

Ramzi Fawaz  
Spring 2023 Graduate Course Description

English 822 (Section 2): Topics in Theory  
Divergent Feminisms  
M, 1:00 PM- 3:30 PM, HCW 7109

The second wave of American feminism, which exploded onto the US-political and cultural scene in the early 1970s, was arguably one of the most revolutionary, and successful, rebellions against heteropatriarchy in human history. Composed of a multi-racial coalition of former Civil Rights and New Left activists, professional educators, seasoned political organizers, and college-age youth, this movement not only demanded the equal humanity and civil standing of women everywhere, but the potential liberation of all human beings from the constraints of normative gender and sexuality. Yet today on the social justice left, and in the writings of many queer and feminist theorists, second wave feminism is viewed retroactively as a regressive movement characterized by pervasive whiteness, transphobia, liberal pandering to the state, and essentialist understandings of biological womanhood. From this perspective, contemporary social movements like transgender liberation and intersectional and abolitionist feminisms, are seen as a necessary and progressive break from, and improvement upon, 1970s feminist thought and practice, rather than productive interlocutors to, or beneficiaries of, its legacy.

Against this logic, this seminar will explore recent work in feminist theory that reclaims the rebellious, world-making spirit of projects for gender and sexual freedom, while refusing traditional feminist orthodoxies, including notions of universal sisterhood, the idealization of (or wholesale rejection of) mothering, and an understanding of women's trauma as the shared basis for their collective political power. We will conceive of this body of thought as composing an archive of "divergent feminisms," which draw theoretical dynamism from the original feminist impulse to diverge, divest, or break free from the logic of heteropatriarchy. In this sense, far from a regressive, essentialist politics obsessively committed to identifying a singular essence or experience of women's subordination, we will understand feminism as a productive form of apostasy or *anti-orthodoxy* that begins with the anarchist rejection of patriarchal worldviews, ideologies, and forms of domination, and continues with the imaginative reinvention of all gendered and sexual categories from rigidly hierarchized identities to creative sites of unrestrained invention. Toward this end, we will look at feminist political theories that consider the category of "woman" as an ever-evolving, flexible figure of collective solidarity deeply intertwined with, but never reducible to, the oppression of so-called cis women; trans-feminist theory that conceives of feminist and transgender political projects as productively aligned, and mutually influencing, rather than inherently opposed or discordant; Black feminist theorizing, which encourages the release of critical race studies' proprietary ownership of theoretical categories like "intersectionality" so that they might travel into new and unexpected intellectual and political contexts; and feminist theory written by straight and gay cis men deeply invested in feminism's promise of a world free from heteronormative policing for people of all gender and sexual expressions. Some of the theorists we will read include: Linda Zerilli, Jennifer Nash, Leslie Bow, Marquis Bey, Janet Halley, Ann Snitow, Erica Edwards, Gloria Anzaldúa, Tom Digby, Duncan Kennedy, and Robyn Weigman.

**\*\*Note: For those students already invested in feminist, queer, and trans\* studies, this course will offer an advanced (rather than introductory) exploration of these fields, allowing you to deepen and enrich your existing understanding of foundational ideas in gender and sexual theory. For students with no training in these areas, or those who study genres and time periods that seem far afield from the concerns of feminist, queer, and trans\* theory, this course will be indispensable in expanding your critical vocabulary and teaching you to think about and analyze literature and culture in un-orthodox, and interdisciplinary ways. It will also simply encourage you to be a more curious, open-minded, and polyglot thinker.\*\***