

**Wellesley College**  
**Sociology 201: Contemporary Social Theory**  
**Spring, 2015**  
**Tuesday and Friday, 11:10-12:20**

**Professor Thomas Cushman**  
**Office: Pendleton East 334**  
**Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:30-1:30 and by appointment**

This course examines some important sociological theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our focus is on understanding five distinctly sociological approaches to the following social phenomena:

*Social Order*: Consensus and Stability  
*Social Disorder*: Conflict and Violence  
*Social Interaction*: The Social Relations of Individuals  
*Social Meanings*: Culture and Cognition  
*Social Change*: The Dilemmas of Modernity

There are three basic objectives for the class:

1. to help you develop the capacity to read and “unpack” complex theoretical texts
2. to develop an active vocabulary of key analytical concepts
3. to develop the capacity to use these concepts to interpret a broad range of social and cultural phenomena from multiple perspectives.

### Course Readings

The following books are required and can be purchased at the bookstore.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Anchor, 1967)

Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York, 1964)

Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Harvard, 1999)

Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Social Structure of Irrelevance* (Oxford, 2015) n.b, this book will be published in March, so do not look for it in bookstore now

Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Polity, 2012)

A number of articles are on e-reserve and are indicated as such in the course schedule. These are available on Sakai. They are an integral part of the course.

## Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Attendance and participation is required of all students and will factor into the grade. The class meets at 8:30 and excessive tardiness will not be tolerated. Students who miss four or more classes will be asked to withdraw and receive no credit for the class, unless they have a written medical excuse. It is absolutely crucial that all readings be done by the date on which they are listed.
2. Each week, all students are required to do all of the readings and to prepare short assignments of up to three pages on a topic that will be the focus of attention in class. These are the basis for much of our interaction in the class discussions and constitute a substantial portion of your grade for written work. These will be distributed well in advance on Sakai. The responses to these are to be posted in Sakai by the time posted on the assignment. Please post your assignments in the text box of the Assignment section of Sakai. Do not upload short assignments as Word documents (you will only do this for the longer essay assignments). Each short assignment will be graded on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest possible grade. These are a significant part of your grade and no late assignments will be accepted: if you do not post your assignment by the due date you will receive no credit for the assignment. Only medical excuses are valid reasons for turning in late work.
3. There will be two in-class examinations during the course of the semester. The examination dates are as follows:
  - Exam 1: Friday, March 13
  - Exam 2: Friday, April 24
4. There will be an in-class final examination, self-scheduled during the exam period.

Students are responsible for all reading and lecture material on exams. All written work will be graded rigorously according to the highest professional standards and according to the official grade scale as put forth in College Articles of Government (see: <http://www.wellesley.edu/DeanCollege/bk2a7.html>). Grammar and writing style are considered in the determination of grades on papers.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Short assignments/participation/attendance: 30%

Exam 1: 20%

Exam 2: 20%

Final Exam: 30%

## Course Outline and Reading Assignments:

### **January 27: What is Theory? Overview of the Class**

### **January 30-February 6: From Weberian theory to Neo-Weberian Theory**

Read: Max Weber, "Excursus on Markets," in *Economy and Society* ®  
 Edward Tiryakian, "Dialectics of Modernity: Reenchantment and  
 Dedifferentiation as Counterprocesses." Pp. 78-94 in Haferkamp and  
 Smelser, eds. *Social Change and Modernity*.

### **From Durkheimian Theory to neo-Durkheimian Theory**

Read: Emile Durkheim, Excerpt from "Origins of These Beliefs", pp. 236-245  
 in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. ®  
 Lloyd Warner, Ch. 8, "The Symbolic Relations of the Living and the Dead,"  
 and Ch. 9, "The City of the Dead," in *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the  
 Symbolic Life of Americans*, pp. 248-320. ®

## **Social Order: Consensus and Stability**

### **February 10-13: The Social Construction of Reality I**

Read: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*,  
 pp. 1 -128.

### **February 17-20: The Social Construction of Reality, II**

Read: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*,  
 pp. 129-189.

### **February 24-27: Structural-Functionalist Theory**

Read: Robert Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social  
 Action", Friedrich Hayek, reading t.b.a.

## **Social Disorder: Conflict**

### **March 3-13: The Functions of Social Conflict**

Read: Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, pp.15-66; then pp. 67-  
 120, then 67-120

### **March 17: First Examination**

### **Spring Break: March 20-29**

Nota Bene: Start reading Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological  
 Explanation* and try to complete over the break.

## ***Social Change: The Dilemmas of Modernity***

### **March 31:** Modernity Theory

Read, start reading Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*

*Nota Bene:* Professor Eva Illouz of The Hebrew University, will be joining us for a special visit to offer two original lectures on **Monday, April 6 and Tuesday, April 7**. The first lecture is entitled “Intimacy as a Modern Social form: Sexual Freedom and Emotional Uncertainty and the second lecture is entitled: “Capitalism, Emotions and Authenticity.” The two lectures will be from 6-7:30 each evening, and she will also join us in class on April 7. Attendance at both of these lectures is required and is an integral part of the class, so please make sure your calendar is clear for these events.

**April 10:** Discussion of Illouz’s presentations: come with questions and comments

### ***Social Meanings: Culture and Cognition***

#### **April 14-15:** Eviatar Zerubavel’s Cognitive Sociology

Read: *Hiding in Plain Sight*, in entirety

*Nota Bene:* Professor Eviatar Zerubavel of Rutgers University, will be joining us for a special visit to offer a lunchtime lecture on his book, *Hiding in Plain Sight* on Wednesday, April 15. Also, on that Wednesday, he will give a lecture on his new work entitled “Unmarkedness and Cognitive Hegemony: Whiteness, Masculinity, and Heterosexuality”. This lecture will be held from 4:30-6:00, the place t.b.d. Both talks on that day are required.

**April 17:** Discussion of Zerubavel’s presentations: come with questions and comments

**April 21:** No Class, Monday schedule

#### **April 24: Second Examination**

#### **April 28- May 5:**

Read: Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscales: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* in entirety

**May 8:** Wrap up and review: future directions in sociological theory

**Social Meanings: Culture and Cognition**

**April 3:** Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*

**Social Change: Modernity and Its Discontents**

**April 30 – May 3:** Eviatar Zerubavel's *Cognitive Sociology* ( continued)

Read: Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, in entirety

**May 8: Last class – wrap-up and review**