Column/Diana ben-Aaron

MBTA renovation no primrose path

The MBTA closed the old Harvard Square subway station on March 28, 1979. That day, MBTA officials distributed "March 24: Don't get caught by surprise" (these days, it would say "Don't panic") details about their plans and rationale for the Red Line Extension and explaining the interim rerouting of traffic.

There are three pictures inside the brochure. One is an engraving of the Harvard Square subway kiosk in 1912 when it was built: a round, stand-alone pavilion. Another is a drawing of the kiosk in 1928, covered by a vasted roof that was its trademark until 1979 and will soon be part of the Out of Town newsstand.

The last, dated 1982, is a photograph of an architect's rendering of Harvard Square, in which the station appears as an unassuming Harbord-Avalon at the middle of a patio.

According to this brochure, construction would be finished and the Red Line extension would open in "the autumn of 1982. Eventually, Harvard Square will have spacious pedestrian plazas and wider sidewalks; there will be new luminous lighting. With less traffic, the air will be cleaner. The result will be a more pleasant place to work, will be cleaner. The result will be an area of trees, benches, and new construction would be finished..."

However, MBTA officials have announced that the level platform at Franklin Bridge, which connects Harvard Square over the Charles River, will not be closed. Instead, for the next year, the building of the bridge will continue. The last, dated 1982, is a photograph of the bridge as it was in 1912 when it was opened.

When Harvard's class of 1983 graduated, their campus press reported what a pity it was that they would remember only construction when they thought of Harvard Square. They had never seen it any other way. Now another Harvard class has settled under the same conditions, and it will be at least 1990 before memories of pile drivers and concrete mixers are completely exorcised.

Last month, construction began in Kendall Square. Streets have been blocked and every machinery is moving in, and interior brick buildings are being readied for the wreckers' ball. This is the last time we will see all of the new development completed by early 1986.

As I walked back to MIT, I simply dismissed the city as the surface of the unformed fighting back against the trappings of the growing technolog- ical age. I have seen their leaflets and read their propaganda. These are people who demand MIT build low-income housing. I have been read by the wreckers' ball. This is the last time we will see all of the new development completed by early 1986.

The Simplex land is north and west of the Dupont gym. It was used to be a factory named Simplex, but now that Simplex has gone out of business, the property is available for use by the Institute. MIT wants to build office buildings and luxury housing for students, while other community groups want low-income housing built on the site. These community groups feel that MIT should be providing welfare to the low-income households of Cambridge. These groups are wrong; MIT is not the job of the private organizations, but the job of the government.

But the people who are not residents of Cambridge didn't just want low-cost housing; they wanted to keep out the high-tech companies and their buildings.

We've all seen those "high-tech" buildings: Tech Square, Draper, E40. Buildings with smooth facades and sleek glass windows that don't open. Whether these buildings are beautiful or not is still a matter to be debated, but they house and represent a technology which I felt was only beneficial to the region. Clearly, the biting edge of technology required space, and Cambridge, thanks to MIT and Harvard, was that space. Couldn't those people see all the money that we, the members of the technolog- ical elite, were bringing to the area? Couldn't they see with their minds what much we were benefiting? All they had to do was to look at Cam- bridge Center, or Tech Square, or MIT itself, to see what we had done. Could there be a better way to rejuvenate the area?

But now, when I think of the thousands of people who leave this place every year with this attitude implanted and strengthened in them, I'm not quite sure that we are doing the right thing. Perhaps some moder- nation is called for.

I started to see things differ-ently a few weeks ago when I was walking back to the Institute from Inman Square for the first time. I was walking past houses, thousands of Yuppies, many of whom were trying not to look like Yup- pies, each with a little security tag. It was as if they all belonged to a prestigious club, and they didn't want to be told the rules. MIT is going to have to change, or be the outsider.

We live in a strange and won- ders world. But perhaps we should more about it before we go about striking out and changing everything in sight. I am not certain that security tags, buildings with windows that don't open and "us versus them" attitudes are steps in the wrong direction.