



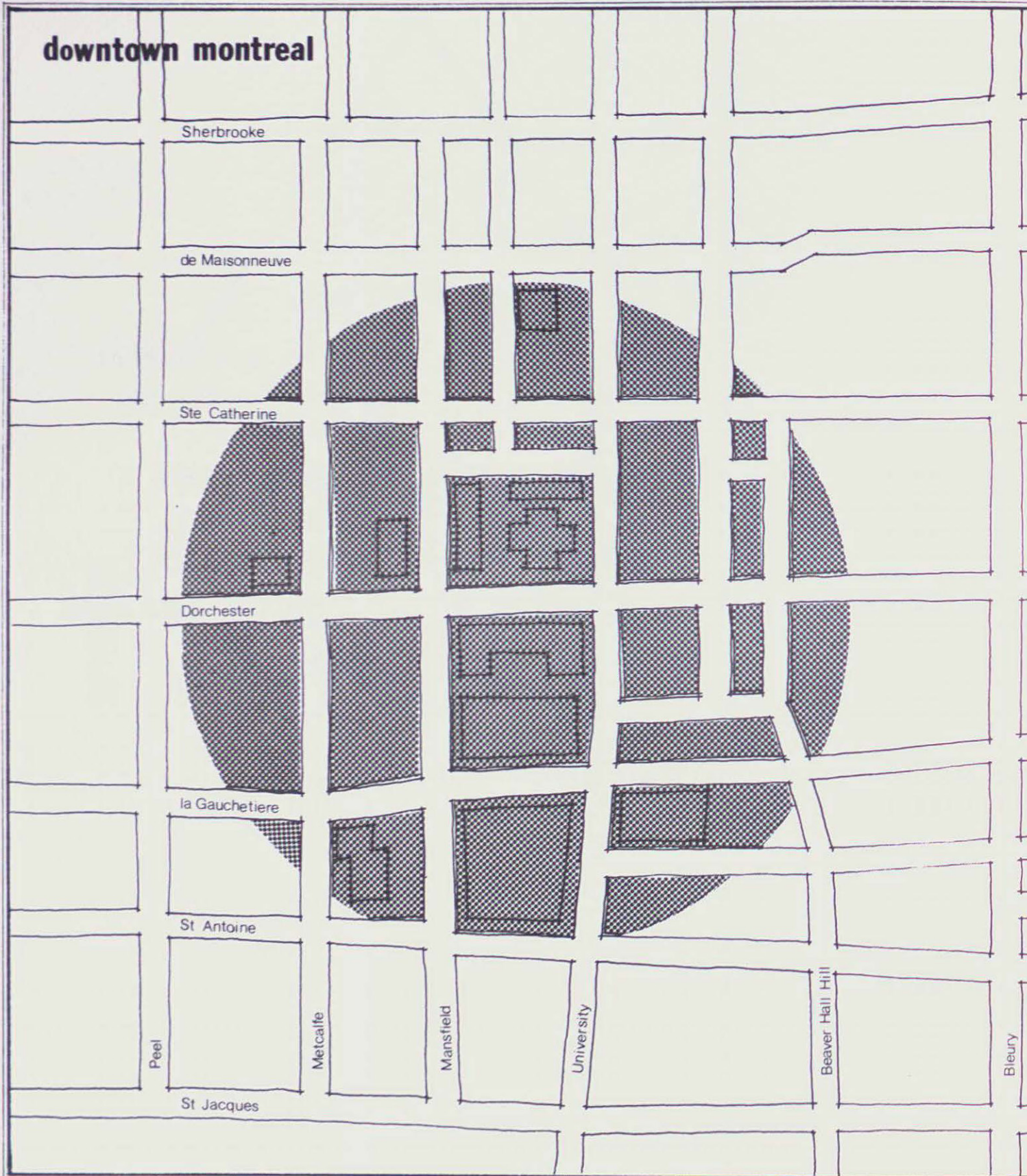
**The development  
of downtown  
Montreal:**

# poles apart

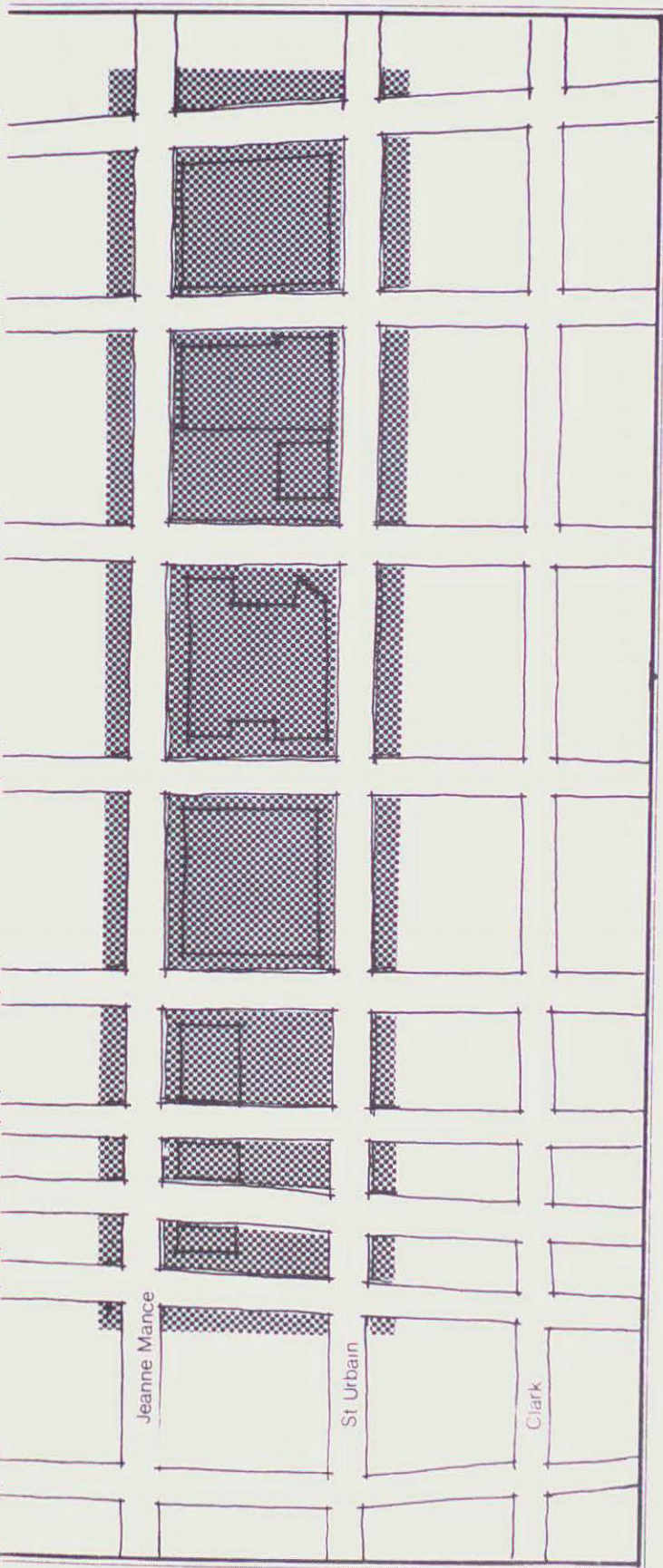
Manhattan's skyline rises dramatically from the water of upper New York Bay and diminishes, resurfacing later in midtown. The financial district with its tightly-packed towers is the American nation's monetary centre, while the heart of New York and many of its attractions lie in the midtown area. This is an analogy which comes to mind when considering the growth and future development of downtown Montreal. The centre of downtown Montreal pivots about Place Ville Marie and is roughly bounded by Sherbrooke, Guy, St Antoine and Aylmer/Beaver Hall Hill Streets. Most of Montreal's business headquarters, rentable office space, hotel rooms and attractions are located in the area. As well, it is well serviced by mass transportation (Central and Windsor Stations, the Metro, etc.), restaurants and the city's main retail area.

by George Bulette









To the east there is a new and rapidly rising centre of activity. It occupies less area than the aforementioned territory but nonetheless stretches from Sherbrooke to St-Antoine and is bounded by Jeanne Mance and St-Urbain Streets. Its heart is Complexe Desjardins, which at its opening in 1976, was proclaimed to be "le coeur du nouveau centre-ville". The origins of this second 'downtown core' revolve around the construction of Place des Arts in the early 1960's. In 1970 the plans for Complexe Desjardins were made public and the area continued its growth in the mid-70's when the federal government announced plans to build Complexe Guy Favreau. This project, located immediately south of Complexe Desjardins, has been stalled and construction is only now being resumed. In 1977 the site of the Palais des Congres was chosen to straddle the Ville Marie Expressway, one block south of Complexe Guy Favreau. In the spring of 1980, Hydro Quebec announced that it would build its headquarters immediately north of Place des Arts. It is a considerable undertaking which will provide office floor space equivalent to that of Place Ville Marie. The total construction cost of these last three projects is in the vicinity of \$460 million, which accounts for the majority of current construction spending in downtown Montreal.

Certain factors must be taken into account however, when considering this second core. Its five major components have been or are being financed with public money. This is significant. The municipal government is responsible for Place des Arts. The provincial government is responsible for the Palais des Congres, indirectly for the Hydro Quebec complex, and partly for Complexe Desjardins. Finally, the federal government is responsible for Complexe Guy Favreau.

It is interesting to note that although Complexe Desjardins' enclosed central 'place' is successful socially, economically its shops have done poorly. Retail business tends to cluster together and



Complexe Desjardins is too far removed from the main retail segment of Ste-Catherine Street. This project characterizes the new core which lacks the diversity of central downtown, a diversity strongly dependant upon private enterprise. Its linearity reflects its lack of depth. With the exception of Place des Arts, the area will soon resemble the downtown stretch of Dorchester Street, in that the people who will go there will be the people who will work there, leaving the streets empty and lifeless during evenings and weekends.

Six major office developments, representing an investment of \$270 million, are presently under construction in Montreal's central core. All are being financed by private enterprise. This is where the polarity of downtown development becomes evident: public financing versus private financing. The complexity of this polarity is consolidated by the largely francophone image of the second core as opposed to the central core's strongly anglophone image. It is for this reason that the provincial government is, through the investment of its money, promoting this eastward shift.

In a November 29, 1977 article in The Gazette, David Farley, director of the McGill School of Urban Planning, identified an "imperialist axis" and a "nationalist axis" in downtown Montreal related to the two aforementioned cores. Farley alluded to a "battle of the axes" in which "a public investment near Dominion Square and Place Ville Marie reinforces imperial interests while investment to the east will shift the focus of downtown and express Quebecois interests". The article appeared shortly after the siting of the Palais des Congres had been publicly announced. The decision in question aroused a great deal

of controversy, particularly within the hotel industry, since the location selected was not within the immediate sphere of the major hotels. The Palais des Congres' siting, however, serves a definite purpose. It will act as a link with a symbolically Quebecois Old Montreal. In bridging over the tremendous barrier presented by the Ville Marie Expressway, the Palais des Congres will allow the termination of one end of the nationalist axis. As such, the siting of the Hydro Quebec complex emerges as no surprise. It will become a symbol of the nationalist axis, from a distance rivaling Place Ville Marie. The site itself is somewhat inappropriate; the scale of the project will have a crushing effect on the neighbouring residential area and will certainly be contested by citizen's groups. Since the nationalist axis is at present a narrow one, relocation would be awkward.

One can only speculate about the future growth of downtown Montreal. Its high density development may continue to spread to the peripheries of the central core as it is presently doing. The nationalist axis with Rue St-Denis as an ally may also spill into its peripheral streets and develop more depth. Eventually, the two cores may be united and there may come a time when the no-man's lowlands between the eminent skylines of the two centres shall develop into prime real estate. The main artery through this no-man's land is Bleury, a north-south street. It is only one block away from the nationalist axis and three blocks away from Phillips Square and the imperialist axis; close to both but part of neither. The character of downtown may change dramatically within the next twenty years, with one major project's siting on Bleury Street rapidly altering the growth patterns of the inner city. □

