because it was there, and we knew it and liked it. We asked people what came to their mind about the city, and to make a sketch map of it, and to take imaginary trips through it. We asked them to describe its distinctive elements, to recognize and place various photographs, and (with a small sample) to go on actual walks with us. Later, we stopped people in the streets and asked for directions to places. Meanwhile, other members of the team, uncontaminated by all this interview work, surveyed the town, in order to make some guesses about what a typical image would be, given the physical form.

This small group of informants produced an astonishing flood of perceptions. At times, as we listened to their tapes and studied their drawings, we seemed to be moving down the same imaginary street with them, watching the pavements rise and turn, the buildings and open spaces appear, feeling the same pleasant shock of recognition, or being puzzled by some mental gray hole, where there should have been some piece of the city. Our conclusion—or perhaps the hardening of our preconceived notion—was that people had a relatively coherent and detailed mental image of their city, which had been created in an interaction between self and place, and that this image was both essential to their actual function, and also important to their emotional well-being. These individual images had many common features—similarities that arose from common human strategies of cognition, common culture and experience, and the particular physical form of the place that they live in. Thus, an observer, familiar with the local culture and with the general nature of city images, could, after a careful study of the town, make predictions about likely common features and patterns of organization in the mental images of that place. We developed methods for eliciting these mental images from people, as well as a way of classifying and presenting them. We asserted that the quality of that city image was important to well-being and should be considered in designing or modifying any locality. Thus, orientation had been expanded into a general method of analyzing place, and a vivid and coherent mental image had been elevated to a general principle of city design. Later, this idea was expanded further, to include a vivid image of time as well as place.[2]

All of this from talking to 30 people! It was not surprising that there were sharp criticisms. The obvious remark was that the sample of people was far too small, and too biased, to permit of such sweeping assertions. Our handful of interviewees were all young, middle-class people, and most of them were professionals. The attack was well mounted; and yet it failed. The original work has by now been replicated in many communities, large and small, in North and South America, Europe, and Asia, because the method is cheap and rather fun to do. In every case, the basic ideas have held, with the important proviso that images are much modified by culture and familiarity, as was predicted in our original speculations. But the existence and role of the place image, its basic elements, and the techniques of eliciting and analyzing it seem astonishingly similar in some very diverse cultures and places. We were lucky.

A second criticism was that the techniques of office and field interview, of photo recognition, and of map drawing were inadequate to get at the true mental image, so deeply lodged in the mind. Map drawing, in particular, is too difficult for most people, and thus it is a very misleading index of what they know. Even just talking may be an exercise in pleasing the interviewer more than a revelation of inner patterns, many of which may be inaccessible to the person.

In principle, the comment is just. What is in the mind is an elusive thing. Environmental psychologists are busy debating the relative merits of various tricks for entering that fascinating realm. But one can reply that, although each method may elicit only a piece of the internal picture, and that may be distorted as well as partial, yet, if a sufficient array of probes is employed, a composite picture develops that is not very far from the truth. Of course, it may only be the tip of the iceberg, whose base is hidden far below, but the tip is the tip of a real iceberg, nonetheless. Luckily for us, the environmental image is usually not a painful subject for most people, something to be defended by unconscious barriers. People like to talk about it.

The possibility remains that the image brought forth for discussion in an interview is not the same one that is used in actually operating in a city. This possibility can be checked only by working with people as they actually move about, as we did in our street interviews. But even if the two images were disjunctive (which does not seem to be the case), the interview image can still have an important social and emotional role.

A method war erupted over map drawing, which was one of the techniques we used that seemed at first to take everyone's fancy. Drawing is indeed an unfamiliar act, as compared with talking, not only for most interviewees, but also (which may be the real problem) for most interviewers as well. Yet I cling to the value of drawing as a means of expression,