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### Title:

Information Scenography: Paris

### Journal Issue:

[Places, 5\(3\)](#)

### Author:

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### Publication Date:

1989

### Publication Info:

Places

### Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3wj889z0>

### Acknowledgements:

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe visit [www.places-journal.org](http://www.places-journal.org). For reprint information contact [places@berkeley.edu](mailto:places@berkeley.edu).

### Keywords:

urban design, future, placemaking, communication, information technology, digital network, paris, la defense, rejean legault

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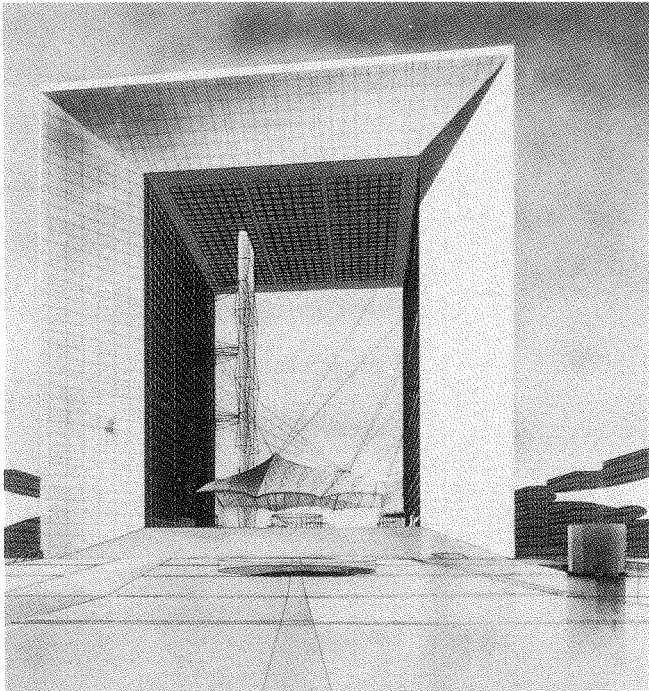


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# Information Scenography: Paris

Réjean Legault



**The "Arch" at La Defense,** previously intended to house the International Center of Communication, perspective view. Reprinted from *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, September 1987, p. 78.

Imagine a city where you can get the stock exchange indexes through public information terminals, find cultural information on public panel displays, or watch the finale of an international tennis match at the subway station. You might think this could only happen in some newly built, information-oriented suburb of fast growing industrial power. True, this information exchange environment is already in operation. However, it is not happening in any modernistic urban setting, but in a city with a strong and weighty urban tradition: Paris.

Like many other European cities, Paris is adjusting its image to the high-tech wave and addresses the issue of new information and communication technology head-on. Many of the new urban projects highlight the need of the advanced information city: the Musée des Sciences, Techniques et Industries, the Park of La Villette, the stalled project for the Carrefour International de la Communication at the head of the Champs-Élysées.

Using the Centre Pompidou as a paradigm, all these projects deal with the notion of the "accessibility of information." They respond to the socialist government's notion of communication in both its political and technological sense, attempting to express a "new type of urban culture, one based

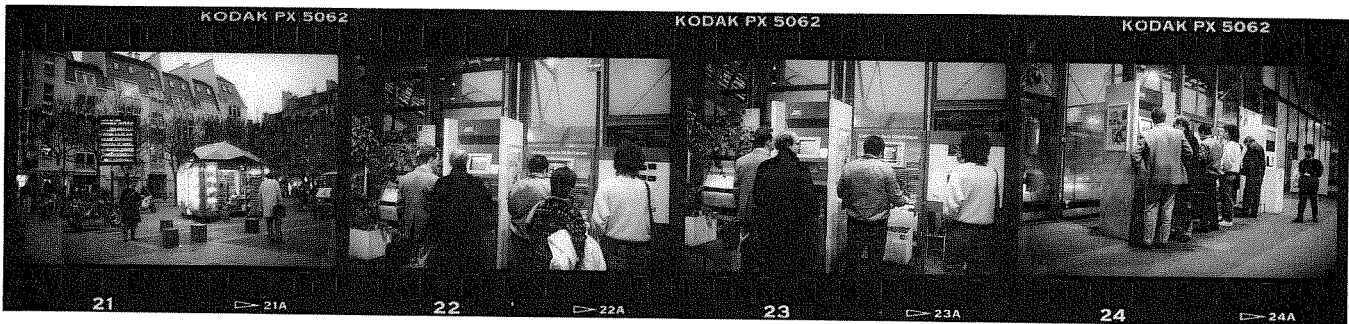
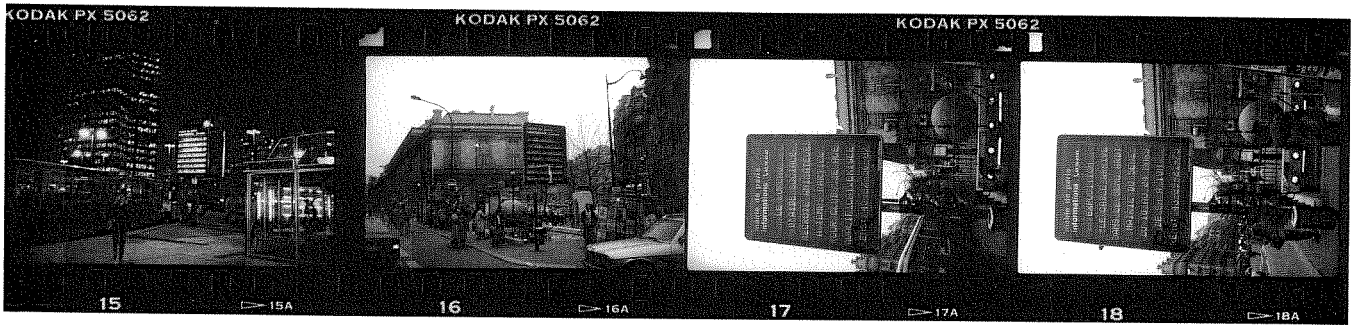
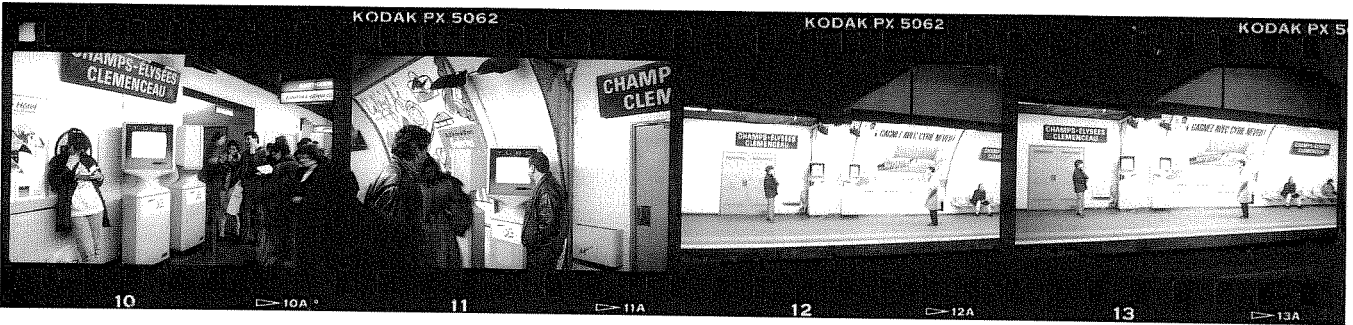
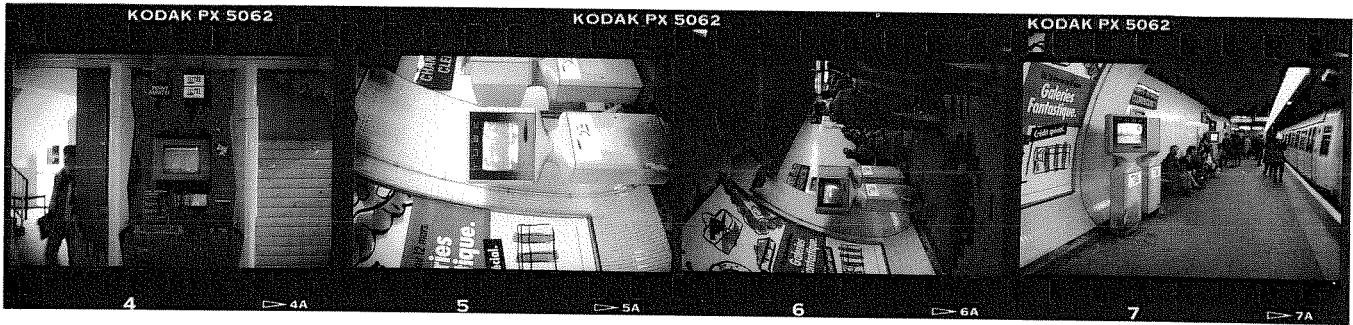
on social interaction and exchange rather than on collection and reification of artifacts."<sup>1</sup>

All these projects, however, are of a centralized and monumental nature. To express the role of communication in a technologically oriented society, the International Center of Communication was to gather a myriad of technological devices under a monumental "arch." Various conflicting positions have forced an adjournment of the project, showing that it was easier to build an icon than to build a consensus.

In parallel, and in contrast to these large symbolic gestures, Paris becomes a laboratory for more discrete information-oriented interventions. With the Minitel (an information system connected with the telephone network), Info-Mairie (electronic information panels set along the main boulevards of the city), and Le Tube (a video system in the subway stations), Paris is at the forefront in the scenography of the advanced information society.

#### Note

1 Hélène Lipstadt, "A Paris for the 21st Century?," in *Art in America* (November 1984), p. 112.



Photos by André Lortie, Paris