"Hustling" in film school as socialization for early career work in media industries

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study contributes to the literature on the sociology of work and socialization, and the literature on creative careers in cultural industries, by describing the various grounded theory categories of "hustling" by film students in the venue of film school. Based on 18 months of participant observation of two student films at a Los Angeles-based MFA film/TV production program, I show that students "hustle" to form connections, work continuously across multiple projects, compete for production classes, and in the process, build their individual and collective reputations. I argue that hustling is a social process that involves an array of socializations, and is experienced subjectively as anticipatory work towards careers in the film/TV industries. Students come to realize that their hustling towards curricular and pedagogical requirements is a synecdoche for the larger industrial careers they aspire to, careers that demand even more hustling and precariousness, but careers that they are better prepared for than they know. Film students leave school with certain agency. Future research should take into account how early career socialization prepares aspirants for later creative work.

1. Introduction

"You're used to being busy for every waking minute every single day… The film industry is all what you make of it. You have to find [the work] yourself. Everybody knows it's competitive. Do what you can to keep working. You call it *hustling*. It's good to always be hustling, and try to make things happen for yourself."

Empirical studies on film students and film schools are exceedingly rare in the field of sociology (Bechky, 2006; Henderson, 1995, 1990; Mukerji, 1977; Redvall, 2013). By contrast, there have been historical overviews by cinema studies scholars of the training provided by film schools, and there have been studies on art school, music school, and art school students (Petrie & Stoneman, 2014; Polan, 2007; Singerman 1999; Thornton, 2008).

Some of these have been inspired by Becker's (1982) work on various players that make up "art worlds." Others, however, particularly from the burgeoning field of production studies, express great concern about aspirants or relative outsiders' careers in the media industries (Caldwell, 2008). Film students, they surmise, like many media industry workers, face a harsh, bleak industry and have little agency to realize their creative ambitions (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). In sociology, Hochschild has coined the term "emotional labor" – i.e., "inducing or suppressing one's feelings in order to maintain an outward countenance" of professionalism – for how agents deal with exploitative work conditions (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7).

This article aims to converse with the sociological literature on precarious work and careers in the creative/cultural industries, and particularly, research on early careers, by highlighting how film students work – or "hustle," as student cinematographer Mikhail

terms it above – their way through film school, in anticipation of the media industries. Taking as a starting point Becker and Carper's (1956) emphasis on the "development of an identification with an occupation" as well as positing as crucial socialization that occurs in organizational contexts, this article presents "hustling" as a multi-faceted, "grounded" phenomenon that in the milieu of film school allows students to form connections, learn about the industry, consolidate their reputations, and, ultimately, make movies (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

In doing so, this ethnographic research contributes not just to the general field of the sociology of work and occupations but also joins a small handful of studies in highlighting the importance of attending to career socialization rituals as a type of structuration (Abbott, 1993; Giddens, 1984). In their hustling within and across the corridors, courtyards, sound stages, elevators, edit suites and classrooms of film school, film students partly emulate industry socialization processes, learn about the craft they believe they enjoy, and come to understand what "creativity" and "precariousness" mean for them as individuals and as cohorts that hope to carve careers in the film, TV and other media industries in the film school's backyard.

The structure of the paper is as follows. I first review the classical literature on the sociology of work and careers and on organizational socialization before turning to the recent literature on creative careers in the cultural industries. I motivate the need for a concept that covers the work involved in sociality and socialization by early career media industry aspirants. In this article, I proffer "hustling" as that concept. The empirical section that follows delineates four manifestations of hustling among film students. I conclude by theorizing hustling as a type of precarious creative work that facilitates qualified interpretations of agency in the otherwise vexed domain of media industries.

2. Literature review

2.1. Socialization as subjective work towards careers

The sociological literature on work and careers has not frequently connected with the literature on organizational socialization (notable exceptions include Fine, 1996 and Porcello, 2004). A key theoretical contribution this study makes is to argue that socialization, and in particular hustling, as an intricate set of interactions among film students, shapes understandings about career and the work it takes to proceed through careers. In this sub-section, I will provide a brief overview of the classical sociological understanding of careers, and using the general notion of subjectivity underlying careers, frame the literature's understanding of organizational socialization as a subject-driven career process.

Everett Hughes' Chicago School of sociology, including ethnographic work by Howard Becker and colleagues (e.g., Becker, 1977/2002), paved the way for a whole body of research on careers in sociology and organization and management studies in the 1980s (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). One of the key moves made at this time was to connect the study of the individual and the institution using the concept of "work." Thus, one handy early conception of career defines it as the "evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 11). This article contributes to career theory by providing an ethnographic description of one type of media work, using the general perspective and methodology of the Chicago sociologists.

Careers, it has been shown in early studies of graduate students and medical students, often begin with the development of identification with an occupation (Becker & Carper, 1956; Becker, 1977/2002). Researchers attend to how "situations present the person with experiences… out of which come stabilization of self conceptions into long lasting identities" (Becker & Carper, 1956, p. 289). Such transformations occur via mechanisms such as "internalization of motives," which brings with it alignment with institutional positions; or by "acquisition of ideology," which develops when actors raise questions about the worth of the activity they are engaged in (Becker & Carper, 1956, pp. 296–297). Thus, even in studies that focus on the individual's experience, subjectivity is shown to always be in interaction with institutional factors.

Yet, it can be said that careers begin with the *reasoning of subjects*. To this end, Barley offers a variety of definitions of careers, two of which I represent here: (i) According to Hughes, career is "objectively… a series of statuses and clearly defined offices… [and] subjectively…, a moving perspective in which a person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes [and] actions;" and (ii) Goffman claims that a career is "not a thing that can be brilliant or disappointing… [it] refer[s] to any social strand of any person's course through life" (Arthur et al., 1989, pp. 45—46). Notable in these definitions is the emphasis that *subjects* interpret what constitutes work and career. Barley further insists that "when sequences of jobs, formally organized contexts, and movement up and down a hierarchy are treated as incidentals," career can properly treated as a "Janus-like concept" that in addition to its objective emphasis on "institutional forms of participation" in some social world, is remarkable for its subjective aspect wherein "individuals shift their social footing and constru[e] their past and future in order to come to terms with the present" (ibid, p. 49). This dual perspective is consistent with careers being treated as "properties of collectives." Even though individuals experience and reason about careers, they are "not solely of the individuals' making…. Careers… were pieced together from the string of alternatives and the set of interpretive resources offered [to] individuals at any point in time by the collectives to which they belonged" (ibid, p. 51).

This article argues that at minimum, *socialization* is a vital "interpretive resource" offered to individuals by the collectives in which they are ensconced *in order to* piece together their careers. Moreover, socialization is not merely an ancillary resource but an immanent aspect of everyday work itself. With this understanding of socialization as a concrete set of everyday practices, researchers are in a stronger position to make claims about individual agency.

I will end this sub-section with an overview of some classical definitions of "socialization." One of the oldest is: "the process by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge – in short, the culture – current in the groups to which they are, or seek to become, a member" (Harvill, 1981, p. 431). Another goes: "Socialization has generally been seen

as a mechanism for bringing new members into existing teams or groups" (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003, p. 16). Feldman (1981) defines socialization as "the process by which employees are transformed from organization outsiders to participating and effective members." In these definitions, we see an affiliation with Chicago sociologists' emphasis on gradual collective change.

The takeaway from the review thus far is that research on careers should attend to the trajectory of individual subjectivity during socialization and how it portends subjects' stringing together careers in the contexts of the groups, organizations and industries they want to become embedded in. This article posits hustling in the social world of film school as an example of socialization towards work and career making in the media industries of film and television.

2.2. Precariousness and agency in creative careers

In addition to connecting the classical literature on work and careers with that of organizational socialization, this article also converses with the recent literature on "creative careers" in the cultural industries (Florida, 2002; Hartley, 2005). It does so by laying out the various ways a socialization process, hustling, is a mini-career ride film students take on, during which they get a preview of precariousness vis-à-vis the creative careers they might embark upon. Further, this article suggests that in their variegated hustling, film students embody surprising agency, even as they confront overwhelming industry gatekeeping.

Richard Florida, in popularizing Pierre Bourdieu's wide body of work on class, taste and human capital, offers a theory on "creative cities" that attempts to explain why "creativity" is what draws workers to the cultural industry. Florida argues that the geographical relocation of a certain type of professionals, i.e., those engaged in the creating "meaningful new forms," explains the agglomeration, explosive economic growth and flight to certain urban locations (Florida, 2002, 2003). His "creative class" encompasses workers in entertainment and the arts as well as people in finance, law, academia, and other domains that do not produce "cultural work" but nevertheless rely on a great deal of independent judgment" and "produce added economic value from knowledge and creativity" (Comunian, Faggian, & Li, 2010, pp. 390–391). Some of that creativity is towards "artistic" purposes. For instance, "Bohemian graduates" represent a subset of the creative class—those who received a degree in a "bohemian" or artistic subject such as design, music, or landscape design [or film production] and whose added value is disproportionally greater than any economic rewards they receive (Comunian et al., 2010).

Further, creative/cultural industry workers, like those in film and television, "are not only confronted with tensions between creativity and commerce when making career path choices" but also "want the products of their labor to reflect their personal identities" (Wei, 2012, p. 446). Wei offers the concept of "identity work—individuals' active construction of their identities," work done by his reality TV editor and producer subjects for whom "identities are multiple, contextual, and shifting" but must always be "coherent and positively valued" (Wei, 2012). Another ethnographic study on talent agents in Hollywood describes its subjects as extremely invested in a form of identity work called "reputation work" (Zafirau, 2008). Reputations must also be "continually achieved, performed and re-performed," and reputation work, such as maintaining a particular "emotional tone in business meetings," consists of the "intentional activities that participants perform in order to create the perception that they are legitimate, according to institutionalized expectations" (Zafirau, 2008, pp. 100–101).

Identity and reputation work can be thought of as subject-driven work in order to further creative careers. It is worth noting that examples in both articles do not involve socialization processes to further careers. Yet, both types of work are implicitly framed as what their subjects might consider as "good work." A recent comprehensive ethnographic study by Hesmondhalgh and Baker on cultural workers in the TV, music and magazine industries points out that in order to do good work, workers must have the possibility for autonomy and self-realization, among other factors. However, they find that the "version" of freedom workers actually experience is highly "complicated" in that, for instance, "pleasure and obligation become blurred in a highly challenging way" (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 18). In doing so, authors join a growing body of research that claims if not strongly criticizes cultural/creative work as alienating, isolating, self-exploitative—generally "precarious" (McRobbie, 2016; Neff, 2012).

In fact, so commonplace is it for "precarious" and "creative" to be paired together that Curtin and Sanson (2016) commissioned an edited collection of empirical and theoretical pieces underscoring the "precarious" aspect of "precarious creativity" in global cultural industries. They emphasize precariousness – signifying a throttling lack of agency – as a "common condition for workers all over the world… No longer can individual workers expect a single career; instead they must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency… as indicative of a new world order of social and economic instability" (pp. 5–6).

However, a smaller section of the sociological work on creative careers in the cultural industries has suggested that there is indeed the possibility for agency, autonomy and self-realization that Hesmondhalgh and Baker value in their social justice framework. These empirical studies move past the "romanticized assumptions about creative work" that Curtin and Sanson worry about (2016, p. 15). For instance, one study argues that it is important to attend to "lifestyle studies" as much as political economy: with the former lens, the "bohemian lifestyle's" devotion to "art for art's sake" allows workers to not simply accept but also embrace and cherish precariousness of creative careers (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006). An emphasis on lifestyle aligns with the previous section's focus on subjectivity and occupational identification.

Similarly, recent research on early-career London jazz musicians found that they "manufacture *greater* precarity in their working lives" (Umney & Kretsos, 2015, p. 313; emphasis added). They do so in part by offsetting the precarious work that they are passionate about – music and the quality of the London jazz scene – by "tak[ing] on varying quantities of teaching or other jobs such as theatrical work… that were typically seen as less fulfilling" (Umney & Kretsos, 2015, p. 319). Thus, "rather than transition away from precarious work" entirely, London jazz musicians "sought to mitigate its negative elements" (Umney & Kretsos, 2015, p. 324) Authors thereby advocate for a "life course" perspective, asserting that the "fatalism" of critical sociologists and media scholars must be balanced by focusing on agents' processing and emphasis of career transitions and trajectories *as a matter of the life course*.

An emphasis on life course can thus be grafted on to career course, in alignment with Hughes' understanding of career in the previous section. Along these lines, a study describes the early career advancement of standup comedians in Los Angeles as a "layered career," which is distinguished by subjects continuing to "maintain their participation within prior stages" (Reilly, 2016, p. 3). The three layers the author offers are: (1) the "proximate layer," which "involves tight cliques of comedy buddies who facilitate support [and] creativity"; (2) the "community layer," which involves broadening social contacts and understanding business practices; and (3) the "industrial layer," wherein comedians begin to earn a living from their gigs which they strive to "situate in a coherent manner" (Reilly, 2016, p. 31–32). Contra viewpoints that understand career as a sequence of statuses, this research suggests that attending to career over the life course tempers concerns about precariousness because of the benefits of continual nested sociality in previous layers of socialization.

Finally, some researchers have even attested to the "normalization" of precariousness among early creative career aspirants (Morgan, Wood, & Nelligan, 2013). They find that young people have "accepted the injunction for vocational restlessness in their industries" and further "feel that not staying in one position too long can be both liberating and adaptive" (Morgan, Wood, & Nelligan, 2013, p. 397) This is an especially interesting response to the literature on precarious careers, one that advocates understanding the metrics of the socioeconomic world – including perhaps lifestyle and the life course – squarely from the point of view of entrants and aspirants.

Thus, what some researchers decry as a "complicated" version of freedom, others interpret positively as "complex notions of agency" (Morgan et al., 2013, p. 410). This article contributes to the literature on precarious creative careers by attending to sociality and socialization during the early stages of a profession/career. I argue that hustling socializes students in ways that actually prepares them for careers in the media industries. I don't seek to diminish the legitimate worries of scholars who have criticized Florida's enthusiasm about creative careers by pointing out, for instance, that the entrepreneurial, "be creative" attitude taken for granted by young British fashion workers (especially women) that brings about "depoliticization", "individualization," and alienation (Henderson, 2016, p. 4168; McRobbie, 2011, 2016). They worry that "a highly individuated set of freelance pathways and informal networks" will "exclude as much as they connect" (Henderson, 2016, p. 4168). "Précarité" will not and cannot go away.

However, in delineating four manifestations of hustling and describing them as an intensive socialization process that anticipates work dynamics in industry careers, I suggest that sociality and socialization partly offset some of the risks of precarity. There is the possibility of agency when film students experience precarious creativity *together*, as an interpretive resource that gets work done, even as students face behemoth media industries in their backyard.

3. Methodology

This article is based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork – participation observation and interviews – in CAFilm, a well-known film school located in a university in Los Angeles. I sought access to MFA student productions in the school's Production department by emailing production faculty about my project. One student director expressed interest and allowed me to follow the making of his thesis film if I took on the role of 2nd Assistant Director during the shoot. Thus began my immersion into student life at CAFilm, as participant observer as well as crewmember. Even though students knew of my status as a researcher, they eventually saw me as one of the team.

Over the years, I followed the making of two short films – the second being a film for an advanced production class (hereon, "PC") – from the pre-production stage all the way through filming and post-production. I interviewed crewmembers of both films during the post-production stage as well as crewmembers for another film being made for PC. The crew size for the thesis film was slightly larger than that of the PC film: 30, compared to 20. Faculty members supervised both films at various stages, but they were much more involved for the PC films. In total, I conducted and recorded 25 semi-structured interviews (six with faculty members), ranging from 45 to 120 min. Field notes and interview data were coded manually, with the aim of inductively generating grounded theory categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This article focuses on findings from the *students*' point of view and what students said and did in the classrooms, corridors, elevators and sound stages of CAFilm, on shooting locations, in 'industry' sites such as casting offices, as well as what they said in the context of interviews.[1] Throughout I sought to understand what motivated student filmmakers to work together in periods of often conflict-ridden and highly stressful work, to constantly help out on each other's projects beyond curricular requirements; and in doing so, how their own relationship to and identification with their work, craft and storytelling changed. Put differently, I was asking, "Film students work together knowing what?" As I followed crews and began to analyze my field notes, I came to realize the crucial role played by various types of socialization in filmmaking itself, while training students for careers in the film/TV industries.

Pursuing an interpretive line of inquiry (Geertz, 1973; Reed, 2011), I attended to the meanings that mattered to my subjects, manifested in their everyday interactions, utterances, and stories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), all the while trying to figure out "what the devil" film students "think they are up to" (Geertz, 1983, p. 58). Finally, rather than treat the two film projects that I followed as separate case studies, I heeded Ragin's (1992) provocation and asked what was it that I had "a case of"? I now turn to my empirical narrative to outline four main interpretive categories of "hustling" at CAFilm.

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[1] Although I did interview some faculty members and witness faculty-student interaction in the classroom, the vast majority of my ethnographic and interview data involves students. "Hustling" is an activity primarily involving students and a term used by students.

4. Hustling as forming connections

CAFilm's courtyards, classrooms, elevators, post-production suites and sound stages are rife with connection-forming. Students embrace, shake hands, bump fists, help carry camera equipment, and always, talk. They talk about who was working on whose project; who was writing what latest script; which faculty member was posing a tough time giving the green light on whose thesis film; who was being a nightmare to work with; and most excitedly, who had what major or minor breakthrough by getting a film into a festival, making the final fifty of a screenplay competition, or securing a "first look" meeting with an industry executive. The students in CAFilm are constantly making connections, drawing comparisons, guffawing at others' tactics, throwing out story ideas, and taking meetings. Their discourse feels cutting-edge and practical. They always have their game face on. They wear multiple hats and work across several projects. They are constantly posing. They are, in their own words, "hustling."

Unlike, say, more vocational film programs in art schools, CAFilm attracts MFA students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some who are accepted have never picked up a camera in their whole lives, a point of pride for the program; others have directed commercials, shadowed directors, or already made short films. My subjects' undergrad majors ranged from broadcast journalism, business, English and history to design and media arts, theater, and the fine arts; only some had majored in film production or cinema studies. A small handful had family or friends who worked in the industry. The majority came in with other kinds of work experience, from retail and marketing to the restaurant industry and news production. Students also started off with varying degrees of ambitions regarding external success, filmmaking vision, and exceling in craft. They differed in their taste about what constitutes a good or aesthetically appealing story. Thus, students came to CAFilm with differing amounts of relevant social and cultural capital.

Irrespective of their backgrounds and individual differences, all students were thrust into the same curriculum and had to hustle hard to make it through. I found that the imperative to socialization became an equalizer of sorts, as students moved from one class project to the other and competed for courses and ranks. Over the years, their ambitions, taste, skills, confidence, and importantly, their identities as filmmakers gradually shifted. An appreciably large component of this evolution, I argue, is due to the various manifestations of hustling. Students departed film school as *cohorts* with greater social and cultural capital that would inform careers in industry.

Examples about connection-forming are in order. During the pre-production stage of his comedy *Guffaw* for the highly selective and competitive advanced production class (PC), Dade, an ambitious student director, was impressed by his otherwise quiet 1st Assistant Director Tina's connections to CAFilm's Animation department. He praised how Tina used her social network to secure storyboard artists who were in turn eager to work with the "glamorous" Production department. At the end of one of *Guffaw*'s shoot days, cinematographer Cate thanked a student who had volunteered to be the 1st Assistant Camera for that day. She knew that the 1st AC's job is tricky and given that he was only in his first semester, she was impressed by his focus pulling. She told him, "It was cool to work with you," and added that she would definitely recommend him for future projects. Right after, the 1st AC and a grip said they would "friend" each other on Facebook. Later in the semester, when Tina's commitment as 1st AD on *Guffaw* was completed and she could focus on other projects, she pitched Kim, the sound designer, an idea for an international project. After all, they had gotten to know each other better during the intense production period for *Guffaw*, so she could request that favor. *Guffaw*'s key grip and gaffer, enrolled in another film LA-based film school, said that they were contacted by Mauricio, the cinematographer, who knew them before he transferred to CAFilm, and they accepted the invitation because they wanted end credits on a CAFilm movie.

Thus, forming connections, securing crew positions on projects, and getting "credits" are expressions of hustling. Students quickly offer to connect each other, learning that if their recommendations pan out, people will come to trust their opinion. They come to realize it really is all about who one chooses to call or text to staff on their project, about calling in favors, and being sufficiently on the grid in order to be called in.

Hustling, then, is a discursive *social* process central to filmmaking, which is surprising since many incoming students consider filmmaking to be a predominantly "creative" or craft-based media activity. Vitally, hustling is also a *socialization* process as students come to know who in the film school is in the know and in the knowhow. Hustling is characterized by its frequently public nature and its ebullience. Film students are gauging and evaluating from the get go. Hustling as a type of networking is thoroughly subjective: opinions and connections are often formed partly arbitrarily, partly by word of mouth, and partly grounded in past performance. These very connections, though, last long into students' work and careers during and after school. Students learn that "rising up with their network" might be the most important takeaway from film school.

5. Hustling as working continuously

Along with connection formation, working as a crewmember continuously and simultaneously across multiple projects is extraordinarily commonplace in CAFilm. Producer Tanya said matter-of-factly of this expectation: "That's the nature of film school. You do it because you want [your peers'] help down the line, and people want you if you have a good reputation." Hustling as working continuously on several projects is indicative of a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" attitude pervasive in CAFilm. Cinematographer Yasha observed that some later-year students had a difficult time attaining key crew positions for their thesis films because they had not adequately volunteered during their first and second years, so they just didn't know enough of their peers to approach. Some enterprising students developed workarounds. Producer Merle told director Ben that he should recruit first year undergraduates for his thesis *Ingrates*: "Freshmen are very eager. Working for an MFA thesis film for them would be like working on *The Dark Knight*," alluding to the high placement of graduate thesis films on the hierarchy of reputation of student projects in CAFilm.

Thus, as students advance in the program and understand the trick of constant socialization, they spread out to help on each other's projects. Editor Don said that especially during thesis films, "it is basically assumed that people are working on other things"

on the side. Don himself was working on some screenplays while cutting (editing) his friends' projects on the side. Mikhail remarked, with curious detachment, "Film school in general is making stuff for cheap with no resources, while taking other classes." I thought that was a great way to summarize the general experience. So I prodded him in our interview because even after more than a year in the field, I remained impressed if puzzled by how busy film students were.

Researcher: "You don't want to take a break?"

Mikhail: "We're crazy, man. It's seriously like we all have problems. After I finished ADing on *Tropos* [a film for PC], I just needed to relax. So, I try to sit in my apartment and just watch a movie, and I couldn't. Not having anything to do gives me anxiety. That happens every semester. Because you are used to being busy every waking minute for every single day for 16 hours a day. You're always doing something… You call it hustling."

Researcher: "Students seem to be hustling all the time."

Mikhail: "They want to do good work."

This was the first time I had heard the term "hustling" (a fuller quote is at the top of this article). Immediately, I grasped it as a highly apt term, arising out of the colloquial "hustle and bustle," but with several pointed meanings for students seeking creative careers during and after film school. What's interesting is how Mikhail thinks of hustling as an addiction, a necessity for success and survival, but also, intriguingly, as a benchmark for quality of work and movies themselves. If you don't hustle, then, quite simply, *(good) movies don't get made*. I tested this observation in later field visits and found it defensible. Movies just don't sit around waiting to get made. Film/TV is an industry where relentless self-presentation is normative, for good reason: films begin when people hear out others' story ideas. *Hustling is necessary for moviemaking*.

Strikingly, students hustle for future work even while immersed on current projects. During "downtime" on set (when, for instance, the camera crew is changing setups), I noticed people chatting each other up for upcoming work. Seth, the 1st AD, showed Nina, the digital intermediate technician, an undergraduate student, his directing reel. Ben, doing Merle a favor for co-producing *Ingrates*, agreed to produce a commercial Merle was directing, and during downtime on the set of that commercial, Ben was doing *Ingrates*-related work.

Hustling is thus a socialization process involving modes of continuous, simultaneous and multifarious involvement. Ideas are out to several people at once; only some become movies. Students pitch in to help on several projects; only some pairs or groups become sustained collaborators. Hustling *gets work done*, gets students on set, jumpstarts their reputations, and helps them become filmmakers. I gather the hustling culture in CAFilm as a bit of chicken-and-egg situation. Students are not clear what comes first: the culture that expects hustling and selectively chooses people and projects, or individual-level hustling that brings about movies, which in turn creates a culture of movie-making. The point is that the majority jumps right in, assuming it's a bit of both. Hustling students want to work on as many good projects because they want to be attached to good movies, do good work. An array of prior credits and an ability to multi-task are important outcomes that hustling generates, skills students believe are indicative of getting work or simply getting *in* among the mighty, elusive industry echelons they aspire to traverse.

6. Hustling as competing

An air of competition permeates the culture of CAFilm's MFA Production program. It starts off during the orientation session when students are asked who wants to be a director, and practically everybody in the room raises their hands. (That this happens with each incoming cohort has become a running joke in the school.) As they are thrust into the curriculum, students scramble to get into classes with buzzed-about professors. In this way, they are forced to the idea – taken to new heights in the industry, they anticipate – that for everything allegedly worth its while, there are waitlists and shortlists: there are those who get in and those who don't. Even the skeptical or industry-distancing students come around to throwing their hat in the ring for something; otherwise, quite simply, they may not be able to complete the program. Hustling as competition seems to be built into the curriculum as a bellwether of industry dynamics.

The class considered to be the most competitive to get into, and the one that "everyone" wants to get into, is PC, the advanced production class that I followed for a semester. The faculty member leading that class opened the first lecture by asserting that this is the class that "makes your reputation in this program. After you take this class, people ask, 'Who should I be working with?'" Mikhail qualified this proclamation by noting that you already need to have a good reputation to get into PC, but agreed that the class "cemented" your reputation, "like, you can work well on a big crew, with lots of people." Duane, who one faculty member called a "golden-tongued" producer because of his smooth yet persuasive style of talk, stated, "PC is presented and packaged as the crown jewel of the Production program." PC's student assistant Lavos said, "It's God, especially for newcomers." Others noted that even people in the industry knew about this class, and those alumni who had worked on it bonded with students who had taken it.

Every semester, a significant proportion of CAFilm students submit scripts, directors' reels, and producer credentials to the application pool for a position on PC. In a series of behind-closed-doors deliberations, CAFilm faculty members make several "cuts," narrowing down the pool to separate lists of a dozen or so producers, directors and writers. Over the period of a brutally hectic week, chosen directors find scripts they like and producers they want to work with; similarly, writers figure out which director might best bring out their story and characters, and producers take meetings with writers and directors. Once a trio of producer, director and writer is formed, the second stage commences, involving the assembly of the rest of the crew.

Unfortunately, I did not have access to this arduous industry-mimicking ritual, which producer Tanya aptly and ever so casually

described as a "meat market/speed dating process." Other students I spoke to concur. Participating in both stages takes the intensity of the previously described categories of hustling – as deeply social, and as continuous work – to the next level. Hustling for a spot in PC encompasses intense rotations of informal questioning, several permutations of sit-down meetings, furtive calling in of references, but most characteristically, decision-making based on sketchy agglomerations of impressions and reputations, leading frequently to flawed decision-making. For the careful discerners however, one director pointed out, the meat market/speed dating process can mark the beginnings of long-term collaborations. I highlight a few students' experiences from our interviews.

Sid said that he applied to PC not as writer, director, or producer, but as editor, because he was confident in his editing skills and was motivated by the competition for slots. Cate, having already been through the ritual the previous semester (you can enroll in PC twice during your time at CAFilm, as long as you occupy different crew positions), was very picky and "thorough" about which crew she wanted to align herself with and what role (editing or cinematography) would give her the greatest advantage and experience. Kim had just finished producing a successful TV pilot for another class, so she entered the arena confident.

> The producer for the TV pilot I was on just left and gave no word as to when she would return… So I just naturally took on all her duties. The showrunner of the pilot told me halfway through the semester, "You know, you've really changed a lot of people's opinion about you," which really is a back-handed compliment… So because I did surprisingly well and everyone thought I was doing great, [and because] I heard Duane was looking for a producer for *Guffaw*, I… approached him. I felt good about people feeling good about me.

Kim didn't eventually bag the producer's role during the "meat market" hustle, but she agreed to do sound design for *Guffaw*. Sid, Cate and Kim's experiences show the diverse motivations for competing for projects but also the differing amount of control students have over which project they get on and in which role they get staffed.

However, that unpredictability is nothing in comparison to the selection for the prized slots of director, writer and producer (three to four each), which Kim said was akin to "winning the lottery." And it doesn't end there. The wooing process for those selected to find the best collaborators puts immense pressure on them and an additional spin on the hustle. Dade, one of the ten semi-finalist directors, talks of his experience before the final pitch.

> I did meet a lot of writers and when I met with *Guffaw*'s writer, we just connected. He didn't even think his script was going to get chosen. It was six pages. I'm like, "Dude, this script is funny as hell." Nobody wanted to touch it because it had "fuck" and every other word. It was Friday morning, and I was in the courtyard and I was going to go with another script. I was like, "Which script should I go with? Should I go with *Guffaw* or should I go with this drama?" And then one of the guys that was pitching, he was like, "Yo Dade. What script are you doing?" I was like, 'I need to make a decision.' He was like, "You should pitch *Guffaw*. Nobody would touch it and nobody else would have the balls to do it but you." I was like, "You know what? You're right." I got a call from the writer [of the drama script] that I wanted to go with. He was like, "Man… I love your ideas but I think I'm going to go with another director." I was like, "All right. Great." So I called the *Guffaw* writer, "I was thinking about going with you. Let's make it happen." He was like, "All right. Let's do it."… I ran into Duane soon after. I was like, "Duane, I want you to come with me." He was like, "Wow! I'm looking at all these others." I said, "Get the fuck out of here. Bro, you need to get down with A-Team. Stop playing around." We sat down. We talked about it and he was like, "All right. I'll do it."

Dade reveals here how *much* back-and-forth occurred before he got naturally pushed into *Guffaw*, which interestingly was not his first choice, and how he formed the writer-producer trio that would pitch in the final round of selection, get chosen, and in turn, hire the rest of the crew, including Sid, Cate, and Kim. As is evident, already established personal connections and prior working experience (as with Duane) matter, but Dade describes the serendipity as well. He also admits that he was courted, that somebody played to his ego by saying that only he, Dade, could, would and should "touch" *Guffaw*.

Not everyone was as lucky as Dade. Ben divulges his critical and gloomy view of the PC selection process, and by extension, of the industry.

> The last film I directed [many semesters before his thesis *Ingrates*], I was really happy with. I remember being at the screening and how many people came up to me and said, "I love your film." So I really thought I had a strong reel to show off my work. And I submitted to the PC director shortlist five times, and I never got on it. I saw people on that list that I've worked with and whose films I've seen, and I do not understand how they got on there… There is no reasoning one way or the other. I talked to the lead faculty member many times and he never game me a straight answer. Nobody could tell me why. That's the way the industry works."

Ben's reflection on the arbitrariness of the PC selection process came after the screening of his thesis film, so a couple of semesters after he had completed coursework for the program and was already working in the industry. In his time at CAFilm, he eventually did work on a PC project, but in the capacity of cinematographer. Above, his way of making sense of his constant rejection is to undertake self-appraisal and come to form hardened expectations about the industry.

Film school, then, is not just a trial before industry because students and crews have to hustle to be heard. It's also a tribulation because it reflects a harsh industrial process that constantly arbitrarily shuts out some (talented) voices and accepts (mediocre) others. The PC selection process is thus a synecdoche for the film school-film industry *complex*, a thoroughgoing competition, a meat market experienced as speed dating, and an unpredictable rollercoaster of emotions for those who successfully or unsuccessfully traverse its cuts.

Hustling in this organizational avatar is thus an exhausting, highly competitive, industry-mimicking ritual. It signals to students the unending pageant of mostly rejections that will stutter their careers. Students come to understand the price of good work – work

that often starts as an individual aspiring towards creativity – is the precarious fragility and distinct un-assuredness of hustling as competition. The hustle *is* the work, *is* the movie, and *is* the industry. Socialization is competition-soaked, and careers depend on constant maneuvering. The subjectivity of career formation pivots on students' being able to swiftly shift shapes, repeatedly reinstate their subjectivity into the bazaar of socialization, accomplish go-aheads, and only thus, make movies.

7. Hustling as posturing reputations

In this section, I elaborate on the implicit suggestion building across previous sections: what hustling really is, is an industry-facing practice that students in film school have no choice but to practice because it yields students, crews, and their films as *complex postures* or positionalities with attendant *reputations*. Hustling through film school postures or positions students with reputations for careers in industries.

Three points connect hustling with reputation consolidation. First, as they form connections and compete to work across multiple projects, students constantly talk about each other. This means that they talk each other "up" or "down"—i.e., they gossip. Cate said that even though she didn't condone it, "talking shit" is normal. Many students preface their opinion by saying, "I love that director, but…" or "Don't get me wrong…" People also gossip about crews; for instance, PC students talked about "epic meltdowns" on set and how some crews had a negative working ambience. Crewmembers of other PC films would try to get me, an outsider, to elaborate on rumors they had heard about heated debates during *Guffaw* production meetings. Gossip, as a form of talk, positions – or *postures* – students and crews in the minds of their CAFilm peers. Students latch on to early impressions, like many did with Juan, *Guffaw's* outspoken production designer; or like Cate, test their accumulating impressions during school. Either outcome leads to reputation consolidation and helps students decide whom to work with.

Some people are sharply aware of their reputations as they work down the grapevine of hustling. Lavos almost boasted about his repute as the "asshole producer." He said, "A lot of people didn't like me because I was cutthroat." I asked him how he felt about this reputation. He replied nonchalantly, "I am a good producer, but I don't like [the job]. But I have to do it if I want to direct. Right now, I don't have a name as a director, so I'm producing my own stuff so I can create my own name…" Lavos believed 'small talk' gossip was harmless but talking the big talk can work to your advantage if you also show that you do good work. He pointed to the industry and said that gossip was part and parcel of networking: "Going to parties, talking to people… The key thing in Hollywood is people talk a lot. So when you talk a lot and actually deliver, then people pay attention." Thus, for Lavos, being a producer means someone who delivers, which required being "cutthroat." Further, gaining a "name" as a good producer was a rite of passage to getting gigs as a director. So, he did not care about his specific reputation as a "hard ass" *producer*. In fact, he implied that he leaned *into* the perception about his reputation. Doing so, he believed, was efficacious for his career development.

Second, hustling as socialization that consolidates reputations results in students deciding about future work partners. Students exchange lore about alumni who worked well together in school and went on to successful collaborations in the industry. So they come to value finding good future collaborators in school. Both Abe and Duane said that based on their *Guffaw* experiences, they knew exactly who they would and wouldn't work with. Abe even had an idea about who didn't want to work with him, because once he was caught "talking shit" about a film he had agreed to work on – because the people were cool even though it was "the worst idea for a movie I had ever heard" – to someone who turned out to be the director's roommate, who then told the rest of the crew about Abe's ethic. Ben stated confidently that he would collaborate with Don, the editor of his thesis, "any time." Sid explained how he would only direct a film for a future semester of PC if he had clear control on who he was working with: "The only way I would consider directing is if I could game the system, and by that I mean, the semester before, I know exactly the people I want, I put them in specific roles… So it wouldn't be like when we get greenlit, I start holding interviews. It would be: I get greenlit, I have everything ready." So Sid would hustle in advance to ensure a crew that already 'fit with' each other: this would guarantee, as much as these things can, a good reputation at the level of the group, which then improved the chances of making a good film.

Finally, some students remained skeptical about "this big idea of reputation," which Maya thought was "a lot of ridiculousness." She elaborated, "I guess that in this program more so than others, you have to work with people who are not in your semester, so you ask around, 'Hey, is this person cool to work with?'" At the same time, it didn't matter to her so much because she thought most people are friendly, which suggested that they are easy to work with. Further, contra Sid, Maya and Cate pointed out that sometimes crewmembers work really well together but the resulting film can be bad, so there's no guarantee either way.

Hustling, students come to understand by the end of their film school careers, is a series of posturing that cumulatively builds their reputations as they transition into the industry. It is a masquerade in which people talk each other up (as with Dade), sometimes backhandedly (Kim), talk each other down (Abe), talk the bigger industrial talk that cashes in on reputations (Lavos), and talk because filmmaking and storytelling is a certain kind of talk. I think back to the cafes, corridors and courtyards of CAFilm. All student and crew talk creates *postures*. People take stabs, form stances. They are engaged in a battle of impressions. They hustle. They constantly *anticipate* each other, even as future work lies in anticipation.

8. Discussion

What I have sketched above are grounded theory categories of the phenomenon of socialization natively termed by my film school subjects as "hustling." As is characteristic of the Chicago School methodology, there isn't a grand elegance or standalone coherence across my categories. Rather, they tentatively *build* on each other. Hustling, I found, involves forming connections, working simultaneously across projects, surviving competition rituals, and ultimately, consolidating reputations. It might involve aspects that I did not interpret. It is also possible that hustling at other film schools looks different; only additional research can fill in the larger

picture.

As they approach graduation, students come to see their tenure more holistically: as the beginning of a subjective, i.e., a subject-led, career, a series of roles and statuses that they have had to work through, practice, interpret. Film students as individuals *encounter* the group (crews and cohorts), the organization-institution (film school), and the larger socioeconomic context (the film industry). They do so gradually. Many of them start off school relatively more ambitious, brash, and married to a particular notion of a good cinematic aesthetic. Others start off with a less distinct individuality. However, all entrants become immersed in a multi-faceted socialization process that gets them through classes, on sets, and with reputations. They end up more like filmmakers – in their own eyes, in their peers', and the industry's – than when they started. A huge factor behind this professional transformation is their multiform hustling.

Thus, a tentative answer to the question guiding my research, "Film students work together knowing what?" is as follows. Film students work together coming to realize what exactly it means when experienced filmmakers – many, their role models – tout in Q & As that filmmaking is a deeply collaborative art form. They subjectively experience socialization in the various manners of hustling as collaborative work, busy work, hard work, social work, competitive work, and reputation work. They come to know that their training in school – or at least the particular school that CAFilm is – *is industry facing,* and that hustling in school is merely practice for relentless hustling in the industry. Film students work together knowing that their fates are partly determined by how well they socialize, and importantly, how said socialization is the basis for their reputation as co-workers, crewmembers and filmmakers. They hustle to make movies *together.* The lived experience of hustling becomes inextricably intertwined with the work of filmmaking and subjectivity about industry *careers.*

This point cannot be overemphasized. If any of them harbored romantic notions of creativity, then their tenure at school tempers these notions with an attendant sense of precariousness. If they thought that filmmaking is about great, individualist, visionary storytelling, then they come away knowing that great storytelling at minimum necessitates hustling to form trustworthy crews, hustling to work on other projects in order to find the right collaborators, hustling to win the chance for a stage and for mentorship, and hustling to just be in the know. In brief, film students work together coming to know hustling as *industrial* rather than merely curricular or pedagogical work that postures them for *careers* in the film/TV industries.

Put yet another way, a significant amount of the lived experience around hustling involves *thoroughgoing anticipation.* This is what I proffer it means to have a career in the creative/cultural/media industries. 'Career' is short for anticipation. It is not, as Barley (1989) suggested, a reconstrual of the past and the future in order to come to terms with the present. Rather, the directionality is opposite: it is centrifugal. Thoroughgoing anticipation means participating so intensively in the present that one's past work and identities closely approach but remain distinguishable from the present; and similarly, one's future identities emanate from the present. Mathematical limits work in a similar way: the limit in mathematics is the value of a function that becomes conspicuous as the input approaches a particular value. Analogically, the shape of an individual's career becomes conspicuous as their socialization intensifies towards a certain level. Hustling involves socialization; socialization takes work or is work; work, when practiced, interpreted, or experienced as thoroughgoing anticipation, approaches whatever a career is and what shape it will take. Framed in this manner, work, career and socialization become inexorably intertwined in a subjectivity and a subject-*drivenness* that is rooted in the present but disposed by the past and towards a future. Can't such subject-drivenness be thought of as *agency*? I return to this notion below.

On the ground, students learn not to have overarching, grand strategies because they understand that they have to continue working hard well after school. Not a single person I spoke to harbored any impression of making it big immediately. They knew that they would have to confront tough, opaque institutions. But they also knew they had already been subjugated to the boot camp that is film school. A mini-career in school paves the way for a larger career in industry. Hustling makes student filmmakers alert and stealthy, grafting on them a particular subjectivity—like a patina, a second skin, a *thicker* skin. The skin of thoroughgoing anticipation.

Is this argument applicable to all creative work? I would say that situation-activated anticipatory socialization pertains to industry-facing creative work. Unfortunately, there has not much scholarship on the socialization aspects of creative career building, though I venture that art schools pose a contrastive case. According to Singerman (1999), they train art subjects as "artists" and are sites where "the question posed most insistently… is whether the *artist* is a professional." (p. 8; emphasis added) By contrast, I found that at CAFilm, students acted implicitly wondering whether their *socialization* was professional.

Sociality and socialization compensate for if also remind students of the precariousness of their future work: "I am on a project now but do I have a project lined up for next week?" Or: "I made a thesis film during school but will I be able to direct my own feature film and get it distribution?" To the extent that autonomy, self-conception, identification with an occupation, and self-realization are core aspects of creative work, and to the extent that creative work needs to be processed through the cogs and wheels of industry structures, film students experience the sociality and socialization of hustling as precariousness, indeed, but also, I interpret, as *agency.*

Film students are *better off* as cohorts with solid proto-industrial reputations. I found my hustling subjects to be more primed, attentive and ready for behemoth industries. Some find pleasure in hustling, and others obligation. Some find release, and others transgression. But many CAFilm students are "hungry" to find work and to put across *their* work, and film school is the boot camp that teaches them how to survive while hungry. Film students have learned better how to capitalize on opportunity. They now walk the walk as much as they talk the talk. They know how to remain vigilant. Their "vocational restlessness" (lit review) has been made productive. They exit with a quiver of tactics. They bank on strength in numbers. They have come to know "how to go on" within everyday routines and structures (Giddens, 1984). *They have agency.* They are now agents of their creative filmmaking work. Film students have hustled to become *student filmmakers.*

Student filmmakers are still *students*, though. They face the industry, but are not yet enmeshed in industry dynamics. They seek careers, but they are not completely indoctrinated. They wait in vigil even as they constantly hustle. They are still somewhat free to deny and turn away, to more carefully stake out their paths, or to more strategically posture their reputations. In this sense, their hustling might be different from that of long-established media workers.

In conclusion, hustling is subjectively experienced in film school as anticipatory socialization towards industrial careers. Student filmmakers embark on careers having previewed and practiced precariousness. They might still be trying to figure out their exact role, position or identity, and they are certainly not yet "professionals." They have competed to form the most useful connections by working continuously across a variety of projects. They have a much better idea of their individual and collective abilities and reputations. Their future work – the course of their careers – lies in anticipation *of them*. They will continue to shape-shift and hustle in the hard work they will pour into their creative lives.

Acknowledgments

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