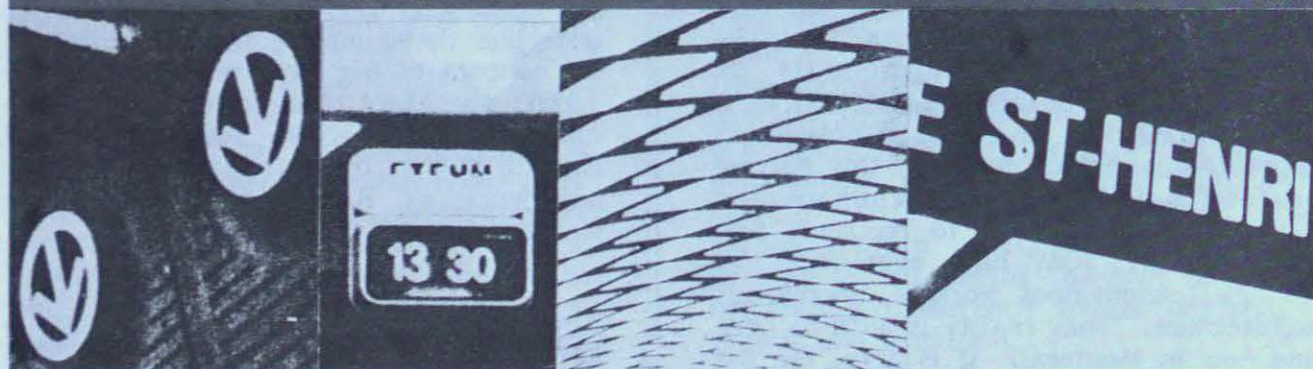


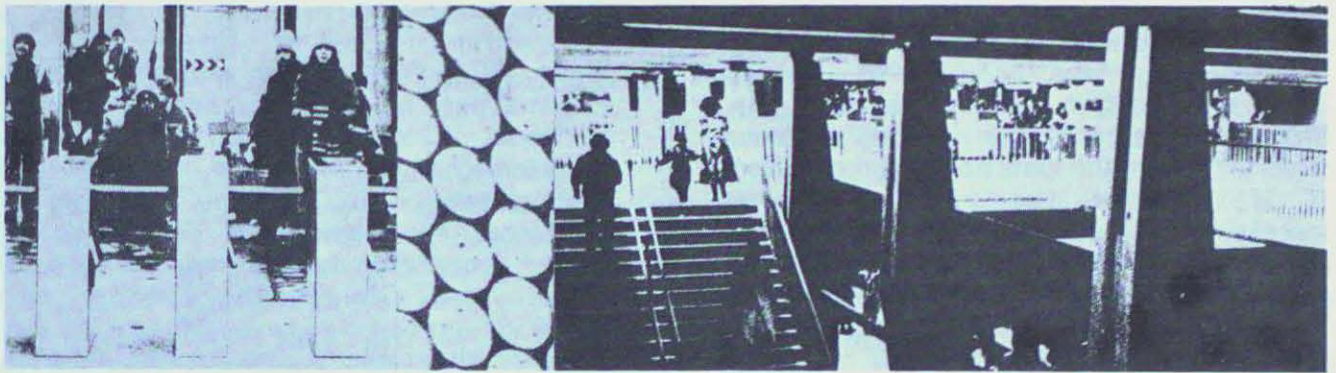
GOING UNDERGROUND



by Nathan Godlovitch.

On Friday, October 16, 1966, an official assembly gathered forty feet below the surface of the City of Montreal. From a 500-foot long chamber of grey ceramic tiles, at the request of the Mayor of Montreal, the French Minister of State blew a whistle, and a new transportation system which heralded a city's apex was rolling. Forty-four seconds later, the first blue and white train hummed into the Berri-de-Montigny station to the applause of the high-level entourage and the music of a brass band. As a

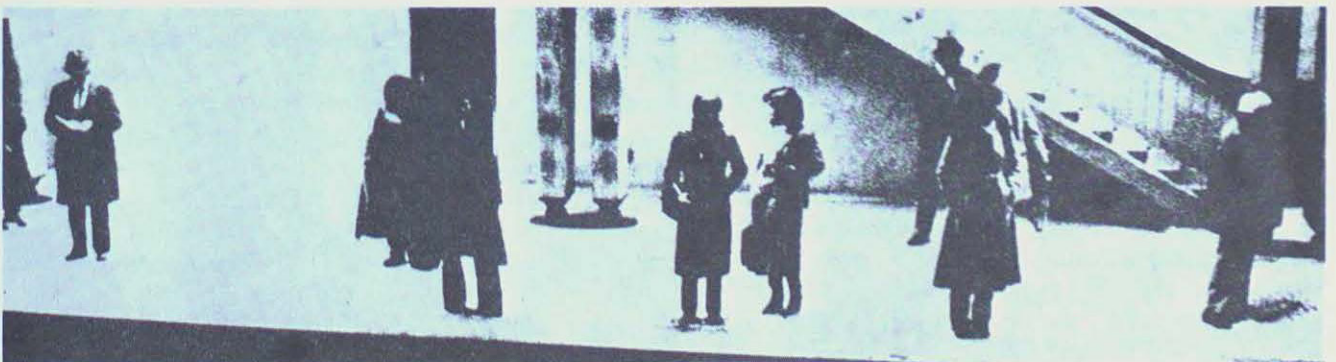
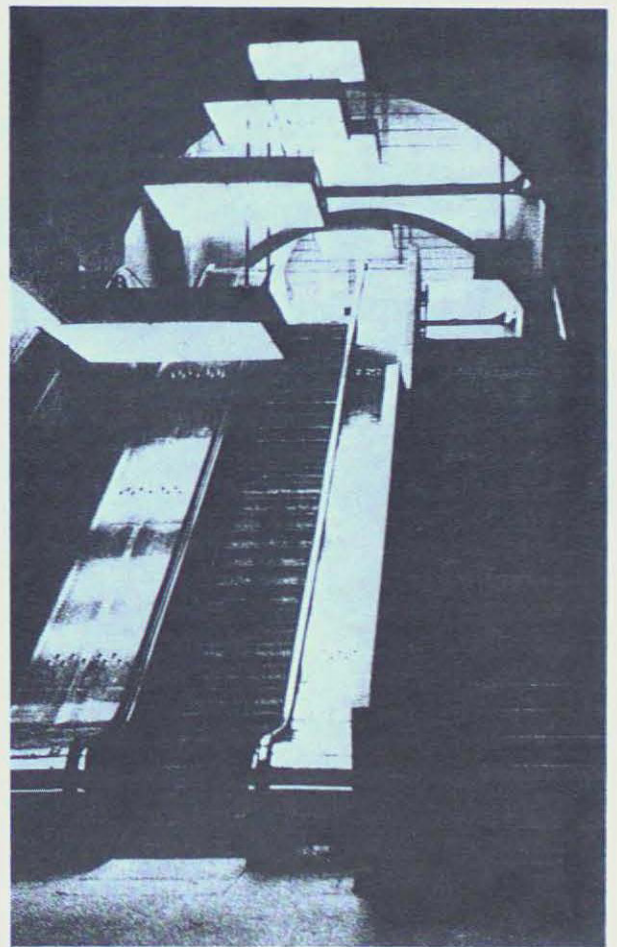
television audience watched, the Archbishop of Montreal gave a baptismal blessing and three days later, when the Montreal Metro system opened to the public, a fifty-year dream was transformed into reality. Today, in the subway's fifteenth year of operation, its incredible impact on the city and its people is yet to be taken for granted. "It's the most beautiful subway in the world," exclaimed Mayor Jean Drapeau - a seemingly pretentious statement from an exaggerative man, though few have



disputed this claim.

Dramatically, the original sixteen mile underground network with its twenty-six stations and associated protected promenades introduced a schism into the personality of Montreal's core. The city's downtown streets were just beginning to suffer the consequences of the commercial boom which had induced most of the irreflective rapid development. Greystone landmarks made way for an elusive **Manhattanesque** fabric of diversity and congestion without consideration for planning or control. As even Sherbrooke Street and McGill University succumbed to cancerous expansion, the Metro was growing below, meticulously based on a master plan.

Parameters were imposed where necessitated by function while form and aesthetics were regulated only by permissive guidelines. The station became the realm of architecture. Each station individually composed, Metro-design became a prestige project resulting in an amazing variety of colour and form throughout the network. Arguably, this variety is the basis of the

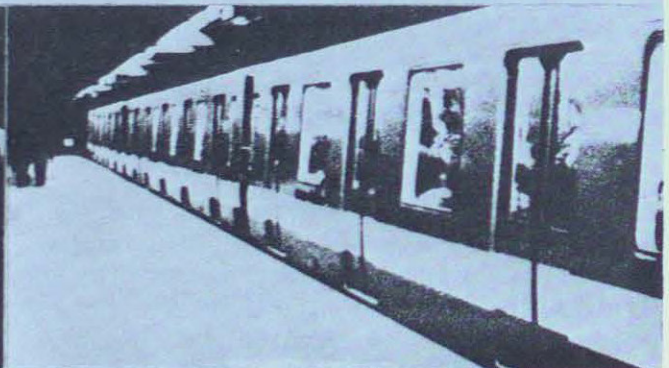
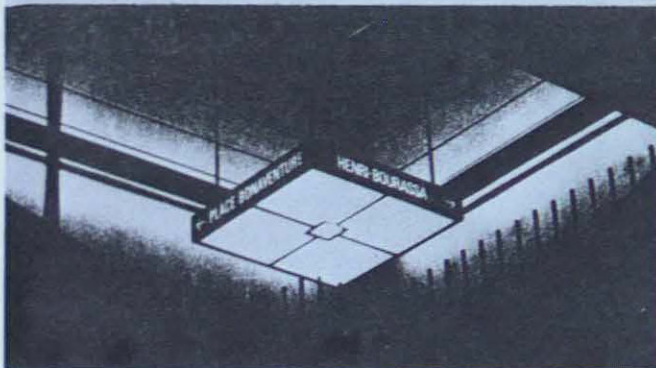
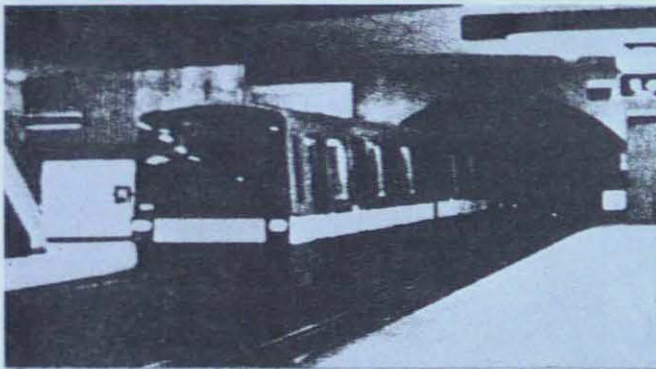


Metro's main appeal, beyond the albeit impressive ultra-tech rolling stock and operational systems.

The treatment of subterranean environment is handled in a novel manner, differing from the palatial ornamentation of Moscow or the rigidly uniform porcelain 'glimmer' of the original Toronto installations, both considered model systems of their times. Metro architects considered the pedestrian moving through space more akin to his outdoor surroundings. Materials are sympathetic to the wear of urban transit. Resilient

transcends the diversity encountered from station to station.

Since 1976 twenty new stations serving extensions have been added to the network. Changes of economy and style dictated changes from the mood of the original twenty-six. Ceramics are limited to floors and some wall decoration as naked concrete and glazed brick have supplanted tile as the predominant interior treatment. Often, as at Place-St-Henri and Lucien-l'Allier, interior designs attempt to suggest the context of the outdoor environment. There are two



ceramic, metal, brick, stone and concrete are articulated in the most successful stations to recreate the rhythm of the city street as experienced by the pedestrian, providing pockets of space, nodes of movement and sometimes wildly dramatic variations in scale and envelope height. Success comes in avoidance of the mundane (particularly the 'lavatory' style typified in Toronto) and the pretentious. The Metro undoubtedly bears the appearance of a subway, yet a unique overall character and image has been thoughtfully developed - clearly recognizable to the commuter - which

related digressions from the nature of the initial installations. The current emphasis on the presence of daylight (often achieved through very indirect means) at platform level is in conflict with the subterranean atmosphere developed in the older stations where only Champs-de-Mars permits light penetration to the tracks. The 'airy' feeling of the most generously sky-lit stops (Agrignon, Jolicoeur and Prefontaine) plays against the brooding qualities of the dark, cavernous stations typified masterfully at Bonaventure and Peel. Extensive daylighting can alleviate the sometimes oppressive claustrophobia,

a result of the system's permanent technical inability to leave its protective tunnels (the rubber-concrete traction system must be kept dry).

The second related departure from original design concepts is found in the openness of view and circulation encountered in the new stations, opposing the 'corridor' architecture of earlier work. This new approach again combats feelings of excessive enclosure, while the strong senses of linearity and directionality of older stations seem conducive to an implicitly linear and directional transit system.

The overall success of the Montreal Metro is beyond question. To travel the Metro is still to discover an orderly, yet exciting world far different from the directionless chaos encountered above. Much like the concurrently conceived Expo '67, the Metro packages the correct proportions of uniformity and variety,

recognizing the vital contemporary role of high-technology. The end-result is a highly functional yet emotionally evocative sub-city - a system not merely to be ridden, but to be experienced. □

References

1. Victor Prus, "Metro Architecture", Architectural Design, Vol.XXXVII, July, 1967, pp.325-327
2. Rene Viau, "Une Integration Reussie des Arts et de l'Architecture", Habitat, Vol.21, No.4, 1978, pp.56-60
3. Canadian Railroad Historical Association News Report, October, 1961, pp.130-134
4. Canadian Rail Magazine, May 1963, pp.109-111; July/August, 1964, pp.66-67; June 1965, pp.117-121; October, 1966, pp.193-215
5. Montreal Gazette, October 14, 1966, pp.29-39
6. The Montreal Star, November 3, 1961, p.1

