

Carleton University Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Sociology 5005F – Recurring Debates in Sociological Thought
Fall 2026

Instructor: Alexis Shotwell

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Course meets: In person, Wednesdays, 11:35-2:25 pm

Office Hours: Reserve an appointment for my regularly scheduled through

<https://calendly.com/alexis-shotwell>, or email me if the times listed there don't work for you and we'll find a time that does.

Sociology, in particular, has an extraordinary mandate as far as academic disciplines go: to conjure up social life. Conjuring is a particular form of calling up and calling out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation. As a mode of apprehension and reformation, conjuring merges the analytical, the procedural, the imaginative, and the effervescent. ~ Avery Gordon

Course Description & Objectives

This course is an introduction to social theory. When we look at the facts of the world, how do we figure out how things came to be the way they are, understand the relationship between how we know the world and what the world is, and make meaning? This figuring, understanding, and meaning-making is what we call “theory,” and it’s super wonderful. It is one of the best things, and it’s so great we can do this together.

We’ll read, talk together, and write about theoretical texts. We’ll discuss what it means to engage theory that we do not yet understand, interdisciplinary work, and writing that uses a range of methodological and theoretical approaches. The class is organized in workshop form, aiming to give you core skills that will serve you in your graduate studies: Working with peers, building intellectual generosity, self-reflection, finding and following questions that interest you, reading with care, presenting ideas, researching, writing, sharing inspiration, sitting with uncertainty. We will do a lot of in-class writing and editing, skill-practice, and discussing.

In this class we’ll be reading four entire books instead of articles or selections of texts. We’ll lose some breadth by doing this, but doing so allows us to practice, over and over again, the rare treat of working with a long-form argument that was written at book length. If it is workable for you, I encourage you to buy or borrow paper copies of these books so that you have the haptic experience of this kind of reading, annotation, and reflection.

Learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete this class will be able to:

- Demonstrate their capacity to understand core concepts in the ways social worlds are made, stabilized, and transformed.
- Identify and demonstrate analytic understanding of core claims and arguments in the course readings, in both oral discussion and in written work.

- Reflect on their experience of issues raised in course readings
- Pose questions and open directions for conversation about issues in the course.
- Articulate reflective responses to central arguments forwarded by course readings and by their classmates
- Manifest skills in editing and revising their own work and offering suggestions and support to peers
- Formulate potential connections between recurring debates in the tradition and their own research interests.

Required texts: Available through Ares/the Carleton library/the Carleton bookstore

Maynard, Robyn. *Policing Black Lives, Revised and Expanded Edition: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Fernwood Publishing, 2025. CA\$36.00

McWhorter, Ladelle. *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. 1st ed. Indiana University Press, 2009. CA\$41.00

Neigh, Scott. *Listen!: Knowing the World and Fighting to Change It*. Fernwood Publishing, 2025. CA\$29.00

Walia, Harsha. *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Fernwood Publishing, 2021. CA\$20.95