Ancient Innovations is a book that researches, analyzes and documents ecological technologies that thrive in the landscapes of the world’s Fourth World people. These landscapes, still largely considered “untouched,” have in reality been successfully occupied, adapted and managed for millennia by local communities. The cultures and spiritual beliefs that have formed with these landscapes demonstrate complex and unprecedented technologies developed in conjunction with local environs. This book reveals how a deeper understanding of traditional ecological knowledge is tantamount to progressing contemporary ecological design.

In this publication, indigenous infrastructures are studied for the first time through an architectural lens and documented using conventional drawings techniques. Inverting the modernist paradigm of the tabula rasa promoted by Le Corbusier and his
understanding of the vernacular as primitive, this book seeks to reveal indigenous ingenuity. In twenty chapters, the diversity of the ancient innovations of local communities from across the globe are studied at the material, structural and systems scale, from floating islands in Southern Iraq to forest agriculture in Brazil. This compendium showcases the complex, thriving environments humankind is capable of creating, reframing the paradigm of the primitive.

Ancient Innovations will be Julia Watson first solo publication and the second publication in the Columbia University Urban Design Department’s ‘Innovations in Infrastructure’ book series. The book is based on an extensive body of research developed over five years while teaching a Landscape Eco-technology seminar. The infrastructures, which range in size from single river crossings to entire watershed reconstructions, have associated mythologies that have guided their use for millennia. Through this investigation, these ancient innovations demonstrate the potential thriving environments mankind is capable of creating.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Julia is an Australian lecturer and landscape designer living, teaching and practicing in New York. She teaches in the Urban Design program at Columbia GSAPP having previously taught at Harvard University, Rhode Island School of Design and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She graduated with the highest distinction of the landscape architecture department at Harvard University as both a Charles Eliot (2008) and Olmsted Fellow (2008) with a specialization in the living landscape eco-technologies and the preservation of sacred cultural space. In 2013, she founded Studio Rede, a landscape design and conservation practice that works at the intersection of anthropology, ecology and innovation.