

Albena Yaneva, Architecture after Covid, London, Bloomsbury

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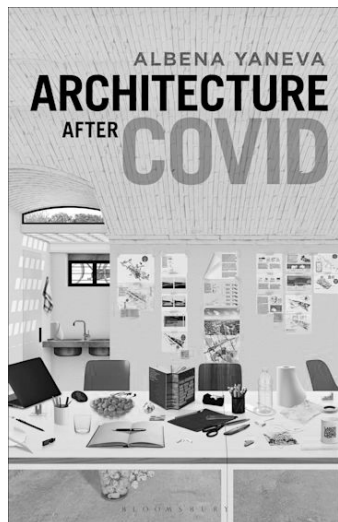
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**Albena Yaneva, *Architecture after Covid*, London, Bloomsbury, 192 pp. – 2023
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Architecture as spatial representation and professional practice change according to the contingencies at hand. What 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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