In my work over the last twenty years, I have been primarily concerned with the connection between subjectivity and an ethics of nonviolence. Throughout my work, I have taken an interdisciplinary approach, using philosophy and theoretical texts, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, along with film, literature, medicine, law, social science, popular culture, and media studies. My theoretical work is always informed by, and formed through, engagements with concrete contemporary issues, including: genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, affirmative action, depression, stereotypes of absent fathers and earth mothers, debates around multiculturalism and English-only policies, various institutional forms of sexism and racism, war, using female sexuality as a military strategy, female suicide bombers, U.S. policies in Iraq, the Abu Ghraib abuses, changing technologies of media, among others. In general, I attempt to address abstract questions of the relationship between subjectivity and ethics within a socio-historical framework within which these concepts have developed, on the one hand, and which they continue to influence, on the other.

On the theoretical level, my work has been an attempt to navigate between the two poles of liberal individualism with its notion of the autonomous subject as transparent to itself and analogous to other rational subjects regardless of cultural and socio-historical differences, on the one hand, and extreme forms of the deconstruction of the subject, now considered fractured and/or an illusion, isolated in its radical alterity from all others in spite of shared socio-cultural contexts. The former evacuates the subject of its historical and cultural context and holds that communication is unencumbered by differences; this position leads to problematic discourses of color-blindness and reverse-discrimination, and the pathologization of women’s depression, which efface the history of racism and sexism that inform the very notion of the liberal individual. And, although I am more sympathetic to the later position, taken to its extreme, the deconstruction of the subject threatens the politics of radical democracy and an ethics of difference, both of which require the possibility of finding some means for communication across differences. My work has been an attempt to articulate how we can take seriously challenges to the liberal autonomous subject without giving up the hope of real connections with others.

In my first book, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Indiana University 1993), I take up the question of the relation between ethics, subjectivity and sexual difference in the context of Kristeva's large body of work. I indicate how her notion of a subject-in-process can be useful in formulating a notion of subjectivity that allows for an explanation of women's oppression and some possibilities of overcoming that oppression. In addition, I go beyond her few gestures towards ethics, to suggest how the notion of a subject-in-process might ground a reformulated ethical subject.

In my second book, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the "Feminine"* (Routledge 1995) I continue to develop the themes of subjectivity, sexual difference, and ethics through an engagement with texts by Nietzsche, Derrida, Irigaray, and others. Here, I argue that while Nietzsche and Derrida attempt to open up the notion of subjectivity that is not autonomous
and self-enclosed, they do so by excluding or appropriating femininity. In other words, while they open subjectivity onto otherness, they do so by foreclosing or appropriating specifically feminine otherness. I maintain that the model of intersubjective relations operating in extreme versions of these texts is a Hegelian model stuck at the level of the master-slave fight to the death where the only options are murder or suicide. In the last chapter, "Save the Mother," turning to new developments in biology, I suggest a new model for conceiving of intersubjective relationships that moves us beyond the violent master-slave dialectic.

In my third book, Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture (Routledge 1997), I continue where I left off in Womanizing Nietzsche. In this project, I explore the ways that primary family relations affect subjectivity in my continued attempt to articulate a theory of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that can ground the ethical relation. Here, I argue that there are contradictions at the heart of Western conceptions of maternity and paternity that make our notions of relationships with ourselves and with others problematic. Using examples from philosophical texts, psychoanalytic theory, studies in biology and medicine, examples from legal cases, and popular culture, I challenge notions of maternity that are associated with nature and notions of paternity that are associated with culture. By addressing familial relations as formative relationships in the development of our conceptions of ourselves as individuals in relationships, I try to develop novel notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that refigure our notions of ourselves and our notions of our relations to others. By articulating alternative ways to conceive of ourselves as subjects, I suggest an alternative intersubjective approach to ethics or questions of values, family values.

In my fourth book, Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers (Rowman & Littlefield 1998), I continue to explore the relationship between images of maternity, paternity, subjectivity and ethics. Here, one of my central questions is: If there is no unified subject, then who is the agent of political action or change? This question has forced theorists to choose sides, for or against identity politics. Rather than choose sides, I suggest that we need to explore the dynamics of identity. I argue that it is premature to accept or reject identity politics until we understand how identity works and what is at stake in the politics of identity. I analyze the repressed others of contemporary notions of maternity and paternity, especially the othered body, and suggest alternative ways to conceive of self-other relations and the subjective identity at stake in them in order to begin to develop a theory of subjectivity as openness to others. By thinking of subjectivity as fluid, I try to navigate between two extremes that plague contemporary attempts to theorize difference: at the one pole, the position that I can understand anyone by just taking up her perspective, which makes communication unencumbered; and at the other, the position that I can understand no one because of radical alterity that prevents me from taking up her perspective, which makes communication impossible. I argue that the first assumes that we are absolutely identical, which erases our differences, and the second assumes that we are absolutely different, which erases our communion. Both presume a certain solidity of the subject; both work with an oppositional notion of identity and difference; and, both seem to presume that communication requires recognition. Here, I begin to explore the usefulness and limitations of the notion of recognition, and its flip side, abjection, in developing a theory of identity that opens the subject to otherness or difference. I do so in the context of analyzing popular culture (specifically religious forms of masculinity evident in the Promise Keepers Movement and the Million Man March), an analysis of adoption laws, and a critical engagement with films by Fassbinder, Polanski, Bergman and Varda.
In my fifth book, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (University of Minnesota, 2001), I develop a critique of recognition models of identity and propose witnessing as an alternative. I argue that recognition models of identity and subjectivity promote false oppositions and hostilities, including the split between subjectivity and agency evoked in antifoundationalist theories. I critically engage various theories of recognition (and misrecognition) from Charles Taylor’s version of multiculturalism and Axel Honneth’s analysis of struggles for recognition, to Jacques Lacan’s notion of misrecognition and Judith Butler’s theory of the performative. I argue that the demand for recognition is a symptom of the pathology of oppression that perpetuates subject-object/other and same-different hierarchies. While theories of misrecognition challenge us to be vigilant in exposing the illusion of familiarity or sameness, most of them still propose an antagonistic subject-object/other relationship. Even contemporary theories of recognition concerned with difference and the other do not move us beyond subject-centered notions of relationships. I argue that rather than talk about the other—a discursive move that perpetuates the subject-other hierarchy—we should diagnose othered subjectivity. I propose developing a theory of subjectivity taking othered subjectivity as a starting point. As an alternative to theories of recognition, I develop a theory of witnessing subjectivity. I argue that the notion of witnessing, with its double meaning as either eye-witness or bearing witness to the unseen, is more promising for describing the onset and sustenance of subjectivity. Subjectivity is born out of and sustained by the process of witnessing—the possibility of addressability and response-ability—that puts ethical obligations at its heart. This work most clearly brings together my interest in subjectivity, political agency, and ethics. Throughout this project, I apply the notion of witnessing to various contemporary ethical and social problems including affirmative action, hate speech, English-only policies, and reproductive technologies, among others.

In my sixth book co-authored with Benigno Trigo, *Noir Anxiety* (University of Minnesota, 2002), we interpret what others have called the free floating anxiety of Film Noir as symptoms of concrete anxieties over race, sex, maternity, and national origin that threaten the very possibility of identity by undermining its boundaries. The existential angst, the moral ambiguity, along with the style of Noir produce a sense of free floating anxiety that we anchor to a complex constellation of concrete anxieties over race, sex, and maternity often displaced on to an abstract angst over the fickle finger of fate or a nihilistic human condition. Behind the free-floating anxiety of Noir is a primal anxiety over borders and boundaries that manifests itself in specific fears and phobias of race, sex, maternity, and national origin. To interpret the anxieties of Noir either as a mere reflection of post-war changes in social institutions or as a mere example of a nihilistic world view and existential angst is too simple. With its distinctive style and investigative narrative structure, Film Noir displays unconscious anxieties over the borders of identity. By interpreting Film Noir as a type of Freudian dream-work marked by condensations and displacements of unconscious desires and fears, we begin to see some of the ways in which anxieties over borders operate as both the return of the repressed and as defense mechanisms in the service of identity formation. Resonant with my other books, this project explores connections between subjectivity or identity formation and ethical, social and political issues focused on race and gender.

In my seventh book, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (University of Minnesota, 2004), engaging with work by Fanon, Kristeva and others, I develop a psychoanalytic social theory of oppression, particularly racist and sexist oppression. I analyze the effects of oppression on those affected by it, particularly within the realm of affects.
I suggest that depression, shame, anger and alienation can be the result of social institutions rather than individual pathology. Continuing my analysis in *Witnessing*, I argue that we are ethically responsible for our affects and their effects on others. I suggest that existentialist and psychoanalytic notions of alienation cover up specific forms of racist and sexist alienation that serve as the underside of subjectivity and the human condition. Many contemporary theorists maintain that alienation and violence are constitutive of subjectivity and humanity. Here, I reject this thesis. Rather, I argue that these leveling notions of alienation and violence are symptomatic of the subject’s anxiety and guilt over the oppression upon which his privileged position as subject rests and that rather than constitute subjectivity and humanity the alienation unique to oppression undermines them. I maintain that sublimation and forgiveness constitute subjectivity, not alienation. I explore the complex ways in which the alienation unique to oppression leads to depression, shame, anger or violence, which are misread and misdiagnosed as individual or group pathologies and then used as rationale for more violent forms of oppression. I conclude that the affects of oppression—depression, shame, anger and alienation-- can be transformed into agency, individuality, solidarity, and community through sublimation and forgiveness. In the course of my analysis, I develop a theory of social melancholy as a counter-balance to medical and psychological discourses of women’s depression. I also develop a theory of social sublimation to explain the dynamics of the colonization of psychic space. I conclude by suggesting that a model of subjectivity based on a notion of social forgiveness enables ethics in a way that models of subjectivity based on alienation cannot.

In my eighth book, *Women as Weapons of War* (Columbia University 2007), I analyze media images of women involved in violence in the Middle East and the Iraq war. From the women involved in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay prisons, to rescued Pfc. Jessica Lynch, to Palestinian women suicide bombers, recent media coverage has turned them into “weapons” of war. Women warriors are not referred to as women with weapons or women carrying bombs, but their very bodies are imagined as dangerous. I link these images of what some reporters have called “equal opportunity killers more dangerous than the males” with older images of dangerous women from Hollywood films, literature, and religious traditions. I argue that these latest examples of women figured as weapons are in an important sense a continuation of stereotypes of dangerous women who use their sexuality as a deadly weapon to deceive and trap men. In one sense, it should come as no surprise that women continue to occupy the position that we have built for them discursively. At the extreme, women become weapons, literally blowing up, the “bombshell” become the bomb. I place events at Abu Ghraib and in Cuba, along with their media coverage, within the historical context of Western colonial violence in order to see how they are a continuation of military practices that normalize violence, particularly in relation to women and sex. I examine media representations of women involved in violence, women’s liberation here and elsewhere, the role of visual recording technologies in the enterprise of war, and the ways in which we justify our own (high-tech) violence and condemn the (low-tech) violence of others. I discuss the new technologies of war, including photojournalism and embedded war reporting within the history of uses of technology, particularly visual technologies, within imperialist occupations. On the one hand, I show how internet and night-camera recordings continue a long history of using visual technologies in war. And on the other hand, I discuss the ways in which new technologies give us new ways of waging war and of thinking about war.
In my most recent book, *Animal Lessons, how they teach us to be human* (Columbia University 2009), with sustained analyses of texts by Rousseau, Herder, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Beauvoir, Heidegger, Derrida, Agamben, and Kristeva, I explore the various ways in which, in the history of philosophy, humanity has been defined against animality. The thesis of the book is that within the rhetorical gestures of certain philosophical texts, man learns to be human from those very animals against which he distinguishes himself. It is not just that the concepts of *human* and *animal* are intimately and essentially related in these texts but also that animals themselves show man how not to be one of them. These texts rely on examples and illustrations of animals that belie their main theses about man. The more that these authors insist on the absolute distinction between man and animal, the more dependent are their arguments on what I call “animal pedagogy.” In spite of the explicit message of these texts—that humans are radically distinct from animals--animals function to teach man how to be human. Not surprisingly, then, this animal pedagogy goes unacknowledged. One aspect of this book project is to show the unacknowledged dependence of man and humanity on animals and animality. Another central theme throughout this project is kinship. If the brotherhood of man is dependent upon animal sacrifices and the sacrifice of the animal, within the discourse of these texts, it is the animals themselves that lead the way. Again, human kinship is dependent upon the absolute foreclosure of animal kin. We can become the family of man by excluding the possibility of any kinship relations with animals. As it turns out, however, because of its dependence upon the denial of kinship with animals, human kinship is itself precarious. In the end, I argue that either kinship with animals is possible or kinship between humans is impossible. Either way, we must rethink the very notion of kinship.

My next project, tentatively entitled *Knock me up, Knock me down: images of pregnancy in Hollywood Film and Popular Culture*, is an analysis of recent films produced in the U.S. dealing with pregnancy, including *Junebug*, *Quinceañera*, *Children of Men*, *Bella*, *Saved!*, *Waitress*, *Knocked-Up*, *Juno*, *Baby Mama*, and *Away We Go*. This explosion of films about pregnancy is remarkable and ripe for analysis. In this project, I plan to examine the tensions between progressive and conservative elements in these films. I will analyze the ways in which the films either ignore or dismiss the possibility of abortion. I will look at the birth scenes and the chaos surrounding them. I will consider the history of Hollywood representations of pregnancy and birth. I will discuss the importance of technology, including ultrasound and I.V.F., in both the visual and narrative texts of these films. When I finish the project on pregnancy and Hollywood film, I am considering writing a book length feminist analysis of current debates in bioethics over genetic engineering.