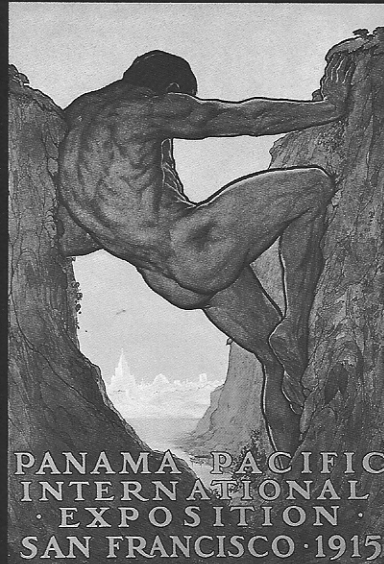


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William Pierson, Jr.:
AMERICA'S CASTLE

Debora Silverman:
**THE ANTHROPOLOGY
OF WORLD'S FAIRS**

Andrew Rabeneck:
**Renzo Piano, Jean Prouvé,
Cedric Price**

Aaron Betsky:
MITCHELL/GIURGOLA

Dell Upton:
**Vernacular Building of
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MONUMENTS AND MAIN STREETS

HARRIS STONE

Harris Stone introduces *Monuments and Main Streets* by suggesting that it follows a line of investigation touching on modern architecture in relation to art, work, nature, and the machine. If so, the line is irregular and disjointed, the attention given each subject inadequate, and the questions poorly put. At the same time, this work is not aimed at the scholar but at a larger public audience, and it points up problems in architecture that even many professionals refuse to admit exist.

Stone's credentials are credible enough. An architect and teacher at Kansas University, he spent many of his formative years as an environmental activist attempting to retake New Haven, Connecticut for the people who live there. As a member of the city's Redevelopment Authority and other community action groups, Stone continually battled the corporate, institutional, and bureaucratic interests that dominated urban planning and decision making.

One outcome of these efforts was *Workbook of an Unsuccessful Architect* (Monthly Review Press, 1973), a series of essays describing Stone's experiences, interwoven with statements about architecture. He concludes—with a classic Marxist argument—that architects are prevented by the forces of the political economy from making social and artistic statements that relate a structure to both its social and physical setting. The format of the *Workbook* reflected Stone's pluralistic tendencies. Writing directly in longhand on pages ready for photographic reproduction, complete with his own line drawings, he developed a less costly alternative to traditional publishing techniques. The end prod-

uct is a quick and inexpensive copy format that gives the reader the sense of work in progress on a subject at once personal and didactic.

Monuments and Main Streets is a continuation of the *Workbook* in aim, content, and style. In page after page of rather ordinary handwriting, and finely drawn but often curiously unemotional pen-and-ink sketches, Stone darts about, probing the soft underbelly of architecture in an attempt to find a point of entry for the changes he sees as necessary. The author contends that his second book "poses new questions that produce a refinement of my analytic technique into a series of verbal and visual tracings." He compares this methodology to the architect's use of a base drawing over which are laid a series of drawings that define and detail the ideas underneath.

If this methodology seems overly structured, the content is even more so. There are four major chapters in the book, or "messages" as Stone calls them. "From the Media and the Fields" first takes on the messages sent by such current architectural stylists as Kurokawa, Eisenman, Graves, and the rest of the Post-Modern bunch—finding them devoid of relevant content—and then relates Stone's attempt to create a utopian community on a farm in Massachusetts, dedicated to evolving new principles for a relationship between people and their building. "From the Past" deals with great architecture through history, which is somehow limited to a study of round buildings. "Of Belief" discusses a passion that supersedes style—not necessarily successfully, in the work of Kahn, Mies, and Gropius, though Alvar Aalto comes off well. In "From Main Street" we move from an "ancient path" in Italy to New Haven, Connecticut, in what I presume Stone considers an unbroken line.

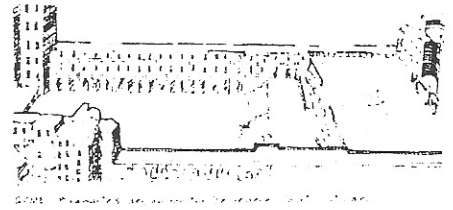
The framework for these messages is the dialectic between the sacred and profane in architecture, the "monuments and main streets," set against a panorama of forward-thrusting and

backward-leaning tendencies in design. The overall result is an unusually complex statement, accomplished in a very broad sweep, that inexplicably denies the notion of a popular tract.

Passion is required for anything, including intellectual exploration, to succeed well. Stone has it, and his exuberance in trying to convey his innermost beliefs, as well as his willingness to admit his confusions is rather endearing. He makes you wish that the world were a simpler place, if only to make his task easier. Unfortunately, as Stone's own work reveals, a better world of architecture and building requires a carefully orchestrated scenario of a collective consciousness (and unconsciousness) bound to a vision of a delicate balance between unrelieved order and uncontrollable disorder.

Stone, the old-line activist and socialist regular, would have the *people* determine the outcome of this ongoing dilemma in creating a humane environment. But even this requires a program. In the most engaging essay of this new book, Stone describes his *Factory in the Field*, a student seminar that tried to develop a new approach to architecture, using industrial technology, through the creation of a self-sufficient community of artisan/craftspeople. Like most utopian communities, the *Factory in the Field* was ill-fated. Stone concludes that, "Our efforts were doomed to endless trial and error, for we never formed a clear concept of our relationship as builders to the tools we were using and the structure we were working on." This is not surprising since few as yet have understood building as a *process*. Where this leaves the people is, indeed, difficult to imagine.

In the attempt to bring such themes to popular discussion, Stone overlaps the work done by others in three distinct areas: on the subject of the failures of modern architecture;¹ on the relationship between technology and culture;² and, on the precise demands of reasserting control over the built environment.³



If Stone has not matched these previous efforts, it is not from a lack of trying, but rather a lack of focus. Significantly, none of the books that provide a background to Stone's discussion (with the exception of Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House*) have succeeded in reaching a wide audience. None have been able to break through the sacred doors shielding the secret society of architects. Stone's abortive efforts in this direction are to be commended. By writing a people's book, and one with plenty of pictures, Stone will possibly reach a different, larger, and potentially more receptive audience. And this is without a doubt the first step to a better architecture, although not an inexorable and irreproachable program for change.

1. Among these books Brent Broolin's *Failure of Modern Architecture* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976) is probably the most thoughtful, Peter Blake's *Form Follows Fiasco* (Little & Brown, 1977) the most popular, and Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981) the most infamous.

2. Lewis Mumford's monumental series on technology and culture is the primary sourcebook on the subject. Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (Random House, 1967) is another probing study from a French Reformist viewpoint, while Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden* (Oxford University Press, 1964), which Stone quotes, is a highly approachable literary attempt.

3. For example John Turner and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build* (Macmillan, 1972) and *Housing By People* (Pantheon, 1977), as well as the numerous books on the subject by Christopher Alexander and his associates.