanding of class.\textsuperscript{12} They each pose the question of political collectivity. \textit{Women of the Rhondda} represents the community as decisively divided along sex/gender lines, and this is reinforced by the way in which men and women are depicted on screen. Although the men are absent from the film’s sound track, they are presented on the image track, always together in groups, either leaving their work place or at the working men’s club. Men’s leisure and work is shown in the film to be both a public presence – visible to the community as a whole – and a specifically collective activity. The representation of masculine collectivity as work and leisure invokes already existing cultural representations of (male) ‘workers’, and the depiction of the miner is a central part of this. Women’s labour is not shown as a collective undertaking: women are represented alone, and the visual representation of their labour requires supplementation by oral description. The film demonstrates that there
are no existing forms of cultural representation to describe specifically feminine collectivity through labour, and as a result we see the women individualized and isolated in their homes. Nevertheless, the film presents the domestic arena as the site of female oppression and posits social reproduction as a potential foundation for collective struggle.

*Women of the Rhondda* reveals a twofold problematic in the depiction of women’s domestic labour. On the one hand, the work these women do as housewives is presented as an important part of the ‘reproduction’ of capital. On the other hand, the film describes the psychological experience of the general devaluation of women’s work, and because women’s domestic labour is not acknowledged as work this has an effect on their sense of self. They are effaced as individuals in their own right as well as collectively as women. Conversely, then, there is a sense in which the film is asserting the validity of female domestic labour – as a collective female experience – and by doing so it defines the personhood of these women, both their individuality and their collective identity, through a prism of re-valued work. In this way the film inscribes women’s domestic labour into the abstract collectivity of the working class, and in doing so it adopts an existing structure of collectivity-through-shared-labour as a means of defining female collectivity. *Women of the Rhondda* presents these women as ‘honorary brothers’. This notwithstanding, in describing female collectivity by way of male collectivity the film highlights the inadequacy of the initial model. *Women of the Rhondda* leaves its audience with a series of questions, about the relationship between sexual difference, power, and psychological identity, and despite the focus on work, the film reveals that the solutions cannot solely be found with production.

Kelly’s involvement with these two documentary films was decisive for her own engagement with the relationship between sexual difference and production. Reading Marx with feminist eyes, as Kelly herself was doing in the early 1970s, reveals the necessary relationship between capitalist production and the social and genetic dimensions of reproduction. At the same time, this sustained feminist enquiry uncovers a strange suppression of women’s reproductive capacity in favour of capital as a supra-human reproductive force. *Antepartum* likewise asks us to see this Marxist dissimulation and to linger a while longer on the implications of this for women’s reproductive labour.

*ANTEPARTUM (1974): THE MIMICRY OF PRODUCTION*

I began this essay by describing *Antepartum* as it appeared in 1974 at Portsmouth Polytechnic. In this double screen format one screen showed a woman’s hands working an industrial machine and the other showed a pregnant woman ‘working’ her pregnant body. The 1999 version of *Antepartum* no longer uses the dual screen format. Nevertheless, this version maintains a certain instability as the apparently ‘finished’ version of the work. This version, in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, is strictly speaking a copy of an unfinished ‘original’ transferred onto DVD from the 8 mm format. Thus the relationship between ‘work in progress’ and ‘final version’ is more complex than a straightforward artistic development. Although it is important to acknowledge the apparent resolution of the earlier ‘work in progress’, I nevertheless contend that this 1974 work marks a key turning point in Kelly’s artistic development. In
fact I would go so far as to say that it engenders her continuing practice as a solo artist.

Antepartum is a condensed version of the argument made in Women of the Rhondda. The dual screen projection compares reproductive labour with productive wage-labour and connects the question of social reproduction by analogy to value producing labour. The shared emphasis on the movement of a woman’s hands further reinforces the visual comparison between the two forms of labour. This depiction of maternity also evokes questions of affect. Here the activities of care, love, and affection, as well as the imposition of sanctions and punishment, would be understood as part of a mother’s ‘work’. Kelly’s staging of affective labour demands to be understood as social reproduction. Or, in the language of Marx: ‘the sum of means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the worker’s replacements, i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its presence on the market.’

In 1974 the projector with film loop attachment was in the same space as the spectator, the filmic apparatus was an integral part of the work. The repetitive mechanical whirring and clicking sound of the film being drawn through the projector gate served as the film’s only soundtrack. In the 1999 digitalized version this aural texture is removed, which empties the space in more ways than simply removing the apparatus of reproduction. The sight and sound of the film projection apparatus would have been an important aural reminder of the film loop repetition. The mechanized sound of the projector can also be read as a metaphoric reference to the female factory worker silently depicted on the second screen. The sound of one piece of machinery – the projector – becomes the soundtrack for the film footage of the factory worker. The repetitive action required by the worker’s labour is a result of the type of low-paid industrial work she is doing. The repetition of the projector noise is thus an aural reminder of this repetitive labour. With this intersection of sound and image, Kelly’s installation stages the aesthetic idea of the spectator-as-producer and its relation to a workerist understanding of production. Located alongside the projection equipment, the spectator is also part of the work’s ongoing production. Through the visual representation of labour, Kelly connects the spectator’s involvement in meaning production to the economic understanding of production.

The stroking gesture on the other screen serves as a temporal ‘stroke’ that beats to the rhythmically defined tempo of the film: a ninety-second repetition. The pregnant woman’s hands define both a space (the expanse of the belly visible on screen) and a time (that of the loop). This visualization of a rhythm does not, however, strictly speaking coincide with the filmic apparatus. The taped join in the celluloid strip is faintly apparent as a barely noticeable glitch in the loop, but the hand movements serve as the narrative marker for the film’s repetition. Because of the work’s analogical structure, the slower tempo of one pair of hands is understood in relation to the repetitive mechanical regularity of the other. Reproduction is understood through production.

In 1971 Juliet Mitchell, who later belonged to two of the same feminist study groups as Kelly, argued that women’s reproductive capacity was seen as ‘a sad mimicry of production’. This may indeed be the dominant cultural inter-
interpretation of *Antepartum*’s compare and contrast structure and undoubtedly it was one that Kelly was well aware of. The analogical structure, however, works two ways. As well as seeing the woman’s reproductive labour as the social reproduction of the worker, *Antepartum* also suggests that capitalist production can be understood through species reproduction: the factory as surrogate for the womb.

In her dialectical treatment of the relationship between production and reproduction, Mary O’Brien has discussed a similar idea. Capitalist production’s self-generative ability, O’Brien argues, allowed male-dominated bourgeois society for the first time ‘to improve on Plato’s mystic brotherhood, for it had the capacity to reproduce and multiply without recourse to sexuality and without any need for females’. O’Brien describes the differential in men’s and women’s relation to genetic reproduction and, borrowing Marxist language, analyses men’s ‘alienation’ from the reproductive process. This alienation has far reaching social and psychological effects that must be treated in their historical specificity and, as we have already seen in Marx, they rarely are. Her most daring claim is that fraternal collectivity – Freud’s ‘brotherhood’ – and the whole ideological edifice of male superiority is a massive defensive gesture against male alienation from the reproductive process. The value of O’Brien’s assertion is that it indicates the complexity of the socio-psychic effects of species reproduction on both men and women and how remarkably unthought they are.

O’Brien further claims that Marx’s historical materialism is inadequate in its assessment of the relations of production because he does not attend to the question of species reproduction, even though, as we have seen, he acknowledges its importance for capital. Other writers have observed the damaging effects on women’s reproductive health and psycho-social well-being of the substitution of reproduction by production, but O’Brien’s analysis offers a longer view and is one that helps elucidate Kelly’s artistic trajectory. While O’Brien draws a good deal from Marx’s work, she argues that ‘history has two concrete substructures in the continuity of the species as well as in the modes of production’. Likewise, Kelly’s *Antepartum* also suggests this dual undergirding.

In relation to *Women of the Rhondda* I have already sketched some of the Marxist-feminist debates of the period. This attempt to square women’s experience with a Marxist model is not, however, O’Brien’s goal. As I have already suggested, *Antepartum* can indeed be understood as a condensed version of this Marxist-feminist analysis, with the woman’s body presented as the site and apparatus of production. This would have the pregnant woman be machine, worker and factory for the production of her ‘commodity’, the child. In contrast, O’Brien argues that simply to analyse ‘women and their work in terms of alienated workers’ gives an inadequate account of the complexities of reproductive labour. She goes on to point out that in this limited approach ‘there is absolutely no conception of the need to understand the value of the product of reproductive labour, the child, as anything other than a potential source of labour power’, whereas the relationship between the two modes of production, she argues, ‘cannot be analysed in genetically sterile categories’ precisely because of the ethical and affective questions that species reproduction raises.

The question of affect is raised in the image of the pregnant woman’s body by the caressing gesture of her hands. When placed side by side with the image of the working woman, this gesture of care, I have argued, is understood as affective
labour. In the 1974 version of *Antepartum*, Juliet Mitchell’s statement that reproduction is seen as a ‘sad mimicry of production’ seems to be borne out. But in the single screen version the elements of affect can become altogether more visible. Unsurprisingly, O’Brien also insists on questions of affect and points the reader in the direction of psychoanalysis. Because of Kelly’s growing intellectual involvement with psychoanalysis, her aesthetic experiments could be said to pick up where O’Brien’s theoretical enquiry leaves off. In the final, single screen, version of *Antepartum* these psychical issues are able to play a greater part and it is to this version that I will now turn.


By the time Kelly made *Antepartum* she already had a good bit of filmmaking experience with the two films *Night Cleaners* and *Women of the Rhondda*. She was most closely involved in *Night Cleaners* and was a full participant in the four-year-long discussions about the film. In addition to this she belonged to two feminist study groups, the History Group and the Lacan Women’s Study Group, both of which included the filmmaker and film theorist Laura Mulvey. Because of these two connections it is my claim that the pared down simplicity of *Antepartum* was not the response of an artist unaware or uninterested in the complexities of film as a practice.

Laura Mulvey’s widely influential essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ was written during her involvement in the two feminist study groups and it was one of the first feminist uses of psychoanalysis in relation to film. In this essay she deploys psychoanalysis as ‘a weapon’ to attack the dominant visual regime of Classical Hollywood Cinema. In 1973, when Kelly was working on *Antepartum* and Mulvey on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, they were both founding members of the Lacan Women’s Study Group with other members of the History Group. Kelly has described this latter group ‘as sort of a closeted cult organization. It only “came out” in 1976 when Lacanian psychoanalysis was presented at the “Patriarchy Conference”. After that, psychoanalysis was seriously debated in the movement.’

In her critically acclaimed installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), Kelly is much more explicit about her use of Lacanian psychoanalysis than she is in the less-widely known *Antepartum*. The latter work is, however, also fundamentally informed by psychoanalytic questions. Moreover, it was within the field of film studies that the cultural application of psychoanalysis was being developed most fully. More specifically, I believe that Kelly’s *Antepartum* can be understood as a point-for-point reversal of Mulvey’s analysis of the representation of woman in Classical Hollywood Cinema. It is my claim that *Antepartum* is an avant-garde alternative to the kind of cinema denounced by Mulvey.

In *Antepartum* the camera is positioned in close proximity to the woman’s body. The body remains immobile except for the regular, rhythmic, rising and falling of her breath, and some possible (though hardly detectable) intrauterine movements. Like the camera, the body’s position is more or less fixed; there is only slight movement, barely noticeable on the first viewing. Thus, there is a reciprocal mimetic relationship between the body and the camera; each remains more or less fixed and immobile except for some slight movement.
This fixed camera position contrasts with Mulvey’s analysis of the camera’s shifting point of view in Classical Hollywood Cinema. Mulvey argues that this establishes both spectatorial identification with the male protagonist and a voyeuristic attitude towards the image of the female body. In contrast, Kelly offers an unedited real-time sequence presented as a film loop, which also circumvents goal-orientated narrative logic. Spectatorial identification with the male protagonist, Mulvey argues, is achieved through the shot-reverse-shot technique. This is called ‘subjective camera’ and it works through editorial splicing: the first shot shows the protagonist and the next what the protagonist sees. In this way the spectator’s visual attention is directed by way of the hero on screen, and through this the spectator is subjectively stitched, or ‘sutured’, into the narrative.27 Kelly, on the other hand, gives us no access to the on screen subject’s point of view, at least not according to these conventional means.

Mulvey goes on to describe how ‘woman’ does not hold a viewing position but, rather, is only present as an image, her visual presence is so abundant in cinema that she connotes ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (19). Looking itself, Mulvey argues, is determined by sexual difference, so that woman ‘holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire’ (19). This relationship is voyeuristic because it requires the spectator’s ‘repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer’ (19). Mulvey argues that there is a strong separation between the looking (male) spectator and the looked at (female) performer. In Antepartum there is no on screen gaze to return the spectator’s (plate 5). Moreover, there is no identification with a character, or even a specific individual, and Kelly’s female nude is far from idealized in the manner described by Mulvey. This truncated view produces an immediate sense of unfamiliarity, an effect that is further exacerbated by the harsh lighting that, along with the cropped view of the body, creates a visual uncertainty. The body is lit from top right so that the light emphasizes the spherical shape of the belly, and, with the bottom left corner in shadow.


it suggests a waning or waxing moon. Before the hands enter the frame there appears to be a slight oscillation in our perception of the domed shape as it shifts from convexity to concavity. The visual strangeness of the close-up view of the pregnant body is made familiar by the introduction of the caressing gestures. It is not until the woman’s hands enter the frame that this partial body is rendered fully recognizable through the everyday touching motion (plates 6–8).

The hand movements also describe the spatial expanse of the swollen belly as it is presented in the frame. They travel the length and width of the body shown on screen, demarcating it spatially as if it were topographical terrain. The gestures are a coordinated and symmetrical arrangement of simple components, somewhere between care and orchestration. Without a reciprocating gaze, the woman’s body is rendered spatially comprehensible through the depiction of touch. This tactile relation is further emphasized by the proximity of the camera to the body, which by analogy brings the spectator close to the woman on screen.

Mulvey describes the fragmentation of the female body as producing a fetishistic response in male spectators. In Antepartum, fragmentation is used in quite a different way. A filmic comparison will help to clarify the point. Jean-Luc Godard’s film British Sounds (1969) was widely influential on British film culture and it presents a strikingly similar view of a woman’s body to that shown in Antepartum. Further, Godard maintains this shot on screen for an extended length of time (plate 9). As in Antepartum, we see a section of midriff cropped below the breasts; the shot is temporally extended as a conscious attempt to make the spectacular image of female nudity quite boring, and the camera is static. Godard, however, presents a slim attractive woman’s body with the added salacious addition of her genitals on view. The previous section of British Sounds to this one shows an extended panning shot of men working in a car factory. The shift in sexual difference as the film progresses from section one to section two is also a shift in economic processes: from production (by the
male) to consumption (of the female). The opening scene of *British Sounds* shows a specifically male realm of production, which is contrasted with Godard’s meditation on the commodified nature of female sexuality in section two of the film. *Antepartum* enacts a further shift in these relations and the pregnant woman’s body is shown to be a moment of specifically female production.

*British Sounds* straightforwardly presents the spectator with the woman’s genitals, whereas *Antepartum* offers a series of displacements. At the same time it presents a different invocation of the sexually differentiated body as maternal, quite unlike Godard’s full-frontal view. The spectatorial point of view for *Antepartum* is close-in to the woman’s body just above the pubis. This position of proximity has been described above as one that suggests a certain kind of spectatorial embodiment. The lower part of the belly has a muscular seam, called an alba lingua, that tracks down off screen towards the woman’s genitals. Although the pubis is not visible in the frame, as it is in *British Sounds*, its presence is implied by the alba lingua, which functions as a line pointing downwards like an arrow. Furthermore, the woman’s genitals are narratively suggested by the fact that the term of the pregnancy has almost reached completion. Even more important, however, is the position of the camera, the body of which is placed level with the woman’s pubis. Spatially, the camera body is situated at the pubic rim, physically below the camera lens and the threshold of what is visible on screen: the woman’s sex. This comparability is further reinforced by a reciprocity between the (camera) body and (pregnant) body because they both exhibit similar slight movements while otherwise remaining static.

The first section of *British Sounds* presents male collectivity through the depiction of production. Male collectivity is also at stake in Mulvey’s argument. She argues that the spectatorial experience for the audience of Classical Hollywood Cinema allegorizes an earlier narrative of masculine psychical formation: the Oedipus complex.⁹ The key insight for my argument here is Freud’s claim

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9 Still from *British Sounds*, 1969, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, 1969. 16 mm colour film, 52 minutes. Photo: The Harvard Film Archive.
that the recognition of sexual difference for the male child occurs through the fearful sight of the mother’s anatomically different body. The mother’s lack of a penis is seen as a wound and as a potential punishment that could befall him if he were not to relinquish her as love object. It is Mulvey’s contention that cinema rehearses, reiterates, and assuages the continued anxieties produced only in the masculine psychical narrative. Feminine subjectivity in these films, she tells us, is wholly ‘subjugated to [woman’s] image as bearer of the bleeding wound’. Mulvey’s spectator is thus psychically gendered as masculine. Whatever their biological gender, this spectator is conceived of as an imaginative figure who is interpellated by the film and his psyche is bolstered and reproduced in the darkened space. Again, we see collectivity conceived solely in masculine terms, like the ‘honorary brothers’ of Women of the Rhondda. Mulvey’s radical insight in this essay, which is the basis for its importance, is that the representation of woman in Classical Hollywood Cinema tells us little about the way in which women are idealized or despised in social reality. Instead, she argues that the image of woman in cinema is a sign that represents something in the masculine unconscious.

In British Sounds the spectator’s attention is focused on the woman’s pubic region, which is presented centrally in the screen. The spectator’s view is eye-to-genitals. This can be understood as a literalization of Mulvey’s allegorical reading of Classical Hollywood Cinema. In the view presented by Kelly, however, the spectator is eye-to-navel. The navel functions as a kind of vanishing point within the landscape of the woman’s body. In Antepartum the screen is filled with the maternal body and the navel is emphasized as an important feature within the frame through the orchestrated hand actions. During the sequence of movements, the hands briefly rest either directly above or below this bodily knot; thus, the caressing action serves to frame the navel. At the same time, the camera is positioned in a reciprocal relation to the woman’s body. The slight quavering of the camera is a physical registration of an insecurely anchored tripod, and this is mirrored by the slight movement that seems to be coming from inside the woman’s body. This emphasizes the camera’s presence as an object, a body that is physically located in relation to the woman’s nude body, adjacent to her genitals. This proximity suggests a form of sexual embodiment that works by way of a technological fantasy and is an aspect of the work that lies beneath the visual register. In Antepartum the spectator is embodied by way of the camera’s body. It is the body of the camera and not its visual capacity, its lens, that enables the spectator’s identification with the apparatus.

Antepartum was made on the cusp of a major shift in obstetrics. The mid- to late-1970s saw the widespread use of sonogram technology in England for the first time. Prior to this, the mother’s own bodily sensation was the principal means of regulating intrauterine development. Because of her focus on touch, Kelly’s caressing action draws our attention to the tactile dimensions of the mother’s experience. Her perception of the subtle shifts of body within body is referenced in her gesture, although of course it cannot be made visible.

With the camera’s unusual partial framing of the maternal body and the particular focus on the repeated everyday gesture of self-caress, Kelly’s Antepartum belongs to a more widespread feminist project of re-imagining the female body. A brief comparison with another work engaged with feminist ideas from around the
same period will give insight into this shared project, while at the same time it will enable me to more clearly describe the specificities of *Antepartum*. My example is Susan Hiller’s photo/text work *Ten Months* (1977–79). Like Kelly’s *Antepartum*, Hiller presents her own transforming pregnant body in an unconventional point of view. Hiller is also seeking a new kind of representation of the maternal body, one that defies conventional sentimentalities. She presents a sequence of photographic images in ten rectangular panels showing a close-up view of her own belly. These are accompanied by an equal number of type-written textual panels of a slightly smaller size. The cumulative effect of the photographic sequence gives a time-lapse depiction of the pregnant body that resembles a lunar calendar (plate 10). Moreover, the ten months of Hiller’s title is the measurement of the average period of pregnancy according to lunar months. Hiller’s image of the maternal body is an even more drastically objectified depiction than the one given by Kelly. She presents us with a minimalist grid showing the most immediately apparent physical manifestation of the maternal body presented as a radically anti-sentimental temporal sequence. The accompanying textual fragments are drawn from her diary entries, and in counterpoint to the image sequence they offer both a subjective response and a critical analysis of pregnancy as an embodied experience. As the artist later put it, pregnancy is ‘an incredibly fertile mental time, quite extraordinarily rich, not just the body and its changes, but the mind as well’. Thus *Ten Months* offsets the objective visual depiction of the pregnant woman’s body with a textual presentation of the complexities of a lived subjective experience. Hiller’s focus on the experiential is not shared by Kelly in *Antepartum*. Unlike *Ten Months*, *Antepartum* does not include any reference to pregnancy as a linguistically articulated lived experience. Kelly’s emphasis on the affective qualities of touch stands in lieu of the linguistic. I would even go so far as to say that *Antepartum* focuses on specifically extra-linguistic qualities. This leads me to conclude that, unlike Hiller’s, Kelly’s work is not solely about the maternal point of view, but it also invokes an imagined intrauterine perspective. Furthermore, together with the careful mirroring of the camera and the woman’s body, it is my contention that *Antepartum* stages a technological fantasy of intrauterine return.

The psychical significance of such a fantasy was initially theorized by Freud in his 1919 essay ‘The Uncanny’. The uncanny is an affective response, which according to Freud is ‘that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’. He describes the uncanny as a process of doubling that invokes a psychical return, and Freud develops this line of reasoning with reference to the semantic doubling he discovers in the etymology
of the word. Unheimlich also means its opposite: Heimlich. The uncanny (Unheimlich) is something that was once familiar (Heimlich or ‘homely’) that has been repressed. I have already noted the visual strangeness of Kelly’s view of the mother’s body, which produces the effect of the unfamiliar, an unfamiliarity that turns out to be most familiar. Freud’s own narrative leads us back to the mother’s genitals, and he suggests that the uncanny response provokes the fantasy of intrauterine return. This is a return that takes us back to our very first home, the womb. Moreover, just as both Mulvey and Kelly were involved in developing a mode of aesthetic analysis through psychoanalytic theory – from the perspective of the film theorist and artist, respectively – Freud uses psychoanalysis in his essay in order to develop an aesthetic theory. This process involves the production of a series of ‘uncanny doubles’, and as Sarah Kofman has argued in ‘The Double is/and the Devil’, this is a psychically invested operation of mimesis.

Kofman develops the implications of Freud’s essay for aesthetic theory. She argues that, if it were not for the ‘seductive artifice of beauty to divert the ego’s attention and prevent it from guarding against the return of repressed fantasies’, all aesthetic pleasure would be uncanny. Following the comparison made above, this might be the difference between the ‘beautiful’ female body presented by Godard versus the ‘uncanny’ female body presented by Kelly. Furthermore, Mulvey argues in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ that the presentation of female beauty in Classical Hollywood Cinema is a fetishistic disavowal of a repressed psychical anxiety. The uncomfortably long – ‘boring’ – presentation of the woman’s body in British Sounds can be understood as an attempt to disrupt this fetishistic operation. The extended use of static camera means that film form interrupts and disrupts the seductive presentation of the sexualized female body. Nevertheless, at the level of narrative structure, British Sounds maintains the gendered opposition between sexuality (feminine) and production (masculine).

Antepartum explores the idea of female-specific collectivity against Mulvey’s description of the masculine collectivity of Classical Hollywood Cinema and against its political corollary exemplified by the labour movement. Kelly’s engagement with feminine spectatorship is not, however, simply reducible to an empirically verifiable female audience. I am therefore not proposing that the work is made for a women-only audience, but rather that it offers a feminine spectatorial position. This is an imagined point of view available to any spectator and evident from the work’s structures of address.

The modernist work of art disrupts the duality of form and content. With an emphasis placed on working process and the instability of materials, it suggests an ongoing and dynamic production of meaning. In the 1970s, the idea of the ‘spectator-as-producer’ was an important development and re-politicization of this central modernist idea of meaning production. The suggestion of the ‘labour’ involved in viewing works of art and film was understood politically, as suggesting a shift in the aesthetic ‘relations of production’. Feminist approaches such as Mulvey’s sought to challenge the more celebratory ‘workerist’ interpretations of spectatorial production by placing an emphasis on questions of subjectivity. Antepartum’s exploration of the relationship between production and reproduction bridges both these interests and pushes the debate in a decisively ‘feminine’ direction.
The umbilical lens

The navel is an indication of our connection to, and disconnection from, our mother’s body. It is the mark we all bear (male and female) that indicates our separation from the maternal body, and at the same time it reminds us of the former connection with that bodily origin. As adults, men and women are positioned differently in relation to the navel. Certainly, we were all once connected to our mother’s body via the umbilical cord, but women also have the capacity to connect again – as mothers to their own child – through the other end of an umbilical cord. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s words, ‘we [women] carry the womb as well as being carried by it’.39

In ‘Postal Survival, or the Question of the Navel’, Shoshana Felman discusses Freud’s invocation of the navel in The Interpretation of Dreams as a metaphor for moments of difficulty in the analysis of dreams. Freud refers to aspects of the dream that are resistant to understanding as the dream’s ‘navel’.40 Felman develops this bodily metaphor: ‘To ask a question at the level of the navel is to ask a question at the level of a certain birth and of a certain scar: the question is posed out of a certain wound, a certain severance, a certain impossibility.’41 Felman’s essay was written in memory of her former teacher Paul de Man and it includes a response from de Man to these insights, given to Felman in a letter that she received not long before his death. De Man proposes a challenge to Felman’s feminist analysis based upon the fact that the navel is a ‘bisexual’ bodily inscription (68). This is indeed the case, but my point here is that although both sexes bear the primary mark of the navel, this is because of our former connection to the mother’s body. Bisexuality (if this is indeed the correct word) is only the case for one end of the umbilical cord. De Man effaces this dis/connection from/with the body of the mother in his assertion that the navel is a ‘knot that is cut’ (68). In an unacknowledged moment of gendered interpretation he sidelines Felman’s attempt to address questions of birth and pregnancy by implicitly proposing the obstetrician as philosopher. Felman in eulogistic mode concedes his correction, and develops his reading further. Instead of the ‘undoing of a knot’ (71) that the process of analysis suggests, Felman goes on to elaborate: philosophy ‘is founded on the violence of Gordian knots’ that are cut (71). In de Man’s analogy, however, the philosophical obstetrician enters the scene in order that the mother can be wheeled offstage and her part in this philosophical birth can be forgotten. Following Felman’s de Manian analysis, the maternal body ends up being relegated once more to inert ground, emptied container, or reproductive machinery to be managed.

In Antepartum the action is suspended at the pre-partum moment. Kelly’s continuous film loop installation remains poised at this crucially late stage of pregnancy. Instead of cutting Felman’s philosophical ‘Gordian knot’, Kelly stages a form of embodied spectatorial identification by means of the maternal body. The camera/projector lens functions as an imaginary umbilical cord extending out from the mother’s navel to the spectator. The projector functions as a stand-in for the camera and this interchangeability of camera and projector suggests a two-way flow of light across time and technology. Light flows into the camera body from the maternal mise-en-scène and out of the projector onto the surface of the screen. This flow of light may be read as a visual metaphor for the umbilical cord, which is also a two-way flow (of nutrition and waste) between mother and
embryo. With the navel presented as a vanishing point, this ‘umbilical lens’ is the visual anchor that secures the imagined spectatorial position in relation to the on-screen mother’s body.

The interconnection between camera and projector in this relational economy is further secured by the camera position. The camera is located directly below the pelvic rim, and thus is level with the woman’s genitals. This suggests the off-screen intrauterine space of the baby. Note that the woman’s navel on screen is the mark of her separation from her own mother and as such this implies her own former intrauterine connection. This means that the implicit spectatorial position is doubly maternalized by Antepartum. First, the spectator is imaginatively reconnected-as-mother to the woman’s navel on screen by way of the umbilical lens. And second, she is imaginatively connected-as-mother to the unborn child not yet visible on screen, but narratively implied. The mechanization of the ‘natural’ process of human reproduction has its uncanny double in the anthropomorphization of the machine, the camera-womb. Moreover, this double maternal re/connection articulates a sexually differentiated relation to the womb. The imagined spectator is feminized and, like the on-screen woman, has the potential for connecting and disconnecting at both ends of the umbilical cord. Antepartum posits a temporally concurrent staging of Spivak’s formulation: ‘we carry the womb as well as being carried by it’.

Recent feminist scholarship suggests that the in utero relation of mother and child might offer a model for theorizing an ethical relation with the other. This argument emerges from an understanding of the peculiar negotiation of mutual dependency and respect for life between the mother and the embryo. In developing this theory the biologist Hélène Rouch and psychoanalyst-philosopher Luce Irigaray counterpose the widely held belief that the in utero relation is one of fusion. According to this erroneous, but quite commonsensical, view the idyllic fusion with the mother is abruptly terminated by birth and this idea of severance is figured most powerfully in the cutting of the umbilical cord. Rouch points out that this so-called first mark of castration, the cutting of the umbilical cord, does not, in fact sever the child from the mother, but rather, this cut separates the child from the placenta. The placenta or after-birth is naturally discharged from the woman’s body shortly after the birth of the child, but the western practice of cutting the umbilical cord has come to represent this decisive moment of severance from the mother’s body. Moreover, the fact that this understanding of human birth resonates so evocatively with a Judeo-Christian narrative of traumatic expulsion from paradise, exclusion, and the burden of original sin, is only further cause for critical reconsideration. The placenta, along with the umbilical cord, is produced by the embryo and not through the fusion of mother and child. It nevertheless performs the unique task of mediating between the needs of the embryo and the needs of the mother as if it were an independent entity. The placenta regulates the correct portions of nutrients to the foetus and mother alike. It therefore enables the co-existence of both parties in a situation of negotiated interdependency.

While Felman’s argument follows a Lacanian logic of birth as the first death, Kelly’s installation strives for an aesthetic equivalent to a philosophy of the feminine. Following Rouch and Irigaray, the mother and baby are foreigners to each other and their détente is negotiated by the ‘third party’ of the placenta. The
umbilical cord is the means through which this encounter is achieved. It is for
this reason that the metaphor of the umbilical lens takes on such crucially
important significance in my reading of *Antepartum*.

Furthermore, umbilical metaphors are not without precedents in the history
of writing about photo-reproductive technology. Siegfried Kracauer deploys such
a metaphor to describe a heightened form of realism for certain documentary
films. He argues that in such vivid and dreamlike works, the camera appears to
have ‘just now extricated [its object] from the womb of physical existence as if the
umbilical cord between image and actuality [has] not yet been severed’. A
similar kind of claim to affective immediacy is made by Roland Barthes in his
posthumously published essay on photography, *Camera Lucida*. Written in
response to the death of Barthes’ mother, this text argues that the ‘photograph is
literally an emanation from the referent. From a real body, which was there,
proceed radiations that ultimately touch me, who am here [. . .]. A sort of umbi-
lical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though
impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been
photographed.’ Although several writers have challenged his claim that
photography is a ‘*literal* emanation from the referent’, Barthes’ widely influential
argument is based upon the indexical nature of photographic technology. The
indexical sign establishes a causal relation to the referent by means of physical
proximity: the footprint, the cast shadow, the symptom. The photograph is thus
an imprint in light of the object that was set before the camera. For both Barthes
and Kracauer, the idea of the umbilical cord is used to suggest a kind of psycho-
physical immediacy for the spectator. Both these writers use the metaphor of the
maternal body to propose a form of psychically invested realism that for Barthes
also suggests the psychoanalytic idea of reconnection with the ‘Real’. Barthes’ analysis,
however, like Felman’s, reinforces the association of birth with castra-
tion and death since *Camera Lucida* is also a eulogy of sorts, in memoriam for the
writer’s dead mother. *Antepartum*, however, avoids these associations by
suspending the pre-partum moment. Like Barthes though, Kelly emphasizes skin
and touch. At such an advanced stage of pregnancy the taut skin of the belly
becomes a now palpable threshold between the mother and the *in utero* infant.
The caressing action reinforces this as a mutually perceptible interface between
the two bodies.

I have already established that Kelly’s own engagement with psychoanalysis
was part of a collective feminist enquiry in the Lacan Women’s Study Group, which
also included the filmmaker and theorist Laura Mulvey. In relation to the psycho-
analytic concept of fetishism, Mulvey argues that Classical Hollywood Cinema is
wholly addressed to the implied male spectator. How, then, does sexual difference
operate for the implied spectator of *Antepartum*? Following Spivak’s speculative
theorization of the concept of ‘womb envy’, it is my claim that in *Antepartum* the
spectator is figuratively *given* the womb. In a symmetrical inversion of Mulvey’s
formulation, Spivak describes ‘womb envy’ as follows: ‘if to give and withhold to/from the mother a phallus is the male fetish, then to give and withhold to/from the man a womb might be the female fetish in an impossible world of psychoanalytic
equilibrium. The icon of the sublimated womb in man is surely his productive
brain, the box in the head.’ Likewise, the camera box as a technological means of
reproduction serves as another form of womb sublimation.
In relation to the concept of ‘womb envy’, the imagined spectator of Ante-partum is subjectively stitched, or ‘sutured’ into a maternal position. She is reattached as mother/womb to the technological umbilical cord. The ‘male spectator’ is imaginatively given the womb through an operation of gender transvestism. This relation, I have suggested, can best be understood as a form of female fetishism: womb envy. Men are only carried by the womb, but Antepartum imaginatively positions the male spectator as also carrying the womb. This installation acknowledges male alienation from species reproduction and is at the same time a decisive challenge to exclusively masculine models of collectivity. Kelly’s film reverses the gender transvestism described by Mulvey for Classical Hollywood Cinema, with an implied viewing position that is feminine and embodied. The feminine spectator is imaginatively connected to her mother at the same time as she connects as mother to her child. At one and the same time she ‘carries the womb as well as being carried by it’.

By the ‘feminine spectator’ I do not mean an empirically identifiable biologically female audience. All spectators, female and male, are feminized in Antepartum, in a reversal of the masculine gender transvestism argued by Mulvey in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. My analysis here is not directly concerned with actual spectators, whether men or women, or for that matter gay or straight, differentiated by race and class, or ideologically formed through a number of different institutional frames. Whether or not an actual female spectator has been, is, is able to be, or even wants to be a mother might find her relating to this double maternalization in very different ways, certainly not all positive. These speculations on individual psychology and actual spectatorial response are not the concerns of this argument. Having said this, the complexities of this process of spectatorial maternalization when we imagine real spectators only reinforces the importance of this work as a feminist intervention.47

Mary O’Brien’s theorization of reproductive consciousness has given us an insight into Kelly’s decision to abandon the analogical format of Antepartum. Nevertheless, even if we maintain Kelly’s single screen set-up, the visual presentation of the projector in the original film loop installation adds an additional layer to the analysis so far. In conventional film projection (that is, not in a continuous loop), the film strip runs from one reel through the projector gate and back onto an empty reel until all of the film has been used up, credits roll: The End. In order to present a film in loop format, one end of the film is physically joined to the other, and with a mechanical attachment added to the projector this creates a continuous loop. The loop of film attached to the projector presents us with a celluloid umbilical cord connected to itself in a continuous circuit. This endless circuit metaphorizes the feminine spectator attached across time and space at both ends of an imaginary umbilical cord, simultaneously both mother and child. This two-way maternal relation is a mimetic double of the continuous film loop attached to itself and visually present within the space of the spectator, and as such is another moment of uncanny technological doubling. In contrast to the impoverished gender transvestism that Mulvey describes for the putative ‘real’ female spectator, in Antepartum Kelly presents a philosophically and psychically rich set of possibilities for re-imagining both feminine subjectivity and masculine alienation from genetic reproduction.
Notes

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1 Kelly made this point in a telephone interview with the author (11 December 2004).
2 The 1975 installation Women and Work, first shown at the South London Gallery, was represented in 1997 in Vancouver, Canada. See Judith Mastai, ed., Social Process/ Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–1975, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1997. I am piecing together this early version of the work through descriptions given to me by Kelly and following the viewing of the film loops from the installation Women and Work now in the collection of Tate Modern in London. Unfortunately, there are no extant reproductions of Antepartum in this form. My analysis of the two parts of the 1974 work-in-progress is by necessity uneven, but this is also because the ‘final’ version, now in the collection of the Whitney Museum, does not include the Women and Work footage.
4 Mary Kelly, Rereading Post-Partum Document, Vienna, 1999, 197. This point was also reiterated by Kelly in a telephone interview with the author (30 November 2003).
6 While spousal domestic labour never became part of the wage economy of any nation state, the ‘Wages for Housework’ movement certainly had a significant impact on the direction of subsequent feminist activism addressed to the domestic sphere. For a full discussion of these issues, see the Ellen Malos, ‘Introduction’, in Ellen Malos, ed., The Politics of Housework, Cheltenham, 1995, 36–41.
7 Esther Ronay did most of the post-production editorial work and the main vision for the film was hers. In the 1975 entry on Women of the Rhondda in the British National Film Catalogue, Kelly and Trevelyan were acknowledged as part of the film’s directorial collective along with Mary Capps, Margaret Dickinson, Esther Ronay, and Brigid Segrave. See Verina Glassner, Women of the Rhondda, London, 1975. Other regular members of the group were Barbara Evans, Midge Mackenzie, and Francine Windham. I am grateful to Emma Hedditch of Cinemova in London for information on the London Women’s Film Group. Also see London Women’s Film Group ‘Notes’, Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90, ed. Margaret Dickinson, London, 1999.
11 Marx, Capital, 717–18. My emphasis.
12 The most fully elaborated argument about Night Cleaners was presented immediately following the completion of the film at a conference at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1975. For the complete paper and subsequent panel discussion see Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, ‘Brecht in Britain: the independent political film (on Nightcleans)’, Screen, 16, 4, 1975, 6. For a more recent analysis of the film see Griselda Pollock, ‘The Pathos of the Political: Documentary, Subjectivity and a Forgotten Moment of Feminist Avant-Garde Politics in Four Films from the 1970s’, Work and the Image, 2, ed. Griselda Pollock, Aldershot, 2000. Also see the chapter on Night Cleaners in my forthcoming book, Reproducing the Avant Garde: Feminism, Art, and Politics in 1970s Britain.
14 Marx, Capital, 275.
I discussed the transformation of the work for the 1999 exhibition at the Generali Foundation in Vienna with Kelly in a telephone interview (11 December 2004). My concern was about the loss of the work’s specifically filmic texture. Kelly told me that she considered transferring the degraded 8 mm ‘original’ into 16 mm format in order to retain the filmic texture of the work, but decided that this would make it seem too ‘precious’. The transformation in technology from celluloid to digital is also a shift in sensibility and, thus, Kelly was a little uncomfortable with the work’s relation to recent large-scale spectacularized video and digital projection. Her contribution to the 2004 Whitney Biennale, *Circa 1968* (2004), was specifically conceived as an engagement with this problematic.


Evidence of Kelly’s engagement with Mulvey’s work as a filmmaker can be found in her review of her film *Penthesilea* (1974), see Mary Kelly ‘Penthesilea’ [1974] *Rogue Reels*.

Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington, IN, 1989. Further page references will be given in parentheses in the text. Along with Peter Wollen, Mulvey was working on *Penthesilea* her first film, which came out in 1974, one year prior to the publication of this essay.

The Lacan Women’s Study Group included Kelly, Mulvey, Mitchell and Delmar from the History Group as well as the literary historian Jacqueline Rose.


Mulvey’s discussion of the disembodied viewing position of Classical Hollywood Cinema is explicitly pitched against the embodied spectator of avant-garde film. This has subsequently been described as a totalizing opposition, and numerous film theorists have both implicitly and explicitly challenged the historical narrative described by Mulvey, from a number of perspectives. It is not my intention to simply reiterate Mulvey’s argument here, but rather to see it as a historically and politically specific feminist intervention. The many important critical challenges to ‘gaze theory’ are compelling and have informed my argument in crucial ways. For an overview of the debate, see the essays collected in Linda Williams, ed., *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1994. For a polemical response to the unexamined racial dimensions of the films discussed by Mulvey see bell hooks, ‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators’, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston, MA, 1992.


Mulvey uses the masculine pronoun throughout the essay. She has subsequently described her use of this gender-specific pronominal indicator as a way of indicating the psychical transvestism that the female spectator is compelled to perform; Laura Mulvey, ‘Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Bloomington, IN, 1989.


Although this is a strategy that will soon be adopted by Kelly in her multi-panel mixed media work *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79).


41 Shoshana Felman, ‘Postal Survival, or the Question of the Navel’, *Yale French Studies*, 69, 1985, 69. Subsequent page references to this essay will be given in this paragraph in parentheses.


47 In her essay, ‘The Oppositional Gaze’, bell hooks critically responds to Mulvey’s essay by using a range of varied anecdotal evidence from a series of class- and race-differentiated female spectators, who respond to the racial coding of femininity in mainstream cinema. Although the two writers are in fact describing very different kinds of spectators, hooks (empirical) and Mulvey (psychically imagined) the critique of Mulvey’s inability to see the ‘whiteness’ of classical Hollywood cinema’s presentation of femininity is important and necessary. In the example of *Antepartum*, the racial identity of the woman is not decisively presented, and even though it is likely generally taken to be a white woman’s body, motherhood is not identified with whiteness here to the extent that femininity was in ‘Visual Pleasure’.