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An Introduction to Comparative Study of the Arts, as a Research Field in Art Studies

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Abstract

Comparative study of the arts, as a research field, has received notable attention from students and researchers in various artistic disciplines, and accordingly, a large portion of artistic research programs in the shape of academic papers, theses, and books. Due to this fact, it would be necessary to study the nature and quality of comparative epistemology and to research about indispensability and history of comparative sciences, and especially comparative science in the art field. In spite of these facts, the quality and history of applying this kind of academic research in artistic ground has not been sufficiently studied yet. This paper plans to help filling the bibliographic gap, to introduce and explain this kind of academic research, as one of the multiple forms of reading and surveying the art works, and simultaneously to depict the various reasons of its necessity in today's world of artistic investigations. To achieve these goals, we first started with the "comparative epistemology" and its differences with the so-called "scientific epistemology", that has been used in classical human sciences for a long time. The epistemology of classical human sciences, along with natural sciences, relies on hierarchical categories, those begin with most basic and general genera, continue with inferior existential species, and eventually end at most trivial and specific phenomena. In contrast, comparative epistemology seeks to analogize and compare various arenas and study them horizontally, rather than studying a single subject in a detail oriented manner. This specificity would open up newborn horizons for research programs. Thus we must see comparative sciences, in different fields of comparative sociology, comparative history, comparative philosophy, comparative literature, and comparative study of arts, as a vast research area that possesses great comprehensiveness and inclusion, and has the ability to go far beyond the local and temporal limits. In fact consolidation and blossoming of comparative sciences is powerfully related to general changes that affect the world biome, especially in last decades. "Globalizing world", the phrase that symbolizes these changes, had an important role in the rise and confirmation of comparative studies, due to increasing intercultural relationships, those fill the cultural spaces among societies. But in globalizing world also we can see increasingly negative effects on individual and social identities, owing to internet network communications, those decay the continuity of human subject and yield psychic anxieties; surrounding cultural, and even physical, environments; decline of metanarrative beliefs; and gradually fall of reinforcing social concepts, such as social class, nationality, and ethnicity. This paper proposes that comparative studies can somehow result in a better and more thorough understanding of unique cultural and artistic social identities, during various systematic comparisons among societies. In this text we have benefited from inspiring ideas and plots of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "A Thousand Plateaus", in describing the epistemologic quality of comparative sciences; Marshall McLuhan's concept of "the global village", in explaining the situation of globalized world; and Fredric Jameson's thoughts on criticizing the inevitable outcomes of globalization, in "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism".

Keywords: Comparative study of the arts, Necessity, Epistemology, Globalization.