Editor’s note:

Exhibition statement as written by Davey in 2006.

Reality/Play 2006

Moyra Davey

Artists: Martin Beck, Pradeep Dalal, Andrea Fraser, Mitchell Goodman, K8 Hardy, Sowon Kwon, Joshua Lutz, Angela Marzullo, Kim Miller, Jennifer Montgomery, Ulrike Müller, Claire Pentecost, Jeff Preiss, R. H. Quaytman, Fabienne Radi, Hugo Radi, Jason Simon, Shellburne Thurber, Union Gaucha Productions, JoAnn Verburg, Therine Youngblood

Organized By: Moyra Davey

Screening and discussion: On Thursday, June 15th at 6pm, *Fifty Minutes*, a video by Moyra Davey will be screened, followed by a discussion with the filmmaker and Gregg Bordowitz.

When I told some friends about the idea for this show at Orchard several of them recommended Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens, an erudite work about the centrality of play in culture. The most inspiring and ludic part of the book (for me) is a short passage concluding the author's introduction in which he cautions the reader not to expect from him expertise on every aspect of his subject. A writer, he maintains, must sometimes be a "raider" in fields insufficiently explored or studied, the desire to write overtaking the exigencies of learning, Huizinga explains: "To fill in all the gaps in my knowledge beforehand was out of the question. I had to write it now, or not at all. And I wanted to write." This impatience, even urgency around writing that Huizinga alludes to, is a testament to the sustaining powers such creative work affords, and it is a form of sustenance inextricably linked to pleasure and forms of play.

Roland Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text says: "The writer is someone who plays with his mother's body," I've long puzzled over that cryptic line, from a longer, even more cryptic passage in which Barthes talks about pleasure in relation to writing (and reading). He says this pleasure comes not from language, but from the mother tongue, thereby denying the symbolic of language and privileging the imaginary of the mother's body. In that same short paragraph he mentions, parenthetically, a psychoanalyst, three writers and a painter, all leads I could pursue if I wanted to decode the mystery of that line: "The

writer is someone who plays with his mother's body," But I suspect the line is not meant to be decoded, and for now I want to write (even if I also don't want to...)

Writing (especially its beginnings) is a heart-quickening thrill precisely because it engages that area of anticipation and dread, desire and fear, the teetering on the edge of a gulf that Virginia Woolf described in relation to the novel. (Non-fiction was straightforward for Woolf: she started an essay with the certainty that "sooner or later a net of words…(would] come down on the idea" and allow her to compose her text, but a novel was something altogether more fraught, its outcome by no means guaranteed.) The gulf is the threshold moment of knowing that something might be created, plucked from non-existence, or not. It is also the moment where pleasure and gratification abut work, and the thrill has to do with putting something at risk, as in a game of chance. There is no desire without law, as Lacan would say.

But getting back to Barthes, here's one more thing, from a an interview he gave in 1977, that begins to inflect and illuminate the cryptic, poetic line about the writer and the body of the mother: "When we attach a lot of importance to certain networks of friendship it is because we're always trying to reproduce the utopia of a childhood space, that of the child playing around its mother. Ultimately, in an affective relationship, whether or not it's amorous, we always simulate a certain maternal space, a space of security which is, why not say it, a gift space." This evocation of a maternal radius extending into adulthood, into the grownup life of Barthes the writer, also suggests its reverse, the forceful pull backwards, reminding me of Melanie Klein, who said that all art-making is a form of reparation with the mother, and emboldens me to take (almost) literally Barthes' idea about writing and the body of the mother.[1] Barthes via Klein leads me to intuit a space of loss where one can in turn lose oneself to a love of making.

What does all this have to do with an exhibition at Orchard? To close, this time via Winnicott: what matters in the play of children is "the preoccupation…the near-withdrawal state…akin to the concentration of older children and adults" (when they are writing, or taking a photograph or editing a video, for instance, and possibly experiencing

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[1] Davey's first book is *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*, an editorial project of writing culled from across literature, poetry, art, philosophy, feminist theory by writers who are women (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001).

In writing this annotation, a great many of Davey's photographs created at the crossroads of working at her art and parenting come to mind, perhaps none so forcefully as [title, year], a shot Davey took in a hotel room, her head above her chin cut off by the frame, in which Davey, naked above her waist and pants, has stood before the camera to get a shot of her breasts. Breasts which, at this moment, are entirely lopsided and sickly looking, as one is greatly enlarged. Engorgement can happen; especially it can occur if too long a time lapses between feedings or otherwise extracting milk with a breast pump. This image was published in *Do You Wish to Direct Me?* LTTR #4 (September 2005) the independently published art journal of the gender queer feminist collective LTTR, with support from Printed Matter and accompanied by an exhibition, "A Wave of New Rage Thinking," Printed Matter, New York.

that sense of unbounded time known as ‘oceanic’). These notes, mostly on writing, but equally relevant to all forms of art making, literalize ideas around demand and play. They exemplify a certain kind of intense engagement and absorption that artists and writers avail themselves of, participate in, and on occasion find therein: pleasure, bliss, wonder, agency and perhaps a place that harks back to, conjures, the “space around the mother.”