

快樂の探求：

— Karen Finleyと「ガングロ」少女 —

佐藤 真己 (本学社会学研究科博士課程前期課程)  
E-MAIL gr003012@ss.ritsumei.ac.jp

---

Exploring ‘Pleasure’ :Karen Finley and ‘*Ganguro*’ Girls

SATO Maki (Ritsumeikan University, Social Sciences, Master's)

---

Introduction

In our everyday lives, we are surrounded by images of bodies that we can consume without having to spend any money. Most of these images are of women's bodies, or are fixated on certain parts of women's bodies. These days in Japan, there is what is called a “gigantic tits” boom, and you can see images of large-bosomed women smiling at you from the comics on the shelves in convenience stores, from the covers of computer magazines, on TV and on the posters in all the trains and subways.

Surrounded as we are by a consumer culture that bombards us with the message to “desire women's bodies”, even I, as a “woman”, often feel aroused by images of these women for consumption. I end up consuming women's bodies in the same manner as a “heterosexual man.” Which leaves me with the following problem: If women are signs for “desire” for men, then when I also fetishize the sign, am I sliding into “perversion”?

The concept of “female” desire always seems to pose problems for feminists. While second

wave feminists have tried to actively affirm a female desire, issues always remain concerning the influence of “male” desire, as well as the possibility of anything defined as “female” or “feminine” being used, conversely, to support patriarchal institutions or Rubin has called it, the “sex/gender system” (Rubin 1975:159). One response to this phallogocentrism was the French feminist's concept of “jouissance.”<sup>1</sup> Jeanie Forte, while acknowledging that the French feminists leave themselves vulnerable to being labeled as “essentialist” by claiming a connection between “écriture feminine” and the bodies that produce it, also admits that

[...] there is still the material aspect broached, of uncovering the body's relationship to power, of making the female body visible in contradiction to its patriarchal invention. (Forte 1992: 254-255)

She also asserts, via Foucault, the importance of positing female bodies through concepts of pleasure and not desire. (Forte 1992: 254-255)

Because of this, I think that the concept of “pleasure” is also very useful for taking

“invisible” problems (conceptual issues) and making them visible. Furthermore, considering the current situation, where this feminist dilemma is contextualized by, or literally surrounded by an inundation of images of “giant boobs,” it might be much more realistic to explore how concepts of pleasure could be used to subvert desire, rather than directly (or simply) oppose it.

I find that the work of American performance artist, Karen Finley, shows a “body” that allows an escape from this dilemma. She has an ample bosom that is clearly different from the “gigantic tits” to be found in Japanese convenience stores or on TV. In this paper, I first consider the extent to which Karen Finley’s performances subvert norms of desire by looking at a recent Japanese fashion phenomenon. Then I show how Karen Finley’s breasts, through the way that they reveal the absurdity of the “breasts for consumption”, clearly delineate the possibility of bodily pleasure for “women.” Through this, I will also be able to explain why Karen Finley’s body has given me feelings of pleasure, and just what those feelings were. The purpose of looking at these issues is to show, ultimately, how positing a continuity between the concepts of pleasure and desire can allow a reclamation of the space that is the body.

### Chocolate Covered Bodies

Karen Finley is a white performance artist who first became active in the 1970s. Her performances are centered on monologues and nudity. She often talks, in rapid succession, about various topics like rape, incest, and revenge by castration, as well as repeatedly screaming “dirty words.” Also, she has been known to take off “excessively” feminine clothing and smear eggs and honey all over her body. Because she was

refused funding by the National Endowment for the Arts for being “obscene,” Finley has earned the label “radical.” That she sued the NEA and lost, after years of trials and retrials, only supports this.

In The Return of the Chocolate-Smeared Woman, which she started performing in 1997, Finley, clad only in a pair of panties, would smear chocolate all over her body and then have members of the audience pay twenty dollars to lick some of it off. In her 1998 performance, entitled Shut Up and Love Me, she had members of the audience help to spread honey all over her body. The combination of women’s bodies and food is not exactly novel. For example, the mainstream movie Tampopo by Itami Juzou (1988) had scenes where lemon juice or whipped cream were put onto a woman’s naked breasts and then licked off by a man. But Finley’s performances differ from these stereotypical images in that the person who licks off the food is not necessarily a heterosexual man. This is to say, the people who licked, ejaculated honey onto, or otherwise consumed Karen Finley’s body during her performances, differed each time according to gender, sexual orientation and preferred fetish. The appearance of desire for Karen Finley’s body was regulated solely by the connection between Finley and her partner from the audience. Finley’s performances revealed the very performativity of desire. Through the explicit act of making the “partner” pay real money to participate in the performance, she completely subverted compulsory heterosexuality by forcing audiences to re-recognize the strong relationship between desire for women’s bodies and consumption, and to see just how strongly desire is controlled by our consumer society.

The “chocolate-smeared woman” first appeared in 1987, We Keep Our Victims Ready. In this earlier performance piece, the chocolate was

meant to imitate feces and symbolize humiliation but, as Finley herself said, by 1997 it was used because of its erotic associations. (Finley 2000: 256). As Jill Dolan has indicated, Finley's feces/chocolate smeared body cannot arouse male desire because it has already been consumed. (Dolan 1991: 65-66). On the contrary though, in The Return of the Chocolate-smeared Woman, it appears that Finley is actively encouraging her own consumption, and the chocolate is no longer meant to represent feces. In 1999, she even appeared in Playboy magazine, dripping chocolate onto her breasts with an obviously exaggerated expression of ecstasy on her face that made fun of Playboy conventions for "sexy."

Interestingly, you can see a similar example in a recent fashion phenomenon in Japan. This "body" is perhaps not as "conscious," but it produced the same effects as Finley's performances.

#### "Ganguro" Bodies

Karen Finley's chocolate woman is remarkably similar to the "ganguro" or literally, "black face" fashion in Japan. This trend occurred in the latter half of the 90s and was popular with junior and senior high school girls. Also called "gonguro," (really black face) "yamamba gyaru," (hag girl, because of the light silver color of their hair) or "ogyaru" (polluted girl), this short-lived trend was absorbed by the "bihaku" or literally "beauty-white" boom, and disappeared around 2000.

The "ganguro," as their name indicates, had darkened faces. They usually went to tanning salons or used make-up to achieve this look which they augmented with white eyeliner and lipstick, ultra-girlie clothes and blond or silver hair and a special vocabulary of "dirty words." The mass media at the time coined the phrase, "Yamatonadeshiko no daraku" which means

something akin to "rotten little Miss Japan" and were very critical, but the media attention caused the trend to expand daily.

The masking of faces occurs in various places around the world, but a case like this, taken completely out of a carnival or a ritual context and placed squarely into the everyday as fashion or daily make-up, is not so common. The "ganguro" look took make-up's function - to mark the face as an erotic (desire-producing) site - and through excess, subverted its meaning. In fact, their make-up was a complete inversion of negative and positive in that they took the white face-paint of the geisha, the symbol of ideal Japanese femininity, and completely reversed it. Judith Butler has said that

The parodic repetition of 'the original,'... reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original (Butler 1990: 41)

The "ganguro" look is a precise parody of "make-up" and through its mimicry of the ideal model, ends up subverting the model.

But, these "ganguro" girls were obviously not trying to become "undesirable." Nor were they trying to make a political statement via their make-up, in the reverse of the way the old "women's libbers" did by refusing to wear any. If anything, the "ganguro" appeared in the hope of being consumed, of being desired by the opposite sex through being "made" fashionable. But, in "processing" themselves (or to continue with the photography metaphor, over-exposing or over-developing themselves), they ended up becoming "ogyaru" or "polluted girls," or the most repulsive of body types. This irony shows precisely how the "body for consumption" contains already within it the possibility for the

subversion of desire.

Both Finley's performances and the "black-faced" look, through their exaggeration of the "body for consumption" subvert the privileging of heterosexual desire in consumer society.

#### Threatening body

The question that remains here, is whether or not this subversion of desire in consumer society has really shown us something "new" or made something visible that we were not able to see before now. As the "big breasts boom" indicates, desire directed towards the body is both a fetish for a material substance and indicative of a given definition of the body. That this desire can be subverted shows that the meaning written onto the body can be shifted. This shifting is often seen as "threatening."

Around the time when the mass media in Japan was discussing the "*ganguro*" girls as a "social phenomenon," the Social Democratic Party used "*ganguro*" images in a campaign commercial for television. This was at the same time as the controversy over the Koizumi government's Wartime Bill (*yuujirippou* or "National Emergency Legislation" that critics say is in direct conflict with Japan's peace constitution). In order to voice their opposition to this legislation, the Social Democrats flashed images of "*ganguro*" girls with the message, "There are some things that shouldn't be changed." In this commercial, the "*ganguro*" girls are a metonym for what the Social Democrats see as the dissolution of Japanese society.

The same things may be said about Karen Finley's body. The differences between her breasts and the breasts meant for mainstream consumption (the "big breasts boom" breasts) reveal the same shifts in meaning.

In Japan, the most of the models who are hired to be "big breast talent<sup>3</sup>" are shown in bikinis. The tiny pieces of fabric that are used to cover the nipples are signs to show that the hidden bits are what are "required to be desired." This then makes breasts a metaphor for the sexual and hides any possibilities for subversive re-definitions.

In contrast, Karen Finley does not tease in her performances, but immediately bares her breasts and then commences to cover them up again with food. Audiences are instantly exposed to the physical "materiality" (or back to what Jeanie Forte called "the material aspect") of her breasts. Since the context that usually sexualizes exposed breasts (the half-hiding of them) gets taken away, the audience is immediately made to forget just what women's breasts were supposed to stand for. Then, when Finley candidly covers them up again, the audience remembers the desire that they felt before for the "swelling under the covering" which then makes them problematize "desire." Furthermore, it makes audience members aware of their own individual metonymic associations for breasts. Through this metonymy, I became "differentiated" from Finley, because I did not see generic "female breasts" but Karen Finley's breasts. Via this "differentiation," I was then able to conceptualize various aspects (like race and sexual orientation) that are contained in "desire."

Finley avoids speaking "as" a woman because she is constantly shifting subjectivities in her monologues. Her monologues are distinctly multivocal, but I think it is her body that is expanding subjectivity.

This body that subverts desire, makes visible the process of metaphorization and the metonymy written onto body parts.

## Conclusion

I have attempted an exploration of pleasure as a continuation of desire through the performances of Karen Finley and the “everyday” performances of the “*ganguro*” girls. Pleasure can be found in the actions that always subvert desire through the strategic use of the body, and the displace metonymic associations with body parts. With actions such as these, we might be able to envision a pleasure that is different from that we have now, limited by our present concepts of desire.

Trying to use the master’s tools, or trying to act purposefully with female bodies that have been marked for consumption, may only end up strengthening patriarchal (or sex/gender) systems. But, I think that, for me, just being able to think about the possibility of new concepts that could change “desire” is a kind of intellectual luxury.

As well, as Karen Finley’s court case and the Social Democrat’s commercial show only too clearly, there is something inherently challenging about the supposed objects of practicing pleasure, that, depending on how it is applied, can threaten the power majority and disrupt the status quo.

The “*ganguro*” girls have all become absorbed in becoming “beautiful whites.” The “black faces” that, for a short while complicated desire, have now, ironically become nothing more than another “adult” video genre and another metaphor for “sexual goods.”

While Finley, famous from her lawsuit against the NEA, has since performed at mainstream venues such as the Lincoln Center, I think the strategies underlying her performances are still resistant to the status quo.

Like “*ganguro*” girls, Finley’s performances are often “read” by the mainstream as “socially

obscene” but are effectively subversive precisely because of this.

Taken as a strategy, performances, like Finley’s, make visible *everyday* performances usually taken for granted and offer an escape route from consumerism. Finley’s particular strategy is also useful when applied to other “social” performances; it makes visible to dominant discourse that has led the “*ganguro*” girls back to whitening their faces.

## Notes

1. There has been much argument over the English translation of “jouissance,” and I have arbitrarily chosen to use the word “pleasure” in this paper.
2. Their language was very close to “male language” (in Japanese, there is a clearly gendered distinction), but they also created new words that were used only by girls.
3. In Japan, “big breast talent” is an established genre, and even has specialized agencies to market the models. One such company is called “yellow cab.

## References

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Carlson, M. (1996). *Performance: a critical introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Case, S. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dolan, J. (1988). *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Dolan, J. (1993). *Presence and Desire*. Ann Arbor: The

- University of Michigan Press.
- Finley, K. (1990). *Shock Treatment*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Finley, K. (2000). *A Different Kind of Intimacy*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Finley, K. (2001). *Aroused*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Forte, J. (1992). Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis, and Pleasure in Feminist Performance. In J. G. Reinelt, & J. R. Roach (Eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance* (pp.248-262). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Fuchs, E. (1996). *The Death of Character*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Goodman, L. & Gay, J. (Eds.). (2000). *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. New York: Routledge.
- Itami, J. (Director). (1988). *Tampopo*. Tokyo; Toho.
- Rubin, G. (1975). The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "political Economy" of Sex. In R. R. Reiter (Ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (pp.157-210). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Schneider, R. (1997). *The Explicit Body in Performance*, New York: Routledge.
- Williamson, J. (1984). *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture*, London: Marion Boyars Publishers.

Special thanks to Alwyn Spies and Kenichi Tachibana.