

PREMISE

There are millions of Los Angeleses. My Los Angeles is but one of these, constructed by memories of the spaces I've experienced, through the shifting lenses of my own cultural, political, economic, and environmental perceptions.

Sadly, the rich and diverse perceptions of a great many Angelenos never make it into the public meeting, nor do they end up on the maps and renderings that urban planners and designers frequently employ.

Cinema, as an immersive and democratically accessible medium, offers planners and designers the power to understand urban space **as experienced** by its users and a creative language to communicate the underlying social conditions of spaces.

By experimenting with different cinematic techniques to study one space in Los Angeles, I hope to develop a compelling prototype for incorporating cinematic thinking into urban design practice.

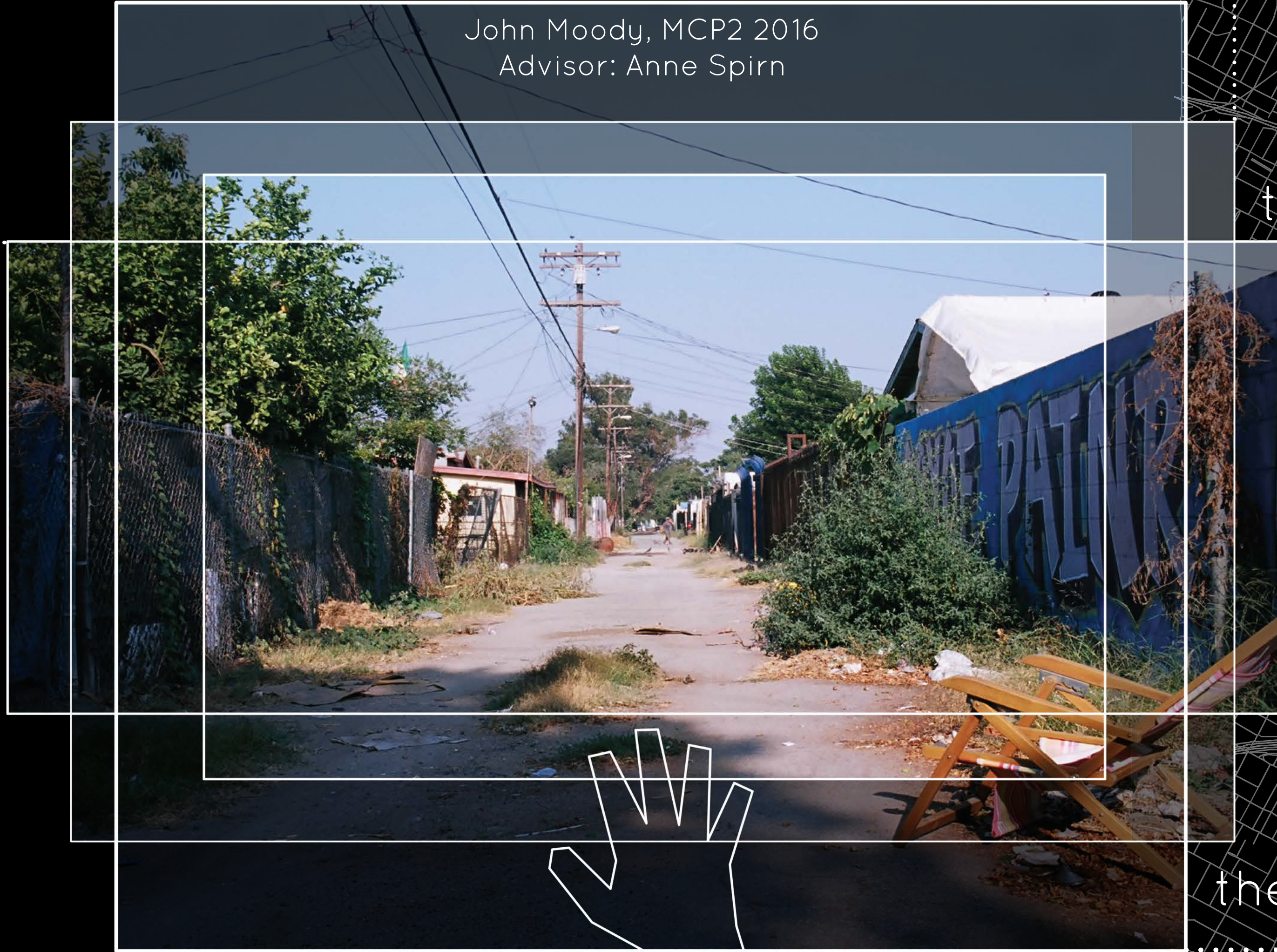
BACKGROUND

This level of cross-disciplinary exploration transcends conventional documentary techniques, such as those demonstrated by William Whyte in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), which used film as a measurement tool to quantify aspects of the built environment. I hope to show that cinema can significantly expand our understanding of urban space if we embrace it as a **mapping tool**. While cinema struggles to objectively quantify or qualify spatial dimensions, it excels at the "soft side" of mapping (Penz & Lu, 2011: 244). Through a relatable narrative it foregrounds the subjective relationship between a user and the space she inhabits. Harnessing this strength of cinema in mapping urban space can lend **greater grassroots credence to planning's conventional cartographies**.

Additionally, I hope to demonstrate how urban designers can help users construct their own spaces by engaging cinema as a **design tool**. If they stick with only conventional design media, designers often struggle to represent the time and motion aspects of a user's experience of space. In cinema, however, space does not exist without time; it is created through the time-based experience of its subject (Boumeester, 2015: 93). Playing with this concept can help designers and communities to co-create a cinematic simulation, or a "model," of what a space could be if it were truly a function of its user's material needs (e.g. to be safe from bodily harm, to be connected with nature) or cultural needs (e.g. to feel welcome in the space, to have creative agency in crafting the space). The resulting "model" could function similarly to Danish landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson's "touchstone papers," which he routinely produced at the outset of a project to serve as a "pragmatic and poetic, measureable and ephemeral" set of goals against which to evaluate future design decisions (Spirn, 1994). Crafting a **cinematic touchstone** has great potential to foster deeper design thinking in creating truly progressive places.

EXPERIMENTS IN CINEMATIC URBAN DESIGN

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the STRUCTURAL city

the SUBJECTIVE city

the IMAGINED city

A TEST OF METHODS

I will produce three short films of 3-5 minutes each, all focused on **the same public space** in Los Angeles. In different ways, each film will convey the time-based experiences of one or more of the space's users in order to extract insights about the space that allow professionals to better design it. I will work with a consortium of participants and LA-based planners to critique the insights generated by each exercise and compare them with insights typically generated by conventional design processes.

Experiment #1: Cinema as forensic analysis tool

I will combine an auteur-driven film theory with critical urban theories to make an argument about who, or what, controls the space. Greater structural forces — infrastructure, economic restructuring, and globalization — take center stage in this exercise.

Experiment #2: Cinema as mapping tool

I will conduct ethnographic and participatory research with users of the space who are materially or culturally marginalized to document a diversity of subjective experiences of the space. Working together with the participants as partners, I will either use my own team/equipment to cinematically map their experiences of the space or facilitate crowd sourcing of videos they shoot on their own. If funding and time allow, I hope to fully involve participants in editing.

Experiment #3: Cinema as design tool

Based on the most powerful narratives discovered through the previous exercise, I will work in partnership with select participant(s) to create a new cinematic space in the screen—a "touchstone" for future design interventions—that communicates what the space might feel like if it truly embodied its user's material or cultural needs.