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The Sociology of the Betting Shop

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## The sociology of the betting shop

The theme of the embourgeoisement of the working class, considered once more only recently in the columns of this journal,<sup>1</sup> has featured prominently in sociological discussion in this country in the past twenty years. It would be wrong to regard it entirely as a post second world-war preoccupation, for more than 100 years ago Engels, in private correspondence with Marx, exclaimed, in one of those characteristic moments of prophetic foresight given to the disenchanted reformer whose raw material refuses to cast itself into the mould fashioned for it, that 'The English Proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois, so that the most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie'.<sup>2</sup> Poverty, mass unemployment, social and political unrest made the subject unmeaningful for a long time, but with economic recovery and the initial manifestations of the changes brought about by the proliferation of mass products, some claimed to be perceiving the arrival of the 'ultimate possession of a bourgeois proletariat' in the late 1930s. Orwell<sup>3</sup> declared that 'in tastes, habits, manner and outlook the working class and the middle class are drawing together' and Carr Saunders and Caradog Jones were noting in their 1937 *Survey of the Social Structure of England and Wales* that 'in respect of dress, speech and use of leisure all members of the community are obviously coming to resemble one another'.<sup>4</sup>

It was however left to the most eminent post-war British sociological spokesmen—Ginsberg,<sup>5</sup> Cole<sup>6</sup> and Marshall<sup>7</sup>—to translate these vague concepts into a firm framework. They stated that a number of factors had led to a situation in which, as Marshall expressed it, 'the evidence now suggested that the conventional use of sharply distinguished groups was less clearly marked and less important'. These were the abolition of hereditary, legally upheld differences in status; technological advance, economic growth, diminution in income and property differentials; social welfare, taxation, Trade Union activities; equality of opportunity in the field of education, now universal and free and replacing the kinship system as an agency

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for role allocation; but above all Affluence—the working-class breakthrough into middle-class regions of income levels, job security and even occupational status and career patterns. With the closing of the economic gap, it was claimed, as was expressed by D. E. Butler and Richard Rose<sup>8</sup> that the traditional working-class attitudes had been ‘eroded by the steady growth of prosperity’.

Others, of whom Goldthorpe and Lockwood are in all probability the most notable, rejected such conclusions, based on evidence none other than economic convergence between the manual wage-earner and his immediately contingent groups—the clerks, technicians, shopkeepers and minor professionals—as inadmissably facile and premature. Even if economic equality were to be granted as an accomplished fact and even were it to have led to acquisition of other trimmings of middle-class occupational levels—job security, intra-work status, progressive career structure, work autonomy (some of these indices are subject to analysis in the article by Gavin Mackenzie in the *British Journal of Sociology*, referred to above) this in itself was not enough. In their view, stated most concisely in their monograph in *The Sociological Review* in July 1963,<sup>9</sup> embourgeoisement of the working-class is multidimensional and cannot be granted as an accomplished fact until economic emancipation has been followed by other developments—adoption by the working-class of middle-class style of life; social acceptance of working-class groups of individuals into middle-class spheres of life and their eventual assimilation; acquisition of norms of behaviour by the working-classes more characteristic of the middle-classes. None of these developments appeared, as yet, to have taken place, although even Goldthorpe and Lockwood conceded that ‘the decline of the gregariousness and the communal form of sociability characteristic of the traditional types of working-class locality’ had occurred, but, as they claimed, it had left the working-man ‘privatized’—withdrawn into apathetic, nuclear family centred egotism, in which the fetish of consumer goods served, in the absence of being granted achievement of the true goal, namely integration into the mainstream of social and cultural middle-class life, as substitute gratification.

What does strike one as a surprisingly common article of faith in these discussions, affecting to no lesser degree the rejectionists than the advocates of the thesis of embourgeoisement, is their shared assumption that social integration into the middle-classes is the ultimate goal to which the working-classes do aspire. That attainment is denied them only by the active resistance of the middle-class groups contingent to them in the social hierarchy, the latter preserving their positions of privilege by rejection or by the more subtle process of keeping one step ahead of their newly-acquired economic equals (or even betters) by astute improvisation of ever-new symbols of distinc-

tion. Universally it is taken for granted that were it not for segregation from above, the working-class subculture—inferior, barren and chaotic—would eagerly dissolve and blend, with only faint traces of its former self remaining, into the middle-class way of life.<sup>10</sup> The present article, although originating in pursuit of purposes unconnected with the present subject of discussion,<sup>11</sup> is an attempt to submit a different perspective to the discourse. A perspective postulating the persistence and urge for survival of a homogeneous, viable working-class subculture, possibly in its manifestations abhorrent and distasteful to the cultural and moral trendsetters observing it from their lofty vantage points, but precious, satisfying as well as rational to those who form part of it; who would, were they to be conscious of the pressures, resist integration into the social strata adjoining them on terms other than their own with no lesser vehemence and pugnacity than they are said to be encountering in their efforts to 'rise in the social scale'.

II

Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big rather than what is commonly thought small. (Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*.)

The East End of London has provided rich material to the social observer during the past hundred years. Nowhere else were the miseries and degenerating distortions of the unadulterated phase of 'laissez-faire' industrialization more apparent in such abundant measure, nowhere else could the entire complex spectrum of human misery and degradation be found to be more completely assembled. From Mayhew to Dickens to Booth to Jack London and finally the Webbs,<sup>12</sup> social consciences were aroused by the chronicles of exploitation, brutality, vice, inhumanity and despairing hopelessness, possibly best summarized by Jack London in *The People of the Abyss*:

No more dreary spectacle can be found on this earth than the whole of the 'awful East' with its Whitechapel, Hoxton, Spitalfields, Bethnal Green and Wapping to the East India Docks. The colour of life is drab and grey. Everything is helpless, hopeless, unrelieved and dirty . . . Here lives a population as dull and unimaginative as its long grey miles of dingy brick. Religion has virtually passed it by, and a gross and stupid materialism reigns, fatal alike to the things of the spirit and the finer instincts of life. . . . A new race has sprung up, a street people. . . . They have dens and lairs into which they crawl for sleeping purposes and that is all. (p. 13.)

Throughout the East Enders were described as abandoned, rudderless wrecks with only the faintest vestiges of social comfort, social awareness and responsibility. Whether it is thanks to the benefits

of social reforms, or to the transition into the more advanced stages of industrialization, or thanks to the more systematic and incisive analysis of the more rigorously equipped social observers, such as Burn, Bott, Rose, Self and finally Willmott and Young,<sup>13</sup> not to speak of the vast demographic changes set in motion by the upheavals of the last war—mass bombing, evacuation, emigration—the image of the East End has undergone a radical transformation. The emphasis on misery and degeneration has given way to acknowledgment of the positive factors to be found in the environment. Cheerfulness, optimism, spontaneity, capacity to adapt to changed circumstances without loss of identity and above all vibrant, cooperative community life are given due credit and recognition. True, poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, slum dwellings, thriftlessness do persist, but the victims find shelter and protection in the deep, dense network of family and community life, are sustained by the corporate, cooperative consciousness, the individual's readiness to offer succour and self-sacrifice—be it thanks to primitive, traditional attachment to kinship roots, to comradeship or through practical awareness that their own turn to ask for help may come next. In this environment human failings and frailties are tolerantly taken for granted. Occasional and even recurrent bouts of voluntary idleness, drunkenness, brutality and infidelity are generously condoned; imperfections are regarded not as the shameful abnormalities of Puritanism, but as inevitable components of the personality structure. Power and Law—of which the visible representative were the means-test man, the bailiff, the rentman, the 'gaffer', the 'Beak' and the 'copper'—are held in scant respect. Infraction of the legal code is a daily spectacle, adroitness in evading detection a positive prestige symbol.

The recurring certainty of the daily struggle, the inescapable limitation imposed by the manual worker's wage, the humdrum monotony of the daily toil alone create a background against which gambling, free from the complexes of guilt which overhang it in other social environments, flourishes in all its forms. The daily flutter on the horses, the evening visit to the dogtrack, the weekly ritual of the football pool afford not only amusement and necessary diversion, but hopeful, even if unreasonable, expectation of a windfall; the winning coup which when it does materialize will allow, while the money lasts, profligacy in the grandest manner, extravagance which even when it is enviously mocked, will be respected and admired. The Gambler is the social norm, the non-gambler the deviant oddity.<sup>14</sup> Traces of the tradition termed by Hobsbawm 'social banditry'—taking from the rich to give to the poor, of not using violence other than in justified self-defence<sup>15</sup>—still survive. The ethos of being confronted by an antagonistic authority, all-embracing and all-powerful and yet, by virtue of its selfseeking greed, vulnerable and even

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pliable, is deeply embedded in the culture. If you cannot match 'Them' in confrontation, get even by trickery, subversion, barefaced deceit, submissive insubordination. In this milieu the street-bookie in the pre-1960-betting-legislation days was in his element. Although nominally outlawed he practised his trade with little concealment. His pitch, his clerks and runners were universally known, his pledged word sufficient cover for any bet, his reach long enough to make default a hazardous extremity; his wealth and success regarded as objects of communal pride and his ability to triumphantly disrespect and defy the Law served as comforting evidence of the asinine witlessness and egotistical corruption of the mighty and powerful. Since liberalization of the betting laws, the legalization of ready-cash off-course betting in 1960, the disappearance of the street-bookie is not the only change in the East End scene. Not only have the Greater London Council and the local authorities completed the work, initiated by Hitler's bombers, of destruction of the worst areas of slum housing—the intricate, interwoven network of tunnel-backs, of clusters of decaying terraces—replacing them largely with tall, imposing, uniform and impersonal blocks of flats. But concurrently with this removal of one of the major bulwarks of indigenous community existence, other cornerstones have yielded to the processes of social change. The pokey corner shop, the focus of parochial life, where regulated closing times, mechanical efficiency, space utilization, strict economic orientation were in scant presence; where gossip, communication and, as was often dire necessity, credit were at all times available, has given way to the bright, brash, impersonal efficiency of the supermarket, the chainstore, the launderette. The working-man's pub—at once vilified and romanticized by his 'social betters'—the refuge in which arduous toil, enforced submissiveness, domestic disorder could however briefly be obliterated in the company of his chosen mates, where the humbled working-man could reassert his individuality, his unique personality, has disappeared. Its place has been taken by the chain-operated, pseudo-elegant, contemporarily-decorated, hygienic public house, in which the landlord is a stranger, where spontaneous relaxation has been superseded by the juke-box, the omnipresent television set, where excesses are strictly barred and almost unthinkable. The introduction of the television set into every home, the increasing level of ownership of cars—the former tending towards social contraction and the latter expanding the universe of experience and of contact—have further led in the direction of weakening the fabric of community life until, as some claim to detect, the same anomic mass existence, as had previously been diagnosed in other quarters of metropolitan life, appears to pervade.

However, wherever one goes, a new but quickly familiar phenomenon has arisen—the Betting Shop. How do these fit into the social

scene, do they conform with the recent trend towards facelessness or do they, as an accidental by-product of the creation, provide a re-charge, a centre of resurgence of the otherwise waning channels of interaction and intercommunication?

III

The betting shop which forms the subject of our discussion lies close to the centre of a long-established, well-known East End street market. A market in which the large number of stalls offer a rich variety of commodities, chiefly foodstuffs and apparel. The accent is on price, on repeatable bargains, clearance lines, bankrupt or fire stocks, with occasional innuendoes to bargains owing their value to 'stuff being nicked'. The market is patronized largely by the local population, a heterogeneous mixture of White and Black, Gentile, Jew and Moslem, of firmly rooted and transient, locally born and bred and recently immigrated. The district is predominantly composed of manual workers, with a large element of dockers and watermen and of workers in the small-scale family businesses concerned with the manufacture of furniture and of clothing—often evolved from the ill-famed sweatshops—and a smaller component, socially almost indistinguishable, of traders, merchants, small shopkeepers and stallholders. The level of occupational training is meagre, the bulk of incomes within the lower regions of the semi-skilled ranges of the industrial workers' brackets. Strikingly obvious is the coexistence, rather than the conflict, between the old and the new—the intermingling of sparkling laundrettes and of male boutiques with the traditional East End 'Caff'—dark, dank, reeking of stale tea-leaves and of slop; the supermodern chainstore and the chaotic second-hand dealer; the miniskirted factory-girl, still wearing her curlers barely concealed under her headscarf; the shining, underslung, supersprung pram, being pushed by mother wearing her scruffy bedroom slippers. Fashion shops, record shops and to no lesser extent betting shops abound—the diminishing majority still owned and managed by the independent entrepreneur, frequently the ex-street bookie or his clerk—but an increasing proportion now chain operated, in the hands of managers controlled by head-office. They all seem to be able to count on their stable, regular clientele. Although punters, apart from other considerations affecting preferences, will after a prolonged unsuccessful run be inclined to switch custom, will try their luck in a different environment—expressions such as 'Mark's shop is a bock [ill-omen] to me' are not infrequently heard—they will unless their luck in the new betting shop changes phenomenally, unless within their new orbit they rapidly form new allegiances, tend to drift back, making little effort to conceal their peccadillo, submitting good-humouredly

to the kindly banter on return—‘so you found that their runners are the same as ours’. Naturally some punters will change under impact of external forces—new job, new home, a new set of mates—and many others, ‘the floaters’, will lay their bets at whichever betting shop happens to be most convenient at the time. But each betting shop has its hard core of supporters, loyal, steadfast, ranging elsewhere briefly to break their luck, to avoid the embarrassment of a long streak of winning bets, or to gain new insights by exchange of opinion with a different set of students of form. Within their own betting shop they are known and addressed by their first names, or even more often their nicknames; their foibles, preferences, idiosyncrasies are known and taken account of, their moments of glory, their splendid exploits are fully recalled in surroundings familiar; their near-misses given a sympathetic ear, their prestige firmly established and regularly reinforced by new deeds of valour—the successful bet, irrespective of volume of winnings, made in face of overwhelming odds, in defiance of expert opinion, the result of personal courage and of firm resolve. Their honour, prestige, self-respect will be revalidated by withstanding without flinching within the range of public scrutiny the assault of sustained losing runs, by display of the appropriate mixture between elation and restraint at their moments of triumph. Each subtle nuance of action and reaction will undergo the litmus test of judgment by equals, will serve, not as on first impact one might be inclined to assume, to divide the wheat from the chaff, to separate the leaders from the mass in competitive encounter, but rather to sustain common values, to confirm the image of what man ought to be like—resolute, independent yet cooperative, humorous, modest, indifferent in the face of danger and adversity.<sup>16</sup>

Irving Kenneth Zola suggests<sup>17</sup> on the basis of a participant study in the United States within a social environment not too dissimilar to the one studied by us, that the predominant motive of the punter is to do down the bookie. He views the activity of gambling as being dominated by the ethos of the personal duel unto death, the encounter between David—the punter isolated, lonely and outgunned—and Goliath—the bookmaker powerful, proud and representative of superior, predatory power. Triumph of the weak by any means is justified; total, complete ruin of the bookie the ultimate goal of the encounter (however disadvantageous in objective terms such annihilation might be to the punter). Each series of bets is a personal contest, a competitive activity in which success will serve to establish excellence, superiority over the herd, or at least some modicum of personal worth ‘What do they think I am, a Nobody?’. Such observations may accurately reflect the American scene, they may well be true of a society in which competitive success—the stiffer the contest the better, the more devious the means the more glorious the triumph



—may in itself be a culture goal. They may well be the reflections of a system in which the bookmaker, proscribed and outlawed is a more convenient, comprehensible scapegoat.

They are certainly not true of the field of activity observed by us. Study of form, deliberation, selection may be isolated and even secretive, winnings are personal, but each triumph belongs to the unit, the entire group of which paradoxically the bookmaker—after all the owner who is footing the bill—forms an integral part. Minor regular winnings occur constantly and these are collected without much comment on either side. But the coup—not assessed primarily in quantitative terms, but rather as matter of quality, the outfacing of heavy odds, the courage to defy the majority successfully, to think and act independently—is not only rewarded by due personal recognition of the winner, but by expressions of common jubilation and exhilaration, in which all the regulars, not least the owner, spontaneously take part. Not as a tribute to the individual punter's excellence, but as a common triumph over the massed forces of the outside, over the superior external powers, a victory of 'Us' over 'Them'. This struggle is free of signs of tension and strain; losses are borne with pokerfaced composure, are nonchalantly shrugged off with a casual smile—'always picking wrong 'uns', 'Can't pick a winner for toffee', a self-mocking phrase, usually of stereotyped character 'wouldn't know a winner if I saw one', 'What's the odds, easy come, easy go'—after all defeat in face of the overwhelming odds facing 'Us' is anticipated and in itself not shameful. But lack of character, of moral fibre are. Fruits of one's knowledge are granted openhandedly when asked for and are given without imposition of inferiority. Yet it is but rarely solicited—is one not facing an incomprehensible foe, a superior combination of nebulous forces; not united in subtle alliance to do 'Us' down—that after all would be more amenable to analysis, to comprehension and exploitation—but fighting their own battles, for their own benefit by their alien system of logic, taking 'Us' as expendable supply material for granted. But possibly for the very reason that intrusion into the thought processes of 'Them' is a virtual impossibility, triumph becomes all the more precious and sweet.

In this world strong, rigid sex-differentiation continues to exist, the male and female universe follow different paths, their separation almost retaining forms of ritual avoidance. The morning hours, from opening-time at ten to midday belong to the women. Soon after the shop has opened, after the racing pages of the morning press and the early editions of the evening papers have been pinned to the walls, the females start trooping in. Bets are already written out on slips of paper with total stakes neatly added up and usually proffering the exact amount of cash. Stakes are modest, a daily maximum of 6s. with

a minimum of as little as 1s. The majority of bets are of the various combination types—doubles, trebles, accumulators—multiple bets usually made up of the shortpriced selection of the racing experts of the morning press, in most cases the 'Daily Mirror' whose 'nap' selection—the pick of the day—figures in some form or another on almost every winning slip.<sup>18</sup> Comments connected with betting are minimal, even when winnings on the previous day's racing are collected—these are pocketed without emotion or comment, rather in the manner of drawing Family Allowance from the Post Office. Conversation is nevertheless lively and intense, concerned chiefly with matters of family life—enquiry into health, husband's new job, daughter's council flat, with particular concentration on topics relating to babies, perennially a favourite working-class topic. Occasionally some banter of ambiguous, strictly circumscribed sexual overtone (such as the admiring 'Had a rough night?'), always some comments on the quality and content of last night's 'telly'. Nor by any means are these exchanges one-way traffic. To a no lesser degree than the bettors', the history, background, family life of the two proprietors—H. and J.—themselves products of the environment and of M., the female clerk, are known and stable subjects for discussion. When winnings of moderate amounts are handed over, H. or J. will usually pass some encouraging remark: 'It's time your turn came up', 'That'll be a little treat for the kids', 'Don't let the old man get 'is 'ands on it' and when a really big win comes up—one elderly regular, a woman in the later sixties, had won £67 on a 4s. wager 'The first big draw in all my life', an event highly improbable but the designed outcome of this type of bet, the multiple—the handover acquires almost ceremonious overtones. The cash is slowly counted out with considerable emphasis, the bundle of notes is handed over and accepted with undisguised jubilation—no trace of that haughty restraint the male takes it upon himself to display in similar situations—and without the least overt trace of rancour or recrimination—after all this win, representing a relationship between stake and winnings of something like 400 : 1, a series of results against which the management cannot budget, afflicts the bookmaker most cruelly. A few final remarks as to the most fruitful manner of disposal, free of condescension or dogmatism, are passed on, local legend such as the tale of the old regular who with her £120 win just before Christmas had fitted out her entire family, including all grandchildren and then had enough left over to stand her Darby and Joan Club a 'proper do', are recounted in details often rehearsed and repeated.

It is possible to state with confidence that in this, as well as in other cases when money is paid out to regulars, the owners share in the local triumph. Identification with the group is sincere, heartfelt and genuine, despite the fact that such rejoicing is, being jubilant at an

event damaging to one's interests, paradoxical. True enough behind the scenes, in the little back-office invisible to the public, the owners will silently in course of the race commentary cheer for the horses carrying little of their money. They will rejoice when betting slips heap into the losing pile at the end of a race, they will utter a mumbled curse when a big win (to them loss) shows up and particularly when, as happened not infrequently, losses in course of the day exceed takings with accumulated longshot bets still running against them. But once the amount of the big win has been calculated and particularly when the number on the winning slip has been related to the face of one of the old-timers (no effort is made to conceal resentment when an outsider strikes a coup) the process of group identification takes over. 'I suppose the old dear can do with the few bob', 'It's time Ted's luck changed for him' and by the time pay-out comes, the transformation from the role of bookie to member of the community has been completed, rationalized by 'If they backed nothing but losers, they would soon stop coming'.

Strangely, M. the female clerk—forty-fiveish, bustling, articulate, humorous and humane, possessing strong reality awareness—is allowed to stand apart. Not by any means is she an outsider, in fact her personal knowledge of the lives of the clientele is the most highly developed, the most up-to-date. Yet her official role—that of the paid functionary—allows her freedom of action, comment and above all detachment denied the other, though personally more directly involved, members of the establishment. The accepted differentiation between the private self—the indistinguishable member of the local community—and the public self—the functionary, the authority's representative—permit her both participation in private gossip, extending even to consultation on form and race performance, as well as an official role she is expected to assume immediately she acts in her appointed capacity, in particular the handling of her employers' money. To this latter role the right of caustic comment—'Why don't you give someone else a chance', 'You got the luck of the devil', 'What do you do with it all'—are granted. Detachment—'Your second draw of the day', 'I saw you pounce and knew you had a good 'un'—and public identification with the bosses' cause—'If this goes on much longer we'll have to close down', 'They've got it made'—are permitted without causing offence, without the least overspill of resentment into the private role. The public after all expects the paid functionary, the hireling of authority, to be 'Anti-Us' and they feel no surprise when such expectation is fulfilled. Whilst at the same time, the same process, permits to owners re-identification with the environment in which love of contests, valour, conformation of mutuality are common values, greater than those of mundane consideration of personal profit, of private gain.

The morning session, as said before, belongs to the females, supplemented however by a section of male old-age pensioners. This group of males in retirement occupies an indistinct twilight zone in the world of the betting shop. It seems that those who have accepted relegation into the limbo of dependence and of non-productivity, who have resigned themselves to their loss of function and of independent survival in the male world of swagger, assertiveness, dominance over the females, who have undergone the metamorphosis into meekness, dependence, acceptance of domestic democracy have at the same time voluntarily, without any act of rejection by their former associates, transferred into the less demanding world of the female. Their betting times, types of bets, division of stakes, reaction to winnings and to losses begin to resemble the group into which they have moved. Whilst others of the same age, or even older, manage to retain a firm foothold in the male universe, exhibiting the same characteristics of virility, dominance, decisiveness, superiority over their domestic group as their younger, occupationally productive mates. Whether the dividing line hinges on greater or lesser disposal of independent funds, on sufficient means to face on equal terms the requirements of male hegemony, whether it is a matter of greater or lesser degree of sturdy health, whether it depends on the retention of an independent household, or whether it is largely a matter of spirit, of power to adapt to changed conditions, of determination not to falter, is difficult to assess. Yet the contrast is striking. Whilst the majority almost appear to welcome refuge into the less strenuous regions once the fibre begins to weaken, others, such as Charlie, by all appearances in his late seventies, yet still hale, hearty and confident, retain their hold over their former domain. Still manage to hold their own, often with something to spare, in the quest of recognition of those who count. Still demand, perhaps now with a greater edge of aggressiveness, to have their voices heard in expert discussion of form, to have their opinions taken account of in achievement of consensus.

For the world from which they refuse to be parted is of tougher fibre than that into which the bulk of their contemporaries has withdrawn. One single lapse from common standards, from mandatory norms is enough to spell exclusion. By midday the habitués have taken their places against the two counters above which the pages of the daily press featuring the racing news and forecasts are pinned. They intently examine the intricate symbols denoting past performance. Conversation, consultation, even between those who entered together, is minimal. Attention to fluctuations in the ante-post odds, as reported by the 'blower', is by all appearances negligible; demeanour is grave, studious and reflective. Towards the approach of the starting signal for the first race the bets start trickling in, on the announcement

'They are under starter's orders' a sudden momentum builds up. Although superficially reminiscent of the effect of the words *faites vos jeux* on the roulette table, it lacks the latter's atmosphere of compulsiveness, of feverish excitement, of suddenly becoming aware of new fancies. Each punter makes his final choice, hands over his betting-slip, but once the bet has been completed, all interest in the race appears to have departed. Attention is once more fixed upon the clippings in consideration of the next event and even during the climactic stages of the race in progress, the time when even the announcer discards his customary neutral intonation, only a barely noticeable inclination of the head towards the loudspeaker, an imperceptible pause in the study of form, betray involvement and interest. Once the race is concluded, the results and final prices announced, laconic comment—'They must have been preparing him for a killing', 'I fancied his chances' (but backed another), 'Wouldn't touch him at these lousy odds'—addressed to the assembly in general is expressed, strangely pronounced with equal authority by the majority of losers as the few winning punters, now collecting their winnings without permitting themselves, other than possibly for a jauntier, more assertive angle at which they dangle their cigarettes, the least flicker of emotion. Indeed time for ceremony, regurgitation is short. Races, even with only two meetings per day, follow each other at intervals of no more than fifteen minutes. Bets follow a pattern different to that of the morning session, they are almost invariably single selections—one horse only rather than the multiple preferred in the mornings. Rarely does selection fall upon the short-price favourite, but most frequently on horses with odds in the intermediate zone. Bets are usually 'win only', so that the entire stake, usually no less than £1, is staked on one single outcome of a 6:1 to 10:1 chance. The proprietors' books find themselves thus, by a process almost resembling the operation of Adam Smith's 'intervention of the unseen hand', without purposive action on their part, almost in perfect balance. The morning bets incline towards the multiples in which favourites are a strong preference (often runners turning into favourites by the mere fact of being chosen by the mass dailies' experts) while the afternoon crowd will largely omit these from their selections. So that loss on the one will generally be compensated for by takings on all the others, with the likelihood of a large win if a rank outsider, completely unbacked, upsets form by coming in first against the certainty of a heavy loss in the event of a winning accumulator bet, as well as the romping home of one of the local favourites. (Some horses, by virtue of some terminological or emotional association will attract the support of almost the entire community, almost in the manner of the local football team.)

As the afternoon drags on no perceptible change in atmosphere

occurs. Some regulars—mainly the retired, the shiftworkers, the out-of-work will remain through the entire session, others will from time to time drift back from their nearby places of work in order to note results, collect winnings and to linger long enough to renew study of form before placing fresh bets. Others will, again as a regular habit, confine their visits to the daily midday break. An atmosphere of fatigue may slowly seep over the assembly, but self-discipline, universal display of fortitude, haughty yet modest indifference to the vagaries of fate remain unbroken. Each new manifestation serving to reaffirm common values, to reinforce solidarity, to revalidate the actor's self-image, to re-emphasise honour, reputation, as expressed in Calderon's phrase *Soy quien soy*—I am who I am.

From this universal male ethos some however stand exempt. One early afternoon two swarthy, sharp-featured men marched in, distinguished in this assembly by their immaculate appearance, their brazen self-assurance, their apparent indifference to the necessity of prior study of form. They stayed in self-imposed isolation long enough to each back two fair-priced winners in the following two races, to collect their winnings, to defiantly award a last glance of nonchalant disdain to the assembly and then to depart. What place these 'hawks' occupy in the structure of the racing world is obscure, whether they are themselves those independent professionals who by inside information are able to gain advance knowledge of a coup; whether they are merely the big-timer's minions, spreading their master's bets when operating a coup; or whether they are just smarter, more astute backers possessing sufficient self-restraint to bide their time until a 'hot one' comes up—and their expert judgment in placing their bets at the very moment when their selections were offering the best odds, suggests this alternative—their bearing clearly differentiates them from the group. As outsiders they are exempt from the moral code of the group, they need not make any attempt to disguise jubilation and triumph, they are able to refuse the group affective participation in victory, they are isolated, despised yet feared representatives of the self-centred, exploitative, merciless world of the outside.

Nor does the moral code impose rejection or sanction on the non-integrated. The neighbourhood has a long history of absorption of immigrant groups, a long tradition as 'boiling pot'—Irish, Jews, Lascars, Poles and in recent years an assortment of coloureds, West Indians, Pakistanis, Africans of all cultures, hues and denominations. Each in turn has faced the intolerance, opposition and even violent rejection, but each has in turn bowed to the storm, has ducked, dodged and trimmed until, though distinct and separate, become accepted and integrated, making in course of integration its own special contribution to the common culture. Colour alone has ceased to carry any stigma, without distinction or discrimination White

and Black make their claim to public recognition. Yet lacking the 'privilege' of being British-born, of being locally reared, the immigrant is pardoned, while on probation, ignorance of the unwritten code of strict observance of emotional neutrality, of phlegmatic gravity, of subversive submissiveness of the decrees imposed by 'them'. Joe, a virile, young and handsome West Indian, possibly the most ardent devotee of gambling of them all, has as yet failed to absorb the norms. Unashamedly, yet with naïve courtesy, will he approach fellow punters to solicit information, without invitation will he proffer advice to the expert engrossed in his private study of form, with the sublime unconcern of the ignorant will he infringe the local taboos—the unmentionable existence of the cash nexus 'I shouldn't be losing all this money'; the conflict of interests between the two sides of the counter 'More money in your pockets', with undisguised, animistic show of emotion will he react to the blower's account of the race—'Honey, be good to me'; with open scorn and dismay will he receive the news of his losses and with uninhibited joy will he claim his occasional winnings (which his lack of self-control itself makes rare indeed). Yet his deviance is endured with tolerance and is even subtly controlled and gradually diminished by the vaguest hints and even the occasional distinction of special praise from the unofficial leadership of the group, until nothing but colour—an unimportant detail—will distinguish him from the other members of the fraternity.

IV

Without wishing to deny that the above observations represent no more than a microscopic snapshot, a large number of conclusions would allow themselves to be validly drawn from the material. The ones which concern us in our present context are those which might throw some new light upon the discourse relating to embourgeoisement, evidence suggesting whether and to what extent economic advance, affluence have served to break-up the proletarian subculture. One might perhaps most usefully examine this aspect in terms of the framework of the pattern variables provided for us by Parsons,<sup>19</sup> as indices of transition from traditional to industrial society, although Tönnies' concept of *Gesellschaft*<sup>20</sup> and Durkheim's of organic solidarity<sup>21</sup> might almost equally well be employed to illustrate the values of the bourgeois way-of-life. Parsons maintains that while affectivity, diffuseness, collectivity, universalism, ascription are values of traditional society, industrial (bourgeois) society is typified by preferences for affective neutrality, specificity, self-orientation, particularism and achievement. Looking at our sample of the proletarian subculture of the betting shop we find (i) the actor regarding his relationship with other individuals as an end in itself (affectivity); (ii) for him the other

actor is a provider of many services (diffuseness); (iii) he considers himself as acting not only for himself, but also for the group (collectivity); (iv) he treats other individuals as individuals and not in the role they play as members of classificatory groups (universalism) and (v) finally, he responds to others in terms of what they are and not in terms of what they have achieved (ascription).<sup>22</sup> Although it would be fatuous to look upon these variables as absolutes—they clearly represent 'more or less' preferences—we find only very slight evidence of value preferences representing the middle-class way-of-life and almost total correspondence with the values postulated in respect of traditional community life in our working-class sample. We must, on the basis of our material, reject the hypothesis claiming embourgeoisement of the working-classes as premature or possibly even as ill-conceived. Is it not likely that each age has its own area of convergence, its own superficial index of bourgeoisification—religion in one era, nationalism in another and affluence in our own.

## Notes

1. Gavin Mackenzie, 'The Economic Dimensions of Embourgeoisement', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. XVIII, no. 1 (March 1967), pp. 29-44.

2. Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (1934), pp. 115-16. Contrast this statement made in private with the near-simultaneous public utterance of Engel's illustrious mentor: 'In no other country have the intermediate stations between the millionaire commanding whole industrial armies and the wage-slave living only from hand to mouth so gradually been swept away from the soil. . . . A complete divorce of property from labour has been effected in Great Britain. In no other country, therefore, the war between the two classes that constitutes modern society has assumed so colossal dimensions and features so distinct and palpable' (Karl Marx, 'A Letter to the Labour Parliament, March 9, 1854', printed in John Savile, *Ernest Jones, Chartist* (1952), pp. 274-5.

3. George Orwell, *England Your England and Other Essays* (London, 1934), p. 223.

4. A. M. Carr Saunders and D. Caradog Jones, *A Survey of the Social Struc-*

*ture of England and Wales*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1937), p. 67.

5. Morris Ginsberg, *Law and Opinion in England in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1959), pp. 3-27

6. G. D. H. Cole, *Studies in Class Structure* (London, 1955), chs. II-IV.

7. T. H. Marshall, *Transactions of the 3rd World-Congress of Sociology, 1956*, vol. VIII (London), pp. 53-4.

8. D. E. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London, 1966), p. 2.

9. John H. Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class Structure', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 4 (July 1963), pp. 133-63.

10. An article by S. M. Miller and Frank Riessman, 'The Working Class Subculture: a New View' in *Social Problems*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1961), pp. 86-97 though restricting itself to the American scene and not directly concerning itself with the issue of embourgeoisement, but rather with difference in levels of perception, generally expresses a viewpoint closely in accord with the views of the author of this article.



11. The remarks and observations which follow are the result of a series of days spent in the winter of 1966 in one of the small-scale single-unit East End Betting Shops—undertaken in course of research into Gambling in Great Britain—into which, thanks to direct introduction, I was given entree on privileged terms. Being, by kind courtesy of the proprietors, enabled to take part in the daily comings and goings by anonymous observations from behind the scenes, where I was afforded facilities of inspecting all records, and where I was spared the necessity of revealing my identity of investigator, or of concealing my purpose by stealth.

12. See particularly: (i) H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 2nd vol. (1851); (ii) C. Dickens, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist; Hard Times; Christmas Stories*; (iii) C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London, 1902); (iv) J. London, *The People of the Abyss* (London, 1903); (v) B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London, 1926).

13. See particularly: (i) W. L. Burn, *The Age of the Equipoise* (London, 1964); (ii) E. Bott, 'Urban Families: Conjugal Roles and Networks', *Human Relations*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1955); (iii) P. J. O. Self, 'Voluntary Organizations in Bethnal Green', in A. F. C. Bourdillon (ed.), *Voluntary Social Services*; (iv) M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957); and *Family and Class in a London Suburb* (1960).

14. See H. Mayhew, *Mayhew's London* (1851) (London), 'Gambling of Costermongers' (p. 46):

'It would be difficult to find in the whole of this numerous class a youngster who is not—what may be safely called—a desperate gambler. At the age of fourteen this love of play first comes upon the lad, and from that time until he is thirty or so, not a Sunday passes but he is at his stand in the gambling ground'.

Although this refers to a specific group, the Costermongers, there is no reason to believe that their habits were radi-

cally different from other sections of the urban proletariat.

15. R. Bendix, *Nation-building and Citizenship* (John Wiley, 1964), p. 44:

'... Such non-cooperation merges on a second type of social unrest, which Professor E. J. Hobsbawm has characterized as Social Banditry. In contrast to millennial radicalism... this is fundamentally secular and conservative response to physically superior powers, which are conceived as alien interference with an established way of life'.

From E. J. Hobsbawm, *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels* (Manchester University Press, pp. 57-92).

16. Would it be too fanciful to quote Durkheim? 'A person is not only a being who disciplines himself, he is also a system of ideas, of feelings, of habits and tendencies, a consciousness that has a content; and one is all the more a person as this content is enriched. For this reason, is not the civilized man a person in greater measure than the primitive; the adult than the child? Morality, in drawing us outside ourselves, and thrusting us into the nourishing milieu of society, puts us precisely in the position of developing our personalities' (E. Durkheim, 'Moral Education' (New York, 1961), p. 73).

17. Irving Kenneth Zola, 'Observations on Gambling in a Lower Class Setting' in Howard S. Becker, *The Other Side*, pp. 247-59. This article discusses gambling amongst the lower social rungs of the American urban proletariat.

18. It must be added that, at this stage, no direct information as to the proportion of these bets in which wives act merely as husband's messengers is to hand. Such practice, if widespread, would serve to undermine some of the conclusions on male-female differentiation. However, personal observation, examination of handwriting on betting-slips, and particularly the virtual uniformity in type of bet made in course of the morning session incline one to the belief that the greater majority of

these bets originate from the person placing them—the woman.

19. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, part p. 36 and pp. 58–9; and also *The Structure of Social Action*. Also see Spratt, 'Principia Sociologica II', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1963), pp. 307–20.

20. Tönnies, *Community and Association* (1955).

21. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (Macmillan, 1933).

22. These definitions follow closely the analysis adopted by John Rex in *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (London, 1961), particularly pp. 107–8, possibly the best exposition of Parson's concept of 'Pattern variables' yet published.

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