LISA FINDLEY
California College of the Arts
Portfolio in support of nomination

ACSA Distinguished Professor in Scholarship

Lisa Findley, Professor of Architecture, California College of the Arts

This portfolio is submitted as a snapshot of my work about the role of architecture and architects in political, social and cultural change. As a thinker, researcher, writer and educator, I engage issues of spatial politics, political agency, and the symbolic nature, as well as cultural and political ramifications, of an architect’s practice and of specific buildings. These investigations extend not only to visual language, design process and cultural context, but also to very specific building practices, materials, costs, sourcing, labor contexts, and so on. This work extends beyond writing to include lectures, panels and serving as a juror and referee.

For ease of navigation, this portfolio of work is divided into three sections: Introduction, Writing Samples and a final section that documents the “ripples” from this work: how it shapes and informs my teaching, how it generates invitations to participate, teach, write, and a snapshot of reviews of the work.

INTRODUCTION

I describe myself as a journalist: a term that, when I began to regularly use it in 1996, disconcerted many of my PhD history/theory colleagues. But I use this term deliberately.

My grandfather was an old-fashioned newspaper man who worked for the Associated Press during the Great Depression and World War II, then inherited from my great-grandfather a stable of small town Iowa newspapers. During summer visits as a child, while my sister and cousins played outside, I hung out with him in his messy, rushed, and ink-scented world. One humid August afternoon, as we sat in his cluttered office at the Webster City Daily Freeman Journal, I asked him why he had spent his life as a journalist. As I played with the type in my great-grandfather’s type case and the mammoth printing press roared in the basement, Granddad squinted at me through the smoke of his pipe and said simply; “Journalism is writing history on the fly”.

These words were not his own. Indeed, I have found they are a kind of mantra among journalists of all stripes. They efficiently define the work of the journalist as exciting, tricky, and important: writing quickly for the historical record, but without knowledge of what might follow.

Journalism about architecture, then, is just-in-time writing that does not have the luxury of hindsight. It takes on ideas beyond the standard reporting seen in most architectural magazines today: the old “what, when, where, why, who” formula supplemented by program requirements, square footages, physical attributes and so on. Journalism adds a specific framing, a particular point of view driven by the journalist’s interests, and, indeed, actual criticism. It’s conclusions may sometimes turn out to be факtually wrong, or just plain wrongheaded, but it plays a critical role in architectural history, and in our discipline. Historians of practices, architects, projects, types, styles and topics routinely draw upon journals and essays to help flesh out the cultural context and response of contemporaries to their subject.

At this point my once-skeptical colleagues have become convinced of the value of my writing practice. In part this is because of the way I have integrated the work into my studio and seminar teaching. In part it is due to the topics I engage entering the mainstream. And, of course it helps that the type of writing practice I began pursuing twenty years ago is now more common in our discipline as it expands its interests, redefines its territory and multiplies its platforms for discussion.
WRITING PRACTICE

How can architects and architecture be productively engaged in social change? What are the opportunities, challenges and limits for such engagement by a discipline that is inherently bound up in systems of power? Are there rich possibilities in the very aspects of producing architecture that seem to limit us? These questions trouble not only me, but also our students, who are facing being architects in an environmentally, socially, and politically precarious world, fueled by a mind-numbing gap between those have and those who do not. My writing practice seeks to formulate some kind of answers to these questions. As such, there are two broad major threads of writing: Building Change and Local Modernisms.

The first set of threads is most clearly laid out in my book Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency (Routledge, 2005). It has been adopted as course readings in many schools and continues to generate invitations to lecture and pursue further writing. This summer (2016), Routledge has invited me to propose a second edition.

South Africa is a particularly rich locale for the Building Change research. One of the case studies in the Building Change book was the Red Location Museum in New Brighton, South Africa. However, my research, interviews, building visits and conversations led me to numerous other buildings and practices, contexts and this has yielded a number of recent essays: various versions of the essay “Red and Gold: A Tale of Two Apartheid Museums”, have been published, including in Places Journal. Places also commissioned the essay “South Africa: From Township to Town”, (with co-author Liz Ogbu). After the success of this collaboration, Liz Ogbu and I co-authored an invited essay, “Becoming Visible: Appropriating the Spaces of Apartheid South Africa”, that was published in the Routledge book Consuming Architecture: On the Occupation, Appropriation and Interpretation of Buildings.


My writing on the Red Location Museum also drew the attention of Field Architecture, who designed the Ubuntu Education Fund buildings in a former township close to Red Location. The architects invited me to contribute an essay, “Realms of Impact: Ubuntu and the Politics of Space”, to their book about the project.
A recent sabbatical allowed me to begin to focus on the second set of threads: **Local Modernisms**. This work builds on the Building Change issues and themes, and on some papers I wrote in 2000 on architecture as a cultural tool to combat the homogenization of globalization. The new research focuses these early ideas to look at specific contemporary architects and architectural practices outside of Europe and North America. These architects seek robust locally derived building technologies and formal, spatial and contextual building strategies to form a response to the cultural and physical homogenization and the capital-intensive technologies of globalized practice. This work is situated historically and theoretically as well as physically, and will lead, eventually, to a book. The short form proposal for this book, *Radical Local: Architectural Resistance to Globalization* (working title), is under review by Bloomsbury Press and Routledge Press.

To date, I have published two essays that begin to address this localization. The first of these is an essay on “Productive Public”, a project by South African architect Jo Noero in an exhibition titled *Energy: Oil and Post-Oil Architecture and Grids* at MAXXI_The National Museum of XXI Century Art in Rome. (2013)

The other essay, “Materia: the Subject is Material”, is a profile of a small a Mexico-city based architectural practice, Materia. The essay is part of a bilingual book, published by Arquine Press, about the strategies, approaches and interests of the practice. The book was launched by a panel discussion hosted at the Tamayo Museum in Mexico City in 2014.

The following pages are included to give a glimpse of my writing:

- Introduction from *Building Change*
- Last pages from *Building Change*
- The full text of the catalog essay, “Productive Public”
- First pages of essay on “Materia”
Introduction

After twenty-two hours in transit it was hard to tell if the apparition before me in the tropical twilight was real or a figment of my jet-lagged imagination. Rising out of the dense vegetation was a line of giant gently curving forms reaching tapering fingers toward the deepening sky. I had never seen a building that looked like this. It was like a dream of a distant planet, or a glimpse of a different future. And yet, its uncanny beauty persisted as I approached and only became muted as I entered and began to wander through the exhibition rooms with the crowd of other awestruck visitors. Something about the place made everyone speak quietly.

It was June 1998, and the first night of the public opening of the much-anticipated Tjibaou Cultural Centre for the indigenous Kanak people of New Caledonia. I had just arrived via Sydney from the US to write about the building for Architecture magazine. After a quick stop at my hotel to change, I had hurried to the site for my first look at this latest project by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop. While I had seen photographs of the building before coming, I was not fully prepared for its reality. That first evening I turned off my critic’s voice – there were several days left for that – and simply wandered, enjoying and joining in the bewildered and delighted reactions of the other visitors. I left with that immense happiness and satisfaction an architect feels after experiencing a masterfully done building.

The following morning I was met at my hotel by William Vassal, the young French architect from Piano’s office who had spent the previous three years overseeing the construction of the project. He had proposed an agenda for the day that left the Cultural Centre for last, after visits to the countryside, villages and traditional buildings that served as important inspirations for the project. This was, for me, a perfect introduction. My interests in architecture, and as an architect, rest heavily on the relationship of buildings to culture, politics and landscape.

Hours later, after an enthusiastic introduction to the history and culture of the Kanak people that included lessons at deciphering the Kanak landscape, stops at three rural Kanak villages and a seaside lunch of traditional Kanak food, William and I returned to the Centre. While I had read several things about the history of the French colonization of the Kanak people before embarking on this assignment, I saw the building differently now that William had given it a context within the specifics of the experiences and perspectives of the Kanak. That afternoon, sitting on the shady terrace of the Centre’s café, I realized that this building was not only technically inventive and formally poetic, but that it was also a glimpse of an expanded possible future for Architecture as a whole.

The discipline of Architecture has, for most of its history, been at the service of those in power. Indeed, it might even be argued that it was invented by those in power. Yet, here in remote New Caledonia was a world class building, by one of the planet’s premier architectural practices, for the indigenous people who only received the right to vote in this still French-controlled island group in 1957. The entire project, like its context, was fraught with complex tensions, both cultural and political, evolving, but far from resolved. While the particular history of the project explains how the building came to be, I wondered how that history was also tied to fast-paced and profound changes in the larger political and cultural arena of the globe – changes most often explored through the lenses of geography, anthropology, and cultural and postcolonial studies. Recent work in these fields has emphasized that the processes and formal qualities of space are a location and indicator of power relationships just as surely as are historical events and social and economic dynamics. It is obvious to apply this thinking to the field of architecture where it has the potential to be more than simply an analytical tool. How might it also be applied to the process of design and the making of buildings – single buildings in particular circumstances?

It also struck me that while architects are certainly tangled in the web of power, the entanglement has both positive and negative implications. In the case of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, the Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW) had used its position, and the cultural power and prerogatives of the architect, to support the progressive social change agenda of the Kanak and the Centre. This was possible in part due to the shifting location of power in New Caledonia. The RPBW could certainly have made a building that essentially responded to the French government (who was paying for the building) as the client, but they did not. Instead, they made the Centre their client, leveraging the power, abilities and production of the architect to enhance the cultural agency of the Kanak. In this way, the building became a significant addition to the emergence of the Kanak as serious and important cultural participants in New Caledonia and in the Pacific region. It made them visible in a profoundly new way – a way understood in a global context and in the global language of architecture.

These realizations, jotted in my notebook while sitting on the terrace in the cooling sea breeze, framed my review of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre for Architecture magazine. However, it was clear that an abbreviated
piece for a professionally oriented architecture magazine could never contain the complexity of this bigger picture. Clearly these ideas needed further exploration in order to understand the implications of this unique project.

Within months of leaving New Caledonia, I encountered two other architectural projects that seemed to me caught up in similar circumstances of evolving political and cultural agency: the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre for the Anangu people of the central desert of Australia and the Museum of Struggle, a project memorializing the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. While profoundly different in their particulars, both projects contain programs that address a range of unresolved cultural and historical tensions. The architects of each project took on these tensions as an essential part of their approach and solution, using their position as architects to support the emergence of previously marginalized people. And, in both cases, the resulting building is simultaneously bold and modest and defies formal expectations. At the same time, both projects raise unique issues related to the question of cultural agency and its relationship to architecture. These projects, along with the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, formed the beginnings of this investigation.

Yet, it seemed to me that something was missing from the range of case studies. I wondered how a project on the margins of power, but where race, ethnicity, and a cultural gap between architect and client were not so prevalent, might stack up against the three already selected. I wanted to use such a project to understand how the dynamics of building within a climate of cultural and political tension would change if race and colonial history were not pivotal to the reason for the project. The new office for the Southern Poverty Law Center is an ideal project in this sense. The non-profit SPLC and its work are supported by a huge loyal coalition of small donors, yet it pursues its national agenda in the often-hostile local environment of Montgomery, Alabama.

Spatial transformation and social change are at the heart of this book: architecture, as a vital spatial practice, has the potential to be a key player in the recalibration of space when power shifts. This may not be obvious since architecture, by virtue of its patronage and resource requirements, is intimately entangled with political, economic, social and cultural power structures and their widespread strategies for encoding that power onto physical space at multiple scales. This book begins with a look at this intimate relationship between built physical space and power. It looks at the spatial strategies those in power use, as well as the historical and cultural conditions that have justified such strategies. The discussion then returns to architecture and architects and, ultimately, to detailed studies of the four architectural projects. These projects demonstrate that, in this world of shifting power dynamics, architects do not have to be servants to any cultural hegemony. They can, through their role as imaginative producers of culture, participate actively and constructively in the reallocation of cultural agency and power.

Architecture, like no other form of cultural production, can manifest renewed cultural agency by making it spatial, material, present and, in that sense, undeniable. This is a sobering responsibility. While many architectural projects may happen in less dramatic and less tense circumstances than those in this book, there are often opportunities for architects to leverage their production for social change and the goals of a larger cultural good. This provides a new arena for architects willing to use their own cultural power strategically and, perhaps more importantly, it suggests a revitalized role for architecture as a proactive cultural practice.
edge where the building meets the sky. At the Centre, the vertical ends of the silver-gray glulam that make up the cases meet the sky in a feathered edge—one that transforms from strong silhouettes when backlit to fuzzy when lit from in front. This front light condition makes the ends appear to melt into the bright sky. Piano seems delighted with this uncanny effect. He has since pulled it into two high-rise projects, where the edge of the building against the sky is more dramatically observed: Aurora Place in Sydney (2001) and the upcoming building for the New York Times in New York.

Piano happily admits to this carrying-over of ideas, strategies and technologies from project to project. The work of the Building Workshop shows, however, that this carry-over is not the conservative practice it might suggest. The startling forms, tectonic exploration, and strategy in relationship to the ground of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre would not have been possible without what Piano thinks of as one of architecture's central allure: that each project presents a set of unique opportunities. "Architecture is an adventure. It is a challenge to measure one's self with each new problem" (Piano 2002, interview). Working with the Kanak in New Caledonia, the problem was much larger than a set of spatial and technical needs. Here Piano discovered an additional set of inspirations and opportunities in the political and cultural history and tensions of the project.

For Greg Burgess, the lessons of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre are part of an ongoing exploration of a process, geometry and material for cultural buildings for Aboriginal people. This process was begun in previous projects, most notably the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre for the five Aboriginal communities in the southeastern part of Australia (Victoria). However, Burgess has also used these same geometries and methods for high-end single family houses. The Cultural Centre gave him a chance to apply these in collaboration with the Agangu who brought an overarching site sensibility to inform the decisions about form and space.

The founding attorneys of the SPLC, Joseph Levin and Morris Dees, seem to have infected the brand new practice of Erdy McHenry Architecture with boldness. A close look at the evolution of the building design shows that each time the architects were sent back to the drawing board the design became clearer, more focused and much more contemporary. The confident aesthetic that emerged continues on into the other buildings the firm is designing.

Building Change

Just as architecture fixes materials in time and space, it also fixes meaning. This is one of the most difficult parts of the projects in the previous chapters.
Centre. The political intention would be that neither the Kanak nor the Agangu cultures will any longer need a designated place where they can be explicitly present. Instead, they should simply be routinely present, visible, respected and effective within their places. Such a shift would change significantly the meaning of the buildings. They would, like the indigenous people they represent, cease to be exotic in their locales, and instead be seen as obvious and integral parts of their place.

In the meantime, however, the Agangu struggle with how to most effectively use the Uluu-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre. Almost as soon as construction was completed, uses of spaces were changed. Within a few years, the toilets were moved to separate structures outside of the building, with the space they occupied being re-modeled to accommodate Park Service personnel working with the Agangu. The multipurpose room became the Winiku Exhibition space where the Walkatjara Art Centre artists work, display and sell their painted ceramics. The now unused dance ground changing rooms have become storage and offices for the Walkatjara Art Centre. Other changes will no doubt occur as the Agangu need the Centre to be different things at different times in the evolution of their growing agency in the context of the Park and the tourists.

The Museum of Struggle, with its saw-tooth factory roof and its humble materials may remain a kind of prototype of South African post-apartheid architecture. Or it may become a transitional architecture that bridges from the rough and tumble “make-do” aesthetic of the townships to another sensibility about making public buildings in the country. Or it may get fondly set aside as a lively example of post-apartheid township architecture by globalized architectural sensibilities. Any of these are possible futures as the meaning of the Museum changes. This meaning, like the meanings of the other buildings here, is intimately tied to the political, cultural and economic future of its place.

Noero Wolff Architects were clearly aware of these possible scenarios when they were designing the building. Since the Museum has been conceptualized from its earliest design as a place of change, it may be a place of meaningful dialog about the past and present for decades to come. The primary exhibit space, with its twelve memory boxes, is very specific in certain ways: the diffused soft light coming from the skylights above, and the fixed column and memory box grids. However, these spaces are otherwise neutral, allowing for their content to be adjusted and changed as history evolves and as needs shift.

As for the SPLIC, they look forward to a time when neither the building nor the Center's agenda are seen as confrontational to the mainstream culture of Montgomery. In such a future, the elaborate security needs of the building would be obsolete, and the funneled entry and small front door would happily have to be redesigned to be more welcoming. This would be a triumph for the Center and its aspirations for the social, political and cultural future of Montgomery.

For each of these projects, the future expansion and integration of the cultural agency of the client may significantly shift the meaning of the building, and perhaps many of its uses. However, despite the implications for these changes on the architecture, such changes are a welcome thing for the clients. For these buildings demonstrate that the ongoing redistribution of the cultural power around the world has altered who has the right to express themselves in space through the products of contemporary architecture. They show that when a building project is explicitly embedded in a process of political and cultural change, it demands a heightened kind of engagement by its architects. And the resulting buildings remind us that architects and architecture can contribute actively and positively to social change. This contribution is possible precisely because buildings are material objects of cultural production that are both pragmatic and symbolic.

These buildings also show that David Harvey, Ian Low and Kim Dovey - authors drawn upon in the first chapter - were right in their assertion that the human imagination is the key to both architecture and cultural change. As such it becomes pivotal when contemplating the possibilities of architects, through the making of individual buildings, to engage in explicit political, cultural and social agendas. As Peter Zumthor suggests in the quote that opens this chapter, all architecture is, by definition, change. It is an essential participant in the necessary reorganization of the physical world to match changes in the political world. Because of this, it is urgent that architects recognize their own agency, and the powers they serve in the way they deploy it. As demonstrated by the architects who designed the projects in this book, this agency is not fixed in its relationship to power. Since architecture is already based upon the assumption of change, it is to a large extent up to the architect to have the courage and imagination to be explicit about what power agenda their agency serves.

Architects know that to make good work is not a matter of instantaneous insight, or raw talent, or good luck - though all of these may be useful at some point. Instead, architecture is an optimistic and, yes, imaginative activity of focused daily effort sustained over long stretches of time. It is an underdog's fight against the basic laws of physics, against both inertia and entropy. Toward the end of his life, even the great master of modernism recognized the simultaneous poetry and humility in this. Le Corbusier said, when accepting the AIA Gold Medal in 1961:

There is not a breath of victory in daily life. Great things are made out of a multitude of little things, and the little things follow one
upon another every day from morning till night . . . Daily life is a matter of perseverance, courage, modesty and hardships. 3

In this daily-ness and in the spatial reality and cultural agency of architecture, lies the power of buildings to participate in political and social change. This power is found in re-imagining the ordinary activities of architecture and in leveraging these activities so that the changes they produce are consciously in service of a progressive agenda. While this potential for architecture is easier to see in the projects in this book, it does not only exist at a heroic scale or in the process of working on an explicitly political or cultural building. When actively and imaginatively engaged, every architectural project offers an opportunity to build change.

Appendix

Project Credits

Tjibaou Cultural Centre

Client
Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (Agence pour le Développement de la Culture Kanak (ADCK)) (www.adck.nc)

Architects
Renzo Piano Building Workshop (www rpbw.com): Renzo Piano (principal); Paul Vincens (associate-in-charge); William Vassel (architect-on-site), Antoine Chaaya, Alain Galissian, Marie Henry, Charlotte Jackman, Robert Keiser, Gianni Morandi, Joost Multhuijzen, Jean Bernard Mothes, Marie Pimmel, Sophie Purnama, Dominique Rat, Anne Hélène Témanes (design team); Oliver Dorcy, Andrea Schultz (modellers)

Consultants
Competition Phase (1991): A. Bensa (ethnologist); Desvigne & Dainoky (landscape); Ove Arup & Partners (engineers); GEC Ingénierie (cost control); Peutz & Associés (acoustics); Scène (scenography)

Design Development and Construction Phase (1992–1998): A. Bensa (ethnologist); GEC Ingénierie (cost control), Ove Arup & Partners (engineers); CSTB (climate control); Agibat MTI (engineers); Scène (scenography); Peutz & Associés (acoustics); Qualinconsult (security); Végétude (landscape); Intégral R. Baur

General Contractor
Glauser International
Lisa Findley Productive Public by...

What if the answer to our energy future, and the future of our climate-altered planet, lies not in inventor’s workshops, university labs or petroleum company research facilities? What if it is not to be found in places with the greatest infrastructure for energy delivery, the largest of reserves or the most advanced energy science? What if, instead, our energy future is found in unexpected places: places where infrastructure and capital investment are exceedingly poor; places where providing energy services does not enhance the bottom line; places where almost no one owns a car, places occupied by the 40% of the world’s population that live on less than 1.50 Euros a day?

South African architect Jo Noero’s contribution to the conversation initiated by this exhibition provokes such questions. Just as mobile phones and Wi-Fi have leapfrogged over landline and Ethernet technologies in developing countries, Noero suggests that future energy networks can leapfrog over conventional and commercially controlled energy infrastructure and sources to provide inspiring and productive models for the energy future of all of us. This future is one of small scale, evenly owned and distributed, renewable systems. It rejects the definition of energy as simply conventional fuels. It rejects the control of energy by multinational corporations or nationalized energy conglomerates. And it relies primarily on the ultimate renewable energy: human beings.

To test this provocative idea, Noero has turned to the small South African town of Hangberg, nestled on a slope just above the fishing village outside Hout Bay Harbor. Just 20 kilometers from downtown Cape Town, this new mixed-race community of 25,000 sits at the end of the road on a compact slice of land. Housing consists of a cross section of the kinds of housing found in most townships: government constructed brick row houses, old workers hostels, a few small concrete block homes, and tightly packed informal settlement shacks. This density is in stark contrast to the stunning

The current rate of energy consumption in the world is unsustainable. The free market mechanism of the global economy is also unsustainable, unfair, and unjust. As a counterpoint we seek to find ways of liberating the single most renewable and sustainable energy resource in the world namely human energy, imagination and creativity. The model that we have chosen to investigate this idea is the informal sector in Africa in which, despite massive difficulties, people are free to operate in a spirit of untrammeled exchange free from all forms of state control such as licenses and taxes. We do not support an anarchic society – rather we support ways to maximize the freedom of people whilst recognizing that the state has an important role to play in ensuring equality of opportunity and equitable access to resources. The area of investigation is a small fishing village outside Cape Town called Hangberg. The project explores the possibility of new spatial realities embedded with productive infrastructures at both household and community scales. These infrastructures are designed to use locally generated systems of energy production which in turn will create autonomous, robust and self-sustaining communities. This energy infrastructure opens up ways of

Noero Architects productive (re)public
stance was not an easy thing to maintain in the full face of the authorities — it required extreme ethical clairvoyancy, daily doses of courage, and an abiding optimism about the future. There were no half measures, no middle ground, very few shades of gray. The strength of mind, forcefulness of opinion and unwavering character developed during this era endures in Noero and in anti-apartheid activists like him across the nation. And a suspicion of those in power, with power, controlling power (energy), became second nature.

In the early 1980s Noero, along with some of his colleagues, signed a pledge to refuse architectural work from the current government. While dramatically limiting his access to commissions, this stance set him on the course he continues to follow today: an investigation of the potential of architecture to enrich the lives of those with least access to conventional forms of societal and economic power. During this time, Noero worked for NGOs in the townships, and also designing township community buildings, modest houses, and a scattering of commercial buildings. He was also appointed as architect for the Transvaal Diocese of the Anglican Church by Desmond Tutu, who later became the Anglican Archbishop of South Africa and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. This post meant that Noero had the honor of designing churches, chapels, administrative buildings and school projects for the diocese — and for this abiding moral authority of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Working in the townships in this era, Noero began developing the architectural, spatial and material palettes he still taps into today. He admired the creative and resourceful uses of recycled and mundane materials procured by township residents for their self-built homes. Noero speaks passionately about wanting to demonstrate that these modest materials — including corrugated tin, concrete block and cement board — could be used in beautiful ways: that they could be elevated to become the materials not only of making do, but of choice.

Inexpensive and readily available, often with prefabricated systems of attachment and waterproofing, these materials are locally produced, and readily available. Their adoption also helps to ensure that maintenance and repair to Noero’s township buildings were straightforward activities able to be accomplished by local residents — a crucial aspect of the sustainability of the projects.

The use of this material palette could easily have led to a “poverty chic” aesthetic — one that mimics without transforming. However, Noero’s formal inventiveness, serious intentions, careful husbanding of every resource (spatial and material) and creative detailing pull the buildings into an entirely new realm. They are lively and surprising, colorful and beautifully made. They have strong forms that reflect the strength of Noero’s convictions forged during the Struggle.

Given the impoverished energy circumstances in the townships, Noero’s buildings have always been “sustainable.” They use architectural and material strategies that provide natural ventilation, shading in the summer, and solar gain in the winter. Ceilings often soar so that daylight can pour down from above. And they seek to leverage program spaces to do more than they were assigned to do — often to add to spaces for community gathering, entrepreneurial activity, and public uses. For instance, in one high school in the Cape Flats, Noero’s firm designed two-faced industrial arts and home economics classrooms to line the township’s street edge. They are opened from the secure inside of the campus during the school day, then, when the students are gone, become adult training and micro-business locations in the evenings and on weekends. Roll-up windows, counter height sill,s and built-in benches on the street side of the classrooms offer the opportunity for selling items made by local adults to the community. Even when the windows are closed, the benches and paved sidewalk invite sitting in the sun, socializing and playing.
Noero's post-apartheid buildings continue these explorations. However, as the townships slowly become towns, the buildings in these places become larger and house cultural programs, his material palette is expanding to include steel, concrete, plate glass and wood. These are appropriate to serious cultural buildings, regardless of location. The works at Red Location - a museum to the anti-apartheid struggle, a gallery (center), and a library with a theater - was won in a competition where Noero's team envisioned a lively public intersection formed by the buildings. The award-winning museum is an exquisitely detailed work using the township palette and spatial references to the factories across the nearby railroad tracks in combination with robust poured-in-place concrete. Completed in 2003, it towers far beyond its humble spatial and material roots to make an iconic building that celebrates the past and the unforeseeable future.

Noero's use of architecture to develop edgy spaces that invite public use is a key leveraging of the township projects. Photos of the townships always show lots of open space - unzoomed empty lots where children play soccer, circumscribed by paths tracing the shortest route to transport, plastic bags tangled in the weeds. But these are not public spaces; these are expanses of no-man's-land. They are unlit, unseemly, and dangerous places in low-density suburban-like sprawl. Indeed, during apartheid non-white people in South Africa had no real public space in the townships and were prohibited from lingering in any developed public spaces in the white cities. Even now, the very notion that an outdoor space might be designed to invite people to gather informally (and safely), to interact, to be used as a collective resource, is still surprising.

Since the end of apartheid formal public space in the townships has been slowly appearing, but with no cultural tradition of using piazzas and parks, these often fall into disrepair unless diligently maintained. Much more successful are smaller public spaces like the ones Noero makes with the street edge of his projects. The investment to make such places is low - requiring only benches and perhaps an overhead covering for shade or rain protection. At Red Location, the Museum provides a shaded veranda with places to sit along one street, and the library hosts a seasonally long bench along a smooth blue-purple wall. These occupiable edges create an additional public amenity; they bring down the scale of these new building types at the street and within the almost entirely one-story townships. In the townships, streets are clean concrete surfaces where children can play out of the dirt and under the tolerant gaze of the museum security guards. "These places of being outdoors, away from home but in community, maintained by the buildings they are outside walls to, provide critical ingredients to a civic life."

While apartheid ended in 1994, from the window of an airplane it is easy to see how deeply the system is still written into South Africa. Even the smallest towns appear as two towns. One consists of a grid of tiered terraces surrounded by lawns, its shanty town, always some distance away, but connected by a well-traveled road, has a much tighter grid of dirt roads lined with tiny houses or shacks. Here trees are rare and lawns non-existent. This pattern appears no matter the size of the population: here, the white town and, over there, the black or colored "township". The impairments of this separation are compounded in large cities: huge distances continue to separate the black and colored townships and the "white" city. While no longer prohibited from living inside these cities, most working-class blacks and "coloreds" cannot afford the move, and many do not want to leave their communities. So they remain in the township locations that continue to grow as the government builds new housing and as new residents add to the sprawling shack neighborhoods. This is a world where car ownership is rare and the transportation so essential to modern life remains inconvenient, expensive, and overcrowded.

Cape Town is the embodiment of this South Africa split between developed and developing worlds, it is a world-class city with numerous poor townships clustering around it. Hangberg, in comparison with many of the other townships, was founded in 1956 when the apartheid government forcibly moved all the colored people who had been living in Hout Bay onto just 2% of the habitable land edging the steep-sided bay. Here they were close to the fishers jobs that needed cheap and readily available labor. Apartment owners ignored the lack of transportation and the kilometers of empty dusty road between the township and the nearest commercial amenities. And the fact that the township has a million-dollar view escaped their attention.

After apartheid ended, Hangberg grew in size and slowly became a mixed-race community. The shack settlement expanded and was eventually sanctioned by an overburdened government unable to provide decent permanent housing for the residents. And the land adjacent to the historical edge of Hangberg, in the little valley that runs up from Hout Bay Harbour was subdivided into a neighborhood called The Heights, and sold to middle-class buyers willing to pay for the view, even if they had to drive along the edge of Hangberg to get to and from home.

But Hangberg is still at the end of the road, where the poor and impoverished citizens are keenly aware of the extreme beauty of their place, but where they struggle every day with limited infrastructure and cut off from commercial and civic life. Most rely on caravans, hitch-hiking, overloaded informal taxi vans known as kombis, and dilapidated public buses to get to work or to go shopping for essentials. Electrical lines are tamped by a tangle of illegal wires tacked on telephone poles, skipping across house eaves and running along improvised fences. The famously fierce Cape Peninsula storms often cause this fragile
electrical arrangement to fail. This clearly not a place — economically, socially, and historically — where conventional centrally controlled, commercially-based solutions to energy make any kind of sense at all. Noero, as he always has, seeks to discover through his project for this exhibition, ways that energy infrastructure can empower the citizens and the community and help them to wrest their energy future from the vagaries of capital markets and corporate greed.

And so Noero and his team have conducted careful scientific research into what kind of energy system already exist, or have the potential to emerge from the landscape, the informal organization and the human energy of Hangberg. And they have asked themselves what more the residents need in terms of “energy”, in terms of replenishment of the hope and courage their lives require. The result is Productive Public, what Noero calls a “new public realm embedded with productive infrastructures” that provides not only energy solutions but also responds to the need for networked public spaces in the community.

To be clear, this is an abstract utopian project. While Noero and his team have had some conversations with residents of Hangberg, the project is not a “real” one. “We wanted to see what would happen if we separated the research out from local politics and community dynamics”, says Noero, who has spent countless hours of his practice life involved in just such conversations. “What we have found,” he continues “is that it is completely feasible for Hangberg to be an autonomous settlement free from the city grid, using only the energy that is available to them locally. But, and here is the utopian part, it requires a cooperative spirit and people have to work together. Look, we may rely on these externalized energy sources because we operate in atomized ways, and don’t care at all about each other. But the current situation is actually like a noose around our neck that is getting tighter and tighter.”

In recent years there have been examples of architects using impoverished communities as fodder for advancing particular research agendas or careers, or displaying to the world a vision of poverty pornographic in the guise of architectural exploration (think Rem Koolhaas in Lagos, Nigeria). This is not the case with Noero’s proposal for Hangberg: not only has Noero spent the majority of his thirty years of practice working in the townships of South Africa, but ten years ago, he built his family a modest house in The Heights. He is a resident of Hout Bay Harbour, and as he did during the apartheid era. Noero daily witnesses the disempowering inequalities that continue to plague Hangberg, South Africa and, indeed, vast swathes of the humanity.

The future of energy for the kilowatt-guzzling global middle class is indeed grim. As the world continues to develop and the middle class expands into the billions, we will quite rapidly meet the end of the petroleum era. In this future, energy costs will spiral to dizzying heights and, as a result, we will live in energy-reduced circumstances that require profound shifts in our behaviors. Many find this a terrifying idea. But what if, Jo Noero asks, this is not the end of life as we know it, but rather an invitation to a decentralized, locally-sourced, community-based energy future for us all? What if we never again have to buy petrol of our cars, or pay an electric bill, or write a check for refilling the propane tank? What if, what if?
La naturaleza de los materiales: el tema es material

Lisa Findley

(a material has a specific character which we must understand if we want to use it. it is not just a tool or container, like a wooden box. we must examine everything that exists and try to understand it. we must be familiar with the functions and qualities of materials and no culture can exist otherwise. we must understand the properties of a material because of its importance, because its functionality has a direct bearing on the effort of a work of art)

Aqui en 1948, Mies hablaba de un estilo de arquitectura sencilla, bien de un compromiso con los materiales, su fabricación y su relación con el contexto cultural, temporal e espacio. Este tema fundamental de la arquitectura trasciende el tiempo, el lugar y la tecnología. Revela además que el pensamiento de Mies sobre la arquitectura es más complejo de lo que se suele considerar. Sus tendencias humanistas que mantuvieron a pie de la ortodoxia del CIAM y su necesidad de ser transmitida a otros arquitectos por categorizar, se dejan ver claramente en las manifestaciones de madera con que se edificaron en el Antiguo Pabellón de la Ciudadela de Barcelona, con las que se edificaron en el Pabellón de la Ciudadela de Barcelona, y en los años siguientes se expresan con una característica precisión de manera que la fórmula "Bauhaus es en los detalles"

Presentar a un joven talles de arquitectura contemporánea con citas de un tono fundamental del modernismo del siglo XX es quizás algo extraño. Sin embargo, estas ideas sobre los materiales en la arquitectura tienen un aporte valioso y, como un lema en el metal, han sido el punto de partida para las ideas que hay que impartir en el cielo. El estampado de arquitectura que se presenta en este libro es una contribución a la estética humana del modernismo. La necesidad de que el espíritu se responda a un contexto, el arte del detalle esquemático y preciso, el despliegue poético de materiales es crucial en la obra de los maestros (Kahn, Scarpa, Zumthor, Siza, Baragan) y los demás (Wendell Burnet, Nathaniel Foster) de estos talles arquitectónicos. Materia Arquitectónica.

1 Mies Van der Rohe, entrevista en el New York Herald Tribune, 3 de junio, 1959.
Materia no tiene que ser arquitectura perfecta ni existen y se jactan de ello, porque la imperfección es lo que nos hace humanos. No podría haber concepto más humano para un estudio de arquitectura. Materia lleva adelante esta idea con inteligencia, diligencia, gracia y el buen humor necesarios para una perspectiva tan dos dimensiones y un estudio extenso. Esta humanidad se profundiza con el nivel de conciencia, tanto en un joven. A la que en general se lleva años llegar a conocer cierto dominio de la arquitectura, en particular, y el control de la obra. Un planteamiento formal. La voluntad de dejar de lado la perfección no significa que no se busque. Sin embargo, implica una liberación que les permite experimentar con sus trabajos, jugar con ideas, toman riesgos, cometer errores, refinar las cosas que funcionan, descartar las que no. Como resultado, para Materia cada proyecto es una plataforma para el aprendizaje, una especial de laboratorio para ensayar su vocabulario espacial y material, desafiar las tendencias locales de construcción y probar detalles. Esto lleva a una versión arquitectónica del juego, como toda gran actividad laboral, el modo no tiene cabida.

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La creación de un modelo económico sostenible para el país es una de las prioridades del nuevo gobierno. La empresa ha realizado un estudio exhaustivo de las condiciones del mercado, teniendo en cuenta las posibilidades y limitaciones existentes. El resultado es un plan detallado que contempla la inversión en nuevas fábricas y la modernización de las existentes. El plan prevé la creación de nuevos empleos y la mejora de la infraestructura en el país, lo que a largo plazo redundará en un crecimiento económico sostenible. Es importante mencionar que la empresa también ha actively buscado la colaboración de los gobiernos locales y regionales para garantizar el éxito del proyecto.

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For Britten, this going out of the finest level of detail is more challenging—but she brings to the details an essential overall sensibility to the poetry. “I find it very difficult to balance the two things—the medium and the reality of architecture—at the same time. Even before she came to architecture Britten was designing and making jewelry and clothing. This work continues in her endeavors to make the things itself, since no intermediate stage of documentation. She is designing while making, refining the ideas in process. Architecture is a scaling up of her design sensibility—from jewelry and clothes to buildings. She understands extreme needs of craft in a most intense level, and the paths and potentials in the way things come together. However, for her, the process of documentation in architecture creates a kind of divide between designing and making. Her collaboration with Cardona bridges this divide.

The two partners admit to an addition to details. “There have been times,” Cardona says, “when we have designed a detail section at the beginning because we had an idea in mind, or wanted to play with certain materials. Britten finishes the idea.” “So the parts is sometimes an excuse.”

“Other times,” says Pabón, “the detail is the last expression of the idea. It reinforces the poetry of the experience we are looking for.” This moment in the experience of the building was not readily available when Materia was only designing retail spaces. With the retail work, the experience of entering and moving through the project was essentially pre-determined. With the houses, the overall hierarchy and relationship of spaces (the parts) and the movement into and through the site and the building, is an opportunity in design. The house projects have allowed Materia to explore not only a sequential way of details, and also to carefully craft other aspects of architecture, these range from negotiating the intersection of brand new materials and program with a 300-year-old former Quinua in the north of Portugal up creating a courtyard for a house in a very steep Mexican city slope.

In general, when Materia receives a new project, both partners start thinking about the overall parts, including issues at the building scale like program, site and context. At the same time, they explore ideas of materiality in the smallest scales. In bridging between these two scales of architectural thinking, they carefully compose episodes and experiences of the site using the craft of the section to bring out the qualities of a place. In this way, the details are not deployed as artifacts, but rather in the service of the intentions of the architecture to make space, evoke mood, más diminuir, desfigurar la expresión, trabajando y volviendo a trabajar las formas en las que los materiales se encuentran. Dice. “Y que nuestros deseos de construcción son más desviados en el edificio, pero se deben ajustar las cosas y cómo se vuelvan un mismo conjunto.” Aunque hacen cambios en el lugar, preferimos destacar hacia el máximo en el diseño.”

Pura Britten esta elaboración del nivel más fino del detalle es más desafiante. Sin embargo, ella asume una sensibilidad, incluso cierta poesía esencial para el detalle. “Se me hace difícil equilibrar ambas cosas, la emoición y la realidad de la arquitectura.” Inclinan ante de acercarse al mundo de la arquitectura, Britten sigue diseñando y produciendo joyas y ropa. Esta labor continua. En estas series, Britten crea el objeto en sí mismo: no hay un paso intermedio para la documentación. Diseño mientras hace, refinando las ideas en el proceso. La arquitectura es un avance de su sensibilidad a la edición: de la joyería a la ropa, a los edificios. Enlazando las necesidades más extremas del arte al más íntimo nivel, así como las ventajas y posibilidades en las que todo convence. Sin embargo, para ella el proceso de documentar la arquitectura crea ciertas divisiones entre el diseño y su producción. Su colaboración con Cardona fusiona esta disociación.

Los dos profesores admiten ser adictos al detalle. “Otro vez,” dice Britten, “el detalle es la última expresión de una idea. Subraya la poesía de la experiencia que estamos buscando.” Este interés en la experiencia del edificio no estaba al alcance en su inicio. Con el diseño de tiendas, la experiencia de encarar y moverse a través del proyecto estaba principalmente determinada con anterioridad. Con las casas, la jerarquía y la relación de los espacios (el parto), y las movimientos hacia y a través del lugar y el edificio, son una oportunidad para el diseño. Los proyectos de casas les ha permitido a Materia no solo explorar el vocabulario de los detalles, sino también profundizar en otros aspectos de la arquitectura. Estos están en el análisis de la interacción de materiales y programas totalmente nuevos, en una Quinua de 300 años en el norte de Portugal, hasta crear el patio para una casa en una profunda pendiente en la ciudad de Mérida.

En general, cuando Materia recibe un nuevo proyecto ambos están pensando sobre el público en general, incluyendo la escala de la construcción, el programa, el estilo y el contexto. A su vez, exploran ideas sobre la materialidad en las escalas más pequeñas. En la acción de un medio de dos estilos del pensamiento arquitectónico, comparan cuidadosamente episodios y experiencias del saber, usando el arte de la nación para destacar las cualidades de las cosas. Así, los detalles no se despliegan como acabados, aparecen al servicio de los intenciones arquitectónicos para crear un espacio, aunque ciertos estudios de línea, digan transiciones y celebran el movimiento del cuerpo humano y sus sentidos.

Los preceptores para este aspecto de su trabajo se basan en la experiencia, las visitas, las cosas que han pasado, lugares que han conocido, muebles de piezas y espacios que explica y explota y poesía y que aportan un espíritu y que aportan una sensibilidad con el cuerpo y su tamaño. Se interesan más que nada en desarrollar una experiencia, una actitud, una sensibilidad más que un estilo. Britten aísla a sus experimentar en los espacios humanos de Puerto Rico, la ciudad tropical y el espacios complementados del viaje San Juan. En su época de estudiantes, trabajan con un arquitecto especializado en la remodelación de edificios en la ciudad vieja. Así, se encontró con los edificios monumentales de grandes muros en tuyo interior se encontraban pequeñas habitaciones.

La primera vez que Cardona contempló el espacio como una experiencia fue sin duda, visitando la fábrica de procesamiento de madera que su padre tenía en el estado de Veracruz. Además de su padre trabajaba, Cardona recorría el patio y jugaba solo, trepando aquellos espacios creados por las plantas de madera procesadas. Los rayos de sol se filtraban entre las columnas, y se hacían visibles en el anecho que flotaba en el aire. Cardona dice: “Siempre me tocaba más los recuerdos de ciertos momentos dentro de la arquitectura que ciertos arquitectos en particular, lugares o espacios específicos. Algunos edificios se quedan cauteloso en un espacio; así que, cada vez que comienzan un proyecto, siempre hablamos sobre los momentos. Nos interesa la forma del momento más que la forma de un objeto. La forma final del objeto es la suma de esos momentos.”

De esta forma, así el detalle es poética en una intensiva y meticulosa las cualidades espaciales y experienciales del trabajo de Materia emergen de una corriente del trabajo. Como lo hace, esta corriente depende del tiempo, así como de las características físicas y artísticas de la arquitectura. Uno no deja llevar de lugar a lugar, explorando y sintiendo. El intelecto se desmaya y se reemplaza por el placer casi infantil de ensayar en el cuerpo propio. Britten y Cardona explican sus intereses en una conversación. Dice Cardona: “Lo que buscamos es realmente un espíritu más que un estilo.” Y Britten: “SI, una experiencia muy humana.” Cardona: “Es un tipo de narración de la conversación, sobre la idea cómo hacer cosa, hacer arquitectura, materia, arte.” Britten: “Rematamos es un proceso escolletrades transiciones y se celebran el movimiento del humano y sus sentidos.

El preceptivo para esta aspecto de su trabajo son la experiencia, la totalidad, las cosas que han deleitado a las personas: que incite al aspecto imaginativo y espacial de la experiencia y sus sentidos. A las personas que más interesan en desarrollar una experiencia, una actitud, una sensibilidad más que un estilo. Britten aísla a sus experimentar en los espacios humanos de Puerto Rico, la ciudad tropical y el espacios complementados del viaje San Juan. En su época de estudiantes, trabajaban con un arquitecto especializado en la remodelación de edificios en la ciudad vieja. Así, se encontró con los edificios monumentales de grandes muros en tuyo interior se encontraban pequeñas habitaciones.

Cardona firmó thought of space as an experience when he was a child, visiting the wood processing factory his father owned in the State of Veracruz. While his father was working, Cardona would wander around the yard and spend time alone playing and climbing inside the tall structures created from the stacks of milled wood. Sunlight would enter through the spaces between those stacks and be made visible by the sawdust in the air. Cardona, "I have always been touched more by memories of moments within architecture rather than by specific architects. Specific places and spaces. Some buildings stay with you, others do not. So, when we start a project, we always talk about moments. We are interested in the focus of the moment rather than on the form of the object. The final form of the object is the sum of those moments."

In this way, just as the detailing is poetic (through intuitive and careful craft, the spatial and experiential qualities of Materia) work emerge from a careful choreography. As with dance, this relies on the element of time as well as the physical characteristics and craft of the architecture. One is shown from place to place, exploring and experimenting. Intellect fails away and is replaced by an almost childlike delight in being in one's body. Britten and Cardona explain their interests in one of their back and forth idea-building conversations. Cardona: “We really seek a spirit rather than a style.” Britten: “Yes, a very human experience.” Cardona: “It's a kind of exercise of feeling—the idea to do it in emotion, material, craft.” Britten: “It's really a very emotional process.” As often happens, Cardona sums up: “You can say we have a very perceptual aim for space but it is done with a very rational way of documenting and deciphering the details or design of that space. It is a kind of crafting.”
RIPPLES: SEMINARS @ CCA

THE POLITICS of SPACE
Politics and space are intimately bound. From the scale of the body, up through the scale of buildings and cities and on to the scale of the landscape, those with political, cultural, economic and social power exercise explicit and implicit control over the shaping and occupation of space. As architects, it is critical that we understand this physical and spatial manifestation of power relationships. This seminar will explore the ways that power, politics, economics, and social and cultural hierarchies are made physical and will survey and analyze resulting building, public space, urban, and landscape patterns around the globe. Of perhaps greater importance, we will also be exploring architectural and urban design tactics, strategies and practices that challenge, subvert or seek to reverse these hierarchies.

LOCAL MODERNISMS
This seminar investigates a new generation of architects who practice within a critique of globalization; a disdain for the impacts of “flat world” labor, material supply and environmental impacts; and an exploration of both form and architectural production that is profoundly local in material, construction craft and technique, capacity building and sustainability (environmental, social, economic and cultural). In the hands of the most talented of these architects, these attitudes lead to fresh, elegant and leading edge architecture. These practices provide an insight into a shift of the international conversation around architecture away from Europe and North America.

These are the third of the three generations of architects we will explore. We begin with the Modernists and the thinking, context and work of the rogue “other modernist” architects—a first generation. This leads to a second generation: one that often spanned new independence movements within their own countries, seeking an architecture that broke with the colonizer and yielded both sophistication in the eyes of the world and identity for those at home.

CHANGING ASIA
This seminar explores contemporary issues in architecture and urbanism in Asia. The first seven weeks of the class will be devoted to the behemoth of China and its myriad architectural issues: staggering urban growth, abandoned towns, and the associated double edge of a growing lively contemporary architecture and the wholesale decimation of architectural heritage. We will look not only at Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, but also the “smaller” cities and struggling towns and villages. Along with urban issues, contemporary Chinese architectural practices, as well as those of foreign firms working within the country, will be introduced and examined from both formal and critical cultural views. After Spring Break, we will take on Southeast Asia with its rich historical complexities and myriad issues that range from strategic post-colonial vernacular identities to an embrace of global architectural culture on par with Dubai. Contemporary practices within the region will also be introduced and discussed. Running through the semester will be an exploration of the idea of “Asia” and its position within global architectural imagination and discourse. At the same time we will also be looking at the role architecture plays in ideas of culture, cultural history and memory, and in symbolic notions of progress.
BOOM + BUST: Architectures for Uncertain Futures
Co-taught with Inaqui Carnicero Fall 2016

BOOM+BUST cycles are in the very DNA of capitalism and are experienced all over the world in varying degrees and for a wide range of reasons. However, these cycles create highly unsustainable and unstable built contexts that raise complicated and intriguing challenges for architecture as unpredictable futures lie in wait. This studio embraces these challenges by seeking architectures that anticipate unknowable future uses different from their initial programming. Given the intense energy and material investment in buildings, how do we design productively for such unusually dynamic cultural and economic situations? We will be testing our work with likely future scenarios: radical switch in uses, evolution over time, and significant additions. We will investigate the architectonic, programmatic, spatial and aesthetic opportunities of flexible, adjustable, open-ended and/or explicitly unfinished buildings. Our explorations will include the implications of these ideas and strategies on program allocation, spatial ordering, form, tectonics, systems, and material and technical choices.

LOCAL FUTURES: NorCal Wood
Co-taught with Aidlin Darling Design Spring 2016

This advanced studio explores reasons (ethical/ideological/historical/pragmatic), strategies (theoretical/spatial/formal/collaborative) and techniques (process/material) for making architecture that is explicitly Local. This investigation springs from a critique of globalization, including myriad undesirable and unintended impacts of “flat world” labor, the unsustainable trans-national material supply chains, and the unacceptable environmental, human and cultural impacts of contemporary building production. This studio seeks, instead, an alternative approach to architecture that is highly local in response to place and climate, in material, construction craft and technique, and in capacity building and sustainability (environmental, social, economic and cultural). While the approach of this studio can be applied wherever in the world an architect is working, we will be using the Bay Area (and northern California) as an ideal place to carry out our research. Of specific interest to our studio is the intensive use of a locally available building material that is currently seeing a renewed focus among architects everywhere: Wood.
RIPPLES:
KEYNOTES/PROJECTS/TEACHING
(see CV for others)

KEYNOTES/PANELS/LECTURES: (selected)

“Building Visibility: DeafSpace Meets the City”

“The Subject is Material”,
Roundtable panel hosted by Arquine Press, Tamayo Museum, Mexico City (2014)

“Negotiating Space: History, Memory and Politics in Building Cultural Visibility”

PROJECTS: (selected)

Consultant: Longling Valley Agricultural Museum, Jeitou, Yunnan, China (2015-present)

Consultant: Setswana Cultural School, with Sharp Shop Architects, Johannesburg, South Africa (2014-2016)

Consultant: Vanuatu Supreme Court Building, WMCQUIA Architects, Melbourne, Australia (2010)

TEACHING: (selected)

“Conservation Planning in Malaysia”, co-teacher, lead workshops on spatial agency for Malaysian and Myanmar Urban Planners, Getty Conservation Institute, Penang, Malaysia (October 2013), (May 2012)

“From Township to Town: Civic Space and the Transformation of South African Black Townships” Workshop, African Studies Department, Emory University (2006)

“Mapping Spatial Power” with M’Phil Architecture students, University of Queensland, Australia (May 2004)
“...The Green Braid is not a book to be read from cover to cover as a coherent thesis or manual, but rather as a kind of collection to be kept on hand for inspiration. Just when I thought I had a handle on what the book was all about, I would turn the page, discover another gem, and feel my expectations challenged and my mind stretched to encompass other perspectives. I found myself surprisingly moved by a critique of Renzo Piano’s Tjibaou Cultural Center for the Kanak people of the French South Pacific territory of New Caledonia. Lisa R. Findley’s thoughtful treatment of the complexities involved in the postcolonial project of designing a cultural center for a marginalized indigenous communities after centuries of French colonial rule complicated my own initial response to the soaring beauty of Piano’s formal choices. Piano’s use of double-skin wall systems, thermal chimneys and louvered panels in this project make me think of the Menil campus in Houston. It reminded me that a few world-class architects have been developing technological and aesthetically stunning innovations in green architecture for decades, and Findley’s hard-hitting essay re-instilled my faith in architecture criticism.”


“Building Change manages a delicate balance by overlapping overt political content with more oblique or probing theoretical constructs to deliver an urgently needed reading of power relations in the production and reception of architecture. Unlike social scientists such as David Harvey or Mike Davis who regularly feature architecture in their analyses but use buildings as diagrams that illustrate rather than embody social and political formations in concrete and specific term, Lisa Findley’s primary investment is in the architectural object. Her close interrogations of buildings dig deeply into the very material of architecture to tease out the content sedimented in form. Her readings yield critical insights that are provoked rather than merely illustrated by architecture—an important distinction that sets her work apart from the more pervasive critical genres. This book, clearly written and free of jargon, is slowly but surely becoming a must-read in academic circles.”

Rodolphe El Khoury, review of Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency