

# How to live in a flat: A study over William Heath Robinson's representations on life in modern houses

Ceren ÇELİK<sup>1</sup>, Gamze ERGİN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> celikce@itu.edu.tr • Department of Interior Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> gamze.ergin@msgsu.edu.tr • Department of Interior Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul, Turkey

*Received: April 2021 • Final Acceptance: April 2022*

## Abstract

Radical changes have taken place on housing under the influence of modernism. These changes drove the writers, sociologists, philosophers, artists, architects, and designers of the period. Today, urban growth and narrowing housing spaces have increased the research on houses again. Upon closer inspection, contemporary houses show that the effects of modernism still last. Therefore, it is essential to examine the productions and discourses on housing to produce new, practical, and realistic spaces. This study examines modern dwelling through the illustrated book *How to Live in a Flat* by William Heath Robinson and K.R.G. Browne in 1936. As critiques of modernism, the satirical images in this illustrated book are still valid today to understand modernism's effects on the dwelling.

This paper deals with the development, symbols, interior features, and furniture of modern houses. The identity of the modernist house was questioned through this book by using phenomenological research as a qualitative research method. The paper examines modernist interiors with a comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, a discussion was held on future predictions by using inductive reasoning. These images offer a considerable amount of data on modern dwellings and decrescent living spaces from modernism until today. As a result, the study argues that examining the previous works will prepare a practical ground for future productions instead of predicting or defining a new residential life. In light of the data obtained, the study concludes that designing by evaluating the data of everyday life should be accepted as a prerequisite.

## Keywords

Dwelling, How to live in a flat, Modernism, Modern houses, William Heath Robinson.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of dwelling has been a significant factor that has various meanings for designers in different periods. Over the years, designers have produced utopias about how houses will be and predicted the life in them. How to sit, eat, work, come together at home are still a matter of research. Homes are in direct contact with people. It is what makes them more than a design object. The relationship between everyday life and homes is an essential topic for designers. Houses form the core of life in cities. Accordingly, utopias affect housing both in terms of concept and design. This situation has gained a new dimension with modernization.

Along with modernism, the concept of dwelling has become an idealized element and a product. As Corbusier (1993) mentions, the opposite situation is not to show interest in what makes up people's lives. However, modernization and home-based productions create a dilemma within themselves. Although the house stands at the center of the discussion, life at home -consciously or not- is excluded.

Objectivation in city life emerges as one of the most prominent results of modernism with industrialization (Talu, 2012). Through modernism, public life is rationalized completely, and housing was at the center of these ideals. Through this objectification, life at home has taken on a different dimension. Houses began to be perceived as photogenic objects, and everyday life did not fit into this fetish image (Garip & Çelik, 2020). Yet the house is the body of actions. It meets the physiological needs of people as well as business, hobby, and spare-time activities as a center of behavior (Després, 1991). And the utopian ideas generated are suggestions for this ideal life. The modernist period experiences this contradiction within itself. While the designers idealize the house and life in it, they also exclude the existing state of daily life. Yet, every future prediction on housing also tries to predict life inside the house. Every design act on housing is political and reveals a vision of life.

Architects are not the only ones who made intellectual and critical future predictions on housing. Various fields

of expertise are produced for dwellings due to their social nature. It is essential to study and understand these productions for the design discipline. Just as it is possible to examine the photographs of Charles Marville (1813-1879) or the caricatures of Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) to understand the 19th century Paris, it is possible to look at the productions of the period to examine the approach to home in the modern period. Alternative approaches help designers understand housing and domestic life through different perspectives.

This study aims to define modern housing through the illustrated book "How to Live in a Flat" by cartoonist William Heath Robinson and writer K.R.G. Browne. The illustrations of William Heath Robinson present a satire of modernism by documenting what modernity has brought to social life. The research examines the development of dwellings in the modern period through symbols, interior features, and furniture. It contributes to the literature by examining the influence of modernism on residential life by focusing on the caricatures of the period. The study is notable in that it consolidates architecture and satirical caricatures within the framework of modern housing.

## 2. Method

The identity of the modernist house was questioned through the illustrations in *How to Live in a Flat* using phenomenological research as a qualitative research method. The paper examines modernist interiors with a comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, holds a discussion on future predictions by using inductive reasoning. The purpose of the study is to analyze these data to form a basis for future housing. Lastly, the article offers a doctrine in light of these critical productions instead of a positive or negative comparison about the modern period. The study suggests that deriving and understanding the idea behind these interdisciplinary productions could help designers create better-living spaces.

Six cartoons were selected from the book *How to Live in a Flat* to examine Robinson's point of view and predictions in detail. The determinant in picking these drawings is that they provide

the most spatial data. Moreover, the article proceeds through the general approaches in Robinson's book. Based on these six images a general discussion was conducted. The study examines the illustrations under three main titles. The first title is about the structural features of modern houses and the situations that occur accordingly. The second main factor is the shrinking spaces and their effect on the interiors and their production. Finally, the third title examines the furniture productions. The gathered data is analyzed with a binary examination over the period analysis and future projection. The data ended with a table to observe the complete analysis of the period altogether.

### 3. Background

#### 3.1. Modernization of interiors and residential life

According to the United Nations, 7.78 billion people live on our planet in 2021. In 2030, this number is expected to increase by more than 1.2 billion. As stated in the United Nations "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), 68% of the world's population is expected to live in cities in 2050 (United Nations, 2017). In the meantime, the population keeps increasing day by day. The settlement patterns and residential life in cities are also changing. 10 more cities will become megacities, and there will be 43 megacities in the world by 2030 (World Economic Forum, 2019).

With the increasing urban population in megacities, the absence of urban areas for horizontal construction, and the difficulty of economic access, residential areas decrease. Along with these changes new lifestyles emerge. A way of life in which more household goods and services are shared. Smaller living spaces are becoming the norm. Concepts such as micro-living, tiny houses, and co-living are promoted for a life in standardized, cramped houses. However, this situation is nothing new but a part of the historical process.

Since the 19th century, modernism's function-oriented, machine-like space productions were designed for industrialized and crowded cities. Modern principles automated space and spatial activities with a functionalist approach (Greenhalg, 1990). Modernism con-

structed a new life ideal and these principles continue to affect life today as a result of industrialization.

Berman (1988) defines "being modern" in 'All that is Solid Melts into Air' subtitled 'The Experience of Modernity' as follows:

"...To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion, ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."

This paradoxical standardization has led to the transformation of the built environment with industrialization, rapidly developing technologies, and new production techniques that created new sociological effects (Berman, 1988). Life has become systematic with industrialization and mechanization, and architectural space production has also been rationalized with this approach.

According to modernism theorists, the modernization process since the 19th century impacted society and individuals towards rationalization (Tanyeli, 2013). Tanyeli (2013) states that modernism is based on the "illusion of a loss of form" whereas the city has never had a form. According to modernism, the city once had a morphology, but this shape has deteriorated over time. Modernism aims to reform city life (Tanyeli, 2013). However, space and society are in a dynamic relationship, and this relationship puts cities in continuous motion. Urbanites tend to change the imposed within the framework of the requirements of urban social life.

The influence of the built environment on social life politicizes it and makes it a research subject for many fields. In 1516 Sir Thomas More published *Utopia*. Thus, he implicitly criticized the

society of his time, igniting the literary tradition that defines the ideal life for the future, both for the Renaissance and the times we live in (Meyerson, 1996). Italian architects Leone Battista Alberti and Filarete sparked a utopian tradition of designing the ideal city (Meyerson, 1996). Social utopias aim to capture the 'better' within their framework. Since then, various utopian ideas have been produced and discussed in different periods. The initiation of these debates on social problems is critical for cities, architecture, and spatial production.

There were also discourses on housing in conjunction with the urban utopias that define the ideal urban life through modernization and aesthetic sterilization. Housing was the foundation of this idealized urban life. The idealized new world has accordingly transformed residential design by focusing on rational design and functionalism. Architects have used exhibitions to present their housing designs and to "educate" society. They exhibited their proposals on modern housing with architectural exhibitions such as the *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris in 1925 and the *Stockholm Exhibition* in 1930. "The Pavilion of the L'Esprit Nouveau" by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret was exhibited in Paris and created a remarkable impact with its roof terrace and fully industrially produced furniture (Ashby, 2017).

The utopian dream of modernity, which presents the ideal of realizing the house as a flawless, minimal, and functional machine, does not meet the personal needs in real life. Modernism emphasizes a design perception that prioritizes visual quality. Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida argue that modernism strengthens its negative aspects by increasing the dominance of visuality in the historical process (Pallasmaa, 2011). However, there were various predictions in the search for an ideal city and home life. In contrast to the sterile approach of modernism that denies the customizability of the private space, there have also been approaches that glorify individuality. They define the dwelling and the city as a whole by randomness and chaos. While some of these are utopian discourses that remain

on paper, some of them, like Le Corbusier's modernist productions, have been realized in different scales from housing to the cities.

There are diverse periods when it comes to modernist houses and modernists approaches to housing. Future predictions have put forward distinct views about modernist architects and home life. It is necessary to ask the following question to understand the architecture of a time: Who was in the world at that period? (Yürekli, 2010). This question is also valid for modernist times. Industrialization-related issues and the need for new housing have placed housing at the center of discussions and productions. It is possible to say that the basis of modern architecture is tuberculosis, not seeking a new style (Yürekli, 2010). Housing and its design have begun to exist in the lives of not only wealthy people but everyone. Le Corbusier (1993) states the following on this issue; the most rightful and primary occupation of every settled society; is to place people in houses. The dilemma of modernism begins here. Modern ideals put the dwelling at the center of the design and discussion and tried foreseeing daily life. However, by doing this, life at home is marginalized. In the following periods, this approach has changed and transformed.

Architecture is always a dream and functionality, the expression of a utopia, and a means of comfort (Barthes, 2008). Based on this view, it is possible to see that every architectural production is in this duality. While the modernist era puts the house at the center of the discussion, it excludes human life at home. Within this dilemma, each designer has taken different approaches. This exclusion may appear as a visual representation of everyday life or as neglect of life. However, this situation may also exist as the exclusion of life at the design phase. The home is isolated from human life. This situation gives rise to the desperately desired ideal home (Talu, 2012).

This duality can be seen, for example, in the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright. He communicates differently with the users. The motivation to design every single domestic item excludes the ability to personalize and own the place. The house becomes a fetish design object.

According to Corbusier (1929), a house is a machine for living in. In Corbusier's view, the elements of the house should be designed accordingly. Visuality is the basis of modern ideals. The sense of sight occupies a critical place in the writings of modernists. The privilege given to the eye in early modernist theory is revealed in Le Corbusier's words: "Only if I can see I am alive, I am an inveterate visual and I will remain, everything is in the visual, to understand it must be seen with clarity. I urge you to open your eyes." (as cited in Pallasmaa, 2011). These approaches provide context for ideal housing research and critical texts (Talu, 2012). For example, Smithson's most popular projects, the house of the future, were the most distinct ones. Ordered by the Daily Mail to suggest a future suburban living space, this sample house was full of ingenious little gadgets (such as a shower-hairdryer-beacon combination). However, the curvilinear plastic form inspired the principle of adopting new technologies to architectural structures and science fiction films of the time (Foster, 2013).

Modern interiors changed the way people cook, sit, study, sleep or arrange their furniture. The style of the furniture determines the interior of the house unambivalently. Various designers produced furniture in their design style during the period. In this context, Mies Van Der Rohe's Farnsworth House is an example. In this open-planned house, the furniture defines the interior with clear lines. It is unique and clear from the design of the seats to their placement. Ideal integrity is sought in the design. Many other modern dwellings have the same integrity aim.

Furniture is used as an element to determine the interior and lifestyle. This situation is also valid for the different functional spaces of the residence.

Similar approaches have been tried for kitchen design in various modern homes, and written and visual media have been produced for the ideal kitchen. In each production, there are sterilized forms of daily life adapted to this mechanic approach. Kitchen proportions were designed in the most appropriate way for human access. It is the case from bathroom units to every single item used in the kitchen. In these

wholly designed 'functional' houses, the existence of actions disappears. House becomes a sterile object. It is reflected in the photos as well. Although there are almost no people in the photographs published by the architects, there are objects that do not belong to the houses but are left there on purpose (Altinyildiz Artun, 2012). Photographs and drawings as representations of the modern house are the continuations of this objectification. Life at home is represented unlike what it actually is.

Not just architects but other disciplines have also produced ideas about the political aspect of the modern dwelling and its impact on social life. A house is a tool for every area of the design that feeds on these elements. The controversy created by the modern house influenced the critical illustrators and comics of the period. Twentieth-century intellectuals produced counter-utopias and cautionary panoramas, perhaps at best when the caricature was inherently cyclical rather than the best (Meyerson, 1996). They reflected their critical view of the current situation with caricatures and cartoons.

### 3.2. Caricatures, satire and architecture

The relationship between architecture and comics/caricatures has existed for many years. The relation between these concepts has been featured in many books, media, and academies in America and Europe. Academic interest in the history of American editorial cartoons, comic strips, and graphic novels has exploded in recent years in the United States, with more universities offering courses on the subject. Scholars in France, Germany, and Italy were among the first to pay attention to comic books critically (Roeder, 2008). In Europe, on the comic page, architecture has long been an important feature. Winsor McCay provided readers of the weekly *Little Nemo in Slumberland* with a complete compilation of modern American styles in the early decades of the twentieth century (Labio, 2015). The interiors have a significant role in these comics. Buildings have also played a vital role in the history of Franco-Belgian comics, particularly in the Twentieth Century's last

decades (Labio, 2015). The prominence of architecture in different mediums attracted the attention of many various institutions and architects back then. The architectural movement in Franco-Belgian comics was strong enough that the Institut Français d'Architecture held an exhibition called *Attention Travaux! Architectures de Bande Dessinée* in 1985, which featured hundreds of illustrations from classic and contemporary European comics (Labio, 2015).

Yet what are comics and caricatures? Is it an art form? Or is it a narrative? The most recent detailed study of caricature was conducted by art historian Ernst Gombrich and psychoanalyst Erns Kris. They perceive a clear distinction between caricature and comical art and, portrait caricature did not exist until the end of the sixteenth century (Smith, 1990). In 1985, with Will Eisner's book *Comics as Sequential Art*, perceiving comics as art in academic literature began. For Eisner, comics were sequential expressions with an artistic and literary aspect (Babic, 2013). Yet nearly everyone at a recent comics symposium at the University of Chicago wanted to avoid declaring comics to be an art form. Most of the people who drew and wrote comics stated that they had no desire to be lumped into this group by academic critics, while the majority of academic critics also stated that they had no such intention (Gunning, 2014).

While the discussion of 'art or not' includes many different factors, it is similar to architecture and design in this aspect. Architecture also finds itself in this discussion in many various states. So why is architecture significant for this field? Comics can practically map a life because of their spatial rules. It can depict a person's life on a single page (Chute, 2011). This state places comics and cartoons at an essential point for architecture. On the contrary, architecture and design are also relevant for this field. With the design revealing a story, these can be considered as two areas that feed off each other. The fact that diverse fields tell about life and its problems allows people of that period to conjecture the situation from different perspectives.

A film, a drawing, or a cartoon presents it to its audience by reconsidering

the present or the future. This impersonated form offers the opportunity to revisit the subject, think, and criticize from different perspectives. The satirical feature of the caricatures paves the way for new solutions and discussions by exaggerating reliable problems. However, this potential of the caricatures brings its risks. Modernism, which is a significant period in the intersection of architecture and caricature, is an example. The potential of the caricatures for architecture is considerably high. In addition, it is an indisputable fact for that period that caricatures and cartoons had a high impact on mass media and society's perspective on architecture.

When architectural tendencies coupled the Avant-garde's figurative inquiry with the logic of standardization and industrial production in the 1920s and 1930s, Central Europe underwent a significant revolution in the history of housing types (Neri, 2019). The suddenness and sharpness of this change re-created the typical house structure. The aim was to introduce and adopt people to this new model. But the fact that this change was quite different and sudden, drew a reaction. First, modernism's visual accumulation resulted in a resurgence of cultural stereotypes. This situation highlighted the image as a social construct more than everywhere else (Ratouis, 2019). In this process, the media had a noted influence on the popularization of modernism but, the new wave of urban construction, both small and large scale, quickly revealed many paradoxes and flaws (Neri, 2019).

Modern architecture became the focus of many different critiques. The satire of existing problems with this aspect also fueled the current media attention. Several artists created drawings on the subject. This diverse yet organic group of current cartoonists produced a steady supply of skits for the satirical, specialist, and even mainstream newspapers, many of which highlighted the primary influence of the new architecture on society and often did a better job documenting it than other types of critics (Neri, 2019).

*Simplicissimus*, a satirical German weekly magazine, published a Wilhelm Schulz cartoon titled "Neues Wohnen" (New Living) in 1929, illustrating the

psychodrama of a woman frustrated by modern architecture's extreme minimalism (Neri, 2019). In these cartoons, the reflections of modern architecture on the interior and minimalism are exaggerated. The caricatures draw attention to how life in the house is interrupted due to the Modern approach.

From this sudden arrival of modernism, England took its place in the period. In England, where the housing typology and life is quite different from what modernism offers, the modern interior began to be the leading element of discussions and caricatures. It took its place in many various media mediums in the Modern period and later. Osbert Lancaster, a cartoonist, author, and critic, published English architecture and interior design in the *Architectural Review*, which was reprinted as *Progress at Pelvis Bay* (1936) *Pillar post* (1938), *Home Sweet Homes* (1939) (Rosso, 2019). He drew a caricature in 1938 at *Pillar to Post* named *Twentieth-Century Functional*. He drew the dwellers too large a scale to emphasize the doll's house quality. Later Lancaster's satirizing style has been a regular source of humor in *Punch Magazine* (Powers, 2019).

One of the most important works of the period was *How to Live in a Flat* by cartoonist William Heath Robinson and writer K.R.G. Browne. The book is a sarcastic guide on how to live in modern times. Robinson's predictions about the house create an opportunity for discussion in a different dimension.

#### **4. Findings: Reading William Heath Robinson's modernism representations**

Future predictions, productions, and criticisms on housing maintain a significant role for design culture and new creations. It is required to understand and examine these productions properly. It will allow designers to perceive that period and to create new approaches in future productions. According to Lefebvre (2015), a utopia can be surprising in implications and consequences. Which places will be socially successful? How are these found? By what criteria? What times and rhythms of daily life are recorded and written in these spaces that are suitable for happiness? It is what is

considered fascinating (Lefebvre, 2015). In this context, William Heath Robinson's illustrations are both a criticism and a future prediction/utopia. While criticizing the modernist period by satirizing it, he creates new productions. The design potential and critical perspective of these productions are valuable and influential. In *How to Live in a Flat*, Robinson deals with various components of modern houses.

Born in 1872, British cartoonist, illustrator William Heath Robinson was published in popular magazines as an illustrator and humorous artist in the early 1900s. Having studied at Islington School of Art and The Royal Academy Schools, Robinson continued his career as a cartoonist, which he started with the desire to become a landscape painter. Robinson, better known for his strange, complicated machine drawings, has produced images that satirize chaotic events that happen randomly in human life by chance. He started publishing the "How to..." series that began with '*How to Live in a Flat*' in 1936 (Heath Robinson Museum, 2021).

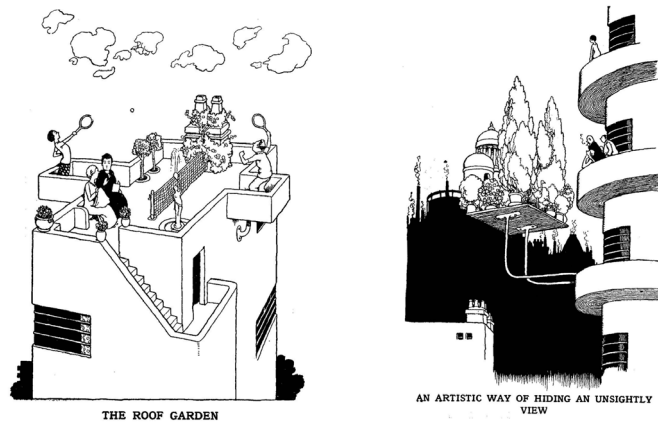
*How to Live in a Flat* consists of ten chapters. In the introduction section, the house is depicted strikingly with the evolution of the flat. The economy of space section addresses the minimum space-maximum function approach of modern housing critically. *The furniture and fittings* section envisages the multifunctional furniture of the time. *Pets and pets corners* question the place of pets in modern houses. The section on *sports and social amenities* deals with the social life envisaged by modernist housing and urban life. The book continues with *converted houses and service flattery* and *bungaloid sections*. It ends with the darker side of a flat life and tail-piece sections. It approaches the function-oriented state of modern housing that excludes daily life with a strong satire. In parallel with economizing the spatial needs of individuals, there is a reduction according to functions. While functions such as sleeping, eating, and sitting are highly valued, the given importance of vacation, leisure time, and visiting are reduced (Helle, 1996). The drawings are a representation of criticism of this situation.

#### 4.1. Icons of modern housing

Above all, it would be to the point to mention the symbolic structural features of the modern house. These features are very much depicted in the book. It is an impartially new approach for this period. In addition to living together in 'apartment' life, elements such as flat roof and metal construction, which are the physical elements of modern housing, have also been included in residential life. In the rapidly developing period, the process was interrupted in most places by the Second World War. After that, a period of rapid reconstruction began without even breathing. As a result, there was no time left to organize and deepen the search for solutions for the 20s. That was a shortcut and countless unmodelled, reduced and distorted copies of emerging forms of modern architecture were produced (Fischer, 2015).

With the effect of these rapid productions, the modern house found itself in the middle of many copies before it was fully developed. Robinson discovered this situation clearly and approached it critically in his book. He had an approach that also encounters the idea of modernism; the claim to offer everything. The sections were written in a marketing style with a modernist approach as if the houses are on sale for potential buyers.

There is a solution to every problem in Robinson's modern houses. He criticizes what modernism cannot provide with the solutions in his ideas. Flat-roofed buildings and social housing are mentioned in the book several times. The drawings describe every action and activity in the home circle. The reason behind it is to satirize the drive of the modern house to predict life. There are many examples in the book about sports that dwellers can do on a flat roof. These are visuals that critically approach man's relationship with nature. He illustrated the activities such as hiking and tennis on the rooftop, which does not fit its surroundings (Figure 1). The modern house also provides sports in city life. Even though they are out of context, there should not be even a single point where life is not predicted; that includes sport activities.



**Figure 1.** Robinson's representations of "The roof garden" and "An artistic way of hiding an unsightly view" (Robinson & Brownne, 1936/2014).

In the second illustration, the problem of this relationship with nature continues (Figure 1). The dwellers always want more, and Robinson portrays precisely their desire for natural life when living in the city. This desire is primarily taken care of by providing the visuality as in this image. Trees are on a platform connected to the buildings where the dwellers can see. Robinson portrays the distorted relationship established with nature. In the book, people who live in modern dwellings dream of returning to nature. But for this, there is a nature house proposal that modern architecture creates. Robinson proposes tiny caravan houses. The idea of returning to nature is offered to the wealthy urban dwellers. Houses in nature are designed and presented for those who are bored of the city as objects of desire. However, designs do not compromise comfort and luxury. Urban dwellers work and try to continue their lives in their pretty, overpriced houses in the city center. While doing this, the 'nature house' fantasy is also presented to the city dwellers. Remarkably, this cycle has continued similarly for hundreds of years. Robinson produced this work decades ago, yet it gives readers the chance to question the current situation.

#### 4.2. Interiors

Another striking point among Robinson's drawings is his foresight and criticism for interior spaces. The book examines life in the shrinking residential areas and the productions proposed by modernism within the framework. Robinson criticizes the idea of seeing the home as a machine and these functions attributed



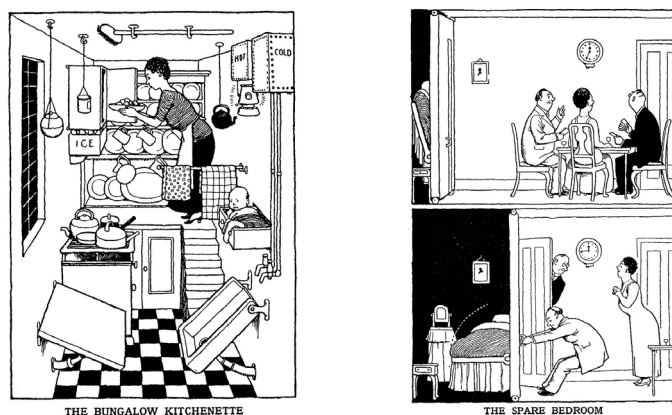


Figure 2. Robinson's representations of modern kitchen and a flexible room (Robinson & Browne, 1936/2014).

to the spaces through satire. The first of the striking images is about the kitchen space, which many architects have drawn on and produced examples. Corbusier's famous 'machine simile' mentioned in the background section and his approach to areas before-mentioned as kitchens are examples of these productions.

In modern housing, the kitchen has become one of the main issues of the house. It has been the core of the arrangement of exemplary life. In this ideal modern life, the kitchen will function like a machine that will "help women" be more involved in social life with the design that facilitates household chores (Moma, 2011a). There is an ideology behind this to change social life through the use of design and technology. The iconic "Frankfurt Kitchen" designed by architect Margarete (Grete) Schütte-Lihotzky is the most striking and principal example of modern kitchen design. Frankfurt Kitchen is produced like a laboratory or factory, designed with contemporary theories such as efficiency and hygiene (Moma, 2011b). The kitchen is encouraged to be designed in the most "functional" way, based on human proportions. Robinson also criticized these elements and produced his kitchen design. Each component is adaptable for usage in the small kitchens in Robinson's design (Figure 2). This kitchen provides maximum performance with the different levels and stairs. Daily objects are hung or attached to the place. The broom finds a position on the ceiling in this scenario. With this image, Robinson discusses how close these predictions are. Space is not a machine. It is a living space.

And life in this area does not work as predicted. The drawings reflect the existence of daily life. The elements rejected by modernism find their place in Robinson's illustrations as well as presenting their existence. The everyday life units such as the child in the kitchen drawer and floating cans are strikingly included in the scenario. Another concept that modern residences ignore in both representations and life predictions stands out in the second image: guests.

In modern productions, attention on roles such as guests is reduced to a particularly profound level (Helle, 1996). Robinson freshly approaches this situation with a critical eye. In addition to the household, there are guests as everyone experiences. In the "sterile" reality of modern life, this concept of being a guest is not common in representations. The house is dismantled from everyday life. The attributed daily life does not reflect reality. Either it is a representation of a sterile frame about the home, or it is presented with the perfect family living in the house. But a 'guest' coming to these images from outside is a stranger.

In his drawing titled *The spare bedroom*, there is a satire about the dwellings not designed for the guest (Figure 2). The house expands and transforms impossibly. It has an extra room with furniture inside. Robinson's ideas about the life and interior pattern of modern housing are critical. It is necessary to perceive the space and the possible actions in it accurately. Rather than classifying these actions under the name of a function, it reveals the necessity to think of them as elements that take care of space and life. In alternative scenarios, everyday life does not conform to these predictions. It should be the priority of a designer to think about the daily life elements. And construct their designs accordingly.

#### 4.3. Furniture

Furniture and its new production methods have a significant position in the modern period. It is also a notable matter in Robinson's illustrations. Tubular-steel furniture started to be produced with the new production techniques that emerged during the period. This advanced furniture style adapted aggressively to the modern world. Designs

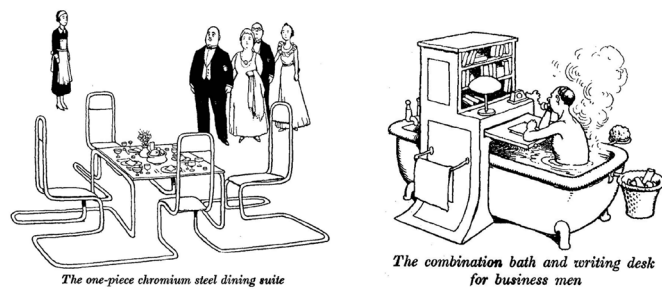
tried to achieve the comfort and good living ideals of the modern age by these new forms and materials (Sparke, 1990).

There are many illustrations of steel furniture. Tubular steel furniture was one of the most eye-catching modern design innovations. The new metal furniture was odd—even repulsive—to the general public, particularly in home settings (Rosso, 2019). Robinson critically approaches this situation. In the first image, he reconstructs tubular-steel furniture with this new production technique. He designs it by using a single piece of steel and points to the contrast by portraying highly dressed people as users (Figure 3).

In this period, the visuality and production methods of furniture gained interest. Robinson criticizes the uselessness of these pieces of furniture. He complements the fact that everything can be washed and collected at the same time by these easy-to-clean products. It is also a reference to the “purity” obsession of modernism. These cartoons not only revealed the metal tubes’ initial use, which was mainly as gas pipes, but also the raw nerve of their application in furniture: their coldness, not merely in terms of temperature (cold to the touch), but also in terms of looks (cold to sight) (Neri, 2019).

In the second picture, he criticizes the lack of space in modern houses and increasing work intensity by combining all functions in one piece of furniture (Figure 3). The user who is satisfied with the benefits of modernism continues to work during his bath. This representation reflects the bathroom combined with the work area and criticizes the shrinking spaces of the period. However, there is a diverse life in these ‘functional’ spaces. It is seen that the critical approach of this furniture preserves its validity when considered in today’s framework.

The effect of modernism and its after-effect on furniture is an undeniable fact. In the current period, the small residential areas and the spatial elements encoded in that space are intertwined. Furniture designs also reflect this condition. As an example from the current period, the usage areas have changed with the pandemic, and each piece of furniture has had to fulfill different ‘un-



**Figure 3.** Robinson’s representations of tubular-steel furniture and a multi-functional desk (Robinson & Browne, 1936/2014).

able to serve’ functions. At this point, the “businessman desk” (Figure 3) with this critical approach where multiple functions are combined is a problem that is also present in today’s residences. The furniture that could not change or transform and provide intended functions had to face these changes. It is vital that the furnishing produced in the new period can serve the small residences and spaces. It is essential to focus on the experience rather than functions and to consider enhancing that experience.

### 5. Discussions & conclusion: What is learned from ‘How to Live in a Flat’

In the light of literature review and findings, the study discusses modern houses as a new way of life, production, and functionality with three main components. These are; building-environment relationships, interior spaces, and furnishing. These core components of modernism changed the way of the discussions over housing. The article analyzes the modern productions through illustrations in *How to Live in a Flat* by William Heath Robinson and examines the drawings under three main titles; building-environment relationships, interior spaces, and furnishing (Table 1). The table shows the derived data about the modern period, its findings, and flaws through Robinson’s drawings.

Architects tried to foresee every element of modernist era dwellings and life. They have designed “multi-functional”, sterile, visually appealing objects that did not usually fit the daily needs. The study argues that these idealized productions and their social and architectural effects can be read through satirical drawings of William Heath Robinson.

First of all, the structure-environment relationship was taken into account. Rapid production and urbanization make it essential to reconsider the relationship with nature. Robinson criticizes these elements in his drawings. He satirizes the inadequacies of the struggle to create socialized houses with unmatching activities on the roof, such as tennis and hiking. Robinson criticizes the solutions that only appeal to the sense of sight for urban dwellers that are longing for nature. Following these elements, he also illustrates the distorted situation of presenting nature as a new object of desire for the wealthy urbanite.

Secondly, the study examines modern interiors. The data shows that the visuality-oriented modernist ideals excluded daily life at several points. This problem created good-looking but dysfunctional spaces stacked with multiple functions. Focusing on visuality, covering up the problems, and excluding the traces of daily life both in representation and production created these problems. One of the most intriguing examples is the problem of “having guests” in these visually perfect, designed environments. Robinson satirizes these situations in his drawings (Figure 3).

Lastly, the paper argues on modern furnishings and their effects on daily life. The period of industrially mass

produced furniture started with the new techniques of the modern era. The concept of modern aesthetics began to emerge with new techniques and materials such as steel and tubular structures. This situation created countless copies in housing and led to standardization and uniformity. These new mass produced forms and feelings were unfamiliar. The cold nature of these materials and furniture was also a matter of criticism.

Robinson also criticizes the modern furniture designs that aim for “multifunctionality”. The satires point out that the dwellers struggle between the visuality as a design parameter and the needs of daily life. Types of furnishing that cannot adapt to the lifestyle of the society emerged in that era. It is seen from the drawings that the idea of multifunctionality did not function as planned.

In the light of these data, the article examined Robinson’s drawings and revealed teachings that could be beneficial for the production. The study concludes that the designers should question the current relationship between nature and the built environment. They should accept that every aspect of life is not controllable. Rather than predicting life, experiences can be constructed more flexibly. The most significant element is the acceptance that the interior is a place to live. It should not be designed only on a visual basis. Designing by evaluating

Table 1. Facts & findings.



the data of daily life should be accepted as a prerequisite. Taking “actions” as design parameters instead of functions is a step to improve these circumstances. Thus, actions manage spaces in a better flow than assigned functions. Designers should handle daily life with ‘real’ data while creating furniture and structures. For space constraints, new and adjustable plans can be an alternative. Designers have to balance the visual and daily life routines. Visuality and the function should support and exist without interfering with each other.

Exploring the creation of the home from different disciplines opens several opportunities for further production. It is essential to shed light on the problems that are still up-to-date and learn from these productions. Learning from researches and creations in such a period and discussing it can provide different perspectives for new bearings.

Moreover, these perspectives of caricatures can also be beneficial for architectural education. This relationship could be addressed for further studies. It could open new discussions and create new angles on the modern era for architecture history classes. It could also be integrated into the design studios. The potential of these caricatures and the satire can be beneficial for students to understand the idea of everyday life and user-designer relationship.

## References

- Altınyıldız Artun, N. (2012). Mimarlık nesnesi ve başka nesnelere. In R. Ojalvo & N. Altınyıldız Artun (Eds.), *Arzu Mimarlığı* (pp.119–155). İletişim Publishing.
- Ashby, C. (2017). *Modernism in Scandinavia: Art, architecture and design*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Babic, A. A. (Ed.). (2013). *Comics as history, comics as literature: Roles of the comic book in scholarship, society, and entertainment*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Barthes, R. (2008). *Bir deneme bir ders: Eiffel kulesi ve açılış dersi*. Yapı Kredi Publications.
- Berman, M. (1988). *All that is solid melts into air the experience of modernity*. Penguin Books.
- Chute, H. (2011). Comics form and narrating lives. *Profession*, 107–117. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41714112>
- Després, C. (1991). The meaning of home: Literature review and directions for future research and theoretical development. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 8(2), 96-115.
- Fischer, G. (2015). *Mimarlık ve dil*. Daimon Publishing.
- Foster, H. (2013). *Sanat mimarlık kompleksi küreselleşme çağında sanat mimarlık ve tasarım birliği*. İletişim Publishing.
- Garip, E. & Çelik, C. (2020). A methodology for interior design. In E. Garip & B. Garip (Eds.), *Handbook of research on methodologies for design and production practices in interior architecture* (pp. 161-178). IGI Global.
- Greenhalgh, P. (Ed.). (1990). *Modernism in design*. Reaktion Books.
- Gunning, T. (2014). The art of succession: Reading, writing, and watching comics. *Critical Inquiry*, 40(3), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1086/677328>
- Heath Robinson Museum. (2021). *William Heath Robinson*. Retrieved in March 10, 2021, from <https://www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org/william-heath-robinson/>
- Helle, J. H. (1996). Kentlileşmiş insan. *Cognito Journal*, 8/Summer. Yapı Kredi Publications, 71-80.
- Labio, C. (2015). The architecture of comics. *Critical Inquiry*, 41(2), 312–343. <https://doi.org/10.1086/679078>
- Le Corbusier. (1985). *Towards a new architecture*. Dover Publications.
- Le Corbusier. (1993). *Mimarlık öğrencileriyle söyleşi*. Yapı Kredi Publications.
- Lefebvre, H. (2015). *Şehir hakkı*. Sel Publishing.
- Meyerson, M. (1996). Ütopya gelenekleri ve kentlerin planlanması. *Cognito Journal*, 8/Summer, Yapı Kredi Publications, 113-124.
- MoMA. (2011a). *Design the modern kitchen*. Retrieved in March 12, 2021, from [https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/counter\\_space/](https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/counter_space/)
- MoMA. (2011b). *The Frankfurt kitchen*. Retrieved in March 12, 2021, from [https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/counter\\_space/the\\_frankfurt\\_kitchen/#highlights](https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2010/counter_space/the_frankfurt_kitchen/#highlights)
- Neri, G. (2019). Irrational interiors: The modern domestic landscape seen in caricatures. In M. Rosso (Ed.), *Laughing*

at architecture: *Architectural histories of humour, satire and wit* (pp. 173-190). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Pallasmaa, J. (2011). *Tenin gözleri*. Yem Publishing.

Powers, A. (2019). Osbert Lancaster: Architectural humour in the time of functionalism. In M. Rosso (Ed.), *Laughing at architecture: Architectural histories of humour, satire and wit* (pp.153- 172). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ratouis, O. (2019). The modern city through the mirror of humour: a different portrait. In M. Rosso (Ed.), *Laughing at architecture: Architectural histories of humour, satire and wit* (pp. 229-248). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Robinson, W. H. & Browne, K. R. G. (2014). *How to live in a flat*. Rhe Media Ltd. (Original work published in 1936).

Roeder, K. (2008). Looking high and low at comic art. *American Art*, 22(1), 2-9. <https://doi.org/10.1086/587910>

Rosso, M. (2019). Humour: A lens for the architectural and urban historian. In M. Rosso (Ed.), *Laughing at architecture: Architectural histories of humour, satire and wit*, (pp. 1-24). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sparke, P. (1990). A home for everybody? Design, ideology and the culture of the home in Italy, 1945-1972. In P. Greenhalgh (Ed.), *Modernism in Design*, Reaktion Books.

Smith, K. S. (1990). Architectural sketches and the power of caricature. *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), 44(1), 49-58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1424975>

Talu, N. (2012). Bir arzu nesnesi olarak ev. In R. Ojalvo, & N. Altınyıldız Artun (Eds.), *Arzu Mimarlığı* (pp. 73-117). İletişim Publishing.

Tanyeli, U. (2013). *Rüya, inşa, itiraz mimari eleştiri metinleri*. Boyut Publishing.

United Nations. (2017). *Yeni kentsel gündem*. Retrieved in March 05, 2021, from <https://uploads.habitat3.org/hb3/NUA-Turkish.pdf?v=2>

Yürekli F. (2010). *Mimarlık mimarlığımız*. Yem Publishing.

World Economic Forum. (2019). *10 cities are predicted to gain megacity status by 2030*. Retrieved in March 05, 2021, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/10-cities-are-predicted-to-gain-megacity-status-by-2030/>

