Summaries

MARIO RUTTEN

Involvement and indifference in Asia

The severe earthquake that hit the Indian state of Gujarat on 26 January 2001 elicited a most impressive response of social concern from the Indian people, especially those belonging to the middle classes. This social concern is closely related to the fact that also members of the middle classes were strongly affected by the earthquake. The help and concern of the Indian people is therefore not a new and hopeful indication of a strengthening of civil society, of building up a more egalitarian society in which there is a transfer of wealth and resources from the elite to the poorer sections of society. On the contrary, there is an increasing indifference among the middle classes in Asia to the plight of the poor in their societies. This widening social distance and increasing espousal of callous views are indications of what Jan Breman has called a social-Darwinist outlook in which members of the Asian middle classes show a brutal indifference or even ruthlessness towards those classed as being socially lower, who are largely to be blamed themselves for their unhappy state.

This increasing indifference among the middle class in Asia takes place within a specific context of globalisation. The middle class in Asia today has developed a strong transnational perspective in which they feel more at ease with their counterparts in other Asian countries and in western societies than with the poorer sections in their own society. Although globalisation is more inclusive when one looks at the middle classes in Asia, it is at the same time more exclusive in nature when one looks at the lower classes in society. Labour has increasingly become more invisible in the present-day global world and its interests are hardly taken into account.

STEF AUPERS

The revenge of the machines: modernity, technology and animism

The classical assumption that scientific and technological progess are the main driving forces behind, what Weber called, the 'disenchantment of the western world', is basic knowledge in contemporary sociology. However, this article argues

that the implementation of digital technology also stimulates the religious, or more specifically, the animistic imagination. A qualitative analysis of *Wired Magazine* (1993-2000) shows that various computer specialists, who are 'supposed' to be the pioneers of a rational, secular and disenchanted society, can be seen as 'techno-animists'. They consider our new technological surroundings as an intelligent, autonomous force and express feelings of humility. Exemplary for this phenomenon is a group of ICT-experts who refer to themselves as 'technopagans'. Paradoxically, the explanation for this unforseen development of 're-enchantment' should be sought in the progress made in the technological fields of Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life. More generally, the ongoing proces of rationalization seems to provide a good explanation for the contemporary emergence of techno-animism.

AMY T. SCHALET

Civilized or Stigmatized: Dependency and Bodily Control in Dutch Figurational Sociology and American Welfare Debates

This article contrasts Abram de Swaan's theory of the collectivizing process with American welfare debates of recent decades. Following Elias, De Swaan and other Dutch figurational theorists have argued that citizens of modern welfare states are aware of their interdependencies and have a firm faith in the internal control of bodily impulses. The American welfare debates however celebrate the self-reliance of individuals and express a profound fear of bodies out of control. Theory and case inform one another: the American case suggests a more profound and consequential variation in political culture among modern welfare states than figuration sociology currently recognizes. Figurational theory, with its emphasis on the role of bodily control in political processes, in turn, draws attention to a crucial, yet seldom recognized feature of the post-1960s American political imaginary: the assumption that bodily self-restraint is a tenuous attainment, and one easily undone by the wrong external incentives. Together theory and case suggest cultural concepts of self and social relations which facilitate, and those which inhibit, the legitimation of government measures to ensure collective economic security.

PIETER R.D. STOKVIS

Women's work: Technology and Labour Saving Devices since the Second World War

Until the 1970s the division of labour between male breadwinner and 'housewife' implied that housework was a female prerogative or duty. Following the arguments

of Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Ruth Oldenziel and Carolien Bouw play down the impact of household technology on the housewife's time-consuming and onerous tasks. This article shows to what extent household technology made burdensome tasks much lighter and changed the nature of these tasks. The insights are based on in-depth interviews and an analysis of neglected reports about time spent on housework in 1955, 1964 and 1984. Moreover it shows that the time-saving effects accounted for a third of time spent in household tasks. So in spite of the importance of the adoption of new strategies such as hiring services, buying ready-made goods and leaving out or sharing tasks the impact of modern amenities and technology should not be underestimated.