

ryphal story about a planning director in Houston taking a student to a top floor and showing him everything out there, then putting his arm around his shoulder and saying, “You see that, son? My job is to let it happen.” (*laughter*)

PIEPRZ: Pudong could prove that poorly designed places need decades before they can be made successful.

GOLDBERGER: What will time do to it? I increasingly wonder whether there are certain forces in particular times that affect urban form more powerfully than anything an urban designer could do. One looks at the commonalities between cities that developed first in this country in the eighteenth century, those in the nineteenth, and those in the twentieth. These temporal commonalities are much more potent than any geographical connection or any designer’s interventions, which is why Houston and Los Angeles have much in common despite their huge cultural and geographic differences, and why Pudong represents the next generation beyond that, which makes one despair that natural forces will over time significantly mitigate what’s there. I don’t want to be too despairing, but the very distinction you drew between some of what has been designed, not terribly effectively, in Harvard Square and what you find in Central Square is analogous to Pudong and the French Concession or other older parts of Shanghai, and it makes me wonder how much urban design can do outside the margins.

Is urban design just tinkering with the margins? And even very successful examples like Allegheny Riverfront Park are as dependent on larger economic and social forces that were sending young professional people back to the cities and particularly to the riverfront in search of a different kind of life than a previous generation sought. Design served to guide and support that, not to create it. Maybe that is enough.

PIEPRZ: But they were planning to tear down the Turbine Hall in London, and strategic thinking saved that building and set the stage for Herzog & de Meuron to come in. Another architect could have ruined it. Urban design thinking mattered a lot there.

MOUSSAVI: The Tate Modern design resulted from a design competition, and other architects wanted to do things completely differently. I think you cannot give Herzog & de Meuron enough credit.