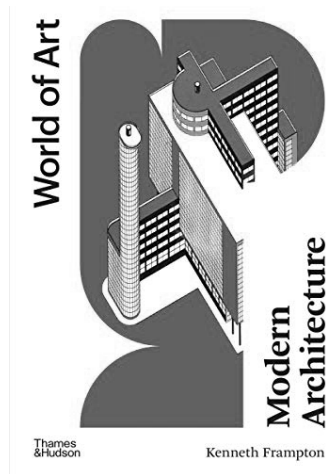


Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 735 pp. – 2020 (5th edition)

Paperback: € 29,00 – ISBN 0500204446



Since its first publication in 1980, *Modern Architecture* has been recognized as an essential book on the modern movement in architecture. Kenneth Frampton's latest fifth edition is a significant improvement from its earlier fourth edition in 2007, employing a much more open and comprehensive approach both geographically and theoretically. The author's sharp observations on critical works in the modern movement have inspired generations of students for an ethical and intellectual approach to architecture. Profoundly influenced by the phenomenology of Hannah Arendt and the critical theory of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, Frampton recognizes the constraints on building culture by the economic and political structure of capitalism

and examines each building as a phenomenological experience of the human subject. His texts and selection of images weave deep sociological and philosophical insight with keen spatial, formal, and material observations. In doing so, he advocates for an architecture of resistance, which is based on the intrinsic uniqueness of the bodily experience of the human subject. Previous editions of *Modern Architecture* have been criticized for inaccessibility and Eurocentrism. Apparently, the first edition was the product of the author's days as a technical editor for *Architectural Design* in London and one of the co-editors of *Oppositions* in New York City. His writings were within the tradition of modern Western architectural historiography, alongside books by Sigfried Giedion, Manfredo Tafuri, and Rayner Banham. Frampton admits that "a disturbing Eurocentric bias has been evident in almost all the received histories of modern architecture" in the preface to the fourth edition. With the fifth edition, the author aims at widening "the scope of the book to redress the Eurocentric and transatlantic bias of previous editions". Frampton's corrective effort is transformative. Both quantitative and qualitative changes coincide. The new book has 736 pages, 311 more pages than the fourth edition. The total number of illustrations is 813, with 396 more than the previous one. These added texts and illustrations embody Frampton's intention of repositioning the book in the contemporary architectural

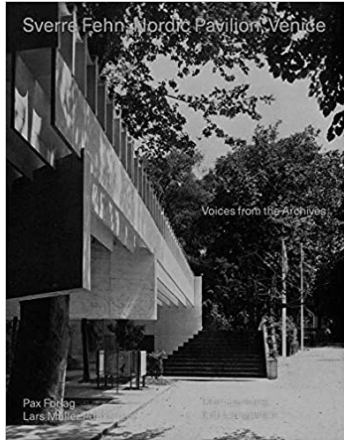
community. When we compare all five editions together, this objective appears to be most decisive. The first edition of *Modern Architecture* (1980) has three parts, including three chapters in Part I, 27 chapters in Part II, and four chapters in Part III. Without changing the primary organization, the second edition (1985) adds a new chapter on critical regionalism in Part III, evocative of the author's classic essay, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance (1981)". The third edition (1992) introduces another chapter titled "World architecture and reflective practice". Despite the title, this chapter mainly discusses architecture in the four well-developed countries of Finland, France, Spain and Japan. The fourth edition (2007) adds a long chapter, "Architecture in the Age of Globalization: topography, morphology, sustainability, materiality, habitat and civic form 1977-2007", to analyze the recent changes brought by globalization. Thus, the first four editions develop gradually. The new fifth edition reveals much more significant changes. Frampton adds two more chapters to Part II, which deal with architectural developments in Czechoslovakia and France between the two world wars. Part III now has only five chapters. The last chapter of the fourth edition, "Architecture in the Age of Globalization", is a coda in the new edition. The 14-page chapter on "World architecture and reflective practice" in the fourth edition is replaced with Part IV, entitled "World

Architecture and the Modern Movement', with 275 pages of texts and illustrations. Following Luis Fernández-Galiano's *Atlas: Global Architecture circa 2000* (2007), Frampton divides the world into four global regions: The Americas, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe. Each chapter covers many countries and architects of the world in the last fifty years. As the author admits, the USSR and some South Asian countries are missing, and the book is still too short to sufficiently cover the architecture of the world. Nevertheless, Part IV is a solid introduction to the global history of modern architecture. Carefully selected photos and drawings help the readers access the works of often underrepresented architects of Africa, Asia, America, and Europe such as Kamran Diba of Iran, Swoo-Geun Kim of South Korea, Alberto Kalach of Mexico, Raul Mehrotta of India, Diébédo Francis Kéré of Burkina Faso, Kabbaj, Kettani & Siana of Morocco, and Kashef Chowdhury of Bangladesh. The fifth edition is more accessible to readers unfamiliar with certain socio-philosophical theories such as phenomenology and critical theory. Part IV allows readers to approach chapters or subchapters independently. With this change, the author seems to encourage readers to access all other parts of the book similarly, as a collection of vibrant pieces. The book is much less a theoretical monolith but is instead an effort to map diverse, rich traditions of modern architecture in the world. At the beginning of Part IV, Frampton

clarifies that he is guided by the efforts to identify "another deeper strand of "regionalism" that is critically creative in itself, but also "critical" in the sense of its fragile and unique poetic character". In this new edition, Frampton remains as consistently insightful and critical as he has always been, now with the eagerness to explore the world beyond the transatlantic region. The fifth edition of *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* offers a concise and consistent history of global modern architecture. This book is filled with Frampton's profound knowledge and brilliant insights into the contemporary world and its architecture. Of course, a more thorough study of specific countries and architects would be desirable. He could also address certain issues such as gender and racial inequality as well as the environmental crisis at regional and global levels more substantially. Perhaps those issues might be better addressed by new generations. Despite some limits, *Modern Architecture* is one of the best—if not the best—books available to begin the study of the global history of modern architecture.

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Mari Lending and Erik Langdalen, Sverre Fehn, Nordic Pavilion, Venice. Voices from the Archives, Lars Müller Publishers, 295 pp. - 2021 Paperback: € 45,00 – ISBN 3037786396



In 1958 the Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn won the competition for the design of the Nordic Pavilion in Venice, inaugurated in 1962. Drawing back on a rich archive on this masterpiece of post-war architecture, Mari Lending and Erik Langdalen tell a different story about the building than the commonly spread poetic and critical narratives. The book is composed of two parts: part one *Historicity of a Concrete Object* takes the readers through key moments of the “life of the building”: the cultural or geopolitical momentum, preparing the ground, the competition, the opening, the cooperations, etc. The second part of the book comprises invited contributions by a number of authors such as Adrian Forty, Camille Norment,

Helen Dorey, to mention just a few, who reflect on different aspects of the Pavilion. Straying away from the added mythical interpretations of its Nordic character, the book offers a close look at the densely factual and contextual reality of the Pavilion archive. This results in a meticulous study of the process of production of the pavilion, the site specificity, the materiality, the construction techniques as well as the myriad of actors involved in its making – from kings and ambassadors, through to museum directors, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, artists, gardeners and Venetian dignitaries, to lawyers, architects, engineers, construction managers, local providers and plumbers. What a magnificent crowd indeed gathered around a Nordic building in Venice. The great achievement of Lending and Langdalen's volume is to turn the archive into a special *locus* where the different voices and technical anxieties of these actors can be heard, and their actions witnessed. Drawing on rare unpublished images and numerous photographs from Fehn's archive, smartly chosen and analytically re-worked and ‘staged’ by the authors, the book outlines the importance of the archive as a networked entity creatively mobilised in search of *another* interpretation of the Pavilion. Engaging in a careful and erudite “material archaeology” of the archive, zooming in and out, looking at the back of the page, comparing details, juxtaposing layers of archival evidence, trying to find traces that the hands of all

those different participants have left on the yellow scruffy surface of these pages, the book makes two important contributions. First, it sheds light on Sverre Fehn as one of the most notable Nordic architects of the century. While the book accounts for the geopolitics and bureaucratic process behind a collaborative project between Nordic countries of this scale, it does not dwell for long on the context to seek for “explanations” of the Pavilion design. The perspective on Fehn's work is unique – rather than drawing on the theories and the ideologies behind this masterpiece, it sheds light on the process and the working techniques of the architect and the other protagonists, the material choices and technical challenges. This process-driven and pragmatist interpretation, provided by Lending and Langdalen, deliberately “downplaying the hermeneutics” and restraining themselves from offering one possible interpretation sharply contrasts the common aestheticized discourse on Fehn's work. In their interpretation the specificity of the building is understood through the small technical actions and challenges such as ‘transporting the Nordic light to Venice, “the materiality of Norwegian slate, the problem of ‘calculating the angle of the light’ to be able to create a different lighting, the “trees and the sun”, “the stability of the grid”, the effort to “create a shadowless space to protect the artworks”, the comparison between the engineers’ and the architects’ “interpretation of the roof”, the

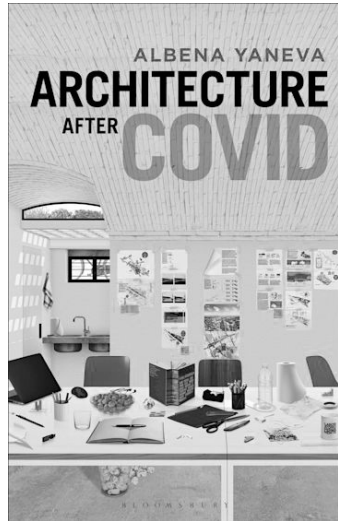
attempts to “adjust the lateral stability” and the entire battle of technology and nature that the Pavilion enacted. In addition, the different chapters of the authors capture numerous stories of collaborations, richly documented and originally seized through the lens of the archival materials. Through a careful ‘detective’ epistemic approach to architectural historiography, Lending and Langdalen make visible numerous infinitesimal details commonly invisible in linear historical accounts (dwelling on success stories and architectural intentions rather than contingencies). They all come to the fore and gain life, voice and colour: the mistakes (of a tree wrongly measured), the technical choices, the misunderstandings, the exaggerated details, the unknowns. In the multiplicity of voices enacted, we hear some that are commonly forgotten in mainstream historiography. Be they contactors, plumbers, or Venetian bakers, slate or light, they all contribute to the polyphonic (and hybrid) assemblage that the archive becomes in this volume. The usual ‘suspects’ – engineers, patrons, politicians – are still there but in the background of this powerfully staged pragmatist story of the making of the Nordic Pavilion. Second, archives tell amazing stories – not just of the glorious achievements of powerful humans, but also of the material disobedience of nonhumans – tiles that ‘refuse to stick’, Italian lights that “disagrees” with the way Norwegian light

works, among others. Looking at it carefully, with scrutiny and care, Lending and Langdalen make us see the scribbles, the hidden marks, the scratches, the colour fading, the back side of the plan or the drawings. A true archival experience indeed. We commonly turn to the archive when an architect is effaced from official historiography or in situations of major lacunas, of accidental destruction or accumulation. Thus, the archive does not simply tell a story of architectural intentions but rather reveals complex logistics from the realisation of the project, construction details, various alliances and parentships. Debunking the myth of the Pavilion as an embodiment of Nordic spirit and atmosphere, a true model of Nordic collaboration, this close quasi-archaeological study of the archive illustrates that, in reality, most of the initiatives came from the Venetians and the intricate material and technical choices (ie the panels were not pre-fabricated, but they were casted on site) contributed to the Pavilion's bespoke design. Treating a canonical example, by undermining the obvious and going against the mythical interpretations, *Sverre Fehn, Nordic Pavilion, Venice: Voices from the Archives*, is a meticulously researched and wonderfully presented inventive archaeology of an architectural archive that will be of interest to historians and theorists of architecture, to anthropologists and archival scientists. Striving to find all missing pieces, Lending and Langdalen turn

the archive on Fern's Pavilion into an object of study, rather than simply treating it as a ‘source’. This results into a highly original volume that offers an unconventional interpretation of the often overlooked material and technological complexity of architectural production. When it serves the historians, the archive is invisible, mute, unchallenged, a source of materials ‘out there’; when it troubles them it resurfaces, it talks, and it interferes epistemologically. In *Sverre Fehn, Nordic Pavilion, Venice* the archive talks loudly and interferes epistemologically in a spectacular way to foreground a new awareness of “how” architectural archives are made and how their can “talk back” to architectural historians and theorists in a new, fresh and undoubtedly more eloquent, way.

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**Albena Yaneva, *Architecture after Covid*, London, Bloomsbury, 192 pp. – 2023
Paperback: £ 20,00 – ISBN
9781350271074**



Architecture as spatial representation and professional practice change according to the contingencies at hand. What has happened to the making of architecture in the aftermath of the pandemic? Albena Yaneva, in this book, follows the traces of this transformation firstly by recognizing the relevance of non-humans to the construction of society, secondly by unfolding the effects of this relevance to spatial configurations, routines and – more specifically – architectural practices. The considerations offered by the author were developed through an ethnographic method and specifically addressed the first two years of the global pandemic, from 2020 to 2021. When such compelling contingencies come along, the discussion arises as to which

changes will take place and which areas are likely to be more affected. However, as highlighted by the author, time is necessary for significant transformations to become visible and recognizable. Therefore, the book sets forth to achieve a verbalization of the covid-induced modifications witnessed by all but still unarticulated in their ramifications. The aim here is to rethink the theory of the social and the present situation while avoiding a historical narration. The first half of the book outlines how the sudden omnipresence of the virus affected the reality of everyday life and how it prompted the reconfiguration of space. The emergence of an enlarged network of actors to address the issues related to the containment of the virus comprised both established public roles and unprecedented ones: the first ones are usually involved with the management of urban settings, whereas the second ones can be exemplified by technical professionals concerned explicitly by the virus. Observing this network allowed the author to reconsider and clarify the previous, cut-clean conception of the relationship between society and science. While urban spaces underwent a *laboratorization* made possible by this same network of actors, it became evident how the actual configuration of urban space and, subsequently, of daily choreographies of human life influenced the production of scientific tools to contain the virus (i.e., social distancing, personal protection equipment, curfews). The second half brings the discourse more closely centred on the practices architects have employed in response

to the limitations brought on by the virus. In this sense, the focus of the book shifts from reasoning about the organization of pandemic cities and the modification of human routines to the alterations that architectural practices endured, which were re-channelled by those practitioners involved with the transformation of space. The exceptional circumstances prevented the ordinary running of the profession: the usual exchange and set of iterations that several individuals would usually have on documents, boards, walls, and models, was clashing with the imposition of social distancing. As a matter of fact, architectural firms came up with new ways of carrying out their practices: they introduced the use of all kinds of digital technologies and exploited them to their full potential. Indeed, the virus inadvertently acted as an accelerator of processes already underway: these different modalities of making architecture have now been absorbed, serving in a sense as elements of innovation. Apparently distant, the two parts are very much connected: drawing on the centrality of humans as well as non-humans – such as the virus – and its agency in the production of social structures, the author points out throughout the whole first part of the book how deeply urban, spatial configuration underwent relevant changes. It becomes clear how the agency of a non-human like covid19 is reflected in space. In this context, space and practices are questioned, and so is the underlying method applied to extrapolate these considerations. Just like architectural practitioners had to

develop different ways to adapt their profession to the prevailing contingencies, the author herself had to re-adjust the usual practice of an anthropologist and ethnographer to a socially distant one. Therefore, surveys, interviews, virtual visits, and documenting material were adopted as tools to investigate and trace the changing in architectural practices. The major advantage of this method lies in the possibility of gathering a considerable amount of empirical data quickly and over different contexts, although the author offers a clear overview of the disadvantages as well. This book has allowed defining the issues that such exceptional contingencies have triggered. In doing so, it has clearly brought to the surface the reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans: the two coexist, they are both capable of producing effects hence there is no subordination between one and the other. Albeit this relationship can be challenging to grasp in all its depth, Covid-19 – the most influential non-human in the last two years – has provided the author with the most suitable example to deliver and articulate it effectively. As a matter of fact, the publisher is not academic, as it has happened for most of Albena Yaneva's publishing repository, but it addresses a broader range of the public.

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