

"Domèstic", 2001

Serigraphy

7/30

"Conversation piece: Narkomfin"\* , 2013

Wood miniature and 2 formica chairs

"Dom Kommuna: Casa Bloc", 2016

Wood miniature and 3 formica chairs

Wood table and digital copy

\* Property of: Col·lecció "La Caixa". Art Contemporani.

In collaboration with:



## Domènec – Dom Kommuna. Domestic architectural manuals for coexistence

On display from May 28th



adnoplatform

## Miniatures. On *Dom Kommuna*. *Domestic architectural manuals for coexistence*

Text by Martí Peran

At the end of the 1970s, when the habitational utopias derived from the Letter of Athens (1942) sink into the metropolitan peripheries worldwide, Roland Barthes dictates the course *How To Live Together* in the Collège of France<sup>1</sup>. According to the author, the communal ideal lies in the *idiorhythm*, a “regularly interrupted loneliness” that allows small groupings among individuals to stay together in a precarious balance between mutual distances and proximities. This daydream -barely outlined in practice by Mount Athos’ monks- does not enjoy any societal vocation. The ideal of a good life has nothing to do with phalanxes or other communal models. It in fact defines itself through excluding terms, because it is about not being too far away from others.

Roland Barthes’ ideas express an irregularity that cancels the prolific history of a “being together” enlightened by mass utopias. On the one hand, the *idiorhythm* acknowledges its genealogy in the anchorit tradition and in some of the multiple cult attempts at utopian socialism. On the other, it dissociates itself from another grand narrative, promoted by Modernity, that identifies coexistence as a way of speaking and being together, able to industrially reproduce itself everywhere and for everyone. The origin of this purpose can be found in Engels’ thesis in 1873: to alleviate the housing problem during the first phase of a new socialist society, eviction will be necessary. Also necessary will be the conversion of already-existing houses into commune-houses (*domma-komuny*) that exorcise the property principle<sup>2</sup>. These communes, however, are only a patch, unable to standardise the habitational solution. The true inflection point happens after the success of the Soviet Revolution, when the Association of Contemporary Architects essays the first collective housing (*Kommunalk*) through the **Narkomfin** prototype. The Narkomfin (1928-1932) is a block for approximately 200 people intended to accelerate the transition to socialist life<sup>3</sup>. The ambition of the project attracts the attention of the modern movement through the CIAM (International Modern Architecture Congress), so that Le Corbusier and the GATCPAC (Catalan Technics and Architects for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) travel to Moscow to learn about a model that will soon feed new projects such as **Casa Bloc** (Barcelona, 1932-1936) or the canonic **Unité d’Habitation** (1947).

The ideal of a communal house, conceived as a multiplicable cell that could reproduce the new models of social relations, seems finally accomplished. However, it never fully progresses. On the one hand, the Stalinist swerve in the USSR aborts all of the radical collective experiences and reorients the Narkomfin’s function towards the *Nomenklatura* senior officials. The same destiny awaits Casa Bloc, where Spanish fascists modify the project for a new function: a military settlement. In its turn, the Unité d’Habitation triumphs as an habitational prototype during the reconstruction of post-war Europe. Nevertheless, it had already become the seed that would soon expand the worldwide suburbial dystopia. The story of social housing will stop relating to communal experiments from that moment onwards. Instead, it reorients itself progressively towards mass credit politics, swelling speculation and property value. The imaginary of the commune, in this context, hardly progresses in the margins of counterculture<sup>4</sup>. Abandoning its genuine germinal function, it becomes an ingenuous refuge to play against the welfare model.

Barthes’s *idiorhythmic* ideal -‘the antinomy of sharing distances’- feels like a true anachronism and a complete setback; at least given that it doesn’t enjoy any correspondence with neither the historical narrative of the societal commune, nor the subsequent ruins of its mythology. The *own rhythms* that Barthes evokes through old lauras athonitas -‘small houses, hermitages for two or three people, close to churches, a hospital and a water course’- has nothing to do with the property bond, but it is also unable to found neighborhoods or become a social body. It is a way of being together reduced to *far closeness*, and therefore, a weak community of *auratic* and not as much of historical episode. Barthes himself recognizes the historical impurity lead by nostalgia from the past, alien to the progress of time. The anachronism is recognized, however, under the epigraph of *simulation* or a *miniature*. The nuance is crucial.

Barthes also postulates how miniatures should be interpreted: not as mere projections of the future, but as “that which is being experienced”<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the “*miniature-work*” is the best example of a practice in which the text’s materialization (the model is literary) is subject to a test and experienced with himself. The miniature is not only an enunciation that is yet to come. The work-miniature does not advance in a dream, but it literally essays it: it is not a promise of becoming but an actual fulfillment. This is why Barthes focuses on simulacres instead of anachronisms. Anachronisms presuppose a lack of correspondence between a narrative and the moment that this narrative is born. The simulation, the miniature, does not have this problem since they always happen, they always ‘are’.

The miniatures of Narkomfin, Casa Bloc and Unité d’Habitation are, in the first place, miniatures of miniatures. They are reconstructions of barely fulfilled old promises. History hardly gave them the chance of becoming something more than a mild simulation. Their reappearance operates as a sort of new chance, a renewed mise en scène of the original intentions lying underneath and inside of them. Clearly, by installing the miniatures in an uncomfortable context -in a natural environment or in precarious balance on domestic furniture-, a shadow is projected. This shadow questions and darkens modern idealist pretensions. But this obvious remark is not a fundamental question. If we interpret them through a Barthesian lens, these miniatures propose the imperative of their actualization. They don’t close habitational utopias: they show us the need for experimenting with coexistence. Again.

### Works cited

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Cómo vivir juntos. Simulaciones novelescas de algunos espacios cotidianos. Notas de cursos y seminarios en el Collège de France, 1976-1977*. Siglo XXI Ed. Buenos Aires, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Frederich Engels. *Contribución al problema de la vivienda*. Fundación de Estudios Socialistas Federico Engels. Madrid, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Moisei Ginzburg. *Escritos: 1923-1930*. El Croquis. Madrid, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Melville. *Las comunas en la contracultura*. Kairós. Barcelona, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes. *La preparación de la novela. Notas de cursos y seminarios en el Collège de France 1978-1979 y 1979-1980*. Siglo XXI ed. México, 2005. p. 233.