



6.3 Legitimization: Cultural mediation as a matter of fiscal responsibility

The fiscal responsibility argument insists that cultural mediation be offered in order to expand the audiences for cultural products. The legitimacy of elite art and culture is at the heart of this argument. It assumes that only the broadest, most heterogeneous audiences can justify the use of tax revenues to finance art institutions, lest all taxpayers be burdened in order to support the interests of just a few. This argument goes back to the 1960s. The familiar slogan “culture for everyone”, which is often associated with this strategy of legitimization, comes from an eponymous book published in 1979 by Hilmar Hoffman, then head of Frankfurt’s department of cultural affairs. However, although the need for accessibility of high culture was an important component in Hoffman’s thinking, he was calling for more than that: he wanted to expand the spectrum of cultural achievements to include the practices and products of culture from rural and working class milieus, such as pigeon-breeding for example. Hoffman proposed that in order to increase cultural participation, such achievements should be supported and disseminated, just as the programmes of cultural institutions visited more by higher-earning groups with more formal education were. His idea was to break down, or at least call into question the boundary between “high” and “popular” (Hoffmann 1979).

One objection raised by critics of the audience expansion legitimization is that the insistence on quantitatively demonstrable equity of distribution is itself unjustified since even those people who do not actively take in cultural offerings profit from the arts as an elementary and indispensable part of society. No one, for instance, questions the legitimacy of public funding for highly sophisticated medical technologies by arguing that they will benefit only a few. In this sense, the arts enjoy a special status, as do science and technology. The argument that one should not distinguish between high and popular culture and should promote the consumption of culture according to individual interests and tastes is countered by the claim that that approach would mean that the public would no longer be challenged by ambitious forms and contents and offerings would change to accommodate the tastes imputed to the majority in a sort of anticipatory conformance.