

Chapter 4 - The Social Sciences

Knowing Ourselves and Others

Key Points

The Social Sciences and Their Methods

- Sociology - the study of social phenomena in large industrial societies [59]
 - Uses surveys, data analysis, experimentation, and field research [60-61]
- Anthropology - the study of social life in small societies [59]
 - Uses surveys, archival research, intimate ethnographies [61]
- Ethnography - researcher produces written descriptions of social situations, behavior, and thinking
 - Tends to be more personal and intimate (including integration in a culture) in anthropology and more scientific and disconnected in sociology

Art and the Sociological Imagination

- Artists often look to social theorists for lenses on social phenomena they observe [67]
 - The art of an age is often an expression of the social theories in vogue at the time
- Art criticizes the social sciences to help us understand their negatives and what they show about Western culture [67]
 - Sociology tends to make broad generalizations of large populations
 - Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *America's Most Unwanted*, 1994 [70]
 - Anthropology tends to “exoticize”, aestheticize, pigeonhole, and frame non-Euro/American cultures in Western terms
 - Michael Arcega, *El Conquistador*, 2011 [72]
- Socially engaged artists investigate social problems and their causes and make social or political commentary, exposing social inequities and biases [68]
 - Rupert García, *¡Cesen Deportación!*, 1973 - Racism and Immigration
 - Graciela Iturbide, *Magnolia*, 1986 - Gender
 - Danny Lyon, *John Lewis and Colleagues, Prayer Demonstration at a Segregated Swimming Pool, Cairo, Illinois, 1962* - Civil Rights and Segregation
 - Chris Jordan, *Midway*, 2013 - Pollution and the Environment
- Art works to make meaning of social phenomena
 - It places abstract or disconnected things and ideas into human terms

Art as a form of social action

- Art as activism
 - Large provocative events to intimate, small-group performances, urban renewal projects, street art, disruptive interventions in civic and corporate environments
 - Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981-1989

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- JR, *Women Are Heroes, Brazil, 2008-2009*
- Hyuro, *O Que Fica / What Remains, 2018*
- Escif, *Fashion Victims, 2022*
- Teaching art has been reframed as a form of social art action
- Social activist public art is deeply influenced by the civil rights and feminist movements of the 60s and 70s.
 - Art that engages audiences via active participation which allows for the learning of social ideas and issues [68]
 - Danny Lyon, *John Lewis and Colleagues, Prayer Demonstration at a Segregated Swimming Pool, Cairo, Illinois, 1962* - Civil Rights and Segregation
- Art and anthropology both use appropriation in their work [69]
 - *Appropriation* - taking forms/symbols from another culture for one's own purposes
 - Schneider argues appropriation is acceptable because it is a creative method of understanding a culture
 - *It is also a traditional learning strategy in art education
- Share the use of a field study book (sketchbook or research workbook) [69]

Art as a Critique of the Social Sciences

- Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *America's Most Unwanted, 1994* [70]
 - Critiques premise that social science can actually determine or measure something as complex as social tastes or norms
 - It generates banal and meaningless insignificant generalizations from large populations data
 - Questions asked by sociologists determine the results (leading questions)
- Michael Arcega, *El Conquistadork, 2011* [72]
 - Satirizes the social sciences', particularly anthropology's, way of exoticizing other cultures and fitting them into the standards of Western society

Discussion Questions

When is a time in your life you have applied the methods of a sociologist (surveys/polls, data analysis, experimentation, or field work or ethnography) to better understand others? [60]

Can you remember a time when you taught or were taught art through appropriation? Was it a positive or negative experience and why do you think the lesson was successful or unsuccessful? [69]