What Is A Livable City?
An Infrastructural Plan for Colorado Station, A Transit-Oriented Community at I-25 & Colorado Boulevard
ARCH 6170/6171_Advanced Architectural Design Studio and Seminar_George Hoover Instructor

The fundamental question investigated in the Studio and Seminar emerges out of Denver’s Comprehensive Plan 2000. The foundational vision of Plan 2000 is "a city that is livable for all of its people, now and in the future." But What Is A Livable City? The Oxford English Dictionary defines “livable” first as “suitable to live in; habitable”, and second as “possible to bear; endurable.” Authors of the plan tell us that this is not what they had in mind; rather, they intended that the city be livable not in the sense of a life that is merely bearable, but in the sense of a life that is full, good, and happy, both for individual citizens and for the citizenry as a whole.

Thus two large questions arise:
1. What constitutes a good life for Denver’s people?
2. How might we shape a good city to support a good life?

In the theory-oriented seminar we asked, What is the good life for which the city should be livable? through readings and discussions in moral and political philosophy. In the practice-oriented studio, we asked, How might we help to shape a livable city to support the good life? through design studies, proposals, critiques, discussions, and revised proposals.

Our preliminary conclusion is that the good life is the life of happiness (eudaimonia) [Aristotle] and/or it is the life of successfully being oneself [Kierkegaard, Habermas], where the individual may perfect herself or himself according to her or his nature. It is the life in which such an individual, living in a community, may aspire to reach the normative in politics and in building [constructing one’s self and one’s community]. It is the life in which she does the possible while aspiring to do the best. But neither the individual person nor the community as a whole can pursue this life without the support of the polity. For the individual person and for the community as a whole to live lives of happiness in an age of pluralism, they must possess the liberty to seek out and construct this life for

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1 Aristotle (384-323BCE). *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Politics*.
themselves, free from others' visions of such a life being imposed upon them, free from injustice, and free from war and domestic turmoil.

To these ends, our national Constitution was established by the Founders "in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and to secure the blessings of Liberty. This is our "shared purpose". The Constitution also established the government we construe in order to exercise power justly while striving to reach that shared purpose.

In response to the second question, How might we help to shape a livable city to support the good life? we looked into the Western conception of “city”. We discovered that out of the classical tradition there arose the understanding that a city, as opposed to a mere settlement, is an entity in which three things are brought into coordination as people live together:
1. A shared purpose;
2. A government they construe in order to exercise power justly while striving to reach that shared purpose; and
3. A physical setting which serves that shared purpose and facilitates their governing themselves.

Thus we found that to shape a livable city that supports the good life, we ought to work with the community to form and reform a city that supports the activities that our polity's constitution organizes. The "polity" is the entity in which the above mentioned three things are brought into coordination as people live together: a shared purpose; a government they construe in order to exercise power justly while reaching for that purpose; and a physical setting which serves their purposes and facilitates their governing themselves.

Since Colorado Station is located in the polity of the United States of America, we find that we ought to shape the city to support the activities that the Constitution of the United States of America organizes. These have been most clearly articulated as primary activities (dwelling and trading); political activities (imagining, legislating, and governing); religious activities (venerating and celebrating); and civic activities (which serve the other

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2 Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America
activities in ways spelled out in our Constitution and traditions).  

"The polity is the instrument people use to inquire into nature in order to discover what is best for them. Among the things they find while searching into nature are buildings. They discover that any particular building is an example of a type, a discovery that entails the distinction between types and examples and the recognition that the type embodies the true and the example embodies the circumstantial. This leads to the recognition that a building serves a political purpose and is therefore like an arrangement or an institution - an instrumental good and not an end in itself. Thus architecture serves politics when politics is the art of living well together. From this it follows that the political service buildings can render must be the dominant things in building.”

“The types' identities are based on the four classes of activities found in the polity, but they do not simply equate a type to a class. Instead, they derive from the way in which people undertake the activities of the various classes and the way in which actual buildings can accommodate actual activities.” For example, the primary activities of dwelling and trading are accommodated in dwellings and shops; the political activities of imagining, legislating, and governing are accommodated in theaters and regia; the religious activities of venerating and celebrating are accommodated in the tholos and temple; and the civic activities are accommodated in schools, parks, community centers, libraries, museums, and many other types of buildings.

In 2000, in a process normal to the life of the polity, while participating in many public meetings during the development of Comprehensive Plan 2000, Denver's citizens explored, examined, and reported on the more tangible things that they value in a livable city. For example, they value their beautiful, natural Terrain, the green oasis at the foot of the Rocky Mountains; their beautiful Locales (neighborhoods, places); their enduring Things (buildings, parks, monuments); their Freedom of movement (transport); their unique frontier Stories (history); their love of art, culture, learning, and sport; and their hope to cooperate with their Metropolitan neighbors to build a better society - a more civilized Terrain - socially, culturally, spiritually, and materially - along the Front Range and in

4 ibid., p. 155
5 ibid., pp. 156-157
the State of Colorado as a whole.

These are the fundamental elements of what we understand to constitute "a livable city". Naturally there are many other elements necessary for a city to be livable, such as affordable housing, medical care, quality education, and so forth. But these and other elements are ones that the citizens themselves will construct and reconstruct within their vision of their shared purpose and through the lawful exercise of power as they strive, through their polity, to reach their shared purpose. Our project is intended to shape the physical setting that can serve their shared purpose and facilitate their governing themselves.

But in Denver today we are falling short in our attempt to build a city that fulfills these ideals. In particular, we are finding ourselves in difficulty as members of a global community attempting to address the challenges of what appears to be the single most pressing question of the 21st century, the dual question of global sustainability:
1. How can human development be sustained? How can personal, social, political, and religious fragmentation and their resultants, psychological stress and international conflict, be overcome, and oppositions joined in a sustainable unity that does not repress differences?
2. How can the life systems of the biosphere be sustained? How can economic development and its resultants, environmental degradation and pathology, be undertaken so as to sustain rather than to degrade the life systems of the biosphere?

Although this two-fold problem is one that extends globally far beyond the borders of Denver, it is one we must begin to address locally in our everyday lives. Facets of the problem can be seen in trends that now threaten democracy, such as the increasing autonomy of value-free markets and their growing independence from democratic guidance. Philosopher and social critic Jürgen Habermas is concerned about certain threats to democracy that are external to it. “If the modernization of society as a whole went off the rails, it could well slacken the democratic bond and exhaust the kind of solidarity that the democratic state needs but cannot impose by law. This could lead to precisely the constellation envisioned [by a number of thinkers today]: namely, the transformation of the citizens of prosperous and peaceful liberal societies into isolated

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6 Introduction, Denver Comprehensive Plan 2000
monads acting on the basis of their own self-interest, persons who used their subjective rights only as weapons against each other. We can also see evidence of a crumbling of citizens’ solidarity in the larger context, where there is no political control over the dynamic of the global economy and the global society.”

“Markets, which cannot be democratized like the administration of a state, are taking over an increasing number of regulatory functions in areas of life that hitherto were held together in a normative\(^8\) manner, that is, by political structures or via pre-political forms of communication. This means not only that private spheres increasingly adopt an orientation to trade mechanisms that aim at profit and the realization of individual preferences; at the same time, the sphere where public legitimization is necessary is likewise shrinking. The reduction of the citizen’s field of action to the private realm is intensified by the discouraging processes whereby the democratic formation of a common opinion and will loses its functional relevance. Sometimes, this functions only to a mediocre extent in the national arenas. And this in turn means that it cannot even begin to function in those processes of decision-making which are transposed into the supranational level. The dwindling of any genuine hope that the global community would be a creative force encourages the tendency to depoliticize the citizens. In view of the outrageous social injustices of a global community that is profoundly fragmented, disappointment grows with each new failure along the path (first begun in 1945) to give international law the quality of a constitution.\(^9\)

Thus a doubt remains with regard to the question of motivation. “When we bear in mind the role played by citizens who understand themselves to be the authors of the law, we see that the normative presuppositions for the existence of a democratic constitutional state make higher demands than would be the case if they were merely citizens of the society and ‘addressees’ of the law. All that is expected of those addressed by the law is


\(^8\) normative: In philosophy, normative statements affirm how things should or ought to be, how to value them, which things are good or bad, which actions are right or wrong. Whether or not a statement is normative is logically independent of whether it is verified, verifiable, or popularly held. Normative is usually contrasted with positive (i.e. descriptive, explanatory, or constative) when describing types of theories, beliefs, or propositions. Examples of normative claims are: "children should eat vegetables", "smoking is bad", and "those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither". Positive statements are falsifiable statements that attempt to describe reality. Examples of positive statements are, "vegetables contain a relatively high proportion of vitamins", "smoking causes cancer", and "a common consequence of sacrificing liberty for security is a loss of both" are positive claims. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

\(^9\) Habermas. Ibid., pp 36-37
that they do not transgress the boundaries of the law when they exercise their subjective freedoms (and claims). The obedience due to coercive laws concerning people's freedom is one thing; the motivation and attitudes expected of citizens in their role as democratic (co)legislators are something else.

“Such citizens are expected to make active use of their rights to communication and to participation, not only in what they rightly take to be their own interests, but also with an orientation to the common good. This demands a more costly commitment and motivation, and these cannot simply be imposed by the law. For example, in a democratic constitutional state, a legal obligation to vote would be just as alien as a legal requirement to display solidarity. All one can do is suggest to the citizens of a liberal society that they should be willing to get involved on behalf of fellow citizens whom they do not know and who remain anonymous to them and that they should accept sacrifices that promote common interests. This is why political virtues, even if they are only ‘levied’ in small coins, so to speak, are essential if a democracy is to exist. They are the fruit of a socialization in which one becomes accustomed to the practices and modes of thought of a free political culture. The status of the citizen is, as it were, embedded in a civil society that is nourished by springs that well forth spontaneously — springs that one may term ‘pre-political’.”

We might imagine the “pre-political springs” envisioned by Habermas as sources of inspiration for change in society. David Grahame Shane has reflected upon the phenomenon of the “heterotopia” as the typical place or precinct within the historical city wherein people inspired by pre-political springs first imagined and then worked to bring about change. He writes that in the 1970’s, philosopher Michel Foucault identified particular places in the city where such processes of change and hybridization appear to be facilitated. He named such places heterotopias. Here actors’ utopian aspirations are at work inside the heterotopia in the form of rules and goals, yet heterotopias are delimited, time-bound places, not actual utopias. Foucault gave as examples of such heterotopic enclaves the clinics, hospitals, schools, and prisons, other exceptional places where professionals seek to cure the sick, educate students, and reform criminals. Grahame Shane holds that this heterotopic system is crucial to modernity, its goal being to rationalize society and to create a more open and equitable system through architectural

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10 Habermas. Ibid., pp 30-31
means. In order to facilitate this process, urban actors build miniature cities, with multiple cells and codes that differ from those of the host city in ways that allow internal controls and interactions forbidden outside.\textsuperscript{11}

By bottling up change in heterotopic spatial pockets or patches, urban actors can conduct concrete utopian experiments without endangering the established equilibrium of the larger system. If an experiment is successful, actors can export the new model, copying (and altering) it so that it becomes, over time, a new norm. What were once surprising and surreal juxtapositions can—and have—become integrated slowly into the social practices of the host city. Foucault distinguished many types of heterotopia; the author concentrates on only three, heterotopias of crisis, deviance, and illusion, linking each to associated urban actors and models.

The studio’s vision for a community of change within Denver is illustrated in its infrastructural plan for \textit{Colorado Station}, a high-population-density, transit-oriented, Denver community. Our vision for \textit{Colorado Station} is framed in terms of the "heterotopia", a precinct within the city-at-large which, at least initially, might serve as a testbed for change, a place of tearing-down and of building-up. Such a heterotopia is a precinct within the city where critical thinking and acting take place, where old ways are subjected to close scrutiny, and new ways are adopted and tested — by identifying and challenging assumptions; by challenging the importance of context; by imagining and exploring alternatives; and by exercising a reflective skepticism.

A livable city is one in which the citizens are continually engaged in the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction — of themselves and of their city.

\textit{For everything there is a season,}
\textit{and a time for every matter under heaven:}
\textit{a time to break down,}
\textit{and a time to build up.}\textsuperscript{12}


elements at a regional scale
street plans and sections
edges: the boundaries between two kinds of edges.

districts: city areas, with common character, recognized both internally and externally.

paths: concentrations of use or activity for travel, means of identity, and elements of structure within a community.

nodes: concentrations of character or strategic foci into which one can enter, typically at the junction of paths and structured as large squares, extended linear shapes, or entire central districts.

imageability and orientation: kevin lynch’s elements
Key: Public Elements

Regia
A building type where any body claiming authority in the governing of affairs resides.

Temple
A building type that allows one to participate in the activity of celebrating the presence of that which is superior to himself with others.

Tholos
A building type that promotes the activity of venerating by allowing a person to be hushed and reverent in the presence of that which is superior to himself.

Theatre
A building type that allows one to join with others and engage in the activity of actively imagining things as being other than they are and predicating actions in an attempt to make them that way.

Shop
A building type that allows people to engage in the activity of trading, sustaining a healthy economy.

Domus
A building type that encourages the activity of dwelling which perpetuates the race in the household and accommodates the extension of the household into the family.

Civic Hybrid
A combination of two or more of the six types to house civic activities in ways spelled out in the politics, formal constitutions and traditions.

School
A building type that encourages educating people by engaging them in the activities that impart knowledge or skill in preparation for living "a good life."

Open Space
A place with infinite volume and extending boundaries where one can engage in the activity of passive or active recreating.

Key: School Elements

Open Space

Subgrade

First Floor (Ground Level)

Second Floor

Third Floor

hybrid buildings

Schiller Building 1892
Chicago, IL
A. stores
B. auditorium
C. offices
D. social club
E. belvedere

Chicago Temple 1924
Chicago, IL
A. stores
B. sanctuary
C. sunday school
D. offices
E. sky chapel

Missouri Athletic Club 1916
St. Louis, MO
A. lobby
B. bank
C. main dining room
D. gymnasium
E. handball courts
F. swimming pool
G. bedrooms

Civic Opera House 1929
Chicago, IL
A. offices
B. civic theatre
C. opera house

hybrid buildings
RESIDENTIAL TOWER - ELEVATIONS AND SECTIONS
The affordable units for COSTA utilize modular systems and consistent sizing with a variety of options for adequate window openings and orientations. Utilizing built-in cabinets, built-in furniture, sliding doors and high the units maximize the small volume if space.
GOALS
1. Provide a pleasant, healthy and stimulating environment
2. Allow for adaptability in needs and use that will vary over time
3. Connect people to necessary goods, their community, and the physical environment
4. Facilitate secure economic commerce
5. Enable stable means of acquiring resources
6. Foster a walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood
7. Encourage the development of identity in individuals and communities
8. Support density

PROBLEM STATEMENTS
FORM
- Individuals (stores, products, people) need to establish distinct identities in order to be successful as economic entities. As a society, we need to be able to sort and group individuals according to various characteristics in order to shape a coherent whole. A market must take a form that allows for the individual expression of its components while establishing its own particular identity
- Movement is the essential component for any market. Goods and people must be moved about until they may be usefully combined. It requires less energy to move along a horizontal plane (usually the ground) than it does to move in a controlled manner vertically. However, dense communities necessarily have a strong vertical orientation. Markets must balance their dependence on motion with the vertical nature of dense communities

FUNCTION
- A market serves as a locus for the assembly and distribution of a diverse supply of goods. Yet, the transportation of goods is expensive both economically and environmentally. A successful market will maximize its diversity of goods while minimizing the energy input necessary to provide those goods
- Human activity and need varies will vary over time. However, some aspects will stay relatively constant. Markets should provide for both continuity and change

ECONOMY
- While stores need to make their products accessible for interaction with consumers, they also must secure those products against damage and theft. Design solutions must resolve this tension between accessibility and security
- Customers typically will choose the products that most conveniently meet their needs. Stores attempt to capture and arrange customers in order to entice them with many of their products as possible. A market should serve customer convenience while exposing them to a range of available products

TIME
- Future needs, capabilities, and practices are by definition unknown. The present is fixed and limited. Design must be tailored to the present and prepared to adapt in the future
- We value those things that endure over time. However, the context of our values inevitably changes. Markets should be structured in anticipation of that which is likely to endure as well as that which is prone to change

PRECEDEENTS
Past
1. Specialized Shop (i.e. grocer, butcher, baker)
2. Farmer’s market
3. Roadside stand
4. Galleria
5. Greek Stoa

Present
1. Supermarket
2. Strip mall
3. Internet
4. Vending Machine

Future
1. Vertical greenhouse
2. Product & shopper recognition systems (biometrics)
SUSTAINING ACTIVITIES: SHOPS - FLOOR PLANS
Meditation Center

Floor Plans & Elevations

Level 1
1. Entry
2. Temple Gate
3. Transition Hall
4. Zendo
5. Store
6. Offices
8. Social Hall

Level 2
1. Temple Gate
2. Relics Hall
3. Dharma Hall & Interview Rooms
4. Green Roof
5. Lounge & Kitchen
6. Bath House
7. Library

Level 3
1. Pavilion
2. Aux. Zendo & Offices
3. Classrooms
4. Bath House
5. Monks Dorm

Floor Plans
Operations Zone
Administrative and Service Functions
- Private and semi-private spaces
- Maintenance and management areas
- All day and all year use

Volumes: Opaque materials
Grounds: Pavers and ground cover

Temple Zone
Meditation and Living Functions
- Place of reflection and contemplation
- Open to the grounds
- Function clear to visitors

Volumes: Transparent materials
Grounds: Sand and rock

Shared Zone
Circulation and Boundary Functions
- Access to levels
- Boundary between zones
- Entry to zones

Volumes: Translucent materials
Grounds: Water and vines

Site Plan & Roof Plan

Meditation Center Site Plan & Diagrams
Meditation Center Site Plan & Diagrams

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Diagram of the Eiheiji Building Layout

1. Dharma Hall
2. Buddha Hall
3. Monks Hall
4. Kitchen, Administrator Offices
5. Study Hall
6. Main Gate
7. Toilets
8. Bathhouse
9. Dogen Zenji Memorial Hall
10. Guest Hall
11. Abbot's Hall
12. Formal Interview Hall

Meditation Center Precedents & Perspectives