Summaries

The self-religion: An exploration of its meaning and dimensions
by Mark Elchardus and Steven Lauwers

Although many sociologists have pointed out the increasing presence of discourses of the 'self' in western culture, it remains fairly unclear what those discourses of 'self-religion' say or claim. This article reports the findings of an explorative content analysis of the self-religion, based on essays written by students as well as survey questionnaires. The analysis reveals several discourses about the 'self': the discourse of self-identity, the discourse of self-distinction, and the discourse of emotional steering. Further analysis confirms that it is impossible to speak of a single self-religion. Different self-discourses prove differently associated with the degree to which one considers a quest for autonomy acceptable, the orientation towards the two principal socio-political cleavages in western society, and the way one perceives relations of friendship.

Working on body, emotions, and energy at New Age-centers: A reenchantment?
by Stef Aupers

This article reports a qualitative case study of currently popular New Age-courses and therapies as they are practiced in several New Age-centers in the Netherlands. The analysis demonstrates that participants are encouraged to de-identify with a cognitive-reflexive perspective on reality (the intellect, reason or 'ego') and to 'make contact' with their bodies, their emotions and their energy (located in the so-called meridians, chakras and auras). This search for an 'authentic identity' confirms the ideas of several contemporary sociologists, who suggest that western societies are witnessing a process of 'emotional reenchantment'.

Modern culture and the disenchantment of the world: Moral relativism and instrumental rationalism in the Netherlands
by Dick Houtman and Peter Mascini

According to Inglehart, contemporary western societies witness a process of 'postmodernization': increasing moral relativism leading to an increase of resistance to rationalization (decline of faith in science and technology, increase of environmental concern, and increasing support of animal rights). Analyzing data collected in the Netherlands in 1998 (N=1,848), we test this theory and study support for moral relativism and instrumental rationalism among supporters of the Dutch political parties. Although we find stronger moral

relativism and weaker instrumental rationalism among the young, the former does not account for the latter. Moreover, instrumental rationalism is only weakly (negatively) related to moral relativism. Instead, it is primarily affected negatively by economic liberalism and female gender. We conclude, therefor, that Inglehart's theory is hardly supported. Supporters of political parties on the left tend to accept moral relativism and reject instrumental rationalism, whereas the opposite holds for those on the right. As to the disenchantment of the world, therefor, political left and right are both characterized by ambiguity.

The public image of technology: Erosion of an instrumental perspective?
by Freek de Meere

In a disenchanted world, an instrumental image of technology should be widespread. As seen from such an instrumental perspective, technology is a generic term for neutral instruments which serve as solutions for fixed problems and technological development is considered untainted by interests and preferences. We study the popularity of this instrumental image of technology and its relation to images of society by means of a survey. We find that this image of technology is not particularly popular and is positively related to an authoritarian and a competitive image of society. It is concluded, first, that people do not interpret technological developments in a disenchanted way. Second, the analysis suggests that the modest popularity of the instrumental image of technology in modern society is due to its connection with an authoritarian and competitive outlook.

The enchantment of Ritzer
by J.C. Dagevos

In *Enchanting a disenchanted world* (1999) George Ritzer is, as usual, critical of modern manners and means of consumption. Since the publication of his book *The McDonaldization of society* (1993), Ritzer takes great interest in the dynamics of contemporary consumer society. He is simultaneously frightened and fascinated by its current course. While he is enchanted by the ubiquity of McDonaldization as a *process*, quite the opposite goes for the way he judges its *principles* of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. According to Ritzer's critics, his analysis of the disenchanted world is too one-sided, simplistic or pessimistic. Ritzer searches for postmodern ideas to understand the spread of consumer religion and its places of worship – the so-called cathedrals of consumption –, but hardly succeeds. Although he fails to grasp the attraction of modern consumption and its means, *Enchanting a disenchanted world* is an enchanting part of his oeuvre.