

INFILTRATIVE ISOMORPHISM: JAZZ VS. THE GATEKEEPERS OF U.S. HIGH CULTURE, 1930-1980

In spite of the well-known role intermediaries play in bringing about substantial cultural change, sociological research on the rise of jazz to art music status has focused almost exclusively on the agency of musicians. This paper is part of an effort to fill that lacuna. Examining the activities of four distinct groups of intermediaries with high but not identical levels of economic, cultural, and racial capital from the 1940s to the 1980s, I seek to identify the factors that elevate cultural entrepreneurs' ability to convert, defeat, or sidestep the gatekeepers of legitimate high culture. My findings indicate that the formation of a diverse institutional support network that is nevertheless firmly anchored in a carefully-chosen small place is the best overall approach. This is because the combination of high interaction density and cascading institutional growth that results from those circumstances converts mimetic isomorphism, the most common institutional form of cultural advocacy, from a blind defensive strategy to an effective offensive one. This "infiltrative" form of mimetic isomorphism partially incapacitates gatekeepers by surrounding them with friendly actors who nevertheless support excluded practices and who may eventually succeed the gatekeepers.