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A Journey to the Centre-South of Brazil.

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Pernambuco.

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Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York, 17

Dear Mr. Nolte,

We have just spent five weeks travelling in some of the more developed states in the Centre-South of Brazil. In order not to be tied to public transport timetables we made the journey by car but, wise after the event, it now seems that the distances in Brazil are so great that the six thousand miles would perhaps have been covered less painfully by a combination of 'bus and plane. This newsletter is an account of some of the points that struck me as a foreigner, familiar only with the Northeast and North of the country.

For political purposes the southern boundary of the Northeast is the southern limit of Bahia, but the effect of the paved road which now reaches just north of Salvador is so great, that it is more meaningful to draw the line in the centre of the state. North of Salvador the road is still only a rutted, potholed, dusty or muddy track much of the way, over which one is lucky to average ten miles an hour and to come through in one piece.

South of the lush, fertile plain that surrounds the bay of Salvador, the population thins out to an occasional taipa (mud and wattle) hut in the scrub, with its occupants living precariously off a small clearing planted with corn, and a few goats. Huge, rounded rocky outcrops around the base of which graze very small herds of leathery cattle break the otherwise monotonous landscape. It is a bleak, unfriendly scene, dry and barren except for a low thin scrub dotted with wide branching cactus trees, drab by day but magnificent against the brilliant red sunsets.

Further south the ground is too poor for cultivation without fertilizer and hard work so that the rural population are living in conditions as abject as any I have seen to the north. They supplement their earnings from the land by making charcoal, coarse straw mats, and in one region, although all capture and hunting of wild creatures in Brazil was expressly forbidden by law last year, they catch and sell small wild birds, especially parrots, on a commercial basis.

Before the border with Minas Gerais we passed but three towns whose existence is not primarily dependent upon the road, and these are basically market towns catering for the needs of the local rural population, but with the opening up of communications are beginning to develop light industry on a small scale. The only other type of community near the road is the small roadside settlement built to cater for the needs of long distance travellers, for whom they provide hotels, restaurants, garages and petrol stations of a functional but usually adequate nature.

In one of these settlements, Milagres (Miracles), where we stayed one night, the income is derived from only two sources: pilgrims to a local shrine

and the lorry drivers and bus passengers passing through. As there is no central electricity and therefore no street lighting, each concern vies with its neighbours to attract more trade by brighter lighting and staying open longer hours. Yet everywhere people are white, pinched and undernourished, and crowds of scruffy boys throng around offering fruit for sale or to lubricate the cars, demonstrating the large amount of marginal employment. The arrival of the road is having some effect, but the benefits are still bestowed on only a very small part of the population.

One curious small point was that from southern Bahia onwards we were not thought to be Americans, and we actually met one waitress in this area who had never heard of the United States. Thereafter we were taken for many nationalities, including Argentinian and Italian, and only on our return to Bahia became Americans again.

Crossing into Minas Gerais the contrast with Bahia in all aspects was far greater than I had expected. Immediately over the border the scrub becomes a coarse, dull green grass, on which graze herds of healthy-looking beef cattle owned by farmers often living in small, modern pretentious houses. The air clears, losing the slightly stifling atmosphere of the Northeast, and the climate, with deep, clear, blue skies is similar to that of the Mediterranean. The streets in small towns are no longer filled with rows of low houses joined together by 1930's pediments but have small, whitewashed, tiled houses. Windows due to the cooler climate are more common, and the churches, often surmounted by stubby spires, assume a far more prominent position.

The Mineiro both physically and in character cannot, it seems to me, be mistaken for the happy-go-lucky, extrovert, generous Nordestino, and of all the states that I have visited this presented the clearest stereotype. Except in the mining areas, negro influence is relatively slight and men have predominantly light coffee coloured skin with long, triangular sharp featured heads, hollow cheek bones and black, slightly wavy hair. They appear to be a humourless race, traditionally bent upon and successful at making money, but lacking in the joie de vivre common throughout most of the country.

The diet relies less upon farinha (manioc flour) and more on potatoes and dairy products. Fruit and vegetables were served in abundance; at one restaurant no less than eleven plates were laid before the two of us, all for well under a dollar a head. Sugar, I noticed, while coarse and brown in the Northeast where it is grown, in Minas where it is imported from Sao Paulo is whiter, finer stuff.

Minas has an area greater than France, but a fifth of its population. This lives in isolated pockets scattered more thickly in the industrialised south and around the capital, Belo Horizonte. Driving from north to south, the mountains with cattle give way to a central belt offering apparently few agricultural possibilities, but buried just below the surface of the rocky, hilly ground are various types of semi-precious stones, including topazes, aquamarines and amethysts.

From what I saw, this flourishing industry centred around Teófilo Otoni, a drafty town lying high up in a valley, is not carried out in any systematic way by large companies. Speculators will buy up a farm in the area and either tunnel optimistically into the hillside or hope to turn up something

of value ploughing the land. The more knowing will then try to sell their stones abroad, and the rest to a dealer in Teófilo Otoni. Much of the trade in this town seems to consist of pressing slightly flawed, hence almost valueless stones onto the numerous unwary travellers passing through, for prices far beyond their worth. It was distressing to see how rapidly these salesmen lowered their prices as soon as they saw that one was not a complete sucker.

The southern stretch of Minas is to me some of the most attractive country in Brazil. With gentle rolling hills planted with fruit, vegetables, hay for cattle and coffee, the scale of the landscape is much less formidable than elsewhere. The rivers which in the Northeast are always muddy brown or black whatever the season, here become clear stony streams. Huge slaughter houses with freezers and richer looking farms advertizing pedigree herds indicate the importance of cattle again in this region.

I was constantly mystified by the lack of sheep grazing on the well-drained mountains throughout the country, but was told by several farmers that they were so prone to worm infestation that they produced far more problems than cattle. Sheep in a flock grazed at reasonable density invariably infect each other within a short time, and the prevention of this is so costly that no farmers consider it profitable to breed them on a large scale.

This relatively densely populated area had obviously been settled earlier than many, for one of its most memorable features is the simple but extremely dignified old farmhouses. These almost all lie on slopes carefully chosen so that the bottom of the house at the front can be left open to serve as a shed for farm implements. Of mud and wattle, or crude red brick, most are whitewashed and have two storeys over the stilted foundations, but their most picturesque aspect is the open wooden balcony that runs along one or two walls of the house often reached by an outside staircase. The largest houses, many of which have their name and date of construction written boldly across the front, date from the eighteenth century and have rows of double shuttered windows but no balconies.

The illusion that one is living in a different century is strengthened by the local systems of transport which are also unlike those anywhere else. The rural population moves around not in buses or on horseback, but in brightly painted pony traps, or in ox-carts reminiscent of Boadicea's chariot with their solid wooden wheels and U-shaped wall of elaborately woven cane for protection at the front and sides.

The less tropical climate has also affected the urban architecture at this latitude. In the towns the middle class houses are no longer focussed on the terraces and even the poorer houses have glass in the windows. Leopoldina near the border with the state of Rio de Janeiro, moreover, has a street of almost Alpine houses with high, steeply sloping roofs and wooden louvred shutters.

The state of Rio is suprisingly poor. The effect of the former capital on its hinterland seems to have been negligible, and if anything to have acted as a magnet in drawing away the wealth of the state. Throughout the region the towns show few signs of industry while the soil seems too poor for anything but a few cattle. The road first follows the valley of the River Paraíba, which like several large rivers in Brazil is prevented by the high mountains along the coast from reaching the sea until it has run parallel to

them for hundreds of miles, and then climbs the magnificently dramatic range of jagged blue peaks which isolates Rio from the rest of Brazil. Centred around Petropolis, the site of the emperors' summer residence, are the week-end homes of the richer Cariocas families who escape to the higher ground to avoid the torpor of the city.

The natural features of the region are such that all the traffic entering Rio converges onto very few roads winding through the mountains. From them one dives straight down into the thick, cloudy air of the industrial town of Duque de Caxias and the hair-raising driving of Cariocas with their notorious lack of lane discipline. Only after passing the docks when one reaches the monumental central avenues does the beauty of the city become apparent.

Accustomed to the habits and opinions of Nordestinos, several points of difference between them and Cariocas struck me at an early stage. The political atmosphere in Rio is much freer and more open. Books by leftist Brazilian writers are much easier to obtain there, and this is not only due to faulty distribution in the Northeast. The 1964 Revolution left a much deeper scar in the Northeast, above all in Pernambuco; politics there is a touchier subject of conversation, and as a result is discussed relatively infrequently in public places.

In Rio it is difficult to stop young Carioca journalists and intellectuals talking about anything but political events and their implications. I sensed a general lack of enthusiasm for the present regime, which even among very moderate thinkers often amounts to overt discontent, but I was struck by the looseness of thought on solutions. Most hanker after what are rapidly becoming the Golden Days of Kubitschek in the latter part of the fifties, but foresee with resignation a long period of military rule. Some of the hopeful feel that another revolution in the next few years is a possibility.

The second difference is the freedom of youth. Boys and girls of the middle and upper classes seem to be perfectly free to go out where they like from the age of fifteen onwards, and the last strongholds of resistance against the enlightened position of European and American teenagers are rapidly collapsing. Mothers turn a blind eye to most of their daughters' activities, allow them to go almost anywhere except, irrationally, night clubs and to return in the early hours. A sixteen year old boy complained indignantly that his girl's mother insisted that she must be home early, by which he meant three a.m. Teen-age fashion is in close touch with Carnaby Street, duly adapted to the beach oriented life. The role of women is also much freer in relation to men, for many of them work, and men do not seem to assume that their rights are very different indeed from those of women, as they do in the Northeast.

The other point of interest is the general lack of concern with, and ignorance of the Northeast. Very, very few Cariocas have ever been there, and those that do know the area have perhaps been to visit a branch of the family that has remained, or been sent up briefly on business to one of the capitals. The rest can be divided into two categories: the minority, the socially conscious left-wingers, show a real interest in what is happening in the region, but are lamentably ill-informed, and although they express a desire to visit the region are prevented from doing so by lack of time or money. The majority think of the Northeast as a burden to be borne by the rest of Brazil, but either do

not want their consciences pricked on the misery that still exists, or do not want reminding that their taxes are being poured uselessly into the region. In both cases they rapidly change the topic of conversation. Interest diminished when Miguel Arraes left the country, in that danger of a major revolt in the Northeast subsided. One young journalist even told me that he saw no reason to visit the area since he knew all about it from reading and it had nothing to offer him. In retrospect I suspect that this opinion was less extreme than it seemed at the time, and that this man was simply being more honest than many others too polite to say so openly.

From Rio with its permanently euphoric atmosphere we headed for São Paulo, its traditional rival as a metropolis and some eight hours away along a singularly monotonous road. The mountains along the Paraíba valley are covered in purple grass with no livestock to be seen grazing on them, although neither transport nor demand are lacking. The road bypasses all the towns, and the only one memorable from a distance is Aparecida where an enormous, extremely ugly cathedral is being built which dominates the old town, already with more than its quota of churches.

Within striking distance of São Paulo rice, coffee, grapes and vegetables, are grown, and we saw one valley planted extensively with healthy looking sugar cane, but the total agricultural activity between the two capitals seemed to me remarkably little.

With no warning other than a few hoardings stuck up on the hillsides the road enters the industrial ribbon stretching out like a finger from the heart of the city. On either side is a continuous line of factories, brand new, clean and carefully laid out, but except for the Olivetti factory with some very bold black chimneys and other vertical structures to vary the ubiquitous red brick, unexciting architecturally. Driving along the seemingly interminable row of model factories, the light grey city gradually looms up against the cloudy sky as the skyscrapers familiar from photographs stand out from an endless wavy sea of houses stretching away to the horizon in every direction. After crossing a short twilight zone the very centre of the huge metropolis devoted to Mammon lies all around.

São Paulo in many respects is like my picture of a large American town. Eclecticism, modernity and efficiency are all very much in evidence. The Streets are thronged with people, not standing around to converse but walking rapidly with an objective.

The racial mixture is even more noticeable than in other parts of the country, for in addition to Brazilians, themselves always varied, the Japanese influence is far greater than I had expected. Nearly one man in twenty in the city is of Japanese origin, and although some quarters are now full of Japanese shops and restaurants, they have infiltrated into every branch of life most successfully. I even saw a Japanese nun. The darker skinned element is well outnumbered, however, by the high proportion of European, especially Italian immigrants which have played a large part in the city's development. The recent growth in population is reflected by the fact that in a week I only met one inhabitant who had been born in the town, and she had Italian parents.

The Paulistas show a lack of reverence for anything old, beautiful or unbeautiful, which has now been carried so far that only one colonial building is left, and this is a very modest seventeenth century inn carefully preserved

in a residential suburb. Everything old is uprooted to make way for something newer, and therefore bigger and more efficient; even buildings dating from the 1940's are being mercilessly torn down.

Much of the modern architecture is of an extremely high standard, especially the tall commercial blocks and the S-shaped block of flats designed by Niemeyer. Multi-storey shopping centres are springing up to help meet the pressure on space in the centre. In every case they are pleasing aesthetically as well as being functionally well designed.

The most impressive piece of all the new commercial architecture is perhaps the recently opened wholesale market which replaces the several scattered around the city. By night the long warehouses, some open sided, others closed in, are filled with hundreds of immaculately laid out mounds of produce stretching away into the darkness. Each pile appears to be supervised by a Japanese and there is hardly a Brazilian in sight. All the produce is in excellent condition and moreover, is so painstakingly prepared that even the turnips have been scrubbed until they are shining white. Many of the varieties were new to me, some introduced by the Japanese, while those that were familiar seemed bigger and juicier than usual.

Outside, rows of lorries are parked alongside systematically. From the registration plates they show the wide area served by the market; several that I saw had come from Rio to collect lettuces, always in short supply there, and at least one had brought jack-fruit down from Sergipe in the Northeast. The whole place is spotlessly clean - I even saw a man sweeping the pavement outside with a feather duster.

Had the place been Japan or even Europe the sight would have been less amazing, but the contrast that this wholesale market makes with others in Brazil is staggering. Elsewhere produce is sold in improvised shacks or on the open ground, surrounded by mud and ⁱⁿsordid chaos.

São Paulo, the capital, continues to grow at an **astounding** pace, and unless some artificial limits are imposed, it is difficult to see why this growth should not continue for many years to come. Various problems, however, will have to be faced shortly if its size is not to become an increasing impediment to its efficiency. The most pressing of these, and one that is already being tackled on one front, is transport.

A comprehensive system of one-way streets has recently been introduced. This has succeeded in reducing the infamous traffic jams, but resulted in such roundabout routes that it is doubtful whether in the end much time is being saved. Certainly, for the time being, they are causing just as much irritation. To make sure that they are observed, there is an efficient and officious police force which is reputedly merciless on offenders.

Public transport remains to be tackled, for it is at present sadly inadequate. There are not nearly enough buses to meet the demand so that, not only is a long wait probable, but when one does finally arrive it is always filled to bursting point. The situation has led many in desperation to buy cars in order to move around at all, and in so doing they have only aggravated the existing problems in the private sector. There is serious talk of building a metro which would clearly help a great deal, but is hardly likely to be ready

within the next few years. In the short run, the only solution is more buses.

The wealth of the city does not seem to be restricted to the hands of a small group of industrialists, but is far more widely distributed than elsewhere. Beggars are few, and more significantly, there is much less marginal employment. All are adequately clothed, despite the colder climate. Furthermore, no urchins hawk mothballs and combs, nor is it easy to find a shoe-black. Paulistas take great pride in their achievements, are loyal to their city, and resent contributing so much of their wealth to supporting the rest of the country. It is easy to understand why they have talked of breaking away from the remainder of Brazil in the past, and in many ways it is amazing that they have managed to retain their wide economic lead when strong political pressure is exerted to help the rest at their expense.

In order to see whether all the wealth was concentrated upon the city itself or whether the hinterland was also benefitting, we spent a day driving inland to Jundiaí, Campinas and Itu. The comparison with towns in the interior elsewhere in Brazil is startling, and it is quite clear that São Paulo is not growing at the expense of its state; on the contrary, much of the wealth is being reflected in its hinterland.

A sea of television aerials, perched on the top of miniature Eiffel towers are fitted to even the poorest houses in all the towns that we saw. Cars are far more common than elsewhere, and very humble houses are built with garages. Children show no signs of malnutrition, and shops sell wide ranges of luxury goods. However, in the largest town, Campinas, I did not see one shop selling consumer durables marked with the full price. In every case they only gave the down payment and monthly instalments. This is presumably indicative of the type of buyer, a member of the working or lower middle class whose wealth is rapidly increasing but who has no capital behind him.

With boys in flowered shirts and "play-boy" hair cuts and girls in mini-skirts and full-bottomed trousers promenading together, albeit rather self-consciously, fashion does not lag behind São Paulo. Even the Peruvian tourist office, hoping to attract some of the idle money in Campinas, has set up a showroom there; this in almost any other town would be considered a waste of time.

The towns are all basically new; moreover, Campinas already has a street of skyscrapers and is building a suburban shopping centre. The others are smaller, but in every one the wealth appears to be founded on industry which is affecting the whole population. Despite the ready market, much of the land is uncultivated. On the higher steeper slopes are coffee plantations and on some of the lower ground neat fields of staple crops, while a few fir plantations for paper are flourishing near São Paulo, but a great deal of the land is not even grazed.

From São Paulo we returned briefly to Rio where the full impact of the extraordinary difference between the two cities hit us. It is hard to remember that such contrasts in every walk of life can exist only eight hours apart and in the same country. Brazilian loyalties are fiercely divided between the two according to temperament, but the most widely held opinion and the one with which I would agree, is that São Paulo is preferable for work, but Rio for holidays or if one is not working.

The difference in their natural features is a partial explanation of many others. São Paulo has little natural beauty, lies high up on a plateau, and has an invigorating climate with severe temperature changes. Rio on the other hand has one of the most beautiful sites imaginable with the bluish-green sea and white beaches hemming it in on one side, and the spiky blue mountains on the other. The light nearly always has a misty, limpid quality. The climate, moreover, is enervating, warm and humid, and shows much less daily variation.

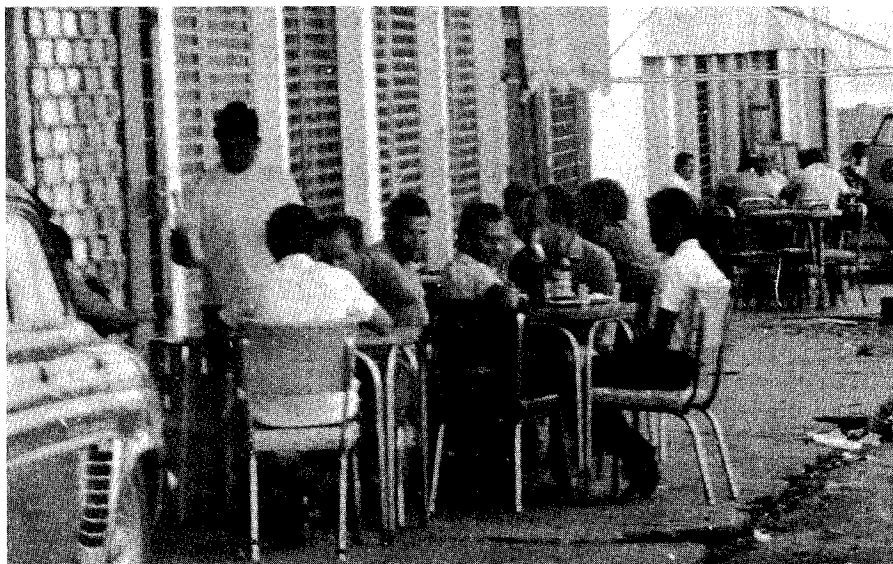
The Carioca, surely due partly to his environment, has little inducement to work and every inclination to lead a sybaritic life, full of sensual pleasures and with the least possible mental effort. The Paulista on the contrary, has little to distract him from his material interests, and has his eye on the future. He has little desire to sit around passing the time drinking cafezinhos while he might be better employed lining his nest.

It is difficult for any individual not to be affected by the atmosphere of a city and modify his own behaviour accordingly; as a result São Paulo has become efficient and businesslike while Rio functions erratically. There, it is generally useless to try and get something done in a hurry, for one will be met with limited cooperation and merely suffer frustration. It is easier to reduce expectations. In São Paulo, I had a strong impression that its people consider inefficiency reprehensible.

The architecture of the two cities reflects the different ways of life. The centre of Rio is a hotch-potch of offices and apartment blocks, often with both in the same building, and in the more residential suburbs, private houses are frequently converted summarily for business purposes. In São Paulo the living and working quarters are separated; business is largely restricted to the tall central office blocks, while people live out in the suburbs. Admittedly the situation in Rio is partly due to shortage of space, and it is logical that new domestic architecture should be high apartment blocks designed for a sophisticated urban life. As there are no physical boundaries to prevent it in São Paulo, families seem to prefer to live in suburban houses away from all the movement and noise of the centre, and as a result, middle class suburbs full of detached houses each with its car and garden are stretching further and further out into the country around.

The day that we returned to Rio one small incident brought home the contrast between the rival cities. We tried to visit the beautiful but incomplete Museum of Modern Art in the middle of the morning. The public functionary at the door told us that it was only open in the afternoon, but was hardly worth seeing anyway, since it contained nothing but a few models of the completed building. We explored a little further, found the workmen supposed to be employed on its construction all lying on their backs reading newspapers, and finally saw that, despite what we had been told, there was an exhibition of pictures inside. As we left we tried to discover the name of the architect from a group of art students working there, but not one knew: nor did they care. I cannot visualize this happening in São Paulo.

Leaving Rio, we headed north west for Brasília, crossing the mountains enveloped in heavy rain clouds, and following the now familiar valley of the River Paraíba back to Minas Gerais. On the borders lies Juiz de Fora, one of the larger older industrial towns of Minas, and full of dirty, smoking, red-brick factories, which contrast strongly with those of São Paulo.



A Bar in W3, Brasilia.

From there to Belo Horizonte the intimate countryside gradually becomes wilder and more mountainous with the smooth green sides scarred only by huge open-cast iron mines, where the soil itself is the colour of rust. Nestling in the valleys are the old towns which grew up during the gold boom in the late eighteenth century, and have changed little since. The far side of Belo Horizonte the road is broken by several prosperous small towns all with large, solidly built churches and whose prime industry seems to be cement. Enormous modern works eat into the hillsides and cover the whole landscape with their white dust.

Beyond this belt of activity the scene remains unchanged until one reaches Brasilia, nearly four hundred miles further on. A high plateau, traversed at frequent intervals by deep cut rivers running at right angles to the road, forms a series of flattened ridges stretching away in a pale blue haze to a horizon as distant as any I have ever seen. The feeling of space is increased by the huge, deep-blue dome of sky overhead. On either side, the reddish dusty earth is covered with dry, scrubby, stunted bushes with tired leaves, and tall, sun-scorched thin grass. Rarely does one encounter any sign of man whatsoever; not even does a herd of goats betray a hut hidden in the bushes. Only on the banks of the fast flowing rivers are there sometimes two or three taipa huts with donkeys, goats, dogs, and perhaps a small clearing planted with corn.

Immense distances separate the towns which form broken patches of white, gleaming in the dusty, green desert. They look new, and have certainly grown since the road was opened up six years ago. The only break in the monotony is the hydro-electric works at Três Marias on the river São Francisco, which was initiated by Kubitschek and is designed to supply the needs of Minas and parts of São Paulo and Brasília. Since the natural fall is small, a dam, a

mile and a half long, has created an enormous reservoir to provide the necessary force for the turbines. With only a small encampment of employees, the sight is still surrealist, but it is planned to build a city just below the dam, and already one foresighted industrialist, bringing in his own labour force, has set up a large isolated zinc factory.

The first sign that we were approaching Brasília was a row of seedy looking night clubs which by day looked as if they had seen better times, and one of which was advertizing itself for sale. These, we later learnt, form an integral part of the city, for although twenty five miles away, it is one of the frequented prostitute zones. Beyond this, the city's misty broken skyline gradually appears in a shallow basin, protected in front by its curved pale blue lake.

As we approached, huge uncompleted earthworks with earth movers crashing through the scrub brought home forcibly the newness of the enterprise. Telephone poles with no wires stretched into the country, and the railway line from the east was being laid in front of our eyes. We headed for the centre of the city, every moment more glad to have our own transport as the Brobdingnagian distances between any two points became more apparent.

Seven years after its official inauguration, eleven after its foundation, I found Brasília stimulating to look at, but at the same time a cold, soulless place in which to live. We spent three days looking at it with open minds. More than that, I tried to see how I could like it; but it was no good, the result is simply too inhuman and lacks any sort of warmth.

Our prime object on arrival was to locate our host whose address was QI 3/2 Lote 10. Novacap, the Orwellian authority responsible for the construction of the city has not yet got around to naming anything, so that all addresses have mysterious codes, and directions can only be given by referring to particular buildings. This would matter less if they had set up an adequate **network** of signposts, but only an occasional, often meaningless indicator helps the newcomer. Our only recourse in the circumstances was to ask pedestrians, but the streets that we drove along were completely deserted except for a few wind-buffed cyclists.

Finally, after more than two hours of intelligent **searching** which was really little more than guesswork asking in one house after another, did we locate the house. It lay in one of the future residential suburbs at the other side of the lake from the city, where each house is protected from its neighbours by a high protective wall of scrub. However, what differentiates the place significantly from any other Brazilian town are the paved roads and sewage systems installed before the houses are built. Elsewhere they invariably follow long after.

Without looking for it, the only thing that we found signed was the British Embassy. Following the carefully placed arrows, we reached the temporary diplomatic quarter, visible through the scrub only by the sea of flags sticking up above the bushes, each embassy insulated by several acres of virgin territory. Although these are only to be used until the permanent buildings are constructed by the occupant countries, there is something pleasingly **comic** in the monumental domestic architecture towering over the humble diplomatic huts.

The pièce de resistance, the Place of the Three Powers, with the Houses of Congress, High Court and President's executive offices, is magnificent, and

no photograph can do full justice to its scale, accentuated by the huge sky. As pieces of sculpture, which is the most natural way to consider them, it is hard to find fault; the High Court and Executive Office, with their beautiful Niemeyer buttresses appear to be floating on air, and Congress, by its size, makes even the colossal ministerial blocks behind look puny.

Inside Congress the spacious black and white marbled halls are already being eaten into by the familiar rabbit warrens of temporary partitions. As one sits, cocooned within the artificially lit, partly subterranean seats of government, aptly described as a pair of contact lenses, the world feels most unreal. One wonders whether a government can function healthily in a synthetic city, in a group of architectural monuments intended to express the grandeur of Brazil, and hundreds of miles from any reminder of the serious imperfections, the poverty and squalor, which still exist throughout much of the country.

The domestic architecture falls far short of expectations, and its shortcomings are rapidly becoming apparent. The main residential nucleus consists of six storey rectangular blocks, few of which show much individual architectural merit, but in which everything is sacrificed for the sake of privacy. Niemeyer considers balconies unaesthetic, and therefore nobody has a balcony in the sitting room, and the normal eyesore of washing and potted plants at the back is carefully camouflaged with a wall of open brickwork. External communications with one's neighbours is thus effectively prevented, and the only place to meet them is in the lift, which in all the blocks I examined, serves but one or two apartments on each floor. I fear that in many cases what may have been considered desirable privacy may turn into severe claustrophobia and isolation.

For those who do not like living in honeycombs, modest bungalows have been mass produced in a quarter mysteriously known as W3. How it obtained this name nobody seems to know, but it is the more curious as the Portuguese alphabet no longer uses the letter "W". At the moment W3 is far the most humanized and animated part of the city, but it is also the quarter that has strayed farthest from the blueprint. This may or may not be interpreted as pure coincidence: I incline to the latter view.

The houses lie along one side of the main thoroughfare in U-shaped blocks looking inwards so that the kitchens and garages at the foot of the U's are open to the view of passing motorists. Along the other side of the road stretch several miles of squalid, two storey buildings originally designed as a wholesale market to serve the shops which lie in the roads descending at right angles among the mazes of apartment blocks. It was intended that these roads should be used only for servicing the shops whose fronts should be turned the other way.

However, things have worked out very differently.

Prices of lots in the intended commercial centre are prohibitively high so that shopkeepers and even banks prefer the more modest premisses of W3, while the commercial centre has remained an untouched wilderness. The multi-storey centres of São Paulo are incomparably superior to this straggling row of tatty, suburban and inefficient shops which have to cater for the needs of all the middle class inhabitants. All the traffic crossing the town uses not the main eixo (trunk road) as planned, but the W3 road as a thoroughfare. This

explains why we found the former highway with its eight lanes completely deserted. The result is that the scruffy backs of the villas are open to public inspection, and the most important shopping street has a constant stream of cars along it. As the car park lies down the centre of the dual carriageway shoppers laden with parcels and children have to brave all the north bound traffic of Brasília.

The shops in the side streets have turned themselves back to front, leaving their rubbish and stacks of cardboard boxes on the side of the apartments, and putting the shop front on the side of the road. The local residents apparently wish to escape from the sight of home when shopping and drinking. Perversely, the one row of shops and bars that has no apartments behind it has remained the right way round. Here the owners are making the most of their freedom to dry the washing out of doors, an impossibility elsewhere, and among the linen draped on barbed wire fences, the mud and the rubbish are perched tables of beer drinkers. However, trade here appears far brisker than in the antiseptic atmosphere elsewhere.

Brasília is said to be designed for the year 2,000, by which time it is assumed that everybody will have cars. But for the time being it is geared primarily to the comfort of the upper middle classes, especially government employees. In order to attract civil servants and members of the government away from Rio their salaries have been doubled. Yet, although they are a little better off, the chief effect of this has been for the prices of everything also to double as soon as others concerned learnt of it. The cost of living is far higher than merited by the distance from centres of production, for other towns in the region are much cheaper. Those not employed by the government, therefore, are much poorer than they would be elsewhere.

When flats and houses, all formerly let by Novacap were sold to free the capital for further development rents immediately rocketed up, so that the original idea to have members of all classes living together in one block has been totally destroyed. Public transport is very inadequate, and as distances of eight to ten miles are commonplace, life without a car is impossible. Yet, the whole time I was there, I hardly saw any buses, and the few that passed me were jammed with passengers.

A high rate of drunkenness seems to be prevalent at the weekend. However, as a carpenter from Goiania lamented, there is little else to do except get drunk; many men are still separated from their families, for those without cars formal entertainment means a forbidding trip by bus, and women are equally inaccessible. Therefore drinking is the only means of escape left to them.

Unless prices come down to a more reasonable level, or all wages are put up to this artificial height, it is hard to see how most members of the working class will be able to afford cars in the next thirty years. Although there is little overt sign of poverty on the streets, almost all the lower classes are kept carefully out of sight in a shanty town eleven miles away. In the state-run hospital, one of the very few places in the main city that they would have occasion to visit, the sight is no different from the one in Recife. Semi-trained nurses cope patiently with long queues of suffering, ignorant people bewildered and distressed by their strange surroundings.

The middle classes outside the government net also complain about the lack of entertainment. The social clubs of which they would normally be members in other cities have the membership fees geared to the inflated government salaries, and night life has hardly been developed. I met nobody enthusiastic about living there; the warmest comment that I heard was that "one gets used to it". The initial camaraderie and sense of adventure seems to have faded, and people are becoming less tolerant of the flaws and irritations.

Cracked pavements and litter bring to mind the unloved and neglected housing estates in England when the first glamour has worn off and little attempt is made to keep up appearances. Brasilia is a very drafty city, and the red dust manages to permeate every nook and cranny, tingeing the concrete walls of blocks high above the ground. Even sandalled feet are invariably dyed a rather unpleasant shade of orange.

Near the centre, huge plots of land still lie untouched by the earthmovers. If the aim is a total population of 300,000 of which 250,000 are already there, many of these open spaces must be intended to remain. In this case, I find the town too scattered for it to have a sense of unity. On the other hand, if the gaps are to be filled in, the population must far exceed the stated goal. In its present state the city would make an excellent setting for a Fellini film.

From this latest attempt at a planned city, we drove back to Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas, and the first Brazilian town planned on a large scale. This is now sixty years old and is wearing very well. The city lacks warmth, but at least it is more human than Brasilia, and its coldness is probably due more to its tight-fisted, closed inhabitants than to its architecture. It is a town of wide avenues and skyscrapers, and though many date from between the Wars, some of the most exciting are very modern. All the municipal buildings that I saw were unexceptionable turn-of-the-century, and the only interesting part of the town architecturally is the suburb on the outskirts known as Pampulha. A river has been ingeniously dammed to form a large artificial lake for sailing, below which the course has been diverted to make an airport on the level ground of the natural



Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais.

bed, since flat land in the mountainous countryside is very scarce. Around the lake are clubs, restaurants, some very rich houses and a museum, but the most memorable building is the church of São Francisco designed by Niemeyer with paintings by Portinari. Facing onto the lake, it is full of fluid movement and curves, with the light entering through the glass wall at the back. Portinari's blue and white tiled wall, depicting the life of St. Francis is also most beautiful in context.

Around Belo Horizonte, mainly to the south and east, lie the old gold mining towns, rich in ecclesiastical architecture and other monuments. The wealth of the region at the turn of the eighteenth century was astounding; even the heavy horses' stirrups were made of pure silver. However, as the gold disappeared the towns suffered from an economic depression which has only recently been relieved by the discovery of iron and consequent opening of mines as well as, in one town, a large steel works.

The largest, richest and most complete of the towns is Ouro Preto, the former capital of the state, and preserved as a national monument since 1932. This, like the other historic towns that we saw, clings to the sides of a steep valley in the middle of the high but well-rounded mountains. With its steep, narrow, cobbled streets and beamed, high-roomed houses it is more reminiscent of an Italian hill town than anything Latin American. The old houses are being carefully preserved, while any new ones are faithfully keeping to the same style. The town seems to have a predominantly young population. I have never seen so many children around, and the numbers of young people are greatly augmented by students at the School of Mines, a branch of the state university. The School has taken over the old governor's palace as a centre, while the students are scattered in old houses all over the town. The other characteristic of the population was the high number of negroes, presumably descendants of slaves employed in the mines.

Ouro Preto appears to be to Brazil what St. Ives is to England, as it seems to have become a centre where self-conscious but manque artists spend a season. The tourist industry is being pleasingly little exploited; there are only a few restaurants, hotels and souvenir shops. The town council seems to be more aware of the possibilities than any private individual for they recently introduced a charge for entering churches to help with their upkeep. However, in Nossa Senhora do Pilar, the richest church of all, the boy at the door told us proudly that we need not pay as his church did not need the money: it was only the poorer churches that had to charge.

Although the stonework of the churches is in excellent condition and has not suffered from climatic or chemical damage, many of the interiors have been sadly mutilated by priests and others. In the latter part of the last century these crudely painted over the magnificent baroque gilt carving. The Patrimônio Histórico, approximately equivalent to the National Trust in England is now occupied in undoing the damage, but the funds and staff employed on this are pitifully small. The man in charge of the work in Minas knows an immense amount about his subject, and for the past six years has been restoring the church of Santa Ifigênia. Like a medieval craftsman he knows that the rest of his working life is going to be devoted to continuing his work in other Ouro Preto churches, however slow the process may be, and his satisfaction comes from the conviction that in so doing he is altering history. Nevertheless, the power of the Patrimônio is very limited, and in one tragic case, the parish church of Sabará, one of the most beautiful of all the churches and recently excellently

restored, the local priest had afterwards repainted the the baroque figure of the Virgin and cherubs over the altar in the most hideous crude colours, completely destroying much of the overall effect. The Patrimônio has not the power to punish the offender; and moreover, since it is known that they restored the church, they are also thought to have committed the atrocity.

The works of Aleijadinho (Little Cripple), the curious, crippled sculptor who lived in the region, working mainly in the early part of the nineteenth century, are as remarkable as the architecture. His most used, and undoubtedly most successful, medium is soap stone of which there are large deposits nearby, and which is extremely easy to work. Although some of his best pieces are very sensitive and as good as those of Italian sculptors a century earlier, a great many show his embittered character and have strange mistakes. Several of his figures, not representing evil characters, are nevertheless portrayed with a certain cruelty, and he invariably puts the boots on the wrong feet, which cannot have been a continuous oversight as some suggest.

We left Ouro Preto to make our way home, driving across country to pick up the main road north. Much of this road is still being made up, and the difference between the towns that have already been linked to Belo Horizonte by tarmac and the rest is dramatic. The former are busy towns with large shops and even multi-storey blocks of apartments and offices, while the latter are little different from towns in the interior of the Northeast. The similarity is heightened by the fact that they lie in the middle of a sugar zone. We retraced our steps home without incident except for heavy rain in Sergipe, which had flooded stretches of the road and was rapidly making them impassable.

In summing up my impressions of the journey it is difficult to be original; most of the points have been made before. Nevertheless, these are my reactions.

The country is absolutely enormous and at the same time strikingly under-populated. The existing population is maldistributed and is contained in isolated pockets. Moreover, the present migration to the coastal capitals and the larger towns inland seems to me a very great menace indeed to the balanced growth of Brazil. Most of the country that we saw is still a wilderness, and unless this migration is checked, is likely to remain so for some time.

A closely related danger is the reluctance of the professional classes, once trained, to move out into the interior. The aspect of most of the country is monotonous and dreary with but little aesthetic attraction; but more than this, it is the ennui outside the larger towns that seems to put off educated Brazilians.

Kubitschek's plan to open up the interior by building many smaller Brasília's has a startling relevance today. People must move westwards if Brazil is not to remain a series of sky-scraped coastal cities. I have not seen the southernmost states, but of all the rest, only in São Paulo has the wealth of the city spread into the interior of the state.

The demographic problem of Brazil is as real now as it was three hundred years ago.

Yours sincerely,

Fanny Mitchell.

Fanny Mitchell.

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