

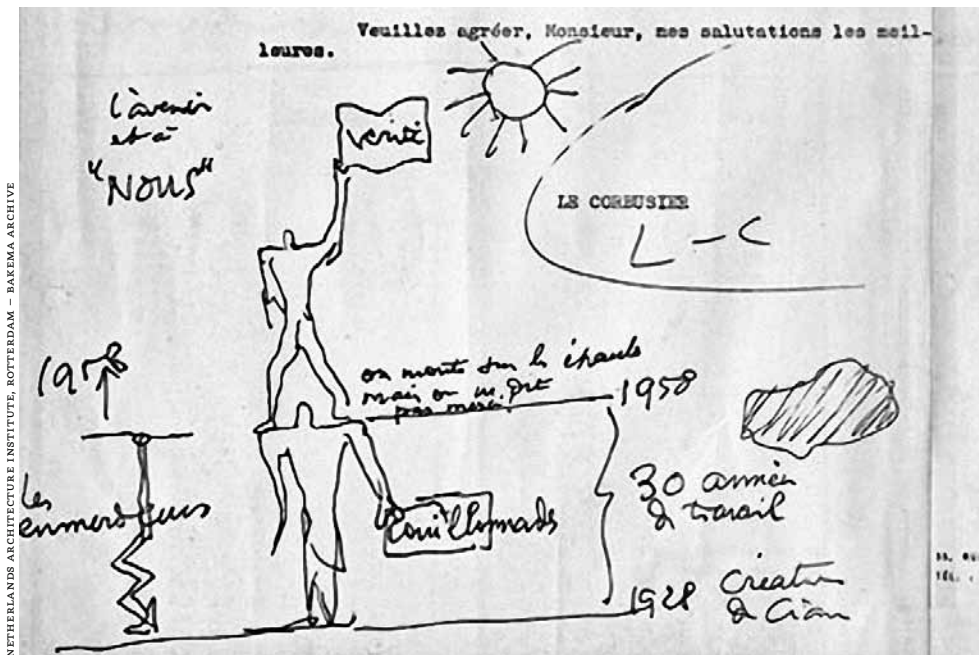
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# CONCRETE GARDEN

The housing estate – a grey linear reality of Polish towns – rarely arouses positive emotions. It is most commonly perceived as a sick whim and a great mistake of modern architecture. Alienation and social pathologies lurking beneath prefabricated architecture have cast a shadow on the rich discourse of modernism, which lay at the heart of post-war mass urbanisation. Its motor was a utopian vision of a brave new world, a Garden of Eden without wars, sickness or hunger. Unlike many earlier utopias, the post-war one was implemented. Showing no consideration for surroundings nor energy usage costs, 20<sup>th</sup> century modernists created an extremely anthropocentric programme that forever changed the human environment. Modernism triumphed throughout almost the entire world with a series of monumental complexes, with Polish ones being just one example among many, and not necessarily the most intriguing or irritating.

The desire to build a new world was an idea which frequently accompanied disagreement on the subject of the encountered reality. The history of modern architecture is full of rebellion and desire to fight the social system and diseases of civilisation, which pushed artists and builders towards a vision of a new – and thus a better – world. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, architectural modernity has been understood in military terms – as a heroic struggle with tuberculosis, illiteracy, poverty and inequalities of a society based on class. According to war logic, architects of the modern era pushed their own statue of arbiter of beauty off its pedestal, which – aware of tradition and history – they themselves had erected with the aim of expressing higher ideas and feelings. Instead of remaining in the hitherto splendour of being connoisseurs of the ideal, architects ‘descended from the heights’ to deal with the real current problems of everyday life, which they could almost touch in the increasingly large and complicated towns of the era of the industrial revolution.

Transforming themselves from engineers of beauty into engineers of society, architects of the modern era also made attempts to define anew the real living needs of people. Full of faith in technology, architects sought to subordinate people’s everyday rhythm, habits and environment to the logic of the machine. The appearance of steel, tempered glass and reinforced concrete turned aesthetic paradigms in architecture upside down and pushed architecture towards abstraction, the simplest forms and meanings. The departure from the ‘zero point’ propagated by modernists allowed construction of both the world and humans anew. While the end of the First World War brought about a collapse of faith in the bourgeois and aristocratic ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the end of the Second World War saw a whole generation of designers shaped in a new spirit faced with the task of rebuilding from the destruction caused by the military cataclysm.



A fragment of Le Corbusier's letter to Jacob Berend Bakema from 5 July 1961. The drawing presents Team 10 standing on the shoulders of CIAM.

The end of the biggest war in modern history, and a turning point in Europe, pushed a generation of pupils of the first modernists towards creation of a utopian vision of the world of the future. Instead of looking to the wisdom of the past – the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal – there was a sudden desire to discover the future and realise it here and now. This breakthrough moment returned repeatedly on various cultural planes. In 1948, Roberto Rossellini in the last film in his war trilogy, *Germany – Year Zero*, directed his camera on a thirteen year old boy wandering aimlessly through the rubble of ruined Berlin. The world in which he had grown up had just collapsed. The church, school, state, and family which shaped his identity had ceased to exist or were no longer of any significance. Surrounded by rubble – both real and social – the boy was a symbol of hope for the emergence of a new world. In the brutal image of the Italian neorealist, the life of the young German was crushed by the environment, dominated by the defeated and humiliated Nazis. However, more important than the complexities of the

plot – into which crime and personal tragedy are interwoven – was the symbolic expression of a vision of youth and innocence brutally confronted with the atrophy of the world.

Rossellini's picture expressed the need for a new beginning (which was important in the post-war epoch) which was faced with the violence of a successive conflict – this time the Cold War – where the main victors of the fight with Nazi Germany turned on each other. The first nuclear explosions carried out on both sides of the Iron Curtain now dividing Europe added to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty regarding the future. Successive Cold War crises were played out far away from Europe, mainly in former colonies, but at the same time they cast a long shadow on life in the whole post-war world. Almost in spite of this ominous atmosphere, and following on from the need for a new beginning, the post-war world experienced a demographic explosion instead of a nuclear explosion.

This new phenomenon constituted a huge opportunity and challenge for architects working after the war. The permanent political crisis and the demographic boom coincided in time with technological advances driven by Cold War military rivalry. The development of aviation, including civil aviation, resulted in the emergence of a new building material – aluminium. The conquest of space, which began at the end of the 1950s, the increasingly fast development of motorisation and the ever greater availability of mass media, including television, also brought about changes in the way of thinking about towns and the human environment. The more time elapsed from the Second World War, the more technological developments were applied in construction.

The first changes were felt just after the war. In 1947, after a ten year break, CIAM, the International Congress of Modern Architecture, met again in the British town of Bridgwater. From this moment, successive meetings of an increasingly large group of modern planners and architects were organised regularly every two years. Post-war CIAM activities were characterised by an atmosphere of growing generational conflict. While the doyen of the group, Le Corbusier, presented plans of the Marseille *Unité d'Habitation*, his junior colleagues, including people who had until recently been his collaborators, increasingly boldly criticised the master. The 9<sup>th</sup> CIAM Congress, organised in the town of Aix-en-Provence near Marseille, was a watershed. During this meeting, the younger participants openly criticised their senior colleagues and

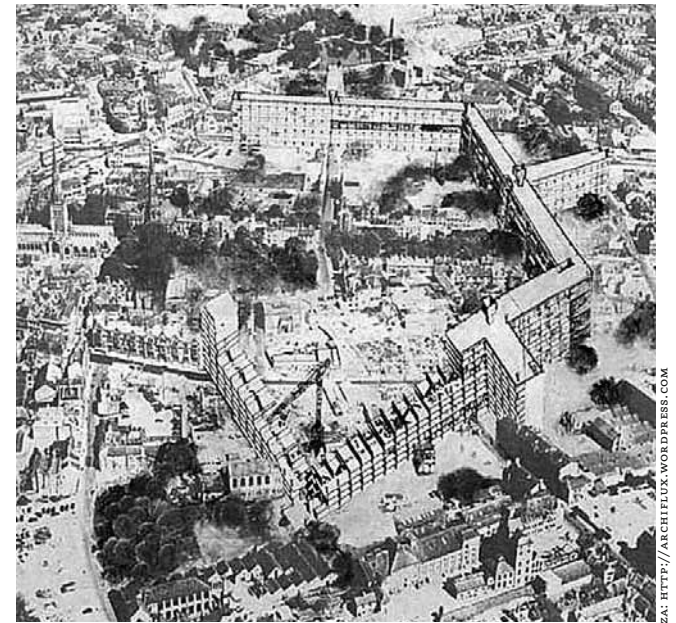
Design of the Golden Lane Estate, Alison and Peter Smithson, 1952

ultimately caused a split in the group, leading to the setting up of a new body – Team X.

One of the leaders of the rebellion, Peter Smithson, argued that the development of modernism up to that point had led architects astray. Fascination with technology and thinking about living in terms of an industrial machine meant that although 19<sup>th</sup> century slums had disappeared, alienating boredom, predictability and repeatability had appeared in their place. Architecture, in his opinion, should go further, in the direction of construction of a new human environment. For this reason, for Smithson's generation, the key to the building of a new classless, democratic environment was harnessing the possibilities inherent in urban planning. The core of Team X was made up of Jacob B. Bakema and Aldo van Eyck from Holland, Alison and Peter Smithson from Great Britain, Giancarlo De Carlo from Italy, and also the Greek architect Georges Candilis, working in France, as well as the American Shadrach Woods. They were all involved in planning projects, shaping the post-war order in their countries. A year after the spectacular schism, the new group published the celebrated *Doorn Manifesto*, a document in which they rejected

the idea that the duty of the architect was to design individual houses and instead preached the need to understand a building as an element in a broad social context. The focus of the architect's creativity was to be the *Habitat*, the environment of human life and functioning of the community, whose shape and degree of density should be dependent on availability of means of transport.

Interaction was one of the concepts eagerly analysed by participants in Team X; the stimulator of social life and the generator of identity. Peter Smithson and his wife Alison also considered that architects should ask themselves the question: ethics or aesthetics? Humans and their way of functioning in modern civilisation, as ideas located at the heart of utopia, necessitated the application of specific urban solutions. In 1953, in parallel with the split within CIAM, the Smithsons managed to implement one of the first of their own projects, a secondary school in the British town of Hunstanton. The complex of simple modernist buildings at first sight resembles a factory. The architects rejected the aesthetics of the white box – typical for early modernism – leaving material from which the object was really built visible: brick, steel and raw concrete. In the case of this complex, the form was literally the result of the function, and the elevation was a derivative of the distribution of the interior space. Many years later, the school in Hunstanton was acknowledged as the first example of brutalism in British architecture.



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At the same time, the two Britons who had worked briefly for the London County Council, where they were involved in planning of the rebuilding of London, took part in a competition for the Golden Lane Estate project, a vast residential complex situated in a part of town that had suffered heavy bombing. Their vision was a complex of buildings, in fact one multi-story housing block, which, like a snake, zigzagged its way through the defragmented building development. Smithsons' Golden Lane Estate was supposed to be composed of linear brutalist structures and, at its inception, was the first of these types of complexes in Great Britain. Another innovative idea was invoking the British tradition of terraced housing and introducing the so-called 'streets in the sky' into the structure of blocks. The traditional terrace of Palladian terraced housing was here multiplied on several levels, creating a building with outside corridors. Wanting to gain the acceptance of the audience for their competition ideas, the Smithsons decided to use visual manipulation. They prepared the project charts using



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Smithdon High School, Hunstanton, Norfolk, designed by Alison and Peter Smithson, 1949–1954





Current view of the Robin Hood Gardens housing complex, designed by Alison and Peter Smithson, 1969–1972

photomontage, inserting photographs of film stars, including Marilyn Monroe into the new context. Well-known figures, associated with wealth and splendour, were there to give the ultramodern building a positive, implicitly exclusive image.

The plan for the Golden Lane Estate did not win the competition, but aroused controversy and became well-known; it was one of the first urban visions associated with the philosophy of Team X, in which the real architectural structure was the result of social needs. A dozen or so years later, the Smithsons were able to return to their urban planning ideas, designing Robin Hood Gardens – two brutalist housing blocks, whose characteristic elements were ‘streets in the sky’ and also folds introduced in lines of buildings. This theme appeared for the first time in 1952 in the “Cluster City” project, a seemingly chaotic structure reminiscent of biological tissue, which was supposed to link the architectural and social structure and also place human interactions at the centre of attention. The fold in the

endless line was supposed to suggest a formal reference to the world of biology. This theme was present in the works of many architects belonging to Team X. The group, which since the seminal meeting in Aix-en-Provence had operated for almost three decades, generated lively debate and constituted the most important voice in the discourse on late modernist urban planning.

One of the leading polemicists in this environment was Shadrach Woods, of American descent, who gained his first stripes under the supervision of Le Corbusier during work on the Marseille *Unité d’Habitation* (housing unit) project. In 1954, Woods’ proposal won in *Opération Million*, a competition for an urban planning project, which was supposed to be implemented as part of a government plan of the mass urbanisation of French towns and territories subordinate to France. The name itself of this initiative is surprising, suggesting the intention of building a million new homes by the Fourth Republic. The French state – humiliated by the defeat in Indochina,

but still before the failed occupation of the Suez Canal and the ruinous war in Algeria – wanted to strengthen the economic development emerging from post-war reconstruction and undertook a task on a scale surpassing all the most daring earlier visions of contemporary urban planners.

In the described period, Shadrach Woods, the architect George Candilis and the builder Victor Bodiansky co-created the ATBAT-Afrique (*Atelier des Bâtitseurs*) office, a company operating in North Africa, co-owned by Le Corbusier. Under its aegis, they designed a range of housing estates, offered primarily to migrants who at that time were increasingly eagerly moving from the depths of the African continent to the coastal cities of Morocco and Algeria. In Casablanca, they erected the extensive *Carrières Centrales* complex, where they applied the traditions and customs of Muslims originating from the desert to the language of multi-story modernist blocks. Just as in the works of the Smithsons, in Woods’ African projects, one can see gallery communication systems, from which lead entrances to flats. Their characteristic feature was extensive balconies that were – most importantly – surrounded on all sides by high walls, which imitated the traditional patio of the Bedouin home. Elements of humanisation and sensitivity to identity and the specific nature of the local culture have been preserved here, but at the same time, the belief that humans are malleable beings, capable of changing their behaviour and habits, is also evident.

*Cité verticale*, designed by ATBAT-Afrique, Shadrach Woods, Georges Candilis, Carrières Centrales, Casablanca, Morocco, 1953

Even before winning the *Opération Million* competition, in the face of growing political crisis, Woods and Candilis returned to Paris, where they created a joint architectural studio, which in time became the main propagator of the ideas of Team X in France. The third partner in this office was Alexis Josic, who came from Yugoslavia. The Candilis–Josic–Woods partnership was from the end of the 1950s involved in the creation of tens of thousands of flats, forming part of a series of gigantic urban projects, built on the initiative of and using funds from French state institutions. The Bobigny Estate, which was ready for use in 1958, was one of the earliest of these types of complexes built in the suburbs of Paris. The estates, which are currently inhabited by immigrants from the former colonies who systematically vent their anger at the Fifth Republic, were erected as a prestigious and priority project of the Fourth Republic and also as a fulfilment of dreams of a whole generation of architects-modernists. In the following years, Woods' company also prepared plans for an enormous new housing development in the northern part of Paris. Drawn up in 1965, the Paris-Nord plan promoted the subordination of the logic of urbanisation to a regular orthogonal network, transforming the capital of France into a gigantic linear system.



SHADRACH WOODS COLLECTION, DRAWINGS AND ARCHIVES, AVERY ARCHITECTURAL AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY/COURTESY OF NAI PUBLISHERS



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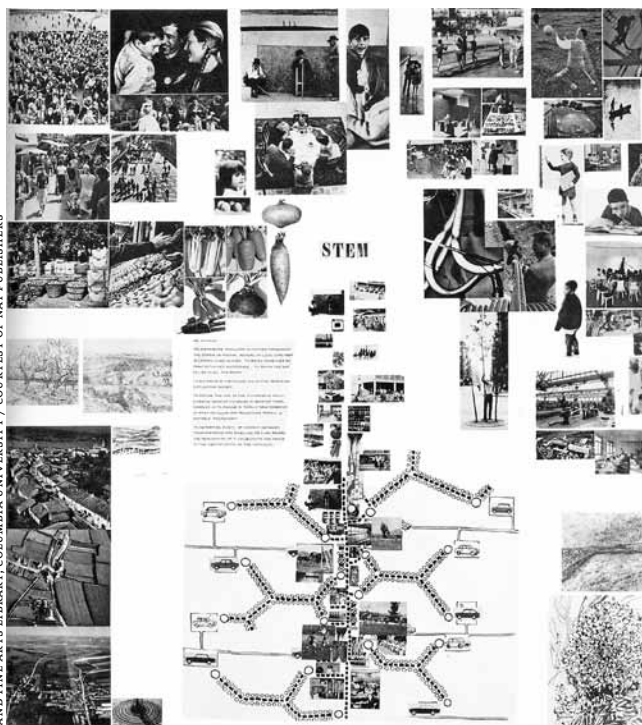
The utopia of democratisation of space and giving equal chances to all inhabitants pushed post-war urban planners towards ever further-reaching experimentation. People were to have a free right to use everything that the metropolis offered. The system of mass communication constituting the backbone of development of the linear town was ideally suited to this purpose. Through analysis of these issues, Shadrach Woods, who had undoubted polemic talent, developed a new vision of organisation of space in the 1960s, which he named the 'Stem'. He proposed that urban design should be based on social interaction and participation of the individual in the life of the district. The fourth dimension of architecture used by modernists – time – was treated here as an alternative way of constructing space, whose fundamental function is human mobility. Time, speed of moving and distance were to generate the character of a place. Space was no longer to be perceived only visually. At the same time, interpreting the problem of mobility in a modern city, Woods pointed out the need to build diversity of space in which people move, in order that they can identify with it.

The mass-scale utopia was here combined with the utopia of participation. Space referring to the idea of 'Stem' was to resemble the structure of a leaf. In time, Woods developed this concept, introducing another definition of non-hierarchical, democratic architecture, which he called the 'Web'. These two principles were expressed most fully in a project for the Free University in West Berlin, realised by Woods jointly with Manfred Schieldhelm (1963–1973). The new university building is a low, extensive and orthogonal structure enclosed in a rectangle. Within this regular shape, architects inscribed a series of small courtyards, each of which, in turn, had a different shape and size. Their shape, like the ancient palace of Diocletian in Split referred to in Woods' descriptions, contained a complicated sequence of various spaces with similar aesthetic solutions. Just like in the Smithsons' projects, Woods consciously revealed structural materials – mainly concrete and steel promoted by the brutalists.

Woods' projects often operated on urban planning principles inspired by fractal geometry. Making use of the bends in the linear system of the block of flats applied

A bird's eye view on *Cité verticale*





Collage of Stem-concept, Shadrach Woods, 1961

where between the high, multi-family buildings forming hexagonal courtyards, the architects have introduced lower service buildings and green areas.

A modern humanistic utopia of a democratic city was fully realised in Toulouse, and Woods had the opportunity to make use of many of the urban planning measures in the repertoire propagated by him. The space, which was supposed to provoke people to interact and shape a modern identity, in time, however, evolved into a dystopia. In 2005, similarly to many other French estates, Le Mirail blazed, turning into a scene of street war between the police and the rebellious, excluded immigrant community. The social and political hierarchy did not disappear, but moved to another level. The concrete paradisiacal garden turned out to be a Hobbesian jungle, a place full of violence, whose residents are stigmatised and reduced to being members of a subclass. A city which was supposed to tear down hierarchies and break down class and ethnic divisions turned out to be a ghetto breeding poverty and exclusion. The war with these phenomena, which lay at the basis of modernism and projects such as Le Mirail, led to a physical war between the excluded and the oppression of the dominating system, turning utopia into its grotesque opposite. The vision of the birth of the modern human being, which modernism was based on, did not find reflection in reality, (instead) creating new barriers and social ruins in which people were not subjects, but just puppets.

Urban utopias of the post-war reconstruction era were implemented with varying degrees of success throughout the world. From 1956 onwards, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer were erecting the linear structure of Brasilia, the new capital of their country. In 1960, the Japanese urban planner, Kenzo Tange, presented a new vision of how to develop the Japanese capital. This architect, a Team X sympathiser who was fascinated by the works of Le Corbusier, used such terms as cell and metabolism in his presentation. He proposed erecting a colossal structure – extending a dozen or so kilometres – in the Bay of Tokyo, in which 10 million people could live. At the same time, on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, the Polish town planner and fine artist, Oskar Hansen, prepared the concept of the Continuous Linear System (see Fig. on p. 56). Hansen, who was also linked with Team X, translated a utopian vision of linear towns into the language of communist-era mass urbanisation, in accordance with which four lines of multi-family prefabricated buildings were to stretch for nearly 1000 km from the Baltic to the Tatra Mountains. Within a few years, in various parts of the world, utopia reached its zenith, and many more similar examples could be mentioned here. The era of utopian visions, however, ended as suddenly as it had started.

In 1969, the Candilis–Josic–Woods partnership ceased to operate. In the last year of their collaboration, the partners could observe the outbreak of the student revolts from the windows of their Parisian studio.

by the Smithsons helped in this. The bend created a closed shape resembling a fragment of a hexagonal honeycomb cell. The most developed project of this type by the Candilis–Josic–Woods office was a plan of the Le Mirail district in Toulouse. In 1966, the governments of France, Great Britain and West Germany signed a preliminary agreement concerning the creation of a joint European aviation company, which in the course of six years introduced the Airbus A300 design – one of the world's most popular passenger aircrafts – into mass production. In connection with the creation of a new factory in Toulouse – like Krakow after the establishment of Nowa Huta – the population doubled in the course of several years. With Airbus employees' needs in mind, within a decade the giant Le Mirail housing estate had been built for 40,000 inhabitants. It was completed at the beginning of the 1970s and is characterised by a network of fractals propagated by Woods,

Building at the campus of Freie Universität Berlin, designed by Shadrach Woods, 1963

a new estate can be without such foundations of modern marketing as images full of sunshine, smiles and hallmarks of luxury linked with a handful of slogans talking about ecology and balanced development meeting the needs of potential consumers, in other words the needs of people. In reality, beneath this new vision lie blocks on a scale and of a form that do not differ much from those of the post-war period. The only thing that really differentiates them is widespread private ownership and the ultimate rejection of the non-hierarchical paradigm, visible evidence of which is illustrated by ubiquitous fences and barriers. So what will remain of the utopian dreams of the modern human? So far the only utopia that has been consistently implemented is the housing estate.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY GEORGE LISOWSKI



So where is the human's place in the planning process? At least since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people and their needs have been printed on the banners of almost all utopian visions of the world of the future. People were supposed to be modern, to live in a garden city, in a machine-home, their life was supposed to be regulated by time, and lastly people were supposed to stop being afraid of their natural aesthetic needs and to return to nature, and also to the city, which they had previously been supposed to leave. The multitude of conflicting ideas which arose in the course of almost a century caused chaos and mistrust towards looking at a city in terms of big ideas. After the fall of modernism, a new utopia was not born. Contrarily, postmodernism led to commercialisation of space and its hierarchisation, generated by its enclosed estates.

Paradoxically, people and their needs still occupy a central position in the urban planning discourse. No commercial advertisement for

A view of Le Mirail estate in Toulouse, designed by Candilis, Josic, Woods, 1961

Under the slogan "It is forbidden to forbid!" the baby boomers spoke out against the conservative social mores and social model that had been imposed from above, the physical expression of the latter being monstrous modern complexes like Le Mirail. The breakthrough in social sciences and the social revolution propagated during the 1968 events hastened the crystallisation of postmodern ideas in architecture and spatial planning. The outbreak of the fuel crisis in 1973, when petrol prices rose more than six-fold showed that the hitherto development model, based on mass consumption of energy, made no sense. The concrete utopia of the founders of Team X was soon mocked and regarded as an anti-humanist aberration. But was it really just a dead end into which architecture was driven by faith in technology and the ability of humans to adapt? From the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is easy to see that postmodernism only named and classified the problems of modernity, but solved few of them.



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