

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

512 West 19th St. (Btwn 10th & 11th Aves) New York, NY 10011

Reservations: 255-5793

THE THEORY OF TOTAL BLAME

The Kitchen (closed)

Karen Finley belongs to that wing of downtown dance and performance art where *ne plus ultra* antibourgeois offensiveness is joined with a broad, blaring, "dumb" delivery that seems derived from comic books or TV. In her new work, *The Theory of Total Blame*, a family comes together at holiday time to remember and/or accuse one another of rape, incest, child abuse, and other forms of violence, but all

this is mixed together with the jello salad and the cheese doodles in such a way as to lose its edge. It becomes just another part of the general crud. When the mother (Finley) lifts her robe and exhibits herself, her children just complain of the smell. Finley is careful, in speaking to the press, to stress the redeeming social value of this work. She told *The Washington Post* that after her father's suicide in 1980—this subject comes up repeatedly in her interviews, just as a father's suicide comes up repeatedly in her performances—she "wanted to try to do [her] part to put back in our culture rituals about feelings, rituals about caring." The reader is left to wonder how Finley's abuse-fests are operating to restore rituals of caring to our society and also, now that she brought it up, what in fact is her relation to the memory of her father. After all, the suicidal father in her work is repeatedly portrayed as having molested his daughter. Whether this sexual abuse, like the suicide, is based on real life, Finley doesn't tell the press, but the suggestion is there and, like the suicide, seems to operate as coercion: she has suffered, and therefore we should listen. She *has* suffered, but what I have seen of her work does not rise above the cruelty that inspired it. It just leavens that cruelty with bathroom humor, and thereby makes it seem less horrid. I don't see this as a public service. **Joan Acocella**

