



Artistic work intermediaries as value producers. Agents, managers, *tourneurs* and the acquisition of symbolic capital in popular music[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to increase our understanding of cultural intermediaries, their activities and the way they set up the relationship between the production and consumption of symbolic goods, with a specific focus on *intermediaries of artistic work*. Among them, in France, agents, *tourneurs* and managers are intermediaries of the music labour market who aim to develop artists' career. What role do these underestimated yet more and more numerous intermediaries play in achieving pop artists' recognition? Statistical data show a strong relation between the amount of symbolic capital of artists and having at least one of these intermediaries work for them. In order to analyse *how* they can help further the artist's access to recognition, I develop a specific use of the concept of symbolic capital that allows a better understanding of social mechanisms of value production. The analysis of qualitative data discloses the various resources and strategies intermediaries use in the artists' acquisition of symbolic capital. They do promotional work, but also take calculated risks to how to place their artists in the market, and constantly work on their social network to create opportunities.

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1. Introduction

Biographies of famous rock stars often depict their manager as a key figure in granting them access to consecration – as Tom Parker with Elvis Presley, Peter Grant with Led Zeppelin or Paul McGuinness with U2. Beyond these success stories, and the pompous depiction of managers as “star makers”, one may wonder the extent to which the work of these cultural intermediaries (agents, *tourneurs* and personal managers) opens the path to fame. *How* do these intermediaries work behind the scenes to achieve the artist's recognition? And in order to do so, what resources, and which strategies do they need to exert?

This study of intermediaries' role in the process of value construction aims to contribute to three current issues of the sociology of arts and culture. The first lies in a better understanding of cultural intermediaries, their activities and the way they set up the relationship between the production and consumption of symbolic goods (Negus, 2002; Wright, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Maguire & Matthews, 2010). I will first go over some of the fundamental studies on the subject matter,

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then offer a broad perspective through a definition and functional typology. This will set the stage for the cultural intermediaries I focus on (agents, *tourneurs* and managers), and help situate them amidst the division of intermediation labour, in-between cultural production and consumption. A more precise review of these *intermediaries of artistic work* (Lizé et al., 2011) and their function alongside musicians will then show the relative neglect they are met with in social science (Section 2). I will present the methodology and data (Section 3) and then I will delve more precisely into the role these intermediaries assume and its evolution over recent years, their socio-demographic characteristics, and the social resources they resort to in their professional activities (Section 4).

Examine precisely the role of the artistic work intermediaries I focus on in the artist access to recognition also aims to contribute to another central question of sociology of the arts: the process of value production of artwork and artists. More broadly, I seek to deepen the understanding of the workings of the economy of symbolic goods (Bourdieu, 1980) in a time when the music field and the music trade have seen rapid transformations (Scott, 2012; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Hracs, 2015; Thomson, 2013). In Section 5, I will highlight the statistical correlation between artists' symbolic capital and the involvement of agents, managers and/or *tourneurs* (show entrepreneurs who set up, manage and sell the tours of an artist or a band). In Section 6, I will then seek to understand *how* these intermediaries can help further the artist's access to recognition. I will show that their involvement in the production of symbolic value, beyond the promotional aspects of their work, requires a set of activities and strategies playing upon both the temporality and the complexity of the economy of musical goods.

Exploring the activities of these intermediaries allows me to contribute to a third issue: the question of which appropriate conceptual tools are required in order to grasp how symbolic and economic values take form and are prioritised within the art world. For that topic, I will rely on the notions of “specific capital” and “symbolic capital”. I will argue the higher relevance of the latter to understand the production of value, over notions such as fame, celebrity or reputation. I will introduce the heuristic features of these concepts and go back to the meaning Bourdieu attached to them, in order to introduce a singular use of the concept of symbolic capital. Paired with the concept of “specific capital”, symbolic capital provides a mean to explore further the mechanics of the creation of symbolic value, and as a correlate, the classification of artists and artworks (Sections 2 and 6).

2. Division of intermediation labour and value production

The substantial role of brokerage functions in producing and distributing cultural goods has long been underlined, especially by research associated with the production of culture perspective (Hirsch, 1972; Peterson & Berger, 1971; DiMaggio, 1977). However during the last fifteen years, work on intermediation in cultural fields has significantly developed. As shown by Maguire and Matthews (2010), most studies refer to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of “cultural intermediary” as introduced in *Distinction* (1984). Throughout this work, the notion “cultural intermediary” defines several types of professionals involved in producing and circulating symbolic goods and services. Understanding that intermediaries owe their dispositions and lifestyle to their trajectories and social positions among the “new petite bourgeoisie” is still relevant today in order to make sense of their actions. However, *Distinction* is far from providing an analysis of their role in the actual relationship between production and consumption. Bourdieu's article “Production of belief” (1980) holds more on this matter. Without yet referring to the notion of cultural intermediary, it does empirically consider the practices and structured spaces in which some intermediaries operate – gallery owners, theatres, theatre critics and publishers. Using field theory, Bourdieu highlights their role as conveyors of correspondences between the spaces of production and consumption as a result of structural homologies. Being subject themselves to these homologies, they are called into this role as intermediaries. Bourdieu thus sheds light on the collective mechanics by which intermediaries grow the symbolic and material value of artworks. He also shows how the social production of belief in artistic value represents the core activity of these cultural intermediaries.

As the role of intermediation has grown throughout the art world (Caves, 2000), a variety of intermediaries have been studied, sometimes under the names of gatekeepers, brokers or prescribers. The notion of cultural intermediary gained a number of empirical illustrations yet no consensus arose in relation to its meaning nor to the functions attached to it (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Cultural intermediaries can be defined as the professionals and institutions in charge of several functions (selecting, distributing, promoting, prescribing etc.) between the stage of artistic creation and its consumption by the audience, some of them intervening at one or the other end of the process. However, as intermediaries do not constitute a homogenous group, neither in terms of functions, nor in terms of social characteristics (Negus, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2006), this definition needs to be completed in order to contextualise their activity in the division of intermediation labour. For this purpose, I offer a typology of intermediaries which provides a mean to identify their position among the functional articulations taking place between cultural creation and consumption.¹ Starting with the latter, we can distinguish:

- *Mediators*, guiding the audience through its relationship with the artworks (booksellers, museum workers, radio hosts . . .)
- *Appraisers-prescribers* (critics, experts, members of juries . . .)
- *Management staff of cultural institutions* (museum directors, radio programmers . . .).

¹ See also Janssen and Verboord (2015) who provide a slightly differ but in many ways also comparable overview of what they call mediators.

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