

loud, but, as much as anything else, it is “to preserve or elevate the class of their clients.”

Architects, of course, do not confuse class with “money or material wealth, old or new,” says Benedikt. It is a matter of exhibiting “good taste and refined behavior”—and certain architects stand ready to offer their clients instruction in acquiring these. The fact that the “star system” has become so entrenched in the architecture world, Benedikt maintains, is due “at least as much to the star-architects’ lifelong commitment to, and success at, promoting their own class status and that of their clients as to their hard work and design talent.”

A mark of upper-class status is “the conscious suppression” of any display of need, including the need for class elevation itself, says Benedikt. “Class-wise architects . . . will appear in no need of permissions or compliments, assurances, money, or agreement—certainly in no dire need.” This “neediness-denying virtue (real or dissembled),” Benedikt argues, powerfully affects “the very nature of design and the architect’s choice of style.”

Consider, for example, Mies Van Der Rohe’s Farnsworth House (1946–50), in

Plano, Illinois, and Philip Johnson’s emulative “Glass House” (1949) in New Canaan, Connecticut. What do those austere glass boxes exemplify, asks Benedikt, but “the class-emblematic transcendence of ordinary human needs” for heat and privacy?

“When genuine needs are spurned rather than satisfied,” the author contends, “and especially when they are spurned out of a strategic need to avoid the display of neediness, the results can only strain at, not achieve, nobility. Not only can the psychic toll be considerable, but the whole strategy is eminently cooptable by those whose real interests are economic.”

Look around, he concludes, at the state of architectural culture today: “The dominant strategy for class supremacy remains attached to the ascetic/minimalist/modernist program of neediness denial, with all sensuality, all richness, all tradition, all need for physical and psychological comfort surrendered to the unadmitted need for art-world prestige, and sublimated to reading/writing about the extremely subtle charms of raw concrete and translucent glass, tall empty spaces, and light.” Most artists and most Americans “aren’t having it,” Benedikt says.

OTHER NATIONS

Brazil’s Young Democracy

A Survey of Recent Articles

The full flower of democracy came late to Brazil, nearly five centuries after Europeans first arrived, but finally, little more than a decade ago, it did come—and so far, it has survived. But its roots are shallow, and daunting social problems persist in the world’s fifth largest and (with 150 million people) fifth most populous country. Sixteen scholars, writing in *Daedalus* (Spring 2000), assess Brazil’s condition and prospects.

Fernando Collor de Mello was elected president in the 1989 elections that marked Brazil’s becoming a full-fledged democracy. The traumatic but successful 1992 impeachment of Collor on corruption charges, and his removal from office, can be read as a sign of the democracy’s strength, rather than its weakness, notes Leslie Bethell, director of

the Centre for Brazilian Studies at the University of Oxford. Current President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who won a second term in 1998, is “a distinguished sociologist . . . and a politician with impeccable democratic credentials and advanced social democratic ideas.”

But Brazilians consistently hold political leaders in extremely low esteem, Bethell and historian José Murilo de Carvalho, of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, separately observe. In a 1998 poll, 94 percent said they did not trust politicians, overwhelmingly regarding them as dishonest. President Cardoso fared a bit better: Only 69 percent distrusted him. Eighty-five percent looked upon Brazil’s political parties with suspicion. Those parties are numerous—30 or so, cur-



A mural in Brasília celebrates Brazilians' image of themselves as joyful and tolerant.

rently—ideologically incoherent, and highly undisciplined, Bethell points out. Nearly a third of the deputies elected in 1994 switched parties during the Congress of 1995–98, some of them more than once.

It is not surprising that, even though voting is technically mandatory, large numbers of Brazilians—38.4 million in 1998—either fail to vote or cast blank (*branco*) or spoiled (*nulo*) ballots.

“The people do not trust their leaders and institutions but do little to make the former more responsible to public needs and to change the latter, taking destiny in their own hands,” writes Murilo. “All the energy and immense creativity of which they are capable is directed toward the private domain, be it to enjoy life or simply to survive.” In a 1995 survey, some 60 percent of Brazilians expressed great pride in their country, but the leading source of that pride was not national institutions (mentioned by only 10 percent), but nature (mentioned by 25 percent)—Brazil’s pleasant climate, big forests and rivers, beautiful beaches, fertile land, and abundant resources. Brazilians—who overwhelmingly see themselves “as more cheerful, more hospitable, more loving, and more religious than other people”—imagine their country, Murilo says, as a natural paradise open to all, “a gift to be enjoyed, not a goal to be achieved.”

Brazil has “remarkably few of the regional, national, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and reli-

gious divisions, tensions, and conflicts that pose a threat to [many other] democracies,” Bethell observes. But Brazil also may be the “world champion in social inequality. Can democracy be healthy, can it properly function, can it even survive in the long run, when, as in Brazil, [at least] a third of the population . . . live in conditions of extreme poverty, ignorance, and ill health and are treated at best as second-class citizens?”

Brazil’s turn to democracy, writes political scientist Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, of the University of São Paulo, has been accompanied by “[an] increase in violent criminality and the spread of gangs, Mafiosi, and other criminal organizations.” The homicide rate of about 25 per 100,000 people in 1996 was nearly twice the rate in 1980—and three times the U.S. rate in 1996. Among South American nations, Brazil, with 40,470 homicides in 1997, now ranks second only to Colombia.

Many North American academics and philanthropic organizations believe that racial bias is at the root of many of Brazil’s woes. They say that statistics on infant mortality, life expectancy, education, income, and criminal justice show that nonwhite Brazilians fare worse than whites (who make up about half the population, according to official statistics). American-style affirmative action is the solution they favor. But racial lines are more indistinct than in the United States, notes Peter Fry,

an anthropologist at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Most Brazilians of all colors, while acknowledging that racial discrimination exists, continue to adhere to the ideal of “racial democracy,” of basically harmonious racial relations. Many, says Fry, “celebrate the virtues of ‘mixture,’ of both genes and cultures.” Ambiguity and compromise are part of the warp and woof of Brazilians’ complex racial classification system. “Where quotas have been proposed,” he notes, “opposition has been virulent.”

Simon Schwartzman, director of the American Institutes for Research for Brazil,

sounds an optimistic note: “While some conditions have worsened in recent years, especially those related to the quality of life in large metropolitan areas, most of the basic social indicators, such as education, life expectancy, housing conditions, and sanitation, have shown steady increase and improvement.”

Nevertheless, Bethell writes, “democratic government is perceived by many as having so far failed to promote a much-needed social transformation in Brazil. In this respect it is in danger of being regarded as no different from the nondemocratic governments of the past.”

The Hegemonic Hamburger

“The French Exception” by Sophie Meunier, in *Foreign Affairs* (July–Aug. 2000), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Resistance to American-led globalization is, well, global, but the French, as usual, are a special case. Theirs is the only 21st-century nation, besides the United States, with universalist pretensions. Naturally, then, they feel especially aggrieved by the sight of the Golden Arches and the invasive presence of the Big Mac.

“[France’s] political and cultural identity combines all the elements threatened by globalization,” explains Meunier, a visiting fellow at Princeton University’s Center of International Studies. Those elements

include “a universalist culture, a language with international aspirations, a ‘superior’ cuisine, a sensitive view of national sovereignty, a strong, centralized state, a need for a world role, a sense of duty toward the poorer nations, and a deeply rooted anti-Americanism.”

The French have worried about the invasion of American movies, music, and TV programs for years. More recently, Meunier says, their fears have grown to encompass “trade in general.” The World Trade Organization (WTO) “has been por-

EXCERPT

Italy’s Shrinking Families

People [in Italy] are not slow to put the smallness of families into a political context. “Of course children are a pleasure,” says an elderly lady to me in the park at the end of my street, as we sit in the shade of a tree and watch them careening about, “but only if you can afford to pay for them.” “That’s right,” another chimes in, “a pleasure for the rich who have everything well arranged. But my son can’t start a family when he hasn’t got a job.” In Britain, Thatcherite values have been so thoroughly internalized that the view that if you want something—in this case a large family—then you have to create the conditions for its existence yourself is more and more unquestionably accepted. In Italy, remarkably (given a political situation which is both chaotic and frequently paralyzed), people have not stopped seeing their own daily lives in political terms. A robust and direct class antagonism persists.

—STELLA TILLYARD, a biographer and historian, writing in *Britain’s Prospect* (July 2000)