

# Summaries

GEERT DE VRIES

## *The vulnerable society*

Vulnerabilities in modern societies are explored at three levels. At the ecological and technological level, the vulnerability of humans tends to crystallize at ever higher levels of aggregation: the collectivization of risk, or 'world risk society' (Beck).

At the level of interdependencies between people, there is a tendency towards further taming of violence within societies or survival units, but this is not necessarily the case between societies. Even within societies, pockets of violence remain. And behind the scenes of civilized life, and in the human imagination, violence is rampant. Complex societies seem especially vulnerable to the problem of 'recreancy' (Freudenburg).

At the intrapsychic level, people show a tendency towards risk-taking in order to compensate for the safety of their living conditions. The same safety, paradoxically, seems to produce diffuse feelings of insecurity. While modern ideals of autonomy foster positive feelings in the case of individual success, they induce negative feelings in the case of individual failure: 'dispensable self' (Sennett) or 'negative individualism' (Castel). Domestic violence, random violence, and depression may be understood as differential reactions to the psychic vulnerabilities of men and women in contemporary society.

G.K. LIETEN

## *Thinking about development: modernism and postmodernism*

In recent years the discussion on development has been dominated by the opponents of neo-liberalism who consider a continuing economic growth the beacon of progress. The former critics of this model, those within the neo-Marxist tradition, have been forced onto the defensive. Their role as rebels against the dominant paradigm has been absorbed by postmodernist authors. Postmodernism, a school of thought that emerged under late-capitalist conditions of individualism and fragmentation, opposes any idea of universalizing Western reason and Western ideals associated with the Enlightenment. Their ultimate reasoning is that modernity and development are Western plots

to oppress the people of the Third World and to imbibe them with alien expectations that alienate them from their roots and their culture. Postmodernism claims to represent the world view of the downtrodden and indigenous people.

In this article, an attempt is made to assess whether such claims correspond with empirical reality, or whether they are mere ideological fragments formulated by romantic intellectuals. Field investigation in rural areas in Northern India illustrates that the (poor) villagers in that area indeed have experienced some of the effects of modernity, and appreciate the changes as positive. Their expectations and projections are structured by values that are closely associated with those of the Enlightenment in the Western tradition. They aspire for more development rather than for less, as the postmodernist school has argued. Their poverty and oppression are not brought about by the ideas of modernity but rather by the material structures supported by the Indian state and the process of globalization.

SUZANNE KUIK

*The end of childhood, the onset of adolescence*

This article describes how a group of thirty Dutch children, eleven and twelve years of age, from a high middle class urban background deal with the theme of sexuality. This theme was omnipresent. I present three portraits of children who managed the subject differently. By looking closely at the reactions they evoked in their classmates, I am able to show that in fact all children were very much concerned with the onset of adolescence. Whereas some of them classified themselves already as adolescents, others preferred to stay children and not to think about what was ahead of them, and yet another group liked to dream about what they thought of as their future. Adults like to think of the age group under study as innocent children to whom sexuality is still quite irrelevant. However, these young children grow up in an urban environment, where one finds sexuality in many different forms very much present on practically every street corner. They have easy access to teen magazines, and other media (movies, television, internet). Amidst all this information, warnings and explanations of adults the children try to find and define their own ways. And they do so in dialogue with their peers.

*Football Fraternization*

Many Dutchmen have taken to abundant decoration of their houses and streets during major football tournaments. The spontaneous popular festival of 1988 seems to have been the start of what has by now developed into a ritual 'orange craze'. Before tournaments inhabitants dress up their street together.

This article looks into the meaning and significance of football decoration for those involved. We surveyed the decoration behaviour in Delft and in the neighbouring (rather more well to do) suburb of Delfgauw, during the last week of Euro 2000. Our observations are supplemented by newspaper articles and a number of interviews with inhabitants of such streets. We have spoken with both 'decorators' and people who were against the 'football craze'. We found that profuse decoration is neither exclusively reserved to football fans nor to the lower classes. Rather the behaviour seems to fill a need for informal contacts with neighbours and provides them with an opportunity to bring out the distinctive features of their particular street.