5 HOW MIDDLE-CLASS KIDS *WANT* WORKING-CLASS JOBS

The New York City Bar and Wine Show takes place every June at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, on the Far West Side of Manhattan. A trade event for bars, restaurants, and nightclubs, the Bar and Wine Show has exhibitors who promote products like lighting, sound, and security systems; absinthe fountains; plastic trays with special holders for shots; and, of course, wine and liquor. Booze brands hire women models to wear skimpy clothing and pass out free samples (in plastic trays with special holders for shots) in front of their booths. A party bus company parks its product in the back; the pounding bass can be felt from a hundred feet away. Flair bartenders compete.

Members of New York City's cocktail community have been working at the event over the past few years. They lead seminars, make cocktails for brands, and, quite simply, promote themselves. The United States Bartenders' Guild (USBG) has its own booth and small space for demonstrations. At the 2010 show, Maxwell, a young up-and-coming bartender at Jack the Horse Tavern and a consultant, stands behind a makeshift bar and prepares a drink, while Jonathan, the USBG's president and the president of his own consulting group The Cocktail Guru, stands to the side and narrates the steps and ingredients. He makes sure to name the products of their sponsors (Tuthilltown's Four Grain Bourbon, in this case). Convention visitors—industry folks and consumers alike—sit in rows of folding chairs. If they wait long enough, they can sample the cocktail Maxwell's making.

I stand in the back and watch. Through the stream of visitors to my right I see Hal walking toward me, wearing a shirt, tie, vest, and jeans, and carrying his brown leather bartender utility bag, designed by famed bartender

FIGURE 10. Jonathan and Maxwell giving a cocktail demonstration at the Bar and Wine Show, with Hal looking on. Photo by the author.

Jim Meehan.[1] Hal tells me he just finished taking the USBG's Advanced Bartender exam, on classic and modern cocktails and spirits, as part of its Master Accreditation Program. He feels confident in his performance.

Hal has come a long way since I first met him, the previous September, at a bartender competition sponsored by Barenjager Honey Liqueur. He has been progressing deeper and deeper into the craft cocktail world. Originally from Long Island, Hal started working for a finance company in their technology department after graduating from college. In 2005 Hal took a date to the Flatiron Lounge. "I don't know who I met, but I fell in love with cocktails," he says about the experience. "I grew up drinking Mudslides, Long Island Iced Teas, and shitty beer." The drinks he had that night were unlike anything he had ever tasted before.

Afterward, Hal started looking up other cocktail bars on the Internet and visiting them. He also gradually built a home bar, increased his cocktail knowledge, and honed his drink-making skills. He started to personally know bartenders around the city. After learning so much about bars, cocktails, and

the New York scene, Hal began regularly recommending places for his friends to check out and drinks they should try. They encouraged him to publicize his reviews. In early 2009 he started a blog about his visits and home experiments. All of a sudden, liquor companies began to contact him and send him their products to review. Then they started asking him to create new cocktails using their products. Going out, mingling and networking with bartenders and his fellow bloggers, and writing about his adventures became his passion, but his tech job paid the bills.

"I'm working on a gin series," Hal told me the December after I met him, at a holiday event. "A bunch of [gin brands] sent me their products so I could write about them. Right now I'm researching them at Greg Boehm's and tasting them.[2] I'll write it all up soon. I'd like to do this to the point where I can quit my day job, but I can't do that yet."

In early 2010 Hal signed up for the one-day BAR ("Beverage Alcohol Resource") Smarts Program, which also has an exam with a tasting component. I saw Hal at an event the night before the program. Back then, he was unconfident. "A few of us had a study session last night. I'm nervous about the recipes because you have to get the proportions correct. I came at cocktails as a geek tasting at bars. I know them based on flavor, not based on classic recipes or making them." Instead of using a shortcut by learning cocktail categories, which tend to have similar proportions of ingredients, as most bartenders and other participants in the program were doing, Hal crammed by memorizing dozens of recipes. He still passed the exam.

The following spring I talked with Hal outside a service entrance to the main branch of the New York Public Library, the site of the annual Manhattan Cocktail Classic's inaugural gala, kicking off this industry event. We were both working at the gala—essentially a huge party with dozens of sponsored booths with bartenders mixing batched ingredients, food by celebrity chefs, and DJs blasting club music, all taking place in one of the city's most serene indoor settings. In the few months before the gala, Hal started working with Jonathan's consulting group, The Cocktail Guru, at various events, and he made drinks with him that night. He told me he got accepted into the BAR's five-day program, a far more intensive program run by BAR's master bartenders. He would also participate in the bartender apprentice program at the upcoming Tales of the Cocktail. I congratulated him, and reminded him that the apprentice program is hell. Apprentices equip the seminars with the ingredients to make the featured cocktails, which relate to the seminar topic

and contain an ingredient of whichever brand sponsors it. They run around the event all day, squeeze juice, prep garnishes, and batch drinks. They get sticky and tired, like working back-to-back shifts behind the bar.

"I know," he said. "They've told me. I don't care, I need to learn how to bartend faster. Although, I wonder what doing the BAR would do for me. I mean, what does it actually mean for me getting a job?"

It's an open question Hal asks himself. I think about his progress as we stand next to each other at the Bar and Wine Show. After having just taken yet another certification that tells people he knows his spirits and cocktail recipes and how to make them, preparing for a fourth one, and gearing up for a week of scrambling around the Hotel Monteleone and French Quarter with buckets of batched cocktails and ice, Hal is closer than ever to reaching his goal. In a little over a year he went from being a cocktail enthusiast, to getting the attention of corporate brands with his blog, to gaining entrée and acclimating to the culture of the cocktail world through its accreditation programs, to working events, all for the purpose of one day building up to working as a bartender.

"I love this shit," he says while gazing around the convention center at nothing and no one in particular.

"What do you love about it?"

"Everything."

I nod my head. A few minutes later, he takes the stage and demos cocktails.

For young urbanites with hip tastes, these workplaces exude cool. To them, visiting the hidden bar for craft cocktails and unique small-batch spirits, the lodge-like masculine barbershop for a classic-looking haircut and an old-fashioned shave, and the local butcher for a rare cut of locally raised meat are fundamental to life in the city. People with certain sensibilities toward what they buy and do for leisure, with a certain level of awareness and desire for quality in how goods get made and tasks get done, and with a certain amount of money to spend on them seek out these new urban luxuries among the city's many other options. They represent fun, cool, and urbane alternatives to the more popular sports bars and loud nightclubs, branded booze, cheap and quick haircuts, and shrink-wrapped meat on Styrofoam trays. Surely working at these places must also be cool.

"Cool" jobs hold a unique position in the discussion over what is a "good" or a "bad" job in the new economy.[3] "Cool" jobs, even "bad" ones, possess an

irresistible aura that can either overcome or mask their negative conditions.[4] Certain industries tend to have more of them than others. The cultural industries, for instance, feature star musicians, artists, and fashion designers who give their enterprises a glow of specialness. But even workers in cultural industries such as music, art, and fashion who are not among the popular frontline producers, who work bureaucratic office jobs in the background, still recognize the "institutional charisma"—or the compelling, structurally embedded glamour—in the work they do.[5] Despite the boring work for low (or no) pay and few (if any) benefits, they still feel special by being involved in the collective effort of making culture.[6] The industries of the jobs in this book—nightlife, alcohol, grooming and style, and food—are some of the hippest and most popular in today's cities, playing key roles in composing their cultural zeitgeist.[7] Nightspots, style, and fine dining have represented glamorous city life for a long time. Only recently, however, have the manual laborers in these industries shared some of the spotlight with the city's celebrities and elites, and become unique elites of their own.[8]

Consumers regularly tell these workers their jobs must be cool because they get to be creative and have fun. They see with their own eyes how these workers get to make and provide special but practical items and services for people. They see the enjoyment they have in their jobs. And they read how people in lifestyle and social media portray them as rock stars in their fields, using such terms as "startenders," "bar chefs," "mixologists," "master distillers," and "hipster" barbers and butchers. In the elevation of these manual labor jobs to a new elite status, the coolness factor plays a key role. People, then, *must* pursue them as careers because they seem cool to do.

The term "hipster" permeates media coverage and popular thinking on these occupations. Or, most importantly, the contemporary hipster's chief trait does: irony.[9] As the thinking goes, hipsters treat everything as a big joke. For instance, while usually well-educated and middle-class, hipsters identify with symbols of working-class culture, like cheap beer and trucker hats, to both show off "coolness" and play intragroup status games. The term is usually used pejoratively: the subcultural figure of the hipster acts insincerely, and is inauthentic.[10] Given this understanding, for some the thought of a college-educated person deciding to take a traditionally working-class job, dress old-timey, and play the part of a manual laborer is the epitome of hipster culture.

Or perhaps nostalgia contributes to the coolness of these workers and workplaces. The themes and motifs of these workplaces and brands, as well

as the work practices and the appearances of some of the workers, all evoke feelings of a lost, better, and sorely missed Americana.[11] Speakeasies and classic hotel bars, rum-running during Prohibition, wooden hunting lodges with classic barber chairs, and slabs of meat sitting on a table. Hand-squeezing juices, pot stills, straight razors, breaking down whole animals. Vests and arm garters, chain mail and scabbards. Looking at each of these aspects through a lens of nostalgia takes them out of their historical time periods and holds them up as superior to their contemporary versions.[12] Store-bought steak on the shrink-wrapped Styrofoam tray is simply not as good as the steak the knowledgeable butcher just freshly cut from the hanging side of beef, as they did in the old days, for instance. These new elite workers are the ones bringing this lost world back.

But people rarely pursue these jobs as careers simply because they thought it would be cool to do. And while the romantic past plays a role in the motifs and themes of their workplaces, and sometimes in the cultures behind the work they do, even fewer people pursue these jobs for the purpose of reviving a lost culture. Most often the coolness and hipness of the work, the job's image, and the historical references do not factor into their initial choice to pursue it. Nor do they consider the imagery the essence or crux of the work they do, while the hipster's trait of irony has no role in their choices or place in either their work lives or professional identities.

The common social mechanisms behind why people pursue jobs in the fields and industries they do—social status and prestige, family influence, educational sorting processes—also do not neatly apply to them.[13] Some scholars have argued that middle-class youth get "bad" jobs, such as in retail, because of the relationship between identity and consumption, or because they identify with the brand of the store and get to spend time with their friends and "cool" co-workers.[14] These explanations do not apply to the workers in this book. How, then, do these workers come to pursue these jobs as careers, and how do they not experience them as downward social mobility?

These workers get cool jobs, but not because they're cool or they want to be cool. For them, getting one of these jobs is the result of a search for meaning in work, to get recognized (by both consumers and people in their occupational community) for what they do, and for an occupation to anchor their lives and provide them with purpose.[15] It is also a signal of their own privileged freedom to choose the career they wish, and a result of their ability to see and tap into the cultural streams of today's city. These specific occupations

are far more than lifestyle jobs, and are not experienced by these workers as "bad."[16] The cultural repertoires these occupations require their workers to perform (the technical skills based on a sense of craft and the ability to understand and communicate a set of specialized knowledge) accomplish both goals of providing meaning and allowing workers to not experience them as downward social mobility. When these workers decide to pursue their job as a career, they understand it to be like a calling, or a vocation.[17]

There are several paths they take to reach this point. Just as many chefs "stumble into" their jobs, in some cases these workers discover it after a period of drift among one to several jobs, without a clear idea of what career to pursue.[18] For drifters, a number of factors, such as having mentors and becoming enmeshed in their community, and discovering the philosophies that undergird these occupations, guide them to the job. Some other workers switch careers, leaving a stable job to enter them. Finally, a select few of these workers do in fact admire the cool cultures or were exposed to the elite versions of these occupations at a young age, which distinguishes them from both drifters and career changers, while for some workers jobs in these workplaces are merely a temporary stop on a much longer career path. These types of paths are not mutually exclusive; workers often follow multiple paths to reach their career goal. Once they find their calling, these workers then work to create some kind of career, the likes of which these industries have not seen before.

The Drifter

On a slow Monday night Joaquin and I chat as I sit at the bar at Death & Co., nursing a Fancy Free (bourbon, maraschino liqueur, orange and Angostura bitters). Two men in their late twenties enter, pause to soak in their new surroundings, and slowly sit down at the bar. As Joaquin greets them and hands them menus, one says, "I hear there's some mixology here."

Joaquin smirks and nods, his eyes looking downward. He hears comments like this one often, and replies with a version of his stock response. "We're bartenders. This whole mixology thing is a horrible name. They should have come up with a name for people that don't know what they're doing and use 'bartender' for those that do. There's nobility in being called a bartender; there's honor there. We don't have to be called bar chefs."

The paths to a career in these jobs are rarely straight. The most common path is hardly a path at all, but more of a drift into the job from a variety of starting points, and with varying amounts and forms of guidance. Drifters hold a unique position in the new economy. They are typically college graduates, but working in the knowledge economy's lower levels, such as in an entry-level job, or they're outside it entirely and struggling to find work. Joaquin's path to calling himself a bartender, not the sexier "mixologist" or "bar chef," started when he was in college.

"I was the uber regular at my neighborhood bar in Boston, a little college neighborhood bar called the White Horse. Kind of college-y, Irish-y, neighborhood-y. And I had a standing job offer from them for a long time because I spent so much time there. So one day I took them up on it, they started me at the door for about a year, a little over a year, got bumped up to barback, barbacked for a long time, and then started bartending.*

"I had the incredible luck of having a lot of incredible bartenders at that place. Guys that may not have been good cocktail bartenders, but guys that were fast, guys that were efficient, guys that really understood the dynamic between regulars and the bar, and the customers, that knew how to take care of you. They knew how to make you feel welcome and were just *really* wonderful bartenders in that respect. Their sense of hospitality was just incredible. Ultimately, I felt like the places that I was working at were jobs, but they weren't careers."

Of the four occupations, cocktail bartenders and barbers are most likely to have worked in their industry in a more typical workplace—such as at neighborhood bars and barbershops, hair salons, and places that profited from volume—and in a more typical role. Many cocktail bartenders started out by bartending in college, or at nightspots or for catering companies upon moving to New York City to support hopeful singing, music, or acting careers. They worked behind the bar and didn't give much thought to the quality or origins of what they were serving. Joaquin pulled pints, poured shots, and opened bottles at his Irish-y, dive-y bar in Boston. At the time the lack of cocktail knowledge and skill of the White Horse's bartenders never occurred to him. But Joaquin does not dismiss his experience there. From his co-workers he learned the most important aspect of being a bartender—namely, the hospitality. He learned the universal tasks of bartenders: serve people and tend the

* A barback is like a busboy in bars.

bar. The cool knowledge and culture of making exquisite cocktails come later in one's path and are less important, as cocktail bartenders assert.

Like many young people Joaquin came to New York City after college with a vague idea of what he would do for work. It was early 2005 and he was 27 years old. At the very least he figured he could always bartend. After some difficulty he eventually landed a job at a tiny Italian restaurant in TriBeCa while he looked for office jobs.

"I thought, alright, I can do that and then in the meanwhile I'll see if there is anything else that I can pursue that might be more respectable or might make the family happier. So I was trying to apply for like grant writer positions for nonprofits. I was trying to, you know, use that English degree for something. But [I lacked] relevant experience. You spend eight hours a day writing cover letters and sending out resumes and not hearing anything back."

Dejected by his lack of progress, Joaquin hopped from bar to bar and restaurant to restaurant, and discovered pleasure in hospitality. Once a denizen of Irish bars and dives, he started going to the nicer places in the city he heard about through service staff circles and the media. He read in *Food & Wine* magazine about the opening of Pegu Club, a cocktail bar in SoHo owned by famed bartender Audrey Saunders, where he had an epiphany of sorts.

"So I remember going to Pegu for the first time and just getting a Manhattan, you know, with all of the pomp and circumstance that attends table service at Pegu. You get it down, you've got the little thing with the bottles and the droppers.* I just remember going in there going, 'Whoa, I don't think I've ever had a Manhattan like this before.' I remember thinking, 'OK, there is a lot I have left to learn,' and thinking, 'OK, I don't even know what this Rittenhouse [Rye] is, I should go find out.' And I realized I could buy a bottle of Rittenhouse for $12 and I had just been charged $14 for that cocktail. But it was such a good cocktail I remember not feeling like I had gotten ripped off. It was just so good. I was like, 'Wow, I couldn't have made that with this.' I never would have looked at this unassuming $12 bottle of booze and thought I could do something so delicious with it and just being so humbled by this. I was like, 'Wow, I have a lot left to do here.' I really just kept trying to work toward that in my own way. That first trip to Pegu was definitely one of those eye-opening experiences."

* Pegu Club is known for providing customers with a small condiment tray of bitters and juices in small bottles so they can adjust the flavors of their drinks themselves.

Over the next two years Joaquin gained a lot of bartending and service experience in the city and educated himself more on spirits and cocktails. He ran the bar program at a short-lived South American restaurant, where he used fresh juices, egg whites, and pisco. But bartenders prepare drinks that reflect the culture of their bars, and Joaquin realized he would only be able to pursue bartending as a career if he worked in a place that wanted to make craft cocktails. After eight years in the service industry he craved the cultural knowledge and skill to partner with the sense of hospitality that he had learned at the White Horse and had been inadvertently cultivating since then. He applied for a job at a new high-profile cocktail bar he saw advertised on Craigslist. He got hired for the opening staff at Death & Co. based on his personality. The knowledge and skills came later.

"It wasn't until I landed at Death & Co., and even within a year or two of being at Death & Co., that things really started to pick up a lot of steam. That was when my family first started realizing, 'OK, this is maybe not the dead end we had been assuming. Maybe you're not wasting your time.' At that point I could really talk to them much more intelligently about what I was learning, who I was meeting, why this was important, all of those things."

Like many of the workers with prior experience in their industry, Joaquin distinguishes between the jobs he had then and the career he has now. The former did not quite have all the elements he was looking for in the latter. I ask him: "Do you think you would have been as satisfied bartending if you were at a place that focused more just on the service, let's say, and didn't concern itself so much with the quality of the drinks that were being served? Would it have felt the same? Would it have felt like, 'This is my career now?'"

"I don't think it would have. I think what I loved so much about what Death & Co. showed me had less to do with the fact that it's so important what's in the drink as much as it is my job to understand what everything behind me [on the backbar] is. It is my job to have an answer for why I'm doing everything. I think it had less to do with the fact that we're making sure we count how many drops of this [bitters] we are putting in this [cocktail]. But as much as we are like, well, you know, 'I don't have the whiskey brand that you just asked for, but I know what that whiskey brand is, I know what its mash bill is, and I know which of the forty-seven American whiskeys I have behind me has a similar mash bill, and I can talk to you about why you should want this one instead and why I'm offering this to you instead of that.' And I think it had less to do with geeking out [and making the] perfect drink, and

had more to do with, this is a place that said you have to know what all of this stuff is because that is your job. I think that is what I liked about it. I liked the fact that there was that intellectual part of it that you had to understand what those things were."

Joaquin moved to New York City with an English degree, a knack for service, and some bartending experience. While drifting from service job to service job to pay the bills and not having luck in the grant-writing field, he fortuitously found a world that could satisfy his search for meaningful work. Obviously not everyone with his background decides to forego searching for more traditional "good" jobs to pursue a career in beverage service. But his background in bartending and his enjoyment of service certainly guided him toward it. Like other workers who drifted into pursuing these jobs as a career, he discovered a passion within himself for bartending, provided it combined service with skill and knowledge (that is, cultural repertoires).

Learning Environments

Scholars have used the concept of "communities of practice" to refer to those informal communities in which people learn.[19] Communities of practice signify an ongoing learning process in which members of a group exchange ideas and learn from one another on conscious and unconscious levels. People learn simply by interacting with each other. Each of these workplaces represents communities of practice by design. Rather than only retail, service, and manufacturing businesses, they foster meaningful interactions between employees, which serve as learning exchanges.

Sometimes learning takes place formally, between a mentor and a novice. In most cases, mentors are senior workers with more experience. Once a newcomer realizes what they want to do and put themselves in a position to do it, a one-on-one mentoring relationship can seal the deal.

Jason is a 34-year-old barber whose body is nearly completely covered in tattoos. He regularly chats with his clients about ink-work, and other barbers often point to his slick undercut hairstyle when making suggestions for them. Jason worked in construction for many years in Massachusetts, before moving to New York City to live with his girlfriend in 2007.

"I was in construction and just wasn't feeling it anymore. Especially in New York, it's a little depressing. I grew up in the country in Massachusetts, and it's kind of what everybody does out there, doing construction. I had a

car, and I could store my tools. Here is like a different ballgame. It's like a rush job, you hardly have time to do anything. And I had to lug my tools on my back.

"So I did that for three years here. And this past year I've been doing the barbering. It's kind of like the same thing, you know? A lot of shit-talking, it's got that kind of tattoo shop kind of vibe to it, too. Dudes come in to hang out, and obviously I like that. There's no way I'm a tattooer—I can't draw. I like the whole gentlemen's club kind of thing. I don't know, I was just like walking by a barber school, and I was like, 'That's what I'll do.'"

But Jason did not want to go to barber school. He wanted to learn how to cut hair in the comfortable setting of the barbershop. Few barbershops will take the time to train strangers who are complete novices. A friend of his told Jason about Freemans and he heard they were hiring.

"I feel like I lucked out working for these guys. I didn't work anywhere else, I didn't even go to barber school.[20] They taught me how to cut hair. I just walked in here one day and I saw they were hiring, and it was actually for the front, selling clothes. And then I was talking with Van [the head barber], like, 'Do you guys do apprenticeships, or hire guys to sweep the floor?' He was like, 'Not right now, but eventually. Just make yourself known around here.' So I was like so annoyed. I was coming here all the time, and one day they offered me a job."

"You were coming here just to hang out?" I ask.

"[Mm-hmm.] Asking questions, watching, sort of like an apprenticeship, but not really, not really on the books. I walked in one day and Van was like, 'You want a job?' I was like, 'Of course!'"

Wanting to train people to cut hair "right," Freemans often has apprentices. After hanging out and showing he was both serious about learning and easy to get along with socially, Jason became one at the shop. He got paid to work the front desk as a receptionist. The receptionist's job is to greet clients, manage the day's schedule, sell products, handle payments, and answer the phone. They also sweep up hair from the floor, refold aprons, run errands for the barbers, and make sure the barber stations have what they need, like hot towels and razor blades. These tasks occupied most of Jason's time during the day. But in the mornings and evenings, when the shop was quiet, he would give free haircuts to friends and people he found on the Internet. He learned from watching and chatting with everyone in the shop, but Van became his mentor. "You just go for it. I couldn't comb hair into my fingers. But now, it's

like I could do it with my eyes closed. But I literally could not comb hair into my fingers, it was like so embarrassing. Van would just kind of take over and then once I figured out how to do shit, he would just touch everything up at the end, like show me what I'm doing wrong, show me what I'm doing right."

Jason had the right connection to hear about Freemans (a friend), the right look to get hired as a receptionist (that is, tattoos, clothing style), and the right attitude to become an apprentice barber.[21] He worked hard to learn the craft of barbering. He came in on his days off, came in early and stayed late, and eventually started doing half-price cuts when a full-time barber was out or at lunch. After five-and-a-half months as an apprentice, Freemans offered him a chair. The masculine, homosocial work environment and "gentlemen's club" vibe of the barbershop drew Jason, who was already used to working with his hands, to the idea of barbering. He then found the right cultural environment for his personal style and a mentor to help him learn the skills.

In addition to one-on-one mentors, like Van was to Jason, colleagues in the workplace collectively guide and socialize these workers into the knowledge and skills of the job. For instance, bartenders regularly ask colleagues about a drink they're making, distillers ask others about how they achieved a certain flavor profile in a batch, and barbers and butchers constantly glance at each other's work while they're working, in search of small differences that could yield big rewards. Newcomers learn from being surrounded by more seasoned practitioners and being embedded in the regular activities of the place.

Based on cocktail-making skill and knowledge, Joaquin was not the best candidate for the Death & Co. job. The other bartenders hired had backgrounds at places like Pegu Club and Flatiron Lounge, two well-known cocktail bars. But he knew he would acquire the skill and knowledge he needed for his career pursuit from working alongside them.

"My training had been such that the guest always mattered so much, so I just basically shut the fuck up and listened to my betters, as it were. Shut the fuck up and listened to Phil and Brian [his more experienced co-workers]. And I learned. 'Why are you reaching for that vermouth? What's the difference between that one and that one? OK, let's taste them. I've never heard of that classic, what is that? OK, let me write that down.' I was a sponge for the first year. It took me forever to even put a drink on the menu. I was terrified to give a recipe to Phil. I knew I was a good bartender, but I didn't have the background that these guys had. I hadn't been trained by Julie [Reiner] or Audrey [Saunders]. I didn't know Sasha [Petraske].[22] I didn't know these people.

So I shut the fuck up. Shut up and work. Be glad you're working here, try not to fuck up, smile, be gracious, and be nice. Don't lose any regulars that these guys have brought over from their tenure at any of the other bars. Even if you can't answer the question in the same way, then just write down whatever it is you don't know and study the hell out of it. So that was pretty much the first year or two at Death & Co."

For these workers who drift into the job, the manual labor is glamorous in itself, but only when it combines cultural taste and technical skills, which they learn through practice within a community.

Philosophical Guidance

Other workers have strong feelings for the career path they would like before entering these jobs, but have not worked in these industries. Craft distillers and whole-animal butchers in particular are far less likely to have such experience, which can introduce the path to them earlier in their lives, than bartenders and barbers. Some workers begin on a path to these occupations from having already adopted the philosophy that underpins the work. These particular occupations were but one of several possible job options for putting the philosophy into practice.

Originally from northwest Missouri, Joel joined the U.S. Army for a brief time before attending college. Afterward he became a brewer's apprentice in Kansas City. Around this time he became critical of the modern American system of food production and distribution, such as agribusinesses and supermarkets. Joel's true passion is sustainability and designing sustainable systems. He worked on small farms in California and New York for six years. He shuttled between the latter and apartments in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where he hung out with artists and other creative people. Joel moved upstate with his romantic partner, where he worked on a farm and at a brewpub. Even though he did not have any experience distilling, when he heard about a job opening at Tuthilltown, he decided to take it because of how it could advance his interests. Naturally garrulous, Joel loves explaining the link between craft distilling and small-scale, local agriculture. One morning during a short break, he holds up a bottle of Tuthilltown's Corn Whiskey.

"This is like almost the idealization of moonshine. You're going to see a lot more of this. This is actually exploding. When I started here and they had this product I was like, 'That's cute but . . . OK. You're not going to sell anybody

moonshine.' I was dead wrong. It is exploding. It's really exploding right now. The best bartenders in America are just in love with it. All of a sudden everybody is like 'We're over-sold and we need way more,' so I've put up eight batches. Eight batches of it! We're just going to start cranking it out because they love it, so great. It's really neat. It's a very credible thing and a very cool thing for the market to have. It's one more point of education [for consumers] and again one more thing that points back to the farmer. With this you really taste, you smell it. That smells like corn. I mean, it smells like popcorn, buttered popcorn."

"That really comes through," I say.

"That's really just one more thing that's going to help direct everything that way, to more holistic and sound practices; more genetic diversity [in agriculture] and all those things. It's just going to benefit the farmers directly through us. We're making alcohol, [so] we're going to benefit no matter what. We could make it out of sugar, the lowest available cost to us, and make garbage just like most of the people do, and make profit."

From Joel's perspective, Tuthilltown and other craft distilleries contribute to and help sustain a local economy by buying products they need to distill directly from nearby farmers. Authentic production at a craft distillery, which includes using local products, puts distillers in a direct relationship with farmers. The relationship means distilleries usually get ingredients that are more unique compared to those from large distributors, while farmers reap a financial benefit.

"Farmers are always going to be beholden [to the market]. The farmer is only going to make profit above what he would normally expect—and sometimes not even that—if the market at that point has its price point set higher than what he expected. [But] if he is selling directly to us at the same cost that we're buying it, he's cutting out the middleman.

"It's the exact same idea as a CSA.* Farmers are getting the money upfront. They've got the funding that they need. They're not taking a loan out and they're not waiting for the market to dictate how much it's worth. In eight months that's a horrible lag of time. There's a lot of empathy for the idea of farmers. [But] the fact is that nobody does anything to help them because they're not buying directly from them. And I feel like the only action that can

* CSA stands for "community-supported agriculture." CSAs are programs in which consumers purchase shares from local farmers. Shares entitle them to a certain amount of products like boxes of fruits and vegetables, usually on a weekly basis, while farmers make direct sales to consumers.

really be taken is on the localized level. Like me buying from my local farmers. That's the only thing that's going to matter."

The potential to become a part of and enhance such a system drew Joel to distilling from a background in agriculture. He learned how to distill and refined his palate for spirits over time. Of all the possible outlets for putting his passion for sustainability into practice, he chose distilling. Without this philosophy, it is uncertain, but probably unlikely, he would have become a craft distiller. But distilling is secondary—a mere conduit to achieve a greater purpose. By craft distilling, Joel can challenge the mainstream food system.

Of the four occupations, whole-animal butchers and butcher shop workers are most likely to come to the job in possession of a strong philosophy toward their industry—namely, food. Along with changing the public discourse around food, questioning how it gets made, and turning it into a fixture of popular culture, the foodie movement has inspired people to become part of the industry, as both professionals and amateurs. People come to work at butcher shops—as butchers, counter workers, cooks, and interns—because they already possess a strong affinity for some aspect of the food world. In some cases, meat was not central to their food beliefs or preferences. For some, their concern revolved around sustainable food communities, and the philosophy of new artisanal butcher shops fit the mold.[23] Food and meat in particular at some point became central enough to lead them to pursue a career in the industry, but only in its upper echelons.

"Can you cut jerky without cutting your finger?" Giancarlo asks me one day at the shop. The previous week I had sliced a solid piece off the tip of my right pinkie while learning how to cut bottom round. I ignored a basic rule of butchery (or of knife-work in general): always know where your other hand is.

"I'm a bit nervous," I say, "but I want to try again. That's the only way I'll get better at it."

"Right. Go get a bottom round."

I take out the only bottom round left in the walk-in and bring it back to the cutting room. I am careful to only remove fat from the cut and not any meat. After a few minutes I have a solid pile of fat on the table. Giancarlo walks over to inspect.

"Is this pile trim or trash?"

"Um, both? I haven't separated them yet."

"There's too much meat you're cutting off with the fat. You don't want to waste that meat. Do you know how much grain and grass a cow has to eat to gain one pound?"

I shrug, sensing the rhetorical nature of his question.

"A lot. We want to waste as little as possible. Make sure we only cut fat."

Giancarlo is originally from Pueblo, Colorado, and went to school at UC Boulder, where he eventually got a degree in economics. "It took me a little while to finish. I was a few credits shy because of some courses I forgot to take, and I was sort of tired of school." He got a job managing a medical center in Denver, which he also eventually grew tired of. The push from working a job that provided no meaning for him and the pull of a love for and interest in food and meat led him to make a change.

"When I was younger I always loved making food, and I always loved things that involved food. And the meat portion was always my favorite. I just wanted to know where my food came from. I was curious. When you go to the grocery store and you see all of this stuff in the Styrofoam or you end up watching YouTube videos or documentaries about animals and you see they put those little chips in cow's ears that constantly feed them hormones and stuff like that. It makes you wonder, you know? You don't want to eat that kind of meat. And those animals, they just hang out in their own feces."

His curiosity about food and meat led Giancarlo to quit working at the medical center and get a job at a charcuterie shop. With his interest piqued, he then went extreme: he got a job on the kill floor at a small slaughterhouse.[24] "I didn't eat meat for a month," he says about the experience. While it proved highly informative, Giancarlo didn't want to work at a slaughterhouse for very long. But being there got him interested in butchery. After saving up some money, he moved east to attend a career training and certificate program called "Meat Processing and Food Safety" at SUNY Cobleskill in upstate New York.[25] Along with enhancing his knife skills, the program taught Giancarlo about food safety, from meat temperature to killing bacteria. After finishing he moved down to New York City in summer 2012, where his girlfriend was starting NYU's Food Studies PhD program. He contacted local butcher shops that promoted the meat ethics he espoused and would teach him how to practice butchery. "I wanted to work at a place like a traditional, old-school butcher. Bring in the whole animal, cut it up." Jake offered him a position as a "butcher assistant." As he explains after the fact, Giancarlo wanted to see if he could grow into the job by gradually learning other areas of the industry. He reflects on his path: "I wanted to kind of work my way through. I feel like people in this industry, the service industry, the people that are very successful and end up opening tons of restaurants or tons of whatever, end up starting as the dishwasher."

"Working their way up."

"Yeah, then they're doing prep and they're cutting vegetables. Then they're the prep cook. Then they're on the line, helping them. Then they're a sous chef, then they're executive sous chef, then front of house, manager."

"Right. From the ground up."

"Yeah. And that way you know everything, all the facets. That's kind of what I wanted to do. I wanted to go backward. So I went from making sausage, like dry cured sausage to the slaughterhouse. That's how I wanted to know if I was going to do anything [in butchery]."

Pursuing a job to satisfy such preexisting philosophies as sustainable agriculture and ethical food resembles a focused drift. They guide people without a specific career in mind to pursue these jobs, which they can then turn into a career. But the philosophy guides them in a specific direction. Giancarlo's "dishwasher to owner" model mirrors the legendary "mail room to CEO" business story. It is not completely without precedent in the food world.[26] But among workers in each of these occupations, the story is highly romantic, since it is extremely rare. The vast majority do not start on the bottom rung of their workplace or industry and work their way up, while the support staff of these workplaces—the barbacks at cocktail bars and porters at butcher shops—are usually from minority groups, do not get promoted and enter these new elite jobs, and certainly do not go on to open their own places. Even though he did not start right away as a butcher, Giancarlo started working in the industry at a special charcuterie store, not at the lowest level, and his first job as a butcher was at Dickson's, an elite whole-animal shop, not at a more common supermarket or meatpacking plant. The philosophy that guides these workers to eventually pursue these jobs, such as the philosophy of ethical meat, specifically leads them to pursue their elite versions. The "bottom rung" for aspirants is not as a barback or even as a bartender at a neighborhood bar, a distillery hand, a barber at a high-volume barbershop, or a porter or butcher at a meatpacking facility. Starting low for these workers is still fairly high in status and prestige.

In each example of drifting into the job—gradual self-realization through practice and guidance by mentors and a supportive community, and guidance by philosophy—workers honed the cultural repertoires that characterize these occupations as they went along. Their early personal and work experiences before entering and while within the industry shaped their approach

to their current work. Except in a few cases, they all had at least some college experience to fall back on and no major responsibilities, such as homes or families to take care of. But the unplanned path of drifting into pursuing these low-status occupations as a career is not the only one people take.

Career Changers

Youngstown is a small city in northeastern Ohio, in the heart of the Mahoning Valley, also known as "Steel Valley." It boomed during the height of the steel industry, and its population reached a peak of 170,000 in 1930. Destroyed by the painful decline of manufacturing, Youngstown today symbolizes the collapse of the industrial economy in the Midwestern United States: excessive levels of abandoned property, unemployment, poverty, and crime. Today its population is only 65,000, and shrinking. If they can, young people leave the depressed city for greener pastures.

"I come from a very blue collar area," says Rob in the back of the Blind Barber's cocktail bar before an appointment with a client. He regularly shares his roots with clients. Rob's grandfathers were a mechanic and a railroad worker back in Youngstown's heyday, and his father is a barber. The way he describes it, his father's life sounds like the blue-collar working man's idyll: he makes decent money and has a decent home, goes on a vacation every year, buys a new car every five to ten years, and in general lives modestly. He charges $7 for haircuts to local policemen, firemen, and workers at car, aluminum can, and steel factories (the ones still operating). The styles are mostly the same. Old ladies in the neighborhood bring him pies and trays of cookies around the holidays. Rob's father first taught him to cut hair, and he went to a barber school after high school. But he understood that getting out of Youngstown meant going to a four-year college.

"All of my friends and peers were going to college. I almost felt like that was what I should do. I had the opportunity to go and I moved to Columbus [to attend Ohio State University]. It was a struggle. Especially when you grow up in such a blue-collar area to where you have a lot of people, whether it be your parents or grandparents, working pretty long and hard hours to maybe give you a little bit more. It is almost like the idea of going to college was something which seemed out of reach and then you finally get there. I would go back to my dad's shop and work over winter break, you know, stuff like

that. I always loved it, but even my father was like, 'You don't want to be on your feet all day.'"

Along with helping his father during breaks, Rob occasionally worked as a barber while in school to help pay his rent, and cut his friends' hair to keep up his skills. He got a student job in the IT department, where he worked in online learning. He got a full-time job there before graduating, and then moved to New York City and took a similar position at Polytechnic School of Engineering at New York University (NYU-Poly) in Downtown Brooklyn.

"That transition was just horrible for me. I worked in the office and a lot of faculty were very resistant to technology. Those who taught online really did not do a whole lot but put slides up. I did not meet barely any faculty or students. Everything was conducted over e-mail. It was very passive aggressive as well. You felt as if you were not making that true bond. It comes back to the idea of, if I work in a cubicle, and I operate via e-mail, and I might maybe leave voice messages—there are all these really underlying pieces that exist in a university atmosphere or business culture to where we are never working on anything together. We are working on all of these separate parts and all of these different pieces to it that never really join. I think when you look at some of the tangible pieces of more blue-collar work, even in culture, in terms of—if I were to walk in, and this is no disrespect to you . . ."

Realizing he is about to say something about people who work in academia I may find offensive, I wave my hand to brush aside any controversy. He continues.

"But if I were to walk in and deal with a faculty member regarding an issue, it is a much different tone and different presence that you need to have, as opposed to if I deal with a maintenance individual and just say, 'You know what, we need a lamp changed in an LCD projector that needs to project in this class. This is a job that needs done. It is straight to the point, let's do it,' as opposed to going through a bureaucratic set of fifteen e-mails to accomplish one basic task. That to me is also something that was just very difficult to handle after a while.

"I guess for me it was like, can I really try and strive to make six figures, sit behind a desk, and feel removed, or do I do something where I may make less, but feel more fulfilled and more connected to what I do? I am not saying that there were not certain people that I worked with [in academia] that were great. [But] I think about how guys feel if they work on a line in a GM plant or a Ford plant and they build a car. They say, 'You know, we kicked out forty

Cobalts a day,' and they feel like every piece of them kind of goes in to building this tangible thing you can touch and feel. You build such camaraderie. I just had this idea of blue-collar work and looked at really what it meant and really what it meant to me. I think that was the biggest transition for me, was the idea that I can build something, I can build more of camaraderie with not only the people that I serve, but the people in which I work with.

"As much as I felt fortunate about having a 9 to 5 and having really secure benefits and vacation time, maybe checking my Blackberry or my iPhone for my e-mail—I felt like I was accomplishing things, but I could not touch, see, or feel them really. It felt as if I felt really empty at the end of the day. I received a set paycheck, which is great in a way, it is great to have a salary. [But] there would be days where I would walk into work in maybe a tie and a flat front khaki or something and feel if I got on the train to go home I was not myself. I did not want anyone to see me until I could be me, you know? It also feels good to create something or to provide an honest service at a fairly decent or honest rate and receive compensation for it as opposed to just receiving a set salary no matter what I did."

The values Rob learned from his blue-collar, working-class background conflicted with what he felt he "should" do to earn a living in today's economy. He went to college, became specialized in the information technology sector of higher education, moved to New York City, got a "good" job in his field, and acquired a suitable wardrobe. He was on a career path. He had support from friends and family. And Rob admits to having enjoyed some of the perks of full-time office work: the high salary, the regular paycheck, the health benefits, and the vacations (in short, the stability and security). But it wasn't for him.

He is not alone among "second careerists," or people who were already working a full-time job, which paid them a regular salary, included benefits, and entailed working in a specific environment and with a distinct set of skills (that is, a "good" job), but then voluntarily decided to transition out of it and into one of these occupations.[27] Recall Hal, from the opening vignette. Hal is a career changer who discovered and fell in love with cocktail culture while in his late twenties, and then gradually worked his way into the industry with the goal of being able to quit his day job, which he eventually did. He became a bartender, consultant for brands, and brand ambassador for a couple of whiskey companies. In Rob's case, he had been a barber before—as a job, not a career—and decided to go back. Rob felt ambivalent about having

an office job (recall Giancarlo's quote in the preface about not wanting to "sit in a box"). Many career changers say they enjoyed the security of full-time employment in an office setting, but did not feel fulfilled in their work. They did not like working in a cubicle, being separated from other people, and having their work existing in the ether of digital technology.

Rob, and others with family connections to the industry (most especially barbers), is unique because his blue-collar background influenced his expectations for work. But he craved the tangibility of certain types of work, not especially the blue-collar setting, such as what exists in a place like Youngstown. He chose a cool shop in the East Village, not a local shop in a working-class neighborhood. For a college graduate with hip urban tastes, a place like the Blind Barber would meet Rob's work needs from both a cultural and technical standpoint. Not every one of these workers learned the values of manual labor from growing up: having to work on your feet, use your hands, make something tangible, and serve other people. Still, for people in a knowledge-based career who switch to manual labor, the lure of using their bodies as well as their minds to interact with the material world proves strong.

Strivers and Culture Seekers

Joaquin, Joel, Giancarlo, Rob, and Hal are all in their thirties, and when they were in college in the 1990s and early 2000s the rarefied cultures in their respective industries were not nearly as widespread as they became just five to ten years later. With cultural currents setting them in motion through interpersonal networks and traditional and social media, and the number of positions rising as the niches expanded, some of these workers developed a passion for the culture at a young age and pursued the job vigorously.

Nicole is originally from Syracuse and went downstate to attend Manhattan College, where she majored in chemical engineering and graduated in 2006. As a teaching assistant for an "Introduction to Engineering" course in her junior and senior years, Nicole helped her professor show the class how to make beer. Fascinated by the process, she thought of how she could turn it into a career.

"And then it occurred to me that there was just one other step to take that to whiskey. Distillation is really the core of engineering, that the understanding of distillation is not much different from all the other engineers.

It made sense for me, it was like a natural progression. I'd never contemplated moving to Kentucky so I was kind of like, 'Oh, wouldn't that be cool, but it's not really going to happen for me so I need to go somewhere else.' I contemplated the idea of going to work for Budweiser. I actually interviewed with them."

After graduating Nicole got a job at an environmental services firm, which allowed her to stay in New York City. At the time, in 2006, not a single distillery was open in the city. Over the next few years Nicole read as much about distilling as she could, spoke with the people at the American Distilling Institute (ADI) about distilling and potential job openings, and heard about a few distillery projects in the five boroughs, where she wanted to stay. She heard about the New York Distilling Company when it was in its infancy, experimenting with recipes in some distilleries upstate while they built their own space, and contacted the owner.

"I was like really impressed by what they were doing. They had a lot of financial backing. It's a job. It's a potential career choice. So I e-mailed [an owner] and he was very polite and said, 'We are not going to be doing anything for quite a while, get back to me.' I was disappointed but hopeful. So I put it off."

Shortly thereafter she heard about Kings County Distillery, which had recently opened in Bushwick.

"They were doing a moonshine tasting and I showed up and introduced myself: 'I'm your newest employee. Nice to meet you. I will be standing next to this table until you agree to meet with me.' I hung out there for a little while. They agreed. I went a couple of days later and I was like, 'I will work for free. I just want to be part of this. I want to learn about this.' Everybody realized that and that was that. I was just so excited at the idea that there was someone doing that here. I didn't have to sacrifice my whole life in New York in order to do the thing I really wanted to do in life."

A tiny operation, Kings County would give Nicole the opportunity to learn distilling by working directly on every step of the process. She always wanted to experience its hands-on nature.

"The other thing that kept me from going off and moving to Kentucky was my [interview] experience with Budweiser. Everything that intrigued me about brewing you don't really get when you work for a large-scale producer. They already had years of tradition and master brewers. They know what they're doing. They know their formula. If you go there you're going to be in charge of making sure the fermenter is always 76 degrees or whatever . . .

they're not playing around. It was less understanding. It was less creativity of artistry. It's more classic engineering."

As the business grew Nicole was able to eventually quit her day job and become Kings County's "master blender" and parlay her expertise to become a consultant for other craft distilleries and the president of the New York State Distillers Guild. Nicole is an example of someone whose passion for the job emerged early in her life while in college. Once the small batch distilling seeds got planted in her head, they guided her pursuits. For other workers, a passion for the culture of the job itself, including the romance surrounding its history, led them to it.

"I will tell you—and you cannot repeat this until your book comes out, and at that point, I'll be well-established. No, no—I'm serious. It's my dirty, dirty secret."

Jeremy and I are sitting and sharing cocktails at Death & Co. in the early evening. I first met him at Raines Law Room, where he was the opening head bartender. Now he is the brand ambassador for Russian Standard vodka. Jeremy usually wears tight dress clothes for his slight frame, a fedora, and brightly colored socks. He also sports a Clark Gable mustache and small black plugs in slightly stretched earlobes. I have a Daisy Buchanan, an original at Death & Co., with chamomile-infused rye whiskey, dry vermouth, Aperol, and Yellow Chartreuse, while Jeremy sips a rye Old Fashioned. I had asked him how he got into bartending, when he swore me to secrecy.

"I won't tell anybody about this," I promise.

"I told you the story about my interest in Americana. My father was a missionary. And I would travel with him to a lot of other countries in Southeast Asia, and to Africa. And I would come back to the U.S., and the older I got, the more void of culture I suspected America to be. This was unacceptable to me. And so I began to investigate American culture. When I was in graduate school, I got in a very heated debate with my classmates. I was taking a class on—it was a craft course, and we were studying grief—the issue of grief within international poetics, and this all led to a very intense emotional debate about American grief. And I said, 'Americans don't know how to grieve. We just don't. And we don't'—and then I made this statement— 'We don't have a culture.' And immediately one of my own friends said, 'What about baseball?' You know, 'What about Cracker Jacks? What about . . . ?' And it was just, you know, all kinds of pop culture. And I said, 'I don't buy it. These

things are superficial conflicts, ways of trying to stimulate culture.' Our culture, from its inception, from the very beginning, was in turmoil, and was never—it never had a solidarity. And it's the same reason today why we enlist something like globalization to come to our aid; why we would refer to that as a tool, rather than a consequence.

"Now don't get me wrong, I'm not a racist—I mean, my wife's Russian-Armenian. It's nothing to do with nationalism. But secretly at night, when I lay in bed, and I want to have little fantasies, my fantasy is about an America that had its own nationality and its own culture a good five hundred years before it became populated with any other nationality. That said, the cocktail exists because of other nationalities coming into America, and our exposure to them. So my investigation into American culture was an investigation into how we used other cultures, and what value they've had to us."

Jeremy began reading and studying about classic American characters, such as those in the works of Herbert Asbury.* He came to love gamblers, jazz musicians, gunfighters, and bartenders, and realized bartending was the only role he could take on, in a healthy way (he plays the banjo, but only recreationally, and finds the jazz musician scene too competitive). In bartending he saw a possible career.

"All this to say what my dirty secret is: I've only been a real bartender since January of 2008 [less than two years ago]. Before that, I was purely a textbook, at-home bartender. So my introduction into this industry is very much like Doc Holliday's introduction into gunfighting. He became a gunfighter. He was not a gunfighter. But he wanted to be, and he practiced shooting a barn, you know, behind his dental practice, which was failing, and became a gunfighter. He even started rumors about himself. And that's largely how I became a bartender.

"[But t]here's this debate that comes up in a lot of articles online, and it's the debate between mixology and bartending. And I agree with one particular stance, and that's this: a bartender is someone standing behind a bar. A lot of people see mixology as the superior title. I don't. Mixology, anybody can

* In addition to such well-known works as *Gangs of New York* (1928) and *The French Quarter* (1936), early twentieth-century journalist and writer Herbert Asbury also wrote about the famed bartender Jerry Thomas in H. L. Mencken's magazine, *The American Mercury*. He also edited the 1928 edition of Thomas's *The Bar-Tender's Guide: How to Mix Drinks or, The Bon Vivant's Companion*. The character Thomas fit perfectly in the grainy, underground nineteenth-century worlds that Asbury specialized in.

practice it. You can practice mixology. What he does [he points to Joaquin behind the bar] only he can do. He's a bartender. He's tending to this bar. *That* is so many things beyond mixology. Mixology is just drinks. That is 40 percent of what he does. He makes sure this atmosphere is comfortable. He makes sure everybody has the water, that their drinks are to taste. Mixology is just the art of making the drink. Showmanship, right?"

Jeremy got a master's degree in poetry from Mills College, and had been working in marketing at an architecture firm in New York City. He wrote poetry in his spare time, researched cocktail history, and started amassing a massive home bar of more than three hundred bottles, including seventeen different bitters, some of which were his own recipes. "I have the best bar in Queens, and I will put money on that," he says. When he grew sick and tired of his job, he scoured the Internet, typing his fantasy term "mixology" into Craigslist. An ad for bartending positions at a new bar, Raines Law Room, came up.

"They were having a walk-in interview the next day. I played hooky from work, I went in and I didn't have any experience, so I bluffed some. I took a photograph of my home bar, I go in, I show him the picture, and I say, 'Look, when I come into work, you can bet your ass that whatever drinks I'm making, I've been making on my own time and with my own money. I can vouch for this shit because I make it myself.' So, that was my pitch to them. Michael, he's from Milk and Honey, was the consultant on the job. So he was there with the owners of the place, and I appealed to him. I said, 'This is what I want to do.' He recommended me for head bartender when they left. They hired me. I set up their menu for the year, and that's still the menu now."

Without bartending experience, and without having to work his way up, Jeremy still landed a head bartending position at a place with a strong pedigree. He did not drift into bartending, possess a sensibility toward service or a philosophy toward quality, or have a personal connection to the job or industry. He had an unfulfilling job, like many of these workers, but his interest in Americana and the folk figure of the bartender drove him to consider bartending as a career. Jeremy's "dirty, dirty secret" is also significant. He carefully lays out the common notion among cocktail bartenders of the difference between bartending (tending the bar) and mixology (making drinks). Jeremy certainly knew his mixology from making drinks at home. While he successfully affected himself to be a bartender, he knew his lack of experience made him a target in the cocktail world, as it does for inexperienced people in the other three occupations. As these occupations transformed into "cool" jobs, they became more attractive for young people out of college who had

never worked in the industry before. Jeremy is genuine in his appreciation of the romance of the job. He did not decide to become a bartender to play a role and revive an old practice. He developed a sincere interest in the job from learning about its classical culture in American history and decided to try it out for himself.[28]

Short Stops on Longer Paths

Not every worker at these workplaces is in one of these "cool" jobs and pursues it as a career. Each workplace needs people to fill support roles, which are often less sexy and rewarding than the activities of the main jobs. These roles include barbacks and servers (who are almost always women) at cocktail bars, tasting room and gift shop workers at craft distilleries, receptionists at barbershops, and counter workers and porters at butcher shops. Bartenders will wash glassware and barbers will sweep up hair, when needed. Usually, though, these dirtier tasks fall to specific workers.

For some support workers, like barbacks and porters who wash dishes at cocktail bars and butcher shops, it is just a job, usually done backstage, and the workplace does not attempt to train them anyway to make them think otherwise or move up to a higher-status position. These workplaces follow an ethnic and racial division of labor in the roles of their support staff. Workers who deal with customers and clients, such as the barbershops' receptionists, the waitresses at cocktail bars, and counter workers at butcher shops, are from similar backgrounds as the new elite workers and the consumers they serve: mainly white, usually college-educated, culturally savvy, and fit the business's style—they "look good and sound right," as previous research on aesthetic labor shows.[29] The people who fill backstage roles, who have limited if any interactions with customers and clients, are mainly ethnic and racial minorities without advanced degrees or outward interest in the cultural repertoires of the work. When a workplace trains someone from a support role to be one of these new elite manual workers, they almost always come from similar backgrounds and possess a similar aesthetic as its existing ones (such as Jason, who started as a receptionist at Freemans).

Some support staff do more than just fit the aesthetic of the workplace. Owners expect them to be familiar with and even passionate about the cultural repertoires of the main jobs as these new elite workers are, because the support workers are often the ones interacting with consumers. They must be

extensions of these workers, carriers of these repertoires, and representatives of these businesses. Some may learn the job and move up in the workplace, as Jason did when he first worked at the Freemans desk. But even if they do not, these workplaces offer more than just a retail or service job. They provide learning and networking opportunities for them to use when they leave.

In his late twenties, Charlie grew up in Greenwich Village and can trace his family on his father's side in New York City as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, all in Manhattan. He went to college at the Fashion Institute of Technology and got an office job in design at an advertising firm after graduating. "I worked in that for a while. I got tired of the office, so I started doing freelance design work from home. [But then] I didn't like working alone all the time. [So] I chose to do the blue-collar thing."

Charlie initially worked in sales and repairs for a short time at the Apple store in SoHo, and then his friend told him about a job as a line cook at a new restaurant being opened by 3rd Ward, an artist collective that ran an events space and affordable studio for artists to work in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn.[30] At the time Charlie was a home cooking hobbyist. Since he had nothing else to do, and since he had an artistic background and hung out with artists, he decided to try it out. From there he became very interested in food and cooking. On the strength of a barbecue dinner party he threw with his roommate at their loft, which attracted more than two hundred people, he started an underground dinner group called the Brooklynauts. With his partner he soon began hosting events and catering parties and fundraisers around the city. He also attended the French Culinary Institute, to improve his food knowledge and cooking skills.

After the 3rd Ward restaurant closed, Charlie cooked in a few other kitchens before having trouble finding employment for two months, in 2011. He then saw an ad on Good Food Jobs, an online forum for restaurant and food retail work, for a counter worker at Dickson's. He had considered butcher shop work before.

"It was funny, I was walking through Chelsea Market with a friend a week before [seeing the ad]—she was curating a little gallery around here for a few days—and I said, 'Oh, that [Dickson's] would be a cool place to work.' Because I'm really good friends with the Brooklyn Kitchen and the Meat Hook guys, [but] I didn't want to work in a place where I kind of have a friendship relationship with them.[31]

"I was humble [on the Dickson's interview]. I didn't know anything about butchery, so I went in there and I was like, 'I want to learn.' Obviously, it

worked out. But I knew, for me, it was temporary. I knew I was going to start my own thing at some point. I knew it wasn't the right time. And Jake, from day one, knew that. He said, 'I don't expect anybody to stay here. You have different things going on and that's why we hired you. Everyone here is a multifaceted person.' "

Charlie and Dickson's were a good fit for one another. Dickson's wanted someone passionate and knowledgeable about food, and Charlie wanted to work in the high-end food world. His experience working at the Apple store, another high-end retail shop, helped him deal with customers shopping for expensive items. Dickson's understood Charlie needed to learn more about butchery, and that he would eventually leave after learning a lot.

"[At first] I was able to speak to the customers about the kitchen end of the meat very easily. 'I want a cut, I want to make a stew.' I knew what they needed. I could cut a steak, but I looked at a cow and it was like, 'Uhhh . . . .' I had a basic idea, but certainly not enough to label the subprimals, you know, just like that [snaps fingers]. But it's like anything else, you learn quickly when you have to. And working in restaurants helped because there was a certain urgency in the restaurant."

During lulls at the counter, Charlie would regularly walk over to the cutting section to observe the butchers and ask them questions about what they were cutting and doing. He would also often go back to the kitchen to chat with the chef and his staff about recipes. Then, after a little over a year of working at the shop, Charlie moved on after the busy holiday season to work on his own restaurant project. As his story shows, many of these workplaces serve as both places of employment and learning experiences for someone with other ambitions in the industry. For them support work is often more than just a retail or service job. It can be a deliberate stop on their longer career path.

Some support workers try to move up into one of these jobs but realize it is not for them. They fit the workplace and job in every way except in terms of desire. Simon started working as a receptionist at Freemans in the fall of 2011. Originally from Bermuda, he went to college in Canada before moving to New York City to become a fiction and screenwriter. Tall, thin, and lanky, Simon's casual fashion sense fits the shop. He normally wears tight V-neck t-shirts or loose button-downs with pants rolled up at the cuff and a pair of classic Converse sneakers. Simon also fits in socially. He regularly banters with and teases the barbers during the day. Working in retail at a shop like Freemans allows Simon to earn some money while he builds his writing career, and puts him in a hip downtown environment that suits his personality and style.

One day after soaking towels in water and eucalyptus oil and putting them in the oven, Simon stands behind Miles as he explains cowlicks to his client. "Cowlicks don't really exist. You're just making the hair do something it doesn't want to do," says Miles. Simon has a curious look on his face as Miles talks about the whorl and part. Noticing, Van asks him, "Are you finally interested in learning how to cut?"

"I'm just curious," says Simon, who had been working at the shop for several months at this point.

"We're gonna get you a baby doll to practice on," Van teases.

Over the next few months, Simon learns how to cut hair a bit. Doing so was never his intention when he first started at Freemans. He simply wanted a flexible job in a cool environment. Near the end of the shift as barbers are doing their final cuts, he stands by Ruben, Van, and Miles as they instruct him.

"Man, I was doing a beard trim the other day and I was *so* nervous. It's easy to do on myself, because I know how much pressure, and I know my own hair and beard. But I don't know how much [pressure] to put on someone's face. I was using like two hands and felt like I was shaking. It took a real long time."

"Are you doing it because, 'Why not, if you're here anyway?'" I ask.

"Exactly. I'm in here every day, I might as well learn. I'd regret it if I worked here and didn't do it."

A month later I ask Simon how the cutting is coming.

"I haven't been doing much. I mean, a little bit. I just don't have the passion for it like these guys."

For Simon working at Freemans is different from working as a receptionist elsewhere, such as at a more typical barbershop. He fits in very well culturally and socially with the group and with clients, and his sense of style and interest in fraternizing match the shop's philosophy. But his passion is in writing, not cutting hair. Working at Freemans, where meticulous haircuts and precise techniques are central to the service, every day made him curious about learning the craft. But for workers like Simon these workplaces will remain simply a cool place where they once worked.

6 THE SCIENCE AND THE ART

A customer at a table at Death & Co. orders a Martini through the waitress, who brings it to Alex, tonight's bartender.

"Did he say how he wanted it?" he asks her.

She shakes her head. Alex nods to himself and starts making it. He takes out the bottles of Plymouth gin and Dolin dry vermouth, measures out two ounces of the former and one of the latter and pours them into a mixing glass, puts in the ice, and stirs it with his free hand behind his back for over a minute, glancing down at it past the end of his nose. When he finishes he strains out the drink, peels and adds a twist, and places the coupe on the waitress's tray. Since Martinis can be made in a variety of ways (with gin or vodka, with varying ratios of spirit to vermouth, shaken or stirred, up or on the rocks, with an olive or with a twist—or with a pickled onion, to make a related drink, a Gibson), I ask Alex if they make Martinis the same way every time.

"Yes, we always make it the same way when it goes out on the floor. You have to stand behind the version of the drinks that you [the bar] make, because they are the best. But an order at the bar always leads to a conversation, because there are so many ways to make a Martini and everyone has their own preference. We can't do that at the tables, unless they specify with the waitress."

One Thursday in the early afternoon I assist Liam as he distills. First we have to transfer the mash to the still upstairs. I take the cloth top off one of the fermenters and give it a stir with large plastic paddle. It bubbles a little.

"It's probably still fermenting, which explains that CO_2," says Liam. "But it's been in there for a week, so it's just about done."

He measures the brix, or the suspended solids in the liquid, which is a test for sugar levels, and then we hook up a pump to the tank that runs upstairs to the still. We transfer two hundred gallons into it, which will distill