

satellite broadcast of television programs to community antennae or communal sets brings that mass medium to remote areas of Arctic Canada, India, Indonesia, and other world areas able to invest in the technology but as yet unserved by ground stations.

Information and Perception

Human spatial interaction, as we have seen, is conditioned by a number of factors. Complementarity, transferability, and intervening opportunities help pattern the movement of commodities and peoples. Flows between points and over area are influenced by distance decay and partially explained by gravity and potential models. Individuals in their daily affairs operate in activity spaces that are partly determined by stage in life, mobility, and a variety of socioeconomic characteristics. In every instance of spatial interaction, however, decisions are based on information about opportunity or feasibility of movement, exchange, or want satisfaction.

More precisely, actions and decisions are based on place perception—the awareness we have, as individuals, of home and distant places and the beliefs we hold about them. Place perception involves our feelings and understandings, reasoned or irrational, about the natural and cultural characteristics of an area and about its opportunity structure. Whether our view accords with that of others or truly reflects the “real” world seen in abstract descriptive terms is not the major concern. Our perceptions are the important thing, for the decisions people make about the use of their lives or about their actions in space are based not necessarily on reality but on their assumptions and impressions of reality.

Perception of Environment

Psychologists and geographers are interested in determining how we arrive at our perceptions of place and environment both within and beyond our normal activity space. The images we form firsthand of our home territory have been in part reviewed in the discussion of mental maps in Chapter 1. The perceptions we have of more distant places are less directly derived (Figure 3.18). In technologically advanced societies, television and radio, magazines and newspapers, books and lectures, travel brochures and hearsay all combine to help us develop a mental picture of unfamiliar places and of the interaction opportunities they may contain. Again, however, the most effectively transmitted information seems to come from word-of-mouth reports. These may be in the form of letters or visits from relatives, friends, and associates who supply information that helps us develop lines of attachment to relatively unknown areas.

There are, of course, barriers to the flow of information, including that of distance decay. Our knowledge of close places is greater than our knowledge of distant points; our contacts with nearby persons theoretically yield more information than we receive from afar. Yet in crowded areas with maximum interaction potential, people commonly set psychological barriers around

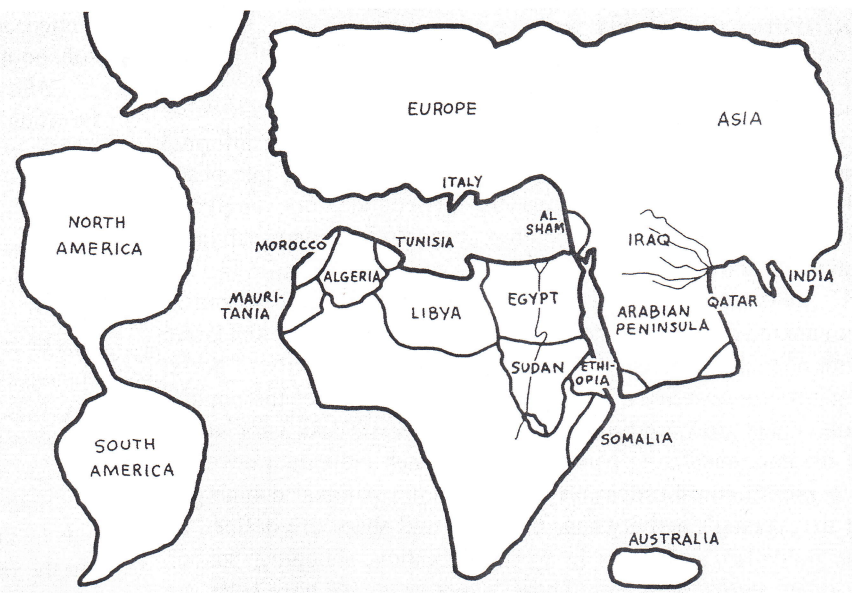


Figure 3.18 A Palestinian student's view of the world. The map was drawn by a Palestinian high-school student from Gaza. The map reflects the instruction and classroom impressions the student has received. The Gaza curriculum conforms to the Egyptian national standards and thus is influenced by the importance of the Nile River and pan-Arabism. Al Sham is the old, but still used, name for the area including Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The map might be quite different in emphasis if the Gaza school curriculum were designed by Palestinians or if it had been drawn by an Israeli student.

themselves so that only a limited number of those possible interactions and information exchanges actually occur. We raise barriers against information overload and to preserve a sense of privacy that permits the filtering out of information that does not directly affect us. There are obvious barriers to long-distance information flows as well, such as time and money costs, mountains, oceans, rivers, and differing religions, languages, ideologies, and political systems.

Barriers to information flow give rise to what we earlier (p. 70) called *direction bias*. In the present usage, this implies a tendency to have greater knowledge of places in some directions than in others. Not having friends or relatives in one part of a country may represent a barrier to individuals, so interest in and knowledge of the area beyond the “unknown” region are low. In the United States, both northerners and southerners tend to be less well informed about each other's areas than about the western part of the country. Traditional communication lines in the United States follow an east-west rather than a north-south direction, the result of early migration patterns, business connections, and the pattern of the development of major cities. In Russia, directional bias favors a north-south information flow within the European part of the country and less familiarity with areas far to the east. Within Siberia, however, east-west flows dominate.

When information about a place is sketchy, blurred pictures develop. These influence the impression—the perception—we have of places and cannot be discounted. Many important decisions are made on the basis of incomplete information or biased reports, such as decisions to visit or not, to migrate or not, to hate or not, even to make war or not. Awareness of places is usually accompanied by opinions about them, but there is no necessary

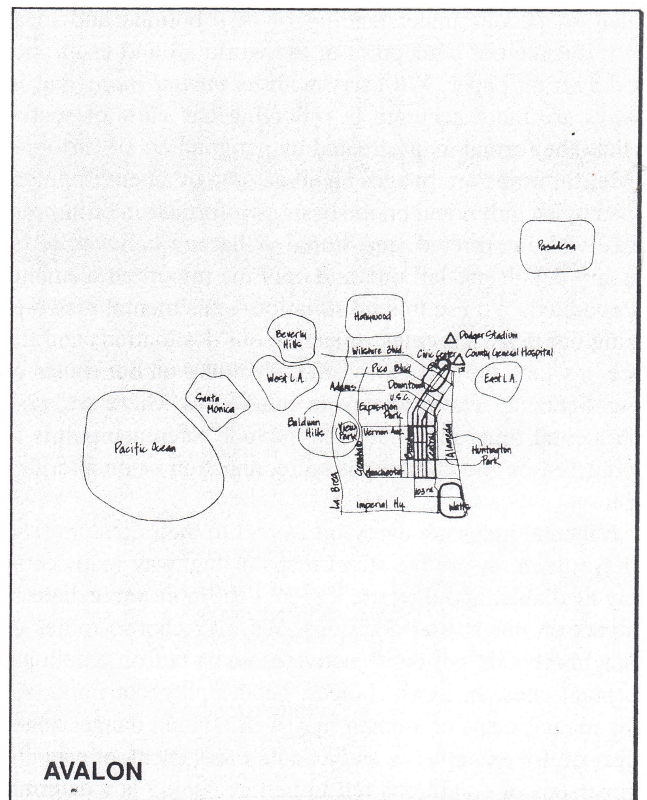
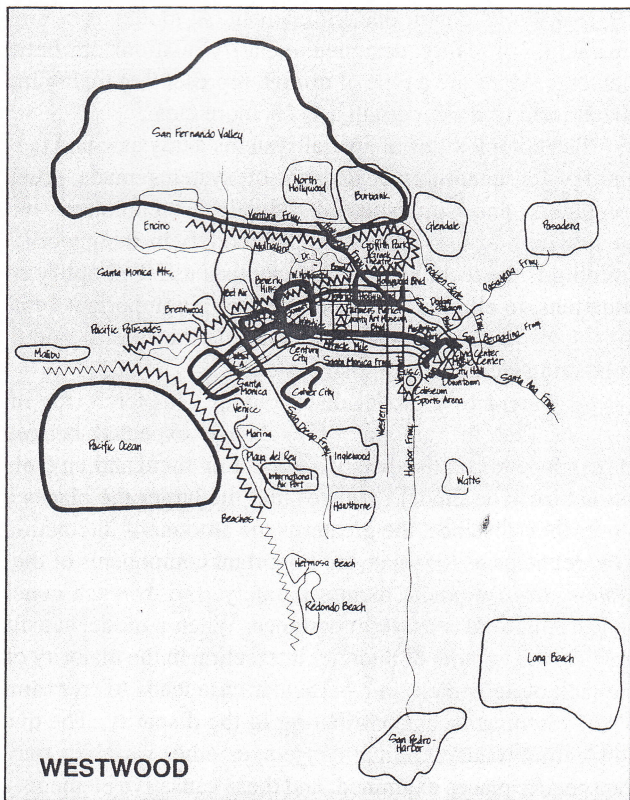
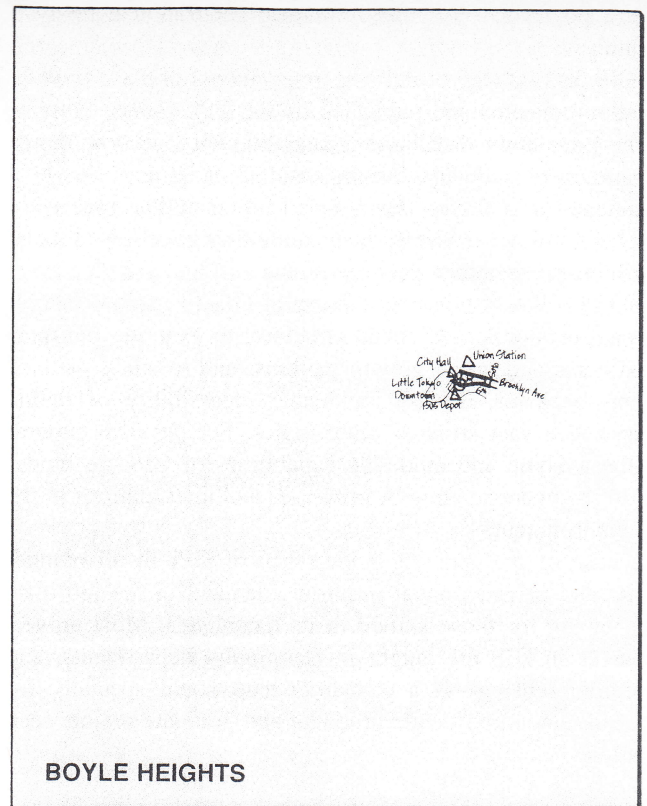
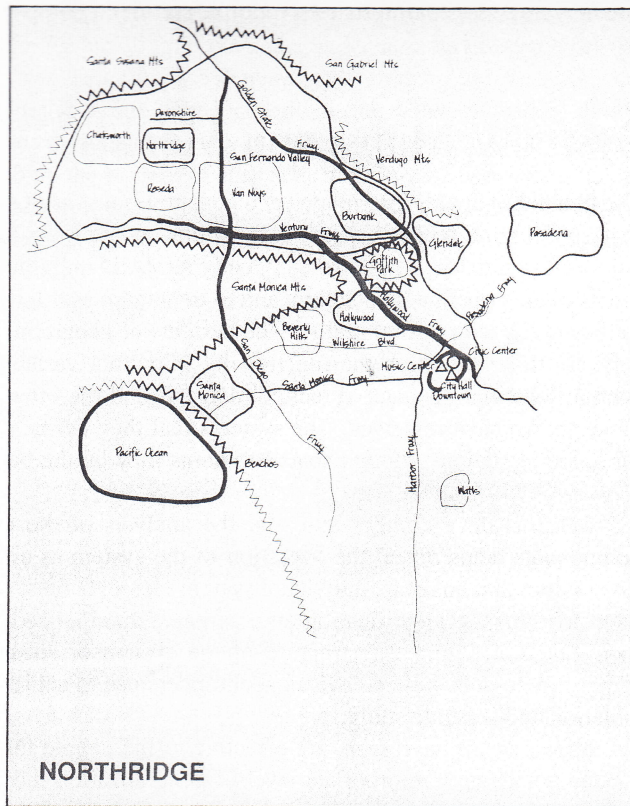


Figure 1.25 Four mental maps of Los Angeles. The upper-middle-income residents of the Northridge and Westwood communities have expansive views of the metropolis, reflecting their mobility and area of travel. Black inner city residents of the Avalon community display a more restricted view of the city because of their lower incomes, social isolation, and reliance on public transportation. Even more limited is the mental map of Hispanic residents of the Boyle Heights community, which reflects their spatial and linguistic isolation within the metropolitan area.

Source: From Department of City Planning, City of Los Angeles, *The Visual Environment of Los Angeles*, 1971. Reprinted by permission.