

The May Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Two swift events, one in the late 1960s and the other in the late 1980s, brought with them important transitions in the ideas and practices of urban design. Largely in response to the war in Vietnam, the student unrest throughout the world and the May Revolution in Paris forced many people to reexamine existing social systems and ideas. It was just around that time—1965 to be precise—that I withdrew from a university-centered life in the United States and began design activities in Tokyo. Two years later, when I returned to the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD) as a visiting faculty member, I encountered entirely different student ways of thinking. Students rejected the program we had prepared and insisted that work begin with the development of a joint proposal for the architecture master's program itself. Even though they were paying a high tuition, they took the position that extensive discussions on certain contemporary urban design issues were far more important than acquiring urban design skills. Let's recollect the remark by Hirayama: "All persons ought to have the right to be heard in the 'space of competition.' Tolerance of myriad views is indeed the distinguishing characteristic of the city." University studios in the 1960s were indeed what he would call "spaces of competition." Since 9/11, the process of rebuilding New York's downtown has shown us quite vividly what a project about which myriad views are held and expressed is actually like.

The participation of large numbers of people of different opinions helped bring about a major change in our perception of the city in the 1960s. That coincided, especially in metropolises, with the gradual fading of the urban image—the collective memory and meaning of each city. The fading of meaning accelerated the experiential transformation of the city into an abstraction. Today, everyone in a metropolis constructs and possesses their image of it, first of their immediate environment and of places familiar to them. The vague and abstract overall image of the metropolis, acquired through the media, merely floats above that construct like a cloud.

The appearance in 1960 of Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* was in tune with the increasing abstraction of the city. I was among those who welcomed the publication of that study as the emergence of a new way of perceiving the city, but it also heralded the transformation of the city into mere signs. Today, the temporal and geographical