20.28. *Norman Foster, Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, Hong Kong, 1979–1985. In such megastructures the expressive force of engineering reaches its height. Photo: Ian Lambot/arcaid.co.uk.*

The Expansion of Modernism

From the Twentieth Century into the Twenty-First

. . . architecture is not a science. It is still the same great synthetic process of combining thousands of definite human functions, and remains architecture. Its purpose is still to bring the material world into harmony with human life. To make architecture more human means better architecture, and it means a functionalism much larger than the merely technical one. This goal can be accomplished only by architectural methods—by the creation and combination of different technical things in such a way that they will provide for the human being the most harmonious life.

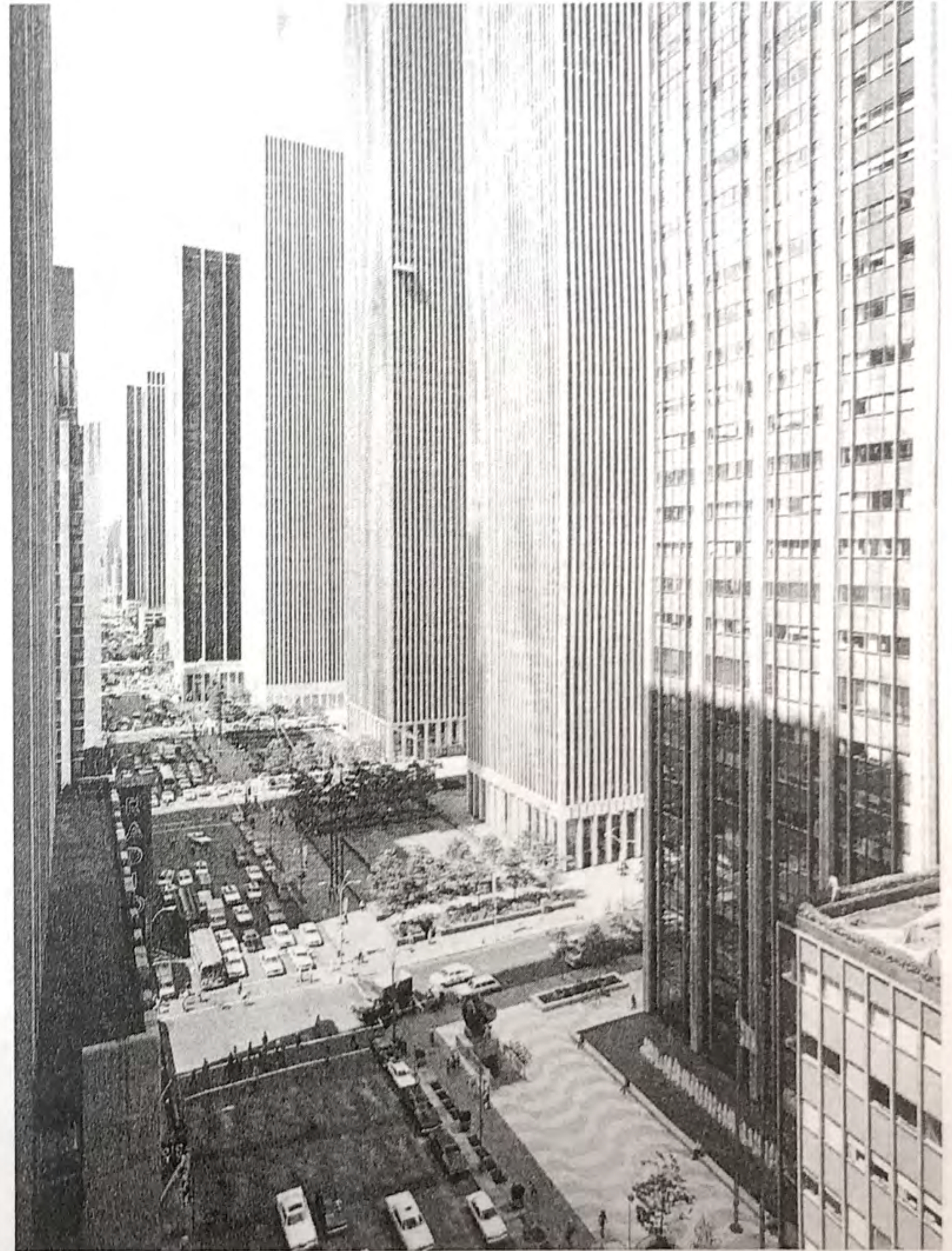
—*Alvar Aalto, "The Humanizing of Architecture,"* 1940

I believe that today there is a need for images, for emotion in architecture; a need for architecture to speak once again to people, to become "presence" once again, to become material, to reacquire a meaning that can sometimes be erotic; a need to reestablish a partnership with people, after decades in which architecture was so antiseptic, distant, after the International Style ruined all possibility of communication.

—*Mario Botta, interview with Stuart Wrede, in* Mario Botta, 1986

International Modernism or Canonical Modernism, as defined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932 in their momentous exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was an architecture of normative standards, of sharp-edged industrial forms built of steel, concrete, and glass, an architecture that rejected the use of axially directed space in favor of random movement. By the late 1930s this aesthetic was being championed by architectural journals and by many architects who were convinced that this architecture was the most appropriate for the twentieth century (though there were some who pursued a more personal design path). Aside from a few isolated examples, such as the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building in Philadelphia, this sort of modernism was not widely embraced in the United States before 1940. Then, during World War II, civilian building essentially ceased in Europe and the United States between 1939 and 1945. After peace was achieved, and the European émigrés such as Gropius and Mies van der Rohe among many others were established in the United States, industrially driven modernism was embraced by corporate capitalism in this country and, with the emergence of the United States as a dominant economic and political power after the war, was exported around the globe.

The earnest social utopianism of earlier European Modernism of the 1920s and '30s, of early Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, was replaced after 1945 by a featureless standardized commercial aesthetic, exemplified by sleek, machine-like buildings, stripped of traditional ornament. This corporate modernism appeared in office and apartment towers, in suburban office parks, schools, and shopping centers. As the production of building assemblies also became standardized, modernism became increasingly cost-effective and was enthusiastically supported by the financial and corporate worlds. As Diane Ghirardo observed, it was not difficult to endlessly copy steel frames and glass curtain walls[1] [20.1]. Nonetheless, some postwar architects—Eero Saarinen, Jørn Utzon, Le Corbusier, and others—shaped their Modernism as a means of highly personal self-expression; and other individuals and groups, such as Buckminster Fuller, Superstudio in Italy, the Archigram Group in England, and the Metabolists in Japan, created what Ghirardo has described as "hyper-celebrations of the supposedly liberating possibilities of endless technological development" that "swept away any tedious connection with reality."[2]



20.1. Sixth Avenue at 50th Street, New York, NY. The hard sterility of the mid-twentieth century is evident here, with repeated glass-sheathed boxes reflecting each other, seemingly unendingly. Photo: Ezra Stoller © Esto. All rights reserved.

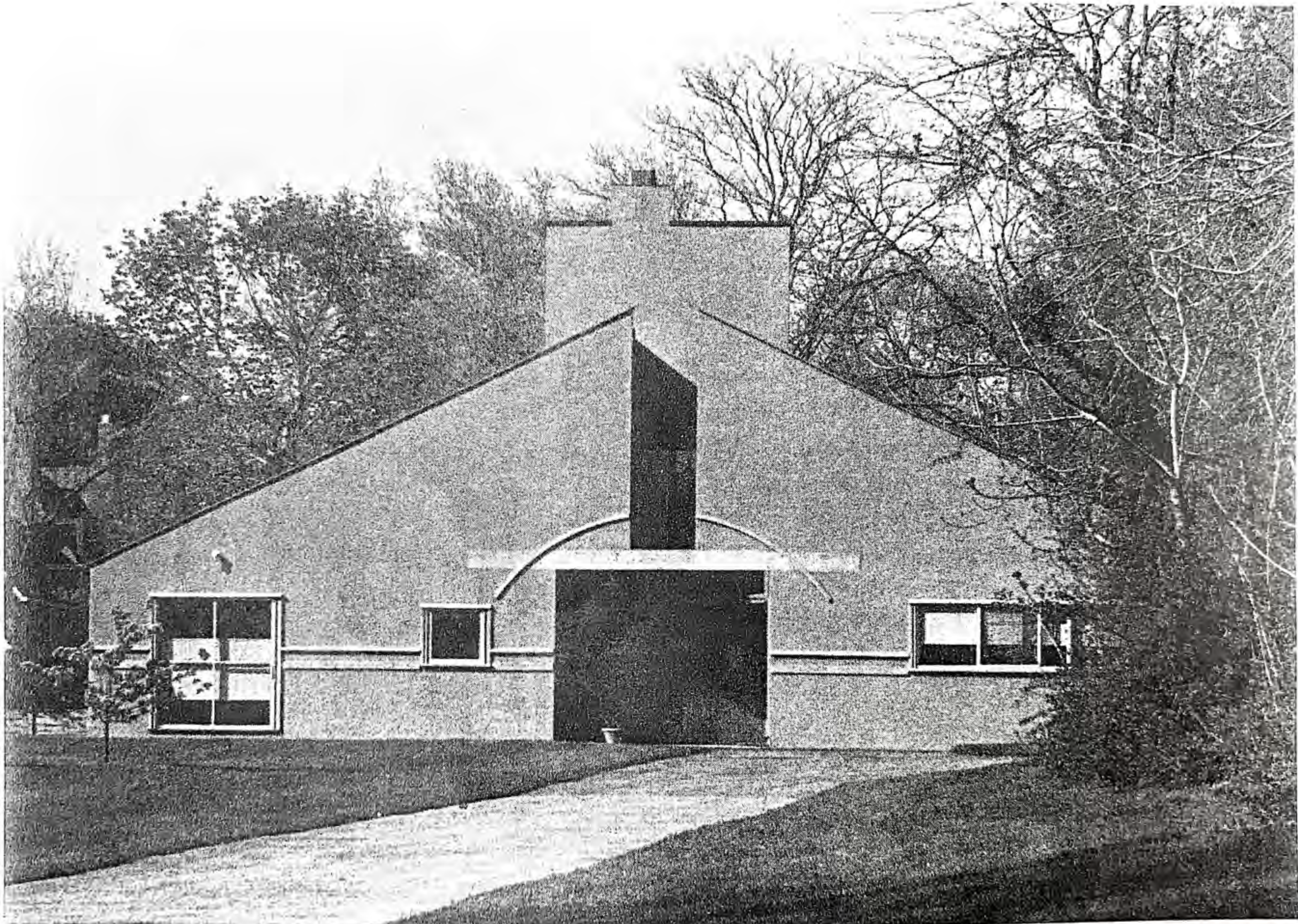
Modernism literally began to show cracks by the 1970s and even to fail in spectacular and horrific ways. One highly visible example, as already noted, was the self-destructing windows of the incomplete John Hancock Tower in the mid-1970s. Another was the failure of Modernist planning principles in the service of urban renewal of the 1950s that produced the social collapse of the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in Saint Louis, precipitating its dramatic demolition in July 1972. Far more serious, however, was the structural failure of elevated walkways in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri, built in 1978–1980. The collapse, which occurred just about a year after the building was completed, was due both to the minimalist structural detailing so as to be virtually invisible and also to the construction methods of suspending the aerial atrium walkways. This disaster, the single worst American building failure arising solely from architectural design and the engineering of the construction process, was the direct result of the Modernist impulse to appear to defy gravity.[3]

Well before these building failures, however, during the mid-1960s there appeared several books challenging the increasingly empty character of Modernism and the misguided aims of Modernist urban planning and urban renewal. First appeared Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which attacked the Modernist notions of rebuilding blighted urban areas and replacing living neighborhoods with sterile high-rise towers. Hassan Fathy's *Gourna: A Tale of Two Villages* (1969) exposed the unsuitability of Western Modernism in solving housing issues in developing countries such as Egypt. Also highly critical was Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City* (1966). Perhaps the smallest book had the greatest impact in redirecting the course of modern design. This was the "gentle manifesto," Robert Venturi's slender volume entitled *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), which addressed the lack of communicated meaning in Modernist architecture. This small but richly illustrated book was the result of decades of reflection on what Venturi (born 1925) had studied during two years at the American Academy in Rome. He came to see that buildings from the past (and there was no shortage of examples in Rome)—both famous monumental architecture as well as ordinary vernacular buildings—were admired and cared for in proportion to their degree of com-

plexity and layered meanings. Such buildings were double coded, he suggested, with multiple and sometimes contradictory intentions. What architects had to rediscover, he argued, was how to create a modern architecture that drew from the structure and materials modernists had developed in the early part of the twentieth century, while also incorporating ornament and visual references to the past and to local tradition. Architects had to avoid "either-or" formulaic design solutions in favor of "both-and" solutions in search of "the difficult whole," as he put it. What Venturi proposed in this new design approach to counter the blandness of Modernism was Postmodernism, as it was labeled by subsequent theoretical writers though Venturi did not use the term himself.[4]

Postmodernism Emerges

Coming out of his teaching at the University of Pennsylvania from 1954 to 1965, Venturi's "counterrevolutionary" principles were manifested in several of his early buildings, which attracted a great deal of critical attention. His initial experiment in this new mix of new and old was a house for his mother, in the inner suburbs of Philadelphia, but his first public demonstration of this philosophy was provided in an apartment house for elderly Quakers, Guild House, Philadelphia, 1960–1965 [20.2, 20.3]. The plan was complex, contained in a block that stepped back from the entrance at the sidewalk; the individual apartments, therefore, had irregular floor plans similar to those in apartment blocks of the 1920s. The red brick exterior was based on the surrounding ordinary brick industrial buildings of this dense urban setting. Yet Venturi also suggested the organization of a Classical building in the white tile base and the band of white glazed brick that sets off an attic story. The broad segmental window of the upper lounge recalled Classical pediments, and there was even ornament provided in the gold-plated television antenna at the very center; it was, in fact, a symbolic antenna, since in those pre-cable television days the real working antenna was at the back of the building. Venturi found a way to combine abstract references



20.2. Venturi and Rauch with Cope and Lippincott, Vanna Venturi house, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1959–1964. In the early 1960s, when the minimalism of International Modernism was still dominant, Venturi composed a modest house for his mother that incorporated in abstracted form a classical pediment, articulated by decorative moldings. Photo: Courtesy of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Associates.