

**PANTEION UNIVERSITY Centre for Gender Studies**

134 Sygrou Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, GR 17671 ATHENS, Tel: +30- 210 9210177-8, fax: +30- 210 9210178

<http://www.genderpanteion.gr>, e-mail: [gender@panteion.gr](mailto:gender@panteion.gr)

## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**'Changing Gender! Research, Theory and Policy  
for Gendered Realities of the 21st century'**

**June 2-3, 2005  
Panteion University  
Athens, Greece**

### **ABSTRACT**

**Sara Cohen Shabot, Dr., Lafer Center for Women's Studies, The Hebrew University,  
Jerusalem, Israel.**

#### **'I Think therefore I am Embodied:' Feminist Phenomenology, the Grotesque or How the Abstract Subject Became Flesh.**

In this paper I show how the phenomenological feminist concept of subjectivity (mainly as expressed by Simone de Beauvoir) can be analyzed in a new way by looking at it from the perspective of the figuration of the grotesque body presented by Bakhtin, mainly in his *Rabelais and His World*. I seek to demonstrate how the new *embodied, sexed subject* proposed by de Beauvoir may be better understood by comparing it to the *grotesque subject* analyzed by Bakhtin. I argue that the grotesque figuration succeeds in presenting the *subject* the way new *gender theories* – specially phenomenological ones – had try to conceive of it, namely, as *embodied*, strongly rooted in concreteness and yet *ambiguously* intertwined with the world and the *others*.

Gender theories have carried out a deep critique of the concept of the *subject* and its identity as it appears in different classical and modern philosophical theories. In this context the grotesque may provide us with a new analytical tool. The *exceeding subject*, represented by the grotesque, cannot be absolutely contained, that is, it cannot be disconnected from the rest of the world or the *others*: it finds itself in a constant and intensive intertwining and mingling with its *outside*. The grotesque body grounds its connection to the world on the very condition of human subjects: the embodied subject is in itself open, ambiguous, fragmented and connected to the world and to the *others*.

The new *subject* that Gender theories and mainly de Beauvoir's feminist theory try to present is above all created as a consequence of its *being embodied* and of its *being-with-others*. This subject, then, must be understood as constantly re-emerging from its intersection with the world *outside* itself and the *others*: no monolithic, closed, immutable and well defined Cartesian subjectivity is possible any more. This new subject is an

*embodied* subject. It is a subject that is historically, socially and culturally defined. This kind of subject – his political and philosophical implications – is the one that I will try to exemplify and explain in the light of Bakhtin's figuration of the grotesque body.