



6.8 Objections to cultural mediation and its promotion

The points of criticism against the legitimizations of cultural mediation depicted in the preceding sections are essentially aimed at improving the practices of cultural mediation rather than at doing away with it entirely. However, arguments against cultural mediation as such and its promotion per se have been raised. Part of these arguments relate to various levels of the relationship between cultural mediation and production. Opponents of the former point out that the policymaker's increased emphasis on funding cultural mediation is not automatically coupled with an increase of available funds and thus often entails a redistribution of existing resources. Thus, prioritizing cultural mediation can result in cuts in funding which previously supported the production of culture. Many are aware of the UK policy which makes public funding contingent on the existence of extensive cultural mediation programmes. Its critics see this as an attack on artistic freedom and the paternalistic treatment of institutions. There are also those who hold the view that cultural mediation always entails a dilution, simplification or infantilization of cultural work. In their eyes, the pedagogic dimension that is key to cultural mediation cannot be combined with the arts, which they consider to be incompatible with any form of didactic preparation, explanation or pedagogic analysis.

The charge of popularism is wielded by people and organizations concerned that artistic quality and the multiplicity of meaning inherent to art might suffer in connection with what they see as a "boom of cultural mediation" – primarily in cases where a focus on cultural mediation is coupled with a desire to develop larger, more broadly-based audiences. In this context, some ask whether intensifying the cultural mediation on a production might actually harm its content – in the sense of putting the cart before the horse, an "anticipatory obedience" on the production side, which might tend toward reduced complexity and greater digestibility before the fact.

Another view hostile to cultural mediation focuses on the relationship between institutions and their audiences. The chief objection here is that cultural mediation programmes are paternalistic attempts to prevent people from thinking for themselves by persuading them what art they should like and what culture they should consume. This perspectives view – and correctly so – art and culture as being produced primarily for an audience of people who already have an interest in it.