THE CONSERVATIVE MIND. WHY DOES THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS HATE ALCOHOL CONTROL?

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An examination is undertaken of the conservative attitudes of the middle class towards governmental alcohol policy. These are considered within theoretical descriptions of the middle classes, and illustrated with a case study of middle class pub regulars in Helsinki. Empirical material is drawn from eleven group interviews, and a sociosemiotic analysis developed. It is suggested that as middle class conservatism is non-political, individualistic and populist, public policy is seen from a "client" point of view rather than from the perspective of those who feel they have power in society. This is contrasted with the view that the interviewees have of themselves as a culturally and socially superior group.

Keywords: Alcohol policy, conservatism, individualism, middle class, sociosemiotics

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to interpret the attitudes of a number of regulars of Sky Bars, three middle class pubs in the centre of Helsinki, to issues surrounding alcohol availability and control. It starts by presenting general theories of the new middle class. It then analyses a number of the responses of the patrons to questions about alcohol policy, using semiotic methods.

The analysis in this article proceeds from the ethnomethodological assumption that "mundane reason", as Pollner (1987) calls it, may not be as inconsistent or illogical as it often appears. To lay bare its structure, steps are taken to develop semiotic methods for the analysis of "everyday language" or, as this author prefers, paraphrasing Pollner, "mundane speech".

New middle class conservatism

Attitudes towards a concrete issue such as alcohol control by state authorities involve a complex set of underlying beliefs about the nature and legitimate functions of the state, of citizenship and society, the individual, and the self. The rise of the new middle class in Western Europe, recently in comparison to the USA, seems to reflect a fundamental change, such that some researchers feel that the whole welfare state system might be put in jeopardy. The political expression of this reshaping of the relationship between civilians and the state is in conservative parties and ideologies.

There are two opposing views on the role of the new middle classes. The more optimistic holds that the evolution of market economies has been part of a continuous process of individualization. The metropolis, as Georg Simmel (1903) argued, is not only a culture of indifference but also of freedom. This view contends that individual moral sensibility could be the basis of new social movements concerned about the environment, minority rights and local affairs (Lash and Urry 1987; Touraine 1968; Bidou 1984).

Against this, the mass society view, which has been popular particularly among American authors (Mills 1956; Riessman 1953; Whyte 1969), maintains that middle class societies have a tendency to 'pulverize' organic (political) communities. The degradation of social differences destroys individual uniqueness and identity; the sense of being 'in the middle' no longer implies movement but stagnation and indifference. The mass society theories, furthermore, imply that the new middle class is conservative in its alienation from public affairs. The lower middle class particularly has been accused of reactionary tendencies ever since the rise of Nazism in Germany, and this accusation has continued in liberal interpretations of right-wing radicalism in the USA in the 1950s (Bell 1963; Lipset 1969). *Escape from Freedom* by Erich Fromm was an early formulation of a very popular theory about status panic or status inconsistency of the middle class—resulting from the contradiction between weak economic position and high status expectation. This will, according to this theory, breed authoritarianism, unpredictability and a tendency to right-wing extremism (Fromm 1941). The recent success of conservative parties in European and North American politics has also been interpreted as a political reaction of the middle classes against the welfare state, particularly against the tax burden it places on wage earners (Crawford 1980).

Neither view is fully supported by the evidence. Several authors maintain that the middle class is in fact the principal supporter of the welfare state which, paradoxically, has become the butt of conservative politics (Esping-Andersen 1990; Olsson 1990). Furthermore, several studies indicate that the new social movements—antinuclear, feminist, environmental, local, regional and ethnic—are mainly supported by new middle class groups especially in France (Bidou 1984; Bidou *et al.* 1983; Monjardet and Benguigui 1982; Touraine 1968) but also in other European countries (Lash and Urry 1987; Offe 1985; Kriesi 1989; Inglehart 1977, 1989). This suggests that the new affluent middle class might be reshaping the old now blurring class-based political boundaries into a form with two lefts instead of one: the traditional working class materialist left and a new left that promulgates the values of postmaterialism. Empirical research partly confirms this hypothesis (Offe 1985; Kriesi 1989), although the relationships between class, party and postmaterialism seem to be quite complex (Weakliem 1991).

Val Burris is obviously right when he says that no theory that ascribes either a liberal democratic or a conservative, even reactionary, political attitude to the whole middle class, however defined, can be empirically correct. Inevitably, the "political cleavage in contemporary capitalist societies cuts through the middle of the white-collar ranks". Where and how the line should be drawn is a complex matter, although Burris himself believes that it is the lower middle class that ends up on its liberal side rather than vice versa (Burris 1986).

As a global description, even that view is probably wrong. There are some new middle class groups who participate in progressive movements and organizations, but others, like the Sky Bar people, who could not care less or would be openly hostile to them. It is no longer clear what conservatism is.

Those researchers who have studied political attitudes as discourse know that political thinking is rarely a unified system of opinions and attitudes—not even in the minds of political professionals. Rather, it is ideological dilemma, containing "more or less incompatible beliefs" as Billig *et al.* (1988) say, for example in authoritarianism and in the value of democracy.

However, full incompatibility is intolerable and consistent inconsistency a burden. Behind what seems an ideological dilemma there is an overriding logic that explains contradictions and gives coherence to thought and action. In the new middle class, this logic is that of individual sovereignty. It is that which allows radicalism as well as conservatism, and gives a distinct middle class tenor to both.

The key to the conservative variant of middle class individualism, is the way people see or define their relationships, first, with the moral order and second, with the state. One might expect middle class people who are as exalted about their social superiority as are the Sky Bar regulars, either to take a distant but evaluative stand on public affairs, criticizing what they see as bad policies from the perspective of those who consider themselves potential holders of power. Or they might be expected to exhibit impeccable awareness of the limits of moral indulgence. Our talks about drinking provided concrete but persuasive examples of both these aspects of their thinking about the individual and society.

Causes of things

Whenever social policy, such as alcohol control, is discussed, the speech forms used will almost inevitably be causal. Policies are intentional projects by someone to alleviate a problem, to achieve an end. Discussion of them necessarily implies causal relationships or their contradiction: this is how our interviewees approached these issues.

In causal speech forms the effects of a policy or an action are always defined in terms of problems. Rising overall consumption of alcohol is seen as undesirable. The question is whether this adverse effect of a liberalising reform—which from the point of view of convenience and pleasure would be good—would be lasting or temporary, and whether alternative causes for it might be found.

But causal speech modes are of many different kinds and they may be employed in many ways to define values of various objects as well as subjects and their actions. Particularly interesting is the way that 'speaker images' are constructed in them and how values are invested in both the objects, the subjects and the processes of causation.

Causal speech forms have special importance in sociological discourse and in the sociology of mundane speech because they are directly related to power. Causality is a core element in any political rhetoric which legitimates policies for the public good even though individual rights may be affected. Also evaluations of the exercise of power rests on causal arguments, either contradicting the implied causal relationships, or pointing out alternative explanatory but still causal relationships. Whatever the use of causal formulations, their appeal lies in their strength and clarity in articulating values and social positions, and this is why they merit special attention in sociological studies of mundane speech.

There is a long tradition of philosophical reflection on causality, but sociosemiotic theory on causal speech forms is surprisingly underdeveloped. In the philosophical and

methodological tradition, causal propositions are thought to be based on implication:

$$\text{if } X \text{ then } Y$$

This starting point may well serve methodological reflections on the verifiability, logical consistency and systematic qualities of causally formulated theories. However, from the sociosemiotic viewpoint, the notion of causality is best construed as concatenations of what semioticians call narrative programmes (Greimas and Courtés 1979; Sulkunen 1992). Narrative programmes on which all causal statements (as well as narrative structures of speech) are based are elementary utterances of doing:

$$\text{(a) } A_1 \rightarrow F(A_2 \cup O), \text{ or}$$

$$\text{(b) } A_1 \rightarrow F[A_2 \rightarrow F(A_3 \cup O)]$$

$$\text{agent } A_1 \text{ makes agent } A_2 \text{ be, have or do something (to } A_3)$$

This formulation will make it possible to investigate what kinds of qualities are invested in the acting and in the reacting agents of the causal relationship and how their relationship is defined, as well as how the enunciator of the causal speech is related to them.

Causal statements imply classification and evaluation of agents: policy reform (A_1) will bring about a series of possible changes in other agents (A_2 and A_3): rising consumption by the population in the long or in the short term, desirable consequences for some and undesirable consequences for others. Modal evaluations are brought to bear not only on the object but also on the agent of causation such as its ability or inability to bring about an effect, or willing and not willing to make an effort. Furthermore, the elementary narrative programmes are always placed in a temporal and a spatial framework.

Causal statements imply relations of social influence. On defining the object of causation as a problem (or a goal, in which case failure to achieve it is a problem), it is essential to know whether the causal agent and the object of causation are intentional, modalized beings or not.

Sometimes both the cause and the consequence are described without reference to any intentional agents at all: "There would be the reform and there would or would not be rising overall consumption, which is as such a bad thing and not anyone's intention". On the other hand, the same causal chains could well be described and evaluated from an intentional point of view: "The state would try to make people spend more money on alcohol" or "If wine were sold in grocery stores, people would have to start thinking where to put their money, on food or on drink".

Another distinction of some importance is whether the object of causation is of a practical or cognitive nature. Agent A_1 may cause agent A^2 either to do something practical (drink more) or to know or believe something. Combining these possibilities we get an inventory of causal speech forms that will be of general use in the analysis of mundane speech (Table 1):

Table 1 Typology of causal speech forms

type:	A_1	A_2	pract/cogn
manipulation	intentional	non-intentional	p/c
power	intentional	intentional	p/c
social process	non-intentional	non-intentional	p/c
constraint	non-intentional	intentional	p/c

The intentionality of the agents is communicated by modal qualities attributed to them: they want, can, may or must, or know how to do (or be) something.

According to this typology, a government *manipulates* the economy by raising or lowering taxes or changing the interest rate, but it *exercises power* when it attempts to achieve a general agreement on prices and wages. *Social processes* occur when non-intentional processes cause other non-intentional processes, like when urbanisation is said to cause violence or divorce. I shall call *constraints* all causal statements in which a non-intentional agent influences an intentional one, such as "Inflation makes people unable to save money".

The variety of possible causal statements will be multiplied when we account for a number of additional factors: temporality (whether the consequence will follow the cause immediately or only intermittently), quantity versus quality (whether the relationship between cause and effect is qualitative (X will cause Y) or quantitative (X will increase [the probability of] Y) and the modality involved in the relationship (X will make it necessary, possible, desirable, or feasible that Y takes place).

THE CASE STUDY—SKY BAR PEOPLE

Method

A case study of middle class pub regulars was conducted in Helsinki to see whether their dialogue could be construed within these general theoretical frameworks. The data were collected in group interviews in a studio, which resembled a public drinking place. We asked the staff of three middle class pubs, here called Venus (V), Tellus (T) and Saturnus (S), to introduce us to some of their regular customers who then invited their friends from the same pub to the groups. Eleven groups were held. The study was introduced as being on modern pub culture in Finland, and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Sky Bar people

A total of 23 women and 32 men, most in their thirties or forties, were interviwed. All were in some kind of office work in middle or executive positions. 6 of the women and 21 of the men were married or cohabiting. The sample is more fully described in Sulkunen (1992).

The Sky Bar people are particularly interesting because they are both individualistic, antiauthoritarian and describe themselves as 'conservative'.

Their self-attributed conservatism is complex, as is its relationship to their individualism. It is not ideological conviction, elaborated in theoretical doctrines as in organized social movements. Nor is it conservatism in a moral or normative sense either: they are frequent drinkers, for one thing, and consider themselves liberal and even avant-garde in this matter. Neither are their understandings of sexuality and marriage old-fashioned or traditional, if by that one means believing in stability and monogamy. They are great nationalists, yet they are also very proud of their cosmopolitan and particularly European contacts, attitudes and manners. Their views sometimes sound authoritarian; but they are extremely sensitive to

relations of power both within their group and especially to power that is exercised on them from outside. They might be conservative in the sense that they are opposed to the equality claims of socialist politics; but again, they are not all in the upper end of the income hierarchy either. What they call 'conservatism' must be something else, an attitude that is in some ambiguous way opposed to traditional working class politics and somehow related to their individualism but little if at all to actual political colouration.

Defying the moral barrier

Albeit otherwise modest and tempered in their views on social affairs, the one moral question in which the people we interviewed exhibited militancy was their antipathy to external control and patronizing over individuals, particularly over drinking *in public*.

The Sky Bars are contiguous to work life literally: they are places for "breaking the day with a rush-hour beer" (T05-Pete; T06-Nelly; T06-Agnes). Dropping in straight from work is exempt from control on the home front. The "rush hour visit" to the pub requires no particular explanations to the wife or husband, and there will be no risk that he or she might want to come also. Drinking with workmates and colleagues is like part of work so the wife or husband waiting at home accepts it more readily than just drinking with anyone (S13-Roy).

> *S13-Duke*: It really feels like a club, almost a secret society. I mean there's no need to say anything if you are an hour or two late when you come home from work, you don't have to explain to the wife that look, first I went over there and then after so-and-so many minutes I went to another place and then . . . In many ways knowledge is bad, not perhaps in this case, but even so for some reason we tend to keep it to ourselves.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the Sky Bars were male hide-outs away from the reach of women's control, as is the case with working class pubs (LeMasters 1975; Sulkunen *et al.* 1985). It is that only in the sense that private life in general is not allowed in. The contiguous relationship between the Sky Bar and work is one way of averting external control.

> *S13-Roy*: What you were saying here about Saturnus actually comes quite close to what I consider an ideal situation. You know, we don't have to talk about going out for a beer, after an evening out we don't have to listen to people at work saying, oh you've been out drinking have you. It would be a perfectly normal part of everyday life, there wouldn't be any threshold between normal life and life down at the pub. It would be part of our normal way of life.

Any boundary at all between the pub and other parts of the public sphere arouses objections: the rituals of entering, passing the doorman, dressing up for the evening or sitting at tables rather than moving around in the pub (V07-Luke) are symbols that mark drinking places as separate spheres cut off from normal, everyday public life.

The everyday public sphere is not limited to work only. Hobbies, sports spectacles or anything else that is public should not be separated from the pub. It is an exhilarating pleasure

to drink in public while actually doing something else. It resembles the thrill of being naked in public places, making sexual advances in the middle of the street, or eating in the market square. The body is made public and its desire is satisfied as it were, on stage, together with other members of the tribe but seen by outsiders as well.

> *S13-Susan*: In many places when you're sitting there with your drink you're not allowed to take your drink to another table because that's a different zone and your waitress will lose out on her tips or something equally ridiculous. When we were in England it was great when we could just take our drinks and go out to watch this football match on the neighbour's pitch and then when our glasses were empty we just swapped them for full ones.

The same contiguity goes for all public activities. For example shopping trips to the market square often turn into Saturday afternoon matinees in Venus (V07-Luke; V07-Mac; V08-Norma; V08-Mary;). Even taking care of a child is no reason to stay away from pubs:

> *S13-Roy*: I was just going to say that when we had to meet one Saturday to exchange some papers, you phoned me and said you'll meet me at this pub Saturnus and your daughter came along. So we went to the Saturnus and we ordered a pint for ourselves and an ice cream for her. She had her ice cream and we had our beers and if you ask me it was perfectly alright, but your old conservative Lady Finn would have been disgusted, you know two old farts drinking beer with a small kid, absolutely disgusting.

Dissolving the moral barrier between alcohol use and everyday life is both disturbing and exciting because of the particular position that alcohol has in Finnish society, where its use in everyday contexts was practically unknown at the time when most of the Sky Bar people were in their childhood or adolescence. Being frequent public drinkers today, they are defensive and inclined to take any limits and boundaries around drinking as criticism.

However, in a larger, cultural frame, their defensiveness is in itself not as interesting as what it is in defense of. On the public stage of the Sky Bar, some of the core values of new middle class individuality are displayed: freedom from the constraints of incontestable control, permission against interdiction; volition and autonomy against manipulation are promulgated as vital for the self-respect and distinctiveness of being full members of adult society. The quintessence of middle class individualist morality is self-direction, one's own good judgement of what is proper.

The conservatism of our interviewees entails in fact also a principle of moral modernism. In their images of the past, drinking represented dreadful sorcery of the mind that once could only be allowed on special ritualized occasions and that always carried the connotation of transgression, a break with normality. The symbolic worlds of the everyday and the day of drink were distinct. The distinction implied public control, both ritual and official rules about the time, place and company in which alcohol could be used without shame. The difference was clear between acceptable collective sharing of an exceptional experience and unacceptable pursuit of selfish and private pleasure.

For the new morality of individual self-direction, such breaks represent old-fashioned collective interdictions to be replaced by a new mundane world of cosmopolitanism and

freedom that already exists in other countries and will be found in a new age that awaits us too (Ahola 1989, pp. 82-92). Freedom, autonomy and sovereignty in public life is affirmed in what some could also see as an intimate affair: drinking, a bodily pleasure, and intoxication, which derives from psychological sensations inside the person. Doing it in public without limits, represents freedom, autonomy and sovereignty but also self-control.

The alcohol control debate

> *Interviewer*: Well what do you think, if they'd liberalize wine and start selling it in grocery stores, what d'you think would happen to the Finnish people?
> *T20-Fred*: They'd be much better off!
> *T20-Denise*: Well I'd expect that the consumption of alcohol would be up, that's for sure, for a short while.
> *T20-Flo*: I can't see any . . . 'cause then again the consumption of alcohol, today you can get it from the monopoly, it's not a matter of availability but the problem's somewhere else.

State interventions into the market of alcoholic beverages were seen to be either useless or harmful. Whatever alcohol problems were admitted to exist, their causes were identified in factors other than the availability of drinks. The idea that the state might have reason to control and even reduce alcohol consumption was rejected with repugnance.

The Sky Bar people were not alone in their hostility towards public alcohol control policy. In Finland, as much as in other temperance-driven alcohol control states, the legitimacy of state intervention in this area is rapidly eroding, and the most trenchant criticism comes from the new middle classes.

Their rally against the moral barrier finds an easy target in the Finnish alcohol control system. Prohibition in Finland lasted only twelve years, ending in 1932, but an intricate system of state controls on the use and distribution of alcohol remained. Until quite recently public drinking, especially, was regulated by governmental rules and decrees, administered mainly by the state alcohol monopoly. The control system was originally biased against women and the working class: drinking in public was exclusively for the upper echelons of society.

This complex web of rules has been gradually dismantled. In the 1980s the essential remaining controls concerned only the opening hours and maximum prices of drinks. The number of pubs and restaurants licensed to sell alcohol had grown beyond saturation point by the early 1970s. Nobody, especially in the bigger towns and cities, would have difficulty finding a public drinking place that suits his—or her—taste.

Yet public debate on these issues continues; it even experienced a boom in the mid-1980s. At the time of the interview period, a bill was debated in parliament to allow the serving of wine and strong spirits in restaurants from 11:00 a. m. instead of noon. The bill was passed in early 1987.

The main mechanism of alcohol control has been the monopoly retail system, especially the monopoly's exclusive right to sell alcoholic beverages other than medium beer (liberated in 1969). Many would allow also strong beer and wine, if not all alcoholic beverages, to be sold in general grocery stores.

Being frequent drinkers in bars and restaurants, the opinions of our interviewees about these matters were understandably permissive. A structured questionnaire administered to the groups included several items that are comparable to general population surveys previously conducted in Finland. One such item was a question on how respondents would like wine to be distributed. The responses and corresponding results from general population surveys are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Opinions on the question "Where, in your opinion, should the public be permitted to buy wine?" Per cent of all responses

	general population (N = 3.624)	Helsinki area (N = 509)	Sky Bar (N = 55)
not at all	3	0	0
in monopoly stores, with personal purchasing licence	14	6	0
in monopoly stores, without personal purchasing licence	58	47	2
in general grocery stores licensed to sell wine	15	27	56
in all general grocery stores	8	19	41
cannot say	2	2	2

The Sky Bar people seem to represent an historical avant-garde in their liberalism with respect to alcohol availability. Repeat survey polls indicate that opinions held by the general population on the issue of where alcoholic beverages should be sold have gradually shifted since 1966, towards the position held by Sky Bar people (Makela 1989). Educated, urban young people in southern (industrialized) Finland, more than the average population, are in favour of liberalization (Ahlström and Österberg 1990). [Since our interviews were con-ducted, the shift in public opinion has accelerated: the latest polls, taken in 1993, show that 60 per cent of the general population wants to buy wine in grocery stores].

Views of the current laws

Very few positive consequences of the current regulations could be thought of, unless criticising the present system of control is counted as such. The monopoly system diverts trade to commercial centres that have a monopoly store (T20-Fred). It reinforces the moral barrier around alcohol, thus creating feelings of shame and sin (T05-Pete) and increases the attraction of drinking (S14-Daisy) but does not prevent abuse (T05-Joe; T20-Flo).

The old regulation, debated in parliament at the time of the interviews, which did not allow serving wine and spirits in restaurants before noon, aroused unanimous objections. Serving wine with lunch to business colleagues (T09-Bert); even taking schnapps before noon is legitimate if it takes place in a working context. Similarly, closing hours at night (currently 1:00 a. m. in most restaurants excluding nightclubs) were not generally felt to be in need of change. "Our" pub, could perhaps stay open as a restricted club for regulars even after hours (T06-Agnes; T05-Pete), but generally restaurants could close even earlier than now so that people would go home and make it to work the next day V08-Iris; V07-Luke).

The distribution reform

> *T20-Fred*: I mean, for us this transition period is going to be quite difficult in that if
> there is an alcohol-policy decision that allows the sale of wine in certain shops with a
> licence and all the appropriate control systems, it'll take us two to three years, but
> there's no problems in Germany, no problems in Austria, so why should we have any
> problems here, I mean are we really backward Laplanders or what?

> *T20-Denise*: Well, of course, the biggest problems, they are in society as a whole

In all groups (except S11 and S13), comments were made on the desirability of selling
alcoholic beverages in general grocery stores. As already indicated by the questionnaire
responses, the idea was greeted with enthusiasm in all groups. In most cases (groups 8, 10,
11 and 13 excepted) the interviewer also asked whether this would lead to adverse
consequences for the Finnish people.

The most common argument presented in favour of the distribution reform was that it
would have no effect whatsoever, or that the adverse effects would be short-lived (S14; T20;
T05; T06; V07). "The Finnish people" would know how to control themselves (S14-Bar-
bara); drinking problems are caused by factors other than the availability of alcohol. Other
countries, where alcoholic drinks are freely available were believed (T09-Leila) to be
evidence of this.

The reform might civilize drinking patterns and persuade more people to prefer wine,
which is not used the same way as beer and spirits.

> *S14-Daisy*: I think we don't perhaps drink wine in the same way as middle beer or
> spirits . . . I'd rather get a bottle of wine than a crate of beer and have it after sauna. I
> think that overall this would improve the situation, reduce the consumption of spirits
> and civilize our drinking habits, you know that every time we drink it doesn't mean
> we have to drink ourselves under the table or empty the whole bottle, you can take it
> easier.

Opening hours

> *V08-Iris*: Well, say in a restaurant it's really up to the staff isn't it. They should be
> able to see whether they're serving a group of drunks or whether they're people who
> are having a meeting and having lunch and that they want schnapps or something.

Discussions on the other specific question of alcohol policy—opening and serving hours in
restaurants—followed exactly the same pattern. Mostly no consequences were deemed
to follow if restaurants were free to choose when they are open and serve alcohol. To "us"
it would make no difference (V07-Mac). Alcoholics would start drinking earlier during
the day if strong drinks were served in the morning; but then they would at least do it in
controlled settings instead of having parties under the bridges (T09-Bert; T09-Larry). On
the other hand, working men may be induced to go to work in the morning if pubs are closed
at least until 9:00 a. m. (T09-Marvin; V07-Mac). For "our" part, it is again only a matter of

convenience whether pubs are opened earlier and closed later or stay the same as they are now.

"Us" and "Them"

Many statements were qualified by making distinctions between people on whom the reform would have effects: youth (T20-Denise) and alcoholics (S14-Barbara) should be excluded from the reform one way or another; if alcohol would be made more available to them or to rural people (T06-Agnes), problems would certainly arise, but then that is not our concern. To "me" or to "us" it does not make any difference whether alcohol is sold in grocery stores or only in monopoly shops; it would only be a matter of convenience (T05-Ed; T20-Marian; S10-Ralph; S14; V08-Iris; V12-Tom).

The distinction between "us" and "alcoholics" is strong, even hostile to those who "mean to kick out; they would just go sooner" (T09-Marvin; T06; T05-Ed) and that would be better for everybody:

> *V12-Tom*: those who'd go under, they'd kill themselves with drink in any case . . .
> *V12-Will*: It'd just speed up the process . . .
> *V12-Bob*: . . . imagine what kind of savings we'd get in social expenses and taxes.
> *V12-Will*: Yeah, imagine how much these people cost society . . .
> *V12-Bob*: . . . It's bloody awful really, because of them we have to suffer every day, or once a month.

All elaborations of the causal relationship between alcohol policy and its effects in these comments concern the consequences of causation, not its agent. The distinctions made between "us" and "other people", who might be negatively affected by more liberal alcohol policies, demonstrate social and cultural hierarchies that appeared in their discussions on what kinds of pubs and company they like. People without culture and competence—young persons, the rural and working class population—would experience problems if alcohol were made freely available to them; alcoholics would be speeded up on their way to the gutters, even to death. In those cases, the relationship between control and behaviour is a social process, even manipulation, provided that someone would consciously aim at these ends. For the Sky Bar people themselves, alcohol control has consequences on the modal qualities of the persons rather than on their behaviour: "We would learn to drink more wine"; "it would improve our drinking culture"; "we are not able to order a schnapps" . . . For "us" alcohol control represents a constraint or a power relationship. Figure 1 is a schematic presentation of the causal structure of the argument on alcohol policy.

Clientism

> *T06-Doreen*: I hope they pass this law, it'll be quite a scandal if they don't . . . I mean they patronize us plenty as it is, sometimes you could put a dummy in your mouth.

Whereas clear distinctions are made between those on whom control measures would have different effects, alcohol policy itself is not discussed at all in terms of intentions or evaluated in terms of its capacity to influence things, its motifs or any other qualities. The causal agent is not even actorialized in any interesting way: it is the distribution reform as such, or the system of regulations on opening hours. The discussion does not focus at all on questions like: "If the Parliament would decide to . . . then . . ."; or "When public opinion will force politicians to accept this reform, then . . . ". Only in Groups 5, 10 and 12 did the narrative programme include an actor of some kind in the role of the causal agent. In Group 5, T05-Joe says that the patronizing system has come to us from Sweden; S10-Ralph complains that our opinion will not be heard anyway by those who make the policies; and V12-Tom refers to "decision makers" ("Take a firm look up there, at the bosses").

This discussion gives one further insight into the type of conservatism that the Sky Bar people represent. The sovereignty and superiority that the Sky Bar people feel with respect to less competent folks, the familiarity and contentment that they have with hierarchical structures of authority, does not give them any feeling of being able to participate in the exercise of power and influence in society at large, not even in an area which is relatively important in their lives. The speaker image they construct of themselves in discussing alcohol policy, is positioned univocally in the role of the reacting rather than the acting agent.

In the best sociological tradition, they understand that the social world is a duality of structure and action. Structure receives very few characterizations from them, it is talked about in a passive form without any attributes ("we are being patronized"), and whenever "we", the speakers and other good citizens like us, get in its way, the consequences are temporary and for the most part negative.

As actors within the structure, they look at the decision makers but do not themselves take the standpoint of making decisions or giving advice on them. Their relation to power is, instead, that of its clients or its victims. Their superiority is the superiority of those who are served, not of those who make decisions, bear responsibilities and reflect on social issues at large. Agnes is not alone when she concludes:
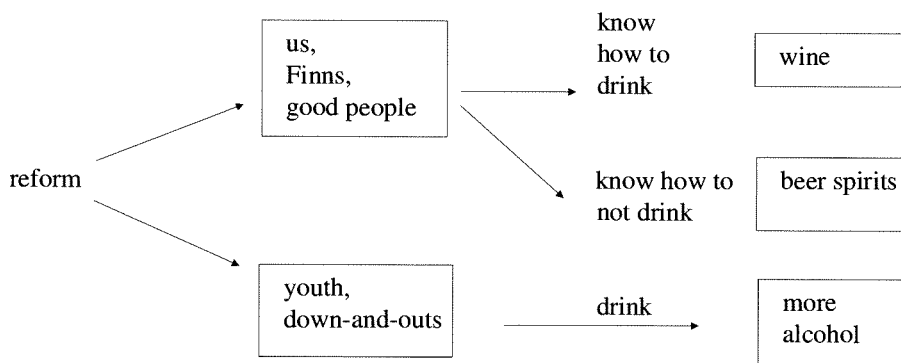
Figure 1 Causal structure of argumentation on alcohol policy

T06-Agnes: After all, it is none of our business to worry about these social problems in the first place, is it?

CONCLUSIONS

Despite their sentiments of cultural superiority, the conservatism of Sky Bar patrons is not the conservatism of those who have a sense of power and responsibility. Instead, it is the detached conservatism of people who see the political system as an incontestable, faceless power, a structure without any qualities or attributes other than the constraint it puts on its citizens.

This might be interpreted as a reflection of the status inconsistency evoked in several theories of the new middle class. Their conservatism is a conservatism from below, a populist rather than a dominant disposition. Superior cultural sensibility is not necessarily transferred into positions that one might expect elites to take in social and political affairs: considerations of advantages and disadvantages of different options from a general point of view.

One might, of course, say that this is a special case: anyone who is not responsible for the particular regulations concerning alcohol availability, is inevitably in the position of the object of power in this matter, however high he or she is placed otherwise in society. But this does not explain the contradiction between the high intensity and low practical significance expressed by the Sky Bar people in their critical views on alcohol policy. Their critical stance in this particular matter is a reflection of the fact that the issue of alcohol control concerns their cultural superiority itself.

The new middle class may well develop radicalism among its ranks, but it can also be loyal to hierarchies, like the people we studied. Power can well be tolerated in middle class life; it is felt to be humiliating only if it deprives real actors, "us", the right to exercise their most valued modal qualities: good judgement and free will. It is the idea that one would have to ask for permission or to wait for an hour, which is infuriating; it has very little to do with the practical importance of that permission or of that hour.

With respect to social hierarchies and authority in general, the new middle class mind probably turns much easier in the direction of loyalty than disloyalty. However, in one respect it is unconditionally antiauthoritarian. Revolt will arise whenever it is felt that the dimensionless power of the system cuts into the heart of its identity as sovereign individuals, as autonomous and competent adults.

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