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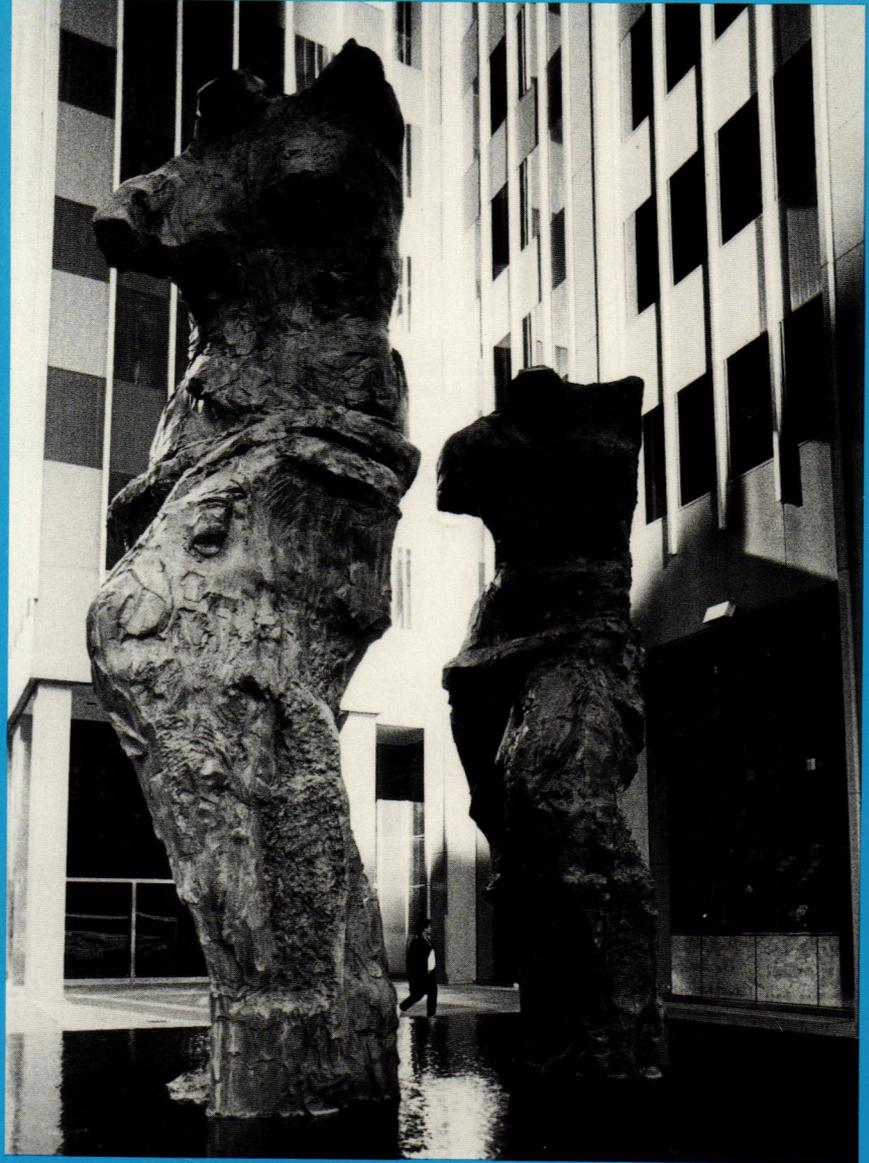
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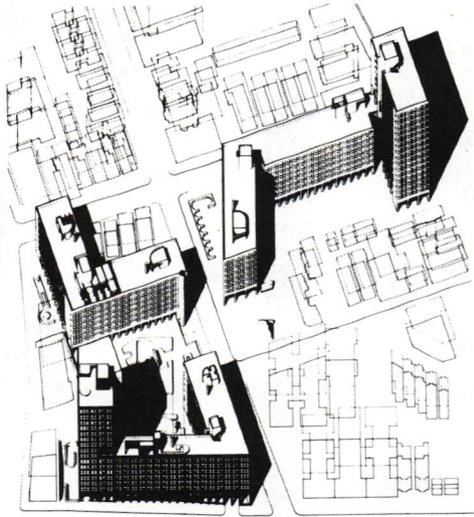
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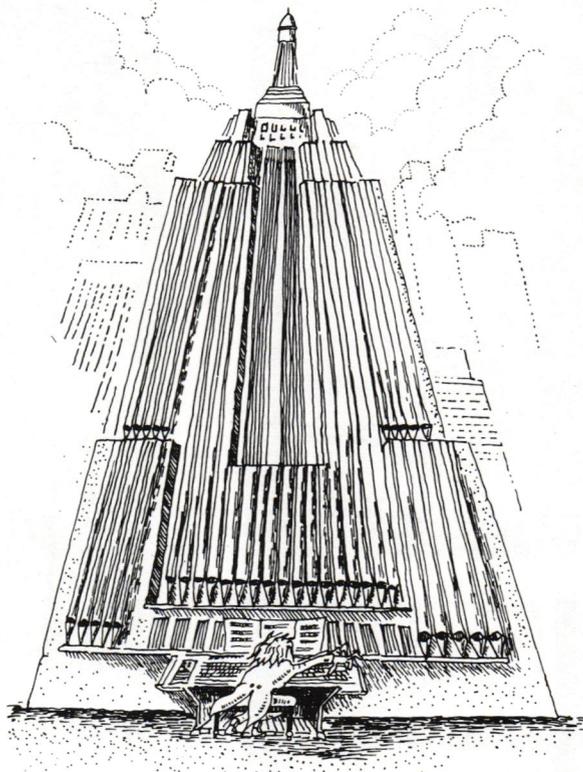
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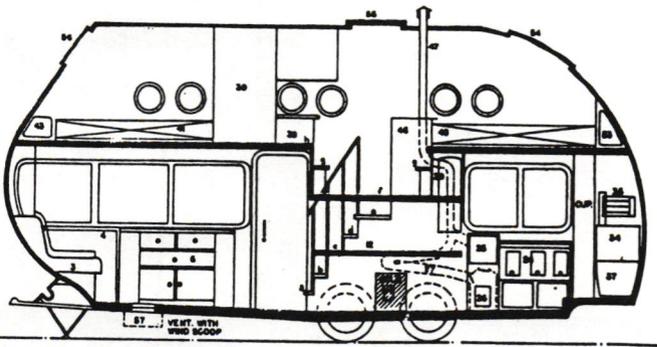
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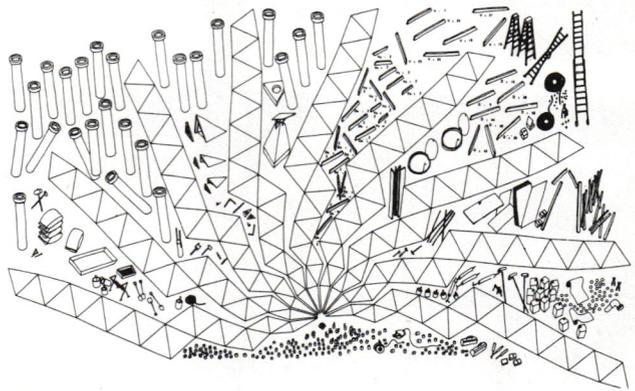


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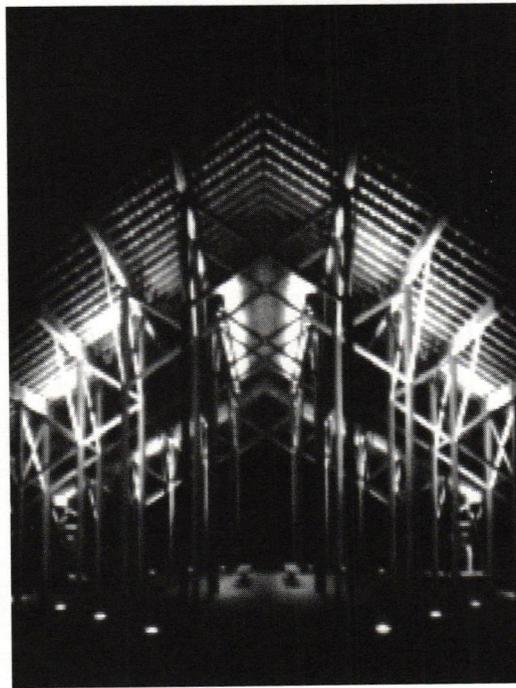
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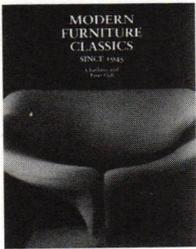


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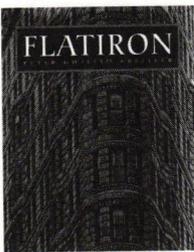
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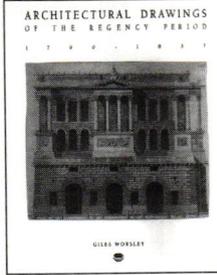
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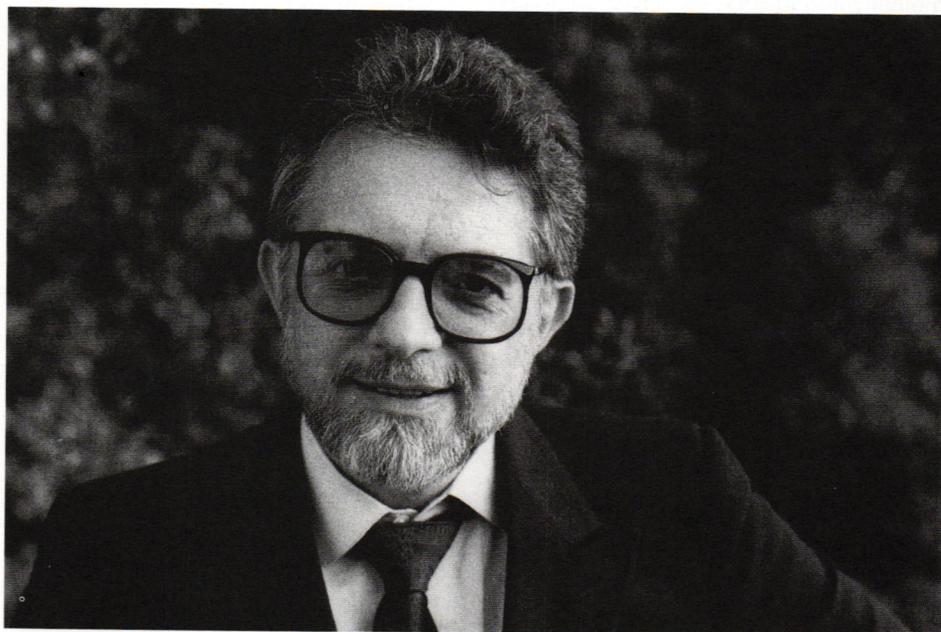
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The Death of Architectural History

To say that an entire field died with one of its preeminent practitioners would either be to claim too little for the field or too much for the deceased. Yet Spiro Kostof, who passed away on December 7, 1991, had such a profound effect on the practice of architectural history in the United States that it is safe to say that the field will never be the same and that it might be time to start calling it something else. Kostof was an electrifying speaker and a meticulous wordsmith who blended pathos and reason into every sentence. As he matured, he became the most convincing spokesperson for the defection of architectural history from the limited criteria of art history. His books, television series, and the memory of his volcanic lectures are a testament to a new architectural history that might better be called a history of the built environment.

To analyze architecture as a landscape, to consider buildings as parts of a working whole, to study artifacts as the result of social and cultural practices, to discover that history has no center: these are the lessons of Spiro Kostof. Where Nikolas Pevsner liked to distinguish be-

tween Lincoln Cathedral as architecture and a bicycle shed as building, Kostof urged us to consider them both. Kostof's own preparation was strictly conceived on the axis of Western humanist traditions at Roberts College in Istanbul and as a Ph.D. student at Yale—the intellectual climate of which he recently described in *The History of History in American Schools of Architecture 1865–1975*, edited by Gwendolyn Wright and Janet Parks (Princeton Architectural Press, 1990). His first book, *The Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna* (Yale University Press, 1965), is a model of archaeologically based scholarship, fulfilling the canonical goals of art history. What the first book accomplished with rigor, the second, *Caves of God: Cappadocia and Its Churches* (Oxford University Press, 1972), compensated for with passion. The caves were outside the realm of the canon; they belonged to the spirit of the land that had inspired so much poetry in him as a young man (he won a major national poetry award in Turkey at age nineteen, and dozens of his poems were published in that period).



Spiro Kostof, 1936–91. Professor of Architectural History at the the University of California, Berkeley; editorial board member and frequent contributor to *DBR*. (Photograph by J. W. White.)

It is difficult to say whether Kostof's concerns for non-Western cultures or for the vernacular process would have developed so fully if he had not broken away from the East Coast academic establishment and come to Berkeley in 1965. Here a revolution was under way to which one could not remain indifferent. "The people" became the subject of both self-serving demagogues and earnest citizens. Kostof was genuinely committed to the democratic experiment but was no revolutionary and maintained rigid academic standards in the midst of appalling disruptions and intellectual deceits. "The people" emerged in his work as a natural outgrowth of constituent demands and his own conviction that ultimately it is people who make cities. This sensibility was perhaps best captured in his Mathews lectures at Columbia in 1976, in which he studied piecemeal, anonymous design acts in medieval Rome (a version of these lectures may be published posthumously). *In The Third Rome: The Traffic and the Glory* (an exhibition and catalogue for the UC Museum of Art, 1973), he took on late 19th-century and Fascist planning in Rome, at the time an unapproachable topic. Kostof was able to make one reconsider the most vilified monument in history, the Victor Emman-

uel "wedding cake," with some sympathy for it as a meaningful place. He likewise was able to evaluate objectively the relative virtues of Mussolini's planners without giving the impression of endorsing their policies. His particular skill was to shake the interpretation of architecture out of its aesthetic and ideological prejudices.

In *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession* (Oxford University Press, 1977), which he edited and for which he wrote two chapters, the problem of architecture as an institution was finally breached. The volume established the scheme of a division of labor that had been strangely missing from most architectural histories, and has made it the definitive text. Although Kostof never broke ranks—in the late 1970s, for instance, he served a term as the president of the Society of Architectural Historians—he tended to listen more seriously to cultural geographers and urban historians than to those from his own field. Instead of the deadly formalist comparisons of great works and geniuses pursued by architectural connoisseurs, he demanded we look at the process of building and compare urban environments across cultures. After two decades of developing an integrated, multicultural vision of archi-

tecture with his colleagues and students at Berkeley, he published his great text, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (Oxford University Press, 1985). It is an inclusive history that grants non-Western, urban, and vernacular issues as much attention as the canonical works.

During the last decade Kostof, aside from his appearances in academia, lectured tirelessly to civic organizations and professional groups across the country, trying to convince them of how people are responsible for the design of cities. In 1987 he conveyed this message in a five-part PBS television series, *America by Design* (for which he was forced to decelerate his usual breakneck pace of delivery in order to be understood by the average TV viewer).

Kostof has not been alone in his disinvestment of the elitist trousseau of architectural history, but his books put him confidently at the fulcrum of a field where the subject is no longer autonomous works of architecture but a complex fabric of civil, professional, and geographical processes. A man died but his discourse is alive and well.

Richard Ingersoll