

# Karen Finley's Performance and Judith Butler's Performative: Subverting the Binary Logic of Theatrical Functions

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## Abstract

This paper argues that the feminist performance art of Karen Finley challenges the terms Judith Butler sets between performance and performativity and concludes that Finley's art engages in a social, cultural and political critique whereby she determines a new set of codes for her performances.

## Résumé

Cet article soutient que les arts du spectacle féministe de Karen Finley défient les termes que Judith Butler établit entre la représentation et la performativité et conclut que l'art de Finley engage dans une critique sociale culturelle et politique par laquelle elle détermine un nouvel ensemble de codes pour ses représentations.

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As feminist critics, we are bound to critique Western theatre as a cultural site where the gender models against which women and men struggle are systematically and profitably imitated. But theatre is also, and in a complex sense, the place of play, and unlike other media, in the theatre the same play - and the "same" theory - can be played not only again, but differently.

(Diamond 1993, 379)

Judith Butler, in her essay on performativity and theatre "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," does not see the theatre as a space for resistance, but sees it as perpetuating constructed categories: "actors are always on the stage, within terms of the performance" (Butler 1990b, 277). She continues, "the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life" (278). Her most useful example of this notion comes with the transvestite onstage whom the audience members respond to with applause and support. This same transvestite, according to Butler, could be sitting on the bus and incite feelings of fear, hatred and anger in the same people from the audience. She uses this example to discuss how the theatre promotes protected enclaves of categorization which are safely removed from the spectator. In this way, theatre maintains the distance between the signified and the signifier. According to Butler, the gaze from the audience toward normalized and expected categories of representation cannot possibly dismantle essentialized notions of categorization. The real (audience) is separated from the imaginary (the stage) and the comfort of the audience is secure. But this is not the case within all theatre. Through her performance art, Karen Finley transcends the limitations to Butler's argument, which can only apply to Stanislavskian theatre practices. Where Butler sees

the theatre as a distanced falsity, Finley's performance art interrogates notions of binaries within the socially appropriate body and the appropriately transgressive body - and parodies "appropriateness" within the performance art form. Through her use of parody and rejection of binaries, Finley creates her own discourse for performance art which moves beyond Butler's boundaries between performativity and theatrical performance. Finley's art consistently reminds the audience that there is no "imaginary" protected distance or comfort as though she seeks out the audience's discomfort in order to distinguish her performance art from other forms of theatre.

Finley's performance art deals with matters surrounding the overt body in representation. As we will see with Finley's experiences in Britain, the explication of the body and what that means becomes a matter of political and juridical concern. Within Finley's performance art her body becomes a stage where social dramas and traumas are re-enacted, creating distinctions between the binaries of truth and illusion, fantasy and reality and essential and constructed identities. Finley's contrasting performances as both a repressive patriarchal figure in "I'm An Ass Man" and abusive sexual desires in "Mr. Hirsch" reassess the Foucauldian framework and challenges Butler's limits to performance and performativity. When Finley opens her body to the audience and "becomes" whomever she pleases, she reveals the disparaging world and promotes a vision through her rage. The distance of Finley's feminist anger is dense as it moves from the page (as a constructed, planned performance) to the stage - where symbolism is made literal at the same time as it remains symbolic. Finley uses her body as a literal object of pleasure and displeasure while at the same time symbolically dismantling the patriarchal gaze and desire.

Performance art has a rather short but complicated history of resistance. According to Sue-Ellen Case, Professor of Theatre at UCLA, performance art contains both the conventional practice of theatre and the mode of "theatricality," described as a term that denotes the practice of theatre with "exaggerated self-display and unnatural behaviour; affectedly dramatic" (Case 2002, 187). The sense of excessive self display marked performance art's visibility in both the experimental theatres and the hippie subculture of the 1960s and 1970s: "It

was a utopic site, where oppression was stripped away, sometimes gleefully cavorting in a new, wild jumble of proximate, pleasurable social relations. The sense of the liberated, civic body, lumping and humping in great group gropes [...] became a new form of social and theatrical imagery" (Case 2002, 187). Feminist performance art appeared as a strong movement of its own: "In the late 1960s and early 1970s, coincident with the women's movement, women used performance as a deconstructive strategy to demonstrate the objectification of women and its results" (Forte 1990, 252). Jeannie Forte, American scholar, director and dramaturge, maps feminist performance art as "appear[ing] as inherently political" (1990, 251). Case believes that performance art is shaped through theatricality and that "theatre is reproduced so that theatricality can expose itself by extending beyond it" (Case 2002, 187). Case, then, believes that Stanislavskian theatre is still at work behind theatricality, but that "the traditional line between spectator and player was aggressively trespassed" (2002, 188). In this way, performance art, or theatricality, moves beyond traditional theatre by dismantling the boundaries set between the audience and the performers. The excess of the "liberated" performance artist finds a more political experience within the "groups" (audience and artist, various artists) within performance art. Abbie Hoffman claims that "politics is shouting theatre in a fire" (Case 2002, 188). Shouting theatre rather than simply producing it marks the difference between theatricality and theatre: "It is excessive in its production and by that excess, designed to incite" (Case 2002, 188). The literal and figurative space between the performance artist and the audience is more proximate, inciting boundary shifts and political action. In short, the shared space between the stage and the social movement is less distant, more obvious, and in-your-face effective. By limiting the distance between signifier and signified, performance art neglects to maintain levels of comfort for the audience, complicating Butler's position on the effect of the performance.

According to Butler, physical and psychological "proximity" between audience and performer can be understood through her trope of the transvestite on the bus where, as previously mentioned, "the sight of a transvestite onstage can

compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence" (Butler 1990b, 278). In the Stanislavskian theatre where the transvestite appears, the audience is physically separate from the character, and is intellectually removed from the actor due to the knowledge that what is onstage is a scripted performance where the character is separate from the actor, and the intentionality of the actor is unknown. The distance between the two allows for a "safe" feeling that the structure of the theatre provides where the audience identifies with the transvestite, or "other," because of the remove. In this way, the "other" cannot possibly be a true "other" because the conventionality of the Stanislavskian theatre encompasses the audience in a protected zone, where actors are simply acting the role of the "other," furthering the binary restrictions between self and other. Butler associates the theatrical mode to the transvestite on the bus when she points out that the physical space has significantly shrunk and that, perhaps, this "other" may be attempting to transgress the binary by simply sitting on a bus seat like everyone else. To attempt to dismantle the binary restrictions is a radical and perhaps unsettling move for the audience member who represents the privileged subject. The theatre, according to Butler, takes these binaries one step further: "[...] the various conventions which announce that "this is only a play" allow strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life [...] the act is not contrasted with the real, but constitutes a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated" (Butler 1990b, 278). Because of this, the actor on stage in a performance cannot be subversively challenging binary constructions because as an actor, s/he is simply relocated inside another binary - a binary of performance. While this analysis describes some forms of theatre, it does not lend itself to Finley's performance art. Instead, Finley's work advocates for political action through her own conventions based on the reactionary history of performance art which announces that "this is not just a play," but a social/cultural critique. Finley's critique does not escape the performativity that Butler disassociates from performance, but complicates the limits of the argument.

To appreciate Butler's approach to theatre performance, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of performativity. In "Performative Acts," Butler maps out her theory of performativity which she later expands upon in her historic work *Gender Trouble*. Before she publishes this work, however, she uses "Performative Acts" to distinguish performance and performativity in terms of the theatre. Butler describes gender as "in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceeded; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1990b, 270). Because there is no "original gender" behind the body, what we see is already an illusion. Gender's illusionary and repetitive acts constitute what it represents: "Because there is neither an essence that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective idea to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler 1990b, 273). This concealment that Butler writes about becomes important to her critique of onstage performance.

The body onstage generates a political contestation of normative gender and sexual practices which form the inception of distinctive notions of performance art and performativity. Just as the male gaze can transgress the binaries of the gazer and the gazed as not simply male or female but contingent with various power structures, so can the body of the performer. According to feminist theatre scholar Josette Feral, "the characteristic presence of performance could be called presentness - that is to say, performance unfolds essentially in the present time" (Feral 1983, 155). Through the manipulation of time, the gender identification of the gazers (audience) and the performance artist's ability to "transgress" contingent bodily and power binaries, I see the body of the performance artist as substituting presence for absence. In other words, the theatricality of the art allows for a certain suspension of disbelief - not in the same way as more common theatrical practices, but in the audience's ability to see the performance artist as a representation of the social and cultural critique s/he is performing. This enables the audience to read the body of the performance

artist as it is represented, not merely through the artist's gender binary or object status.

With her body representing her own political critique, Finley's performance distinguishes itself from Butler's claim that: "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice; [...]. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" (Butler 1993, 24). When Finley appears on stage as a representation of her own authored political critique, the audience's suspension of disbelief can be taken as Finley's own will. In other words, though performativity must always exist in the gendered subject, Finley's performance art reveals much more than Butler's description of performance. Butler distinguishes performance from performativity by characterizing the first term as implying a subject who performs universally and the latter as situating the subject formation after the performance of codes. But in Finley's art, the opposite occurs. While Finley may enact performativity in the sense that no one can escape the performance of gender, because of the political nature of her art, her performativity, or the "codes" that skew her ability to conduct a performance without performativity are complicated. Rather than trying to mimic the real with performance, Finley's art, situated in the history of performance art as a theatre of resistance, has an effect on the audience whereby her intentionality appears clear. The political nature of the work, the shortened proximity of the audience and performer, and the knowledge that Finley authored the script, changes the terms of her performance and complicates Butler's distinction between performance and performativity. If, through her art, Finley's purpose is to demonstrate the norms that constitute performativity, the distinction between performance and performativity becomes troubled.

Finley's refusal to abide by performance "codes" leaves the audience uncomfortably aware of the personal motivations that emerge onstage. In "Unspeakable Practices," New York journalist C. Carr describes how after her father's funeral, Finley felt disconnected by the custom of the funeral and her interior emotion. Carr explains, "When she returned

to college, the San Francisco Art Institute, she felt an 'incredible yearning' to spill it, to get up and tell the awfulest truth in front of people" (Carr 1993a, 142). The power Finley asserts through her own "truth" challenges the structure of the theatre, while simultaneously challenging dominant structures of political, social and economic power.

Finley's theatre encompasses an emotional contingent from Augusto Boal's objective in *Theatre of the Oppressed* where the goal of "new" theatre is "[...] to change people 'spectators,' [from] passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon - into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal 2004, 122). Boal's plan to transform the spectator into actor is adopted in part by Finley whose body becomes active, but who also incites a political motivation of the audience through the themes in her work.

The power of the stage has allowed for Finley's discourse which motivates her to organize and politicize the future of art: "What I'm really excited about is trying to get artists to be organized, to get artists to become political. I think what's happened for hundreds of years is this idea that the artist is crazy [...] no one could think that a person who is intelligent, or is a professional, or who thinks, could create work. The idea is that creativity only comes out of irrationality" (Finley 2000, 314-15). Finley found herself politically motivated by her art when she was defined as "obscene" in Britain: "I was outraged by the fact that Britain's major newspapers publish photos of half-naked women every day, but here was everyone saying that it was illegal for me to take off my clothes in the course of an art piece. In other words, if a woman was passive and showed her naked body for the pleasure of men, that was OK. But if she took control of her own nudity, used it to expose abuse and exploitation, then she was subject to arrest" (Finley 2000, 40). By using patriarchal conventions (the nude body) to display political acts, Finley's art subverts dominant ideologies.

The subversive art of Finley and of performance art as a whole can be understood more clearly through the work of Michel Foucault, who argues that power is manifested in resistance. According to Foucault, power is not simply one-sided or outside of us, but instead is continually re-constituting itself (1995, 187-94). Finley's resistance

to traditional theatrical performance conventions should be seen as part of the complex of power itself - as within power. More specifically, the themes of Finley's work - sexual abuse, rape, suicide, mental illness - suggest a resistance to hegemonic patriarchal social structures. Because performance art is a theatre of resistance, Finley's controversial feminist material is compounded within the power structures that put it in place. At once, Finley communicates resistance to hegemonic performance "codes" while creating new codes.

Onstage, Finley also uses her body as a site of resistance. In Foucault's *History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, he argues that "bio-power" is responsible for introducing the laws of the body to capitalism. Bio-power is the discipline advocating the body as a productive, economical machine working to regulate and control the population through regulating the reproductive capacity of the body. The law began creating bodily/lived norms which regulate the notion of freedom so that we recognize it as freedom. But the themes Finley presents in her work illuminate how little freedom women actually have. In her performances, Finley illustrates how women's bodies are trapped within a patriarchal hegemony where body shape, sexuality and even saying "no" are tools used to control and regulate women. But in her role as performer, Finley is able to subvert norms that govern her body and present to the audience the illusion of women's freedom. By using her body as the stage and site of pleasure/displeasure, Finley overthrows the capitalist hegemonic notion of desire as patriarchal and the silencing of the discourse surrounding sexuality.

Finley's piece "It's Only Art" critiques those who criticize art by applying their own personal moralities to the work. This work takes on a Foucauldian perspective when power/knowledge over art is attempted to be regulated and criticized in a non-objective manner. Former US Senator Jesse Helms famously criticised Finley's work, calling it "obscene," and attempted to shut down Finley's funding source, the National Endowment of the Arts. Her comment in "It's Only Art," "It's a good life when no one thinks that you ever piss or shit" (Finley 2000, 81), refers to censorship and her work which often includes bodily functions. She focuses on political figures (and particularly Charlton Heston) in this piece, and

criticizes the political right's silence on issues of sexuality and abuse. It is through expression, she says, that private feelings and issues become public, not through politics or television which are controlled and maintained through capitalism and sanctioned morality.

Through audience motivation and her own intentionality, Finley's art embodies "the personal is political" and, as a result, Finley's art becomes much more vulnerable to attack than other forms of theatre. Finley's acts, which Carr ironically calls "unspeakable" and "unnatural," are also highly personal and politically and socially transgressive. Finley does not simply act as "the discourse of the objectified other" (Forte 1990, 252). Nor is Finley "[...] rendered an absence within the dominant culture, and in order to speak, [must] take on a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulations, seduction)" (Forte 1990, 252). Finley does attempt, however, to make the personal political and "unmask this function of 'Woman,' responding to the weight of representation by creating an acute awareness of all that signifies Woman or femininity" (Forte 1990, 252). Finley "unmasks" the female body, the binary of "woman" and the ritual of traditional theatrical performances. In this way, Finley enacts performativity and her performance only enhances its own constructedness.

In "I'm an Ass Man" and "Mr. Hirsch," in order to act and talk back to abuse, Finley makes the personal political and moves beyond simplistic notions of binaries when she "becomes" both a male rapist and a little girl. Finley achieves this by exposing bodily markings as historical insignia, legacies of gendered bodies and "becoming" other bodies, genders, races, and sexualities. Finley's body changes its representation and becomes, as Foucault encourages, both the site of pleasure and displeasure. Finley's dual role advocates Boal's objective which is to change people from merely participating as spectators to taking more of an active - or perhaps activist - role. The title, "I'm An Ass Man" appropriates a woman's body, in particular, her "ass" as belonging to a man. Finley "becomes" the male rapist figure who projects anger and intensity at women and their bodies. The rapist essentializes both ethnicity and gender when he sees the woman he intends to rape: "And once I spotted her in the

subway - short, Hispanic, Polish, Chinese, or Jewish, with a huge big butt just waiting to be fucked, just asking to be fucked" (Finley 2000, 20). The race or ethnicity of the woman is irrelevant; women's bodies are essentialized beyond race to simply being an orifice. Finley transgresses beyond her body here to represent both the rapist and all the potential victims. The rape victim in this piece is described as "so fat that the cellulite bunches between her thighs [and wearing] 4-inch cork wedgies that went out of style in the early seventies" (Finley 2000, 20). Allowing the audience to see the victim through the rapist's eyes reminds that rapists are not often after what is deemed "attractive" necessarily, but devastatingly, whoever is there - whoever is convenient. This reminds the audience that any woman is a victim while also politicizing rape as being about acts of anger afflicted on random women who might or might not be wearing short skirts or may or may not be thin. When the rapist discovers that the woman is menstruating, he says, "how could you do this to me woman? [...] BE THE BEST FUCK IN YOUR LIFE! BE THE BEST PIECE OF COCK IN OUR LIFE, GIRL! BE THE BEST RAPE IN YOUR LIFE!" (Finley 2000, 20). His body is also reduced to his genitals, but as a source of power and aggressiveness. Rather than a sitting orifice, his penis would have aggressively sought to substantiate her life. Rather than "taking away" which describes the emotional effect of rape, the rapist sees the act as "adding" to the experiences in her life. By including "THE BEST RAPE IN YOUR LIFE" (Finley 2000, 20), the rapist admits that the woman has likely, or will likely be raped more than once in her life. At the end of the piece, he says, "I'm trying to get those purple hearts off of my hands [...] but the blood won't come out of my lifeline, out of my heartline" (Finley 2000, 20). The purple heart, of course, is a reference to the award won by a soldier for bravery in a war, but in this case it also refers to the bravery within the blood of menstruation, for women "soldiers" who survive and continue despite the "wars" afflicted on them. Her blood has "contaminated" him in some way: "the blood won't come out of my lifeline, out of my heartline, the blood won't wash off my hands. Be a long time before I use that hand to shake my dick after I piss" (Finley 2000, 20). Her menstrual blood is now a part of his life and heart and he has become a part of

her forever - or perhaps he cannot change, cannot not be a rapist.

In "Mr. Hirsch," Finley takes the voice and body of a child being sexually abused by her neighbour. His manipulation of the child is crushingly sad and the invisible child of abuse is now visible and details of sexual abuse become uncomfortably evident to the audience. Performed with the naivety of a child and in a child's voice, Finley's piece is intended to have a devastating effect on the audience. The physical size of the child, whose head is "slammed tight against the toilet bowl" and is silenced, "no one can hear me because my throat is full of him" projects the helplessness of the child and Mr. Hirsch's disregard for her. Besides the physical intimidation, "Mr. Hirsch" delves into the emotional manipulation of children. This strategy is all the more devastating to an adult audience because the manipulation of the child is so demoralizing and premeditated.

Finley illustrates both "I'm An Ass Man" and "Mr. Hirsch" using food such as kidney beans and melted ice cream sandwiches. In "I'm An Ass Man," Finley speaks with a male voice, and just as the rapist is about to rape the victim, she opens a can of kidney beans and lets the beans and liquid run into her hands. The dark red of the kidney beans symbolize the menstrual blood and represents a purple heart-shaped figure similar to what appears on the rapists' hands. The ice cream sandwiches, a child's favourite food, becomes smashed up within their wrappers, creating loud popping noises, and leaving white stains on the girl's dark dress to symbolize Mr. Hirsch's climax. The heartbreaking story and visual effects illustrate Forte's claim that "[women performance artists] manifest the metaphor most central to feminism, that 'the personal is the political' [...]" (Forte 1990, 253). In her interview with Carr, Finley explains, "I'm trying to make an analogy between the abuse in someone's personal life and the abuse happening in our country's political life. Once you're abused in your own life, that gets translated and comes back to you in the political world" (Carr 1993b, 156).

By disrupting the "personal" and creating or adding the "political," women's performance art "has particular disruptive potential because it poses an actual woman as a speaking subject" (Forte 1990, 254). While speaking does give the subject some

degree of agency, Forte's argument falters when she claims that "while women performance artists speak their personal, lived experience, and explore the most intimate aspects of their individual lives, their explorations relate directly to the common category of their woman-ness. [...] Thus, the woman performance artist cannot help but assert an image that is simultaneously heterogeneous and heteronomous; singular yet categorically related to all women" (Forte 1990, 266).

This simply reinforces the binaries that Finley's work seeks to dismantle. By acting out the rapist, the young boy, the older woman, Finley transgresses the simplistic message that her work is for "all women," and instead forces both male and female spectators to see themselves and their others through her work. Would male spectators not find "Mr. Hirsch" a disturbing and devastatingly sad piece simply because of their gender? The genius of Finley's work is that it is able to be political and personal inclusively to the audience members. Finley is a feminist performance artist, but performs with a third-wave feminist mode of inclusiveness and visibility.

According to performance theorist Rebecca Schneider, "women are invisible to the degree to which they are visible, that is, as visible, women will be read relative to man, while man is also read relative to man. Woman who is rendered invisible by her visible markings creates a cultural scenario in which a 'woman' striving to be other than representative of the phallic order can find herself striving to appear as invisible, to appear as disembodied" (Schneider 1997, 99-100). Yet Finley's body is never apologetic and always dares the viewer to disbelieve. Rather than using the "I'm not acting" self in front of the audience that is obviously removed from the "daily" or the "real" as a belief system of "truth" (as much as it can be), Finley's persona is genderless but gendered, a self without a selfhood. Her "persona [...] has shattered, [and she is] unable to put a face on things" (Carr 1993a, 142). In this way, Carr intimates, "Finley rivets, but she doesn't entertain" (142). Finley's objection to rehearsal has the opposite effect of a practiced and polished "performance" that Butler recognizes all theatrical performances have. The spontaneity of her acts "reclaims the female body from its patriarchal textualization through 'writing the

body,' (Forte 1990, 259) and is an attempt to allow the audience into the process of the emotions of exposure. The rawness of her performance "provides a visible basis for the construction of a feminist frame of reference, articulating alternatives for power and resistance" (Forte 1990, 269). Finley has said that she performs some of her work in a trance state to differentiate it from acting, and so that it does not come across as conventional theatrical performance might. This, along with her naked body, pulls the audience in and decreases the space between the signifier and the signified. Finley does not allow for the dreamscape where insatiability exists and by using her body as the site of the dream/object of desire, she literally enacts the abuse of desire which makes obvious the forbiddance of satisfying every desire and the disgust in the attempt to do so. The performance artist, or "political whore" (Schneider 1997, 101) talks back to her positioning and therefore is an unruly commodity. Such unruly behaviour forfeits what has been discussed as Foucault's contingent economy of power, knowledge and discourse. By bringing the body into a non-rationalized, sexualized form, Finley's work is subversive within the capitalist model. Finley looks at the pleasure and the pain of sexuality: her body as the stage resists a pure fantastical/radical sex/pleasure reading, but her literal use of the body makes it evident as a site for realizing the effect society has on gender and the body.

In her piece entitled "Strangling Baby Birds," Finley's character refers to her mental illness as punishment for her "distorted" projection of her gender: "But she knew that it really wasn't the doctors' fault. That the problem was in the way she projected her femininity. And if she wasn't passive, well - she just didn't feel desirable. And if she wasn't desirable, she just didn't feel female. And if she wasn't female, well, the whole world would cave in" (Finley 2000, 48). By becoming several people in the space of an hour (men, women, old, young, various ethnicities), she performs gender while performing onstage, but her body remains the same while she becomes changed. She is real by being a body, both literal and symbolic at the same time.

Finley uses sex and sexuality to interpret the literal and symbolic in her critique of consumption, material commodities and satisfaction through products. Objects and other symbols of what

we are told to desire are attached or inserted into her body to literally collapse the notion of material object and social relations. In this way, objects inhabit the place of bodies by a contract that Finley makes violently explicit. Examples of this include Finley driving objects into or onto her body while discussing private property, or discussion consumption while naked and acting out abuse. The literality of the symbolic made explicit with the body shortens the distance between the eye and the body as canvas.

With brown chocolate marking her body Finley seems to emulate colonialism and the patriarchy all rolled together in symbolic yet literal markings that work to display the inner psyche called "The Chocolate-Smeared Woman." Finley's performances compel an investigation into the "disgust" factor in her work, which, Forte explains,

...works to fuel the exploration of aesthetics as an ideological trap, which subjugates women in particular but which also dictates the numbed and plastic tastes of dominant culture. However, in Finley's case, being catapulted into a higher degree of visibility hastened her assimilation into a more commercial audience. In venues other than New York, beer-drinking fraternity boys came to see the naked woman shove yams up her ass and throw obscenities at the crowd. Her work became re-inscribed in the fetishistic process associated with strip-tease or live sex, and not at all the feminist or subversive strategy that theory might endorse. Finley herself seems to have made note of this, and her newest work is reportedly much more direct in its declaration of feminist politics.

(Forte 1990, 268)

I have included this lengthy quotation because it serves to represent Finley's staging of "disgust" as a performative trope, and also brings into question whether or not the audience can appreciate Finley's work on an allegorical level in the face of her "shocking" and "disgusting" acts. Audiences showing up to see nudity would be sorely disappointed with Finley, because the profound themes that narrate her nude antics make it nearly

impossible to fantasize over her body. Because of her attempt to subvert the hegemonic conceptions of female nudity, Finley's female body refuses to be subjected to voyeurism; rather, the audience sees exactly what Finley intends them to see. Finley describes the process of becoming the chocolate-smeared woman and takes audience reaction into serious consideration: "I could not actually put real feces on myself. Even if I could bring myself to do it, it would disgust the audience so much that they wouldn't be able to focus on anything else. So I decided to use chocolate. It looked like shit. And I liked the idea of chocolate's history, its association with love" (Finley 2000, 258). Here, her nude body becomes obviously subversive and is transformed from "victim" status to political activist. Carr ends her interview with Finley by distinguishing Finley's work from the "standard" tale of the "victim." Carr sees Finley as yet another abused woman, "only this girl's gonna tell. She's gonna knock the self-censor down and tell on Mr. Hirsch, her father, the culture. The tired old vocabulary of abuse has never sounded so sad. It's as if we've never quite heard it before, because we've heard it mostly from men" (Carr 1993a, 150). Finley's nude body, then, refuses to be victimized, fantasized over, or abused. Finley's "shocking" acts will perhaps draw audiences in, but the metaphor of those acts is clear.

The contradiction between Finley's body as symbolic and literal continues to provoke debate. By using her body as the stage, and thus, the tool which she performs, she embodies the constant struggle women have as being defined by sexuality (and given false power), gazed at, abused for it, and then demonized and criticized for it. The contradiction of this definition is what she means when she talks about the problem that heterosexual women face "trying to find a sensible way of living within a code of being desired" (Carr 2000). Through the medium of feminist performance art, and negotiated through a Foucauldian framework, Finley's personal and political motivation reconstructs the "codes" of performance. Finley skews such "codes" by limiting the physical and metaphorical space between the performer and audience and by politicizing her work to highlight her intentionality as author. As a result, these new "codes" change the terms of her performance and complicate Butler's argument on performance and



performativity. While Butler maintains that onstage performance, or the "illusory" is distinguished from the "real life" of performativity, Finley performs the opposite (Butler 1990b, 278). By using her body as a site of the "constructed," and "performed," Finley overtly represents a social, political and cultural critique, while requiring her audience to allegorically interrogate her work. Through its history as a theatre of resistance, feminist performance art allows for Finley to politicize the taboos of our world while challenging the more conventional structures of theatre, theatricality and performance.

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