

DOMESTICITY AS PERFORMANCE

Tatiana Mota

SEZIONE ABITATA, SCENOGRAFIA, DOMESTICITÀ

La capacità rappresentativa della sezione architettonica ne consente l'utilizzo in una varietà di mezzi di comunicazione e contesti. Quando viene esplorata dalla scenografia, diventa un curioso strumento per evocare e mettere in scena l'esperienza collettiva dell'abitare.

Eraritjaritjaka (Svizzera, 2004), *European House* (Spagna, 2005), *Saturday Night* (Portogallo, 2011) e *Castro* (Portogallo, 2020) sono quattro opere teatrali che utilizzano una casa sezionata come scenario per la costruzione narrativa. Lo spazio domestico viene presentato attraverso modelli in scala 1:1 dai quali è stata rimossa una parete, consentendo allo spettatore di vedere la sezione abitata di un alloggio. *Eraritjaritjaka* presenta modelli di una casa la cui scala aumenta gradualmente fino a culminare nella proiezione della sua sezione abitata. *Saturday Night* porta in scena una casa vuota, invitando il pubblico a osservare come gli abitanti prendono possesso dell'abitazione. *European House* mette in luce una casa colorata e universale che diventa uno specchio della società odierna. *Castro* mette in scena una storia del XIV secolo in una casa contemporanea, condensando innumerevoli aspetti costanti dell'abitare.

Si tratta di sezioni abitate volte a rivelare un'intimità che normalmente rimane nascosta. Sono opere che, pur non appartenendo a un luogo o a un tempo specifici, trasformano la casa in un simbolo che sintetizza culture ed esperienze in una rappresentazione simultanea di diversi spazi domestici, mettendo in evidenza l'uniformità dell'abitare nello spazio e nel tempo.

La capacità dell'ambientazione di conferire veridicità all'azione, indipendentemente dal suo discorso, deriva dalla familiarità dell'osservatore con le attività domestiche, che gli permette di contestualizzarle istantaneamente. Così, la casa-palcoscenico, presentata sotto forma di sezione, fonde domesticità e performance, diventando un potente strumento per leggere, interpretare e criticare la realtà.

INHABITED SECTION, SCENOGRAPHY, DOMESTICITY

The representative capacity of the architectural section allows it to be used in a variety of media and contexts. And when explored by scenography, the architectural section becomes a curious device for evoking and staging the collective experience of inhabiting.

Eraritjaritjaka (Switzerland, 2004), *European House* (Spain, 2005), *Saturday Night* (Portugal, 2011) and *Castro* (Portugal, 2020) are four stage plays that use a house in sections as a setting for narrative construction. *The domestic space is presented through 1:1 scale models from which a wall has been removed, allowing the viewer to see the inhabited section of a dwelling. Eraritjaritjaka presents models of a house whose scale gradually increases until culminating in the projection of its inhabited section. Saturday Night puts an empty house on stage, inviting the audience to observe how the inhabitants take possession of the dwelling. European House exposes a colorful and universal home that becomes a reflection of today's society. Castro stages a 14th-century story in a contemporary house, condensing countless permanencies of habitation.*

All are inhabited sections committed to exposing an intimacy that is normally hidden. These are pieces that, without belonging to a specific place or time, transform the home into a symbol that synthesises cultures and experiences in a simultaneous representation of different domestic spaces, highlighting the uniformity of living in space and time.

The ability of the setting to lend veracity to the action, independently of its discourse, stems from the observer's familiarity with domestic activities, which allows them to instantly contextualise them. Thus, the stage house, presented in section form, blends domesticity and performance, becoming a powerful tool for reading, interpreting and critiquing reality.

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Throughout architectural history, the section has been a key instrument of representation, showing spatial organization and the relationship between interior and exterior. Although, as a technical drawing, it privileged the description of construction and the spatial arrangement, several authors have shown that the section also conveys spatial relationships, depth, and ways of inhabiting. Before being reduced to the technical description of construction, the section revealed the depth of space, revealing the building's materiality and what remained concealed: thickness, interiority, and the relationship between body and architecture.¹

Despite growing scholarship on the architectural section, little attention has been paid to its role in scenography, where the section no longer represents architecture alone but becomes the space of action. When a stage set takes the form of a house in section, it becomes part of the theatrical action, offering new ways of understanding dwelling. This condition is defined as the inhabited section: a sectional representation in which architecture, body, and action coexist, revealing spatial organization, social relationships, and the appropriation of domestic space. The stage sets explore different possibilities of the inhabited section through temporal layering and narrative construction.

Eraritjaritjaka is constructed through a scenographic device in continuous transformation, in which the inhabited section is not immediately revealed, but progressively built through a play of scales and representational means. The beginning of the play is marked by the darkness of the stage, accompanied by a melody by Maurice Ravel, establishing an initial relationship between sound, light, and space. Gradually, the light draws a luminous square on stage, presenting the Maestro with a small house — a model that suggests shelter and intimacy. A play of scales begins: the reduced house functions as the character's refuge, while the darkness is interrupted only by the light from its windows. With the introduction of a projector, the scale is inverted and the model becomes a large projection surface, concealing the 1:1 scale house behind it, through which the actor's journey to his real house is followed live, between theatre and cinema.

Through the ambiguous register between the “live” and the “pre-recorded”, the spectator follows the Maestro's daily routine in an unstable continuity between the real and the staged. The action alternates between physical presence and projected image, revealing fragments of the domestic interior without ever making it fully accessible. In this sense, *Eraritjaritjaka* operates as a scenographic device based on the tension between different representational elements; the house as symbol remains a constant element, yet its perception is continuously reconfigured through variations in scale, light, and projection, transforming the scenography into an operative structure that organises the reading of space and approaches mechanisms inherent to cinematic language, constructing a plurality of viewpoints. The scenography developed by Klaus Grünberg rejects a univocal reading, promoting a fragmented perception.

The use of multiple scales in *Eraritjaritjaka* brings scenography closer to methods inherent to architectural representation. The transition from the model to the inhabitable scale reproduces a process similar to that of spatial design, in which the progressive increase in scale allows proportions and the relationship between body and space to be tested. One of the most significant examples appears in *Dogville* (2003), by Lars von Trier, where the city is represented through the drawing of the floor plan on the ground. The absence of materialised walls does not eliminate the perception of space; on the contrary, it reinforces the mental

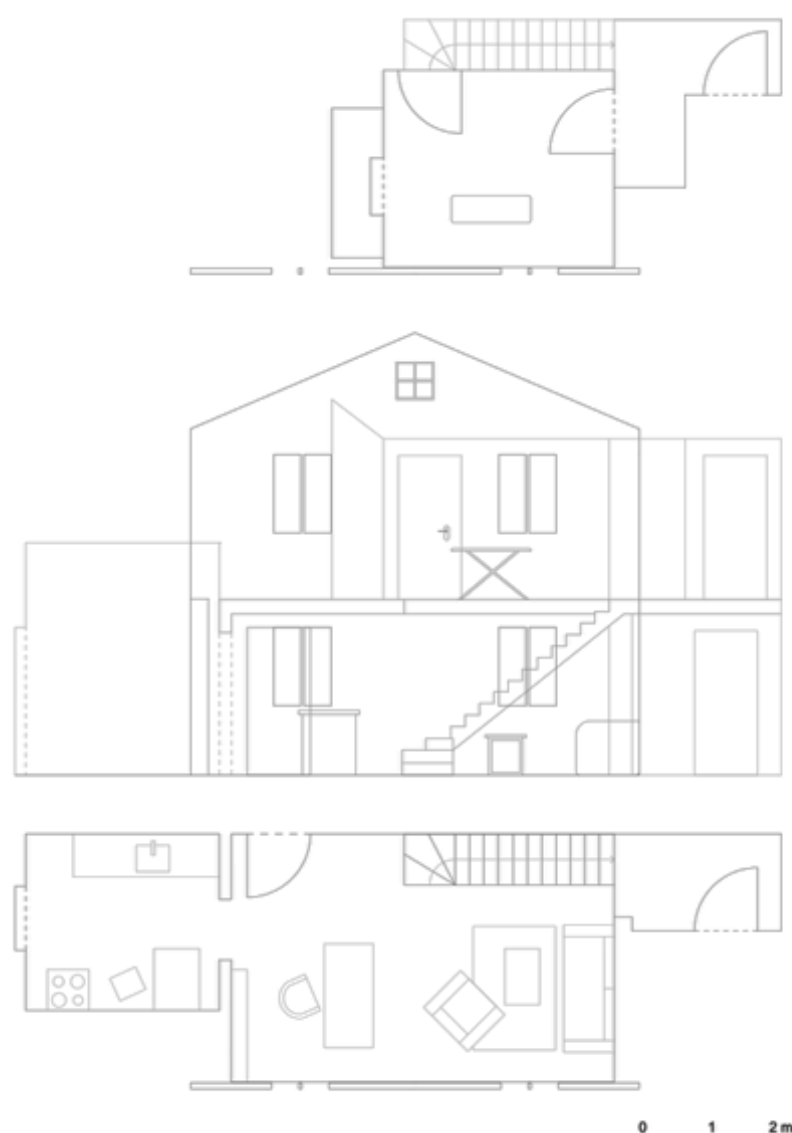
¹ Paul Emmons, *Drawing Imagining Building: Embodiment in Architectural Design Practices* (London: Routledge, 2019).

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1
Photograph of the set for
"Eraritjaritjaka". © João Tuna

2
Set design drawing for
"Eraritjaritjaka" produced by the
author



and performative dimension of architecture. The spectator observes an inhabited drawing, constructed through action, sound, and the presence of bodies.

Eraritjaritjaka results precisely from this confluence between live action and projected image. Only in the final moment does a form of totality emerge through the inhabited section, which exposes the internal organisation of the dwelling and reveals what had until then remained fragmented and concealed by the projection surface. In this way, the play asserts scenography as an expanded field, problematising the idea of a fixed point of view and proposing a dynamic reading of dwelling on stage.

Spatial experimentation at a 1:1 scale also finds a parallel in architectural prototypes such as *House of the Future* (1956), by Alison and Peter Smithson. Designed for an exhibition, the house presents an inhabitable model of the domestic future, staged through objects, lighting, and performers. In *Eraritjaritjaka*, space is likewise continuously reconstructed through representation. The house begins as a model that becomes a projection surface and finally reveals its internal organisation through the inhabited section. This progressive enlargement of scale approaches the logic of architectural representation, in which increasing detail corresponds to a gradual approximation to the experience of space. Thus, the inhabited section emerges at the end as a device that enables the reading of the spaces that sustain the entire performance.

In *European House*, the inhabited section stabilises from the outset in an attempt to continuously represent domestic space. The focus shifts away from the superimposition of representational formats towards dwelling itself and the relations that structure family intimacy. The narrative is constructed through an exposed house in section that reveals the intimacy of a European family in mourning. Without a defined geographical or temporal location, the scenography transforms the dwelling into a collective emotional body, where grief manifests through movement, sound, and light, in a silent representation of contemporary dwelling.

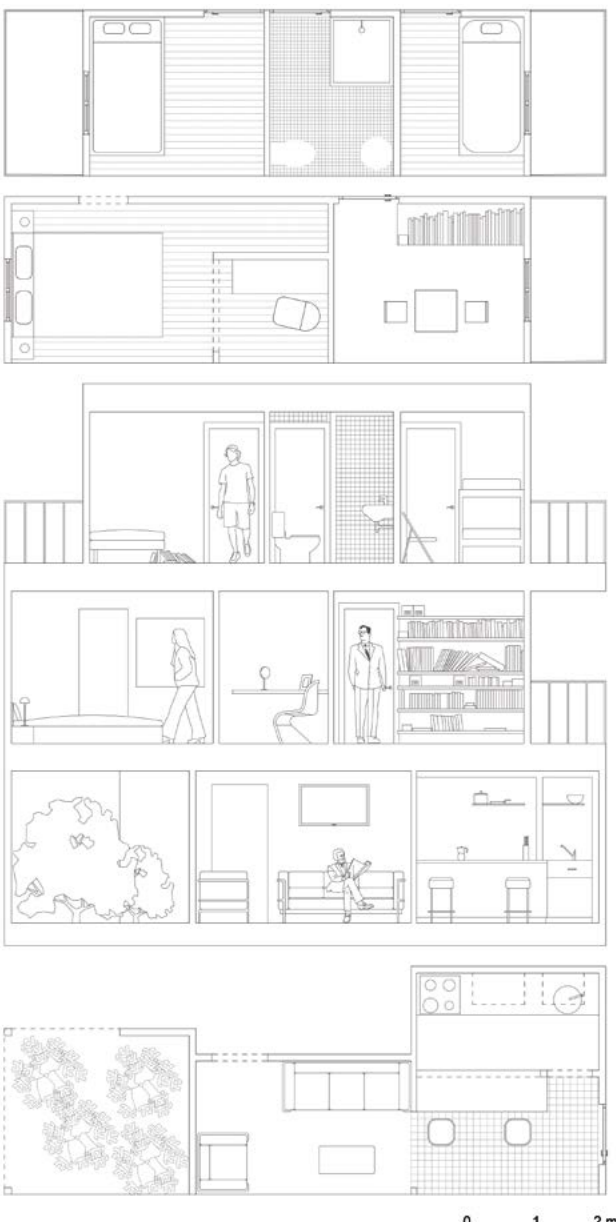
Designed by Sebastià Brosa and Bibiana Puigdefàbregas, the scenographic device presents an intensely animated house in which characters enter and exit without speaking. This configuration reinforces the timelessness of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and shifts the focus towards modes of dwelling, prompting reflection on family relations, communication, and social behaviour. The absence of specific references allows the house to assert itself as a transversal model of European dwelling. In this sense, the leading role does not belong to a character, but to the scenography itself, which, through its section, reveals domestic relations and tensions, as the multi-level organisation allows a simultaneous reading of the rooms, turning the spectator into an observer of intimacy.

«Thus, the concept of dwelling, identified as the decisive interface between the subject and the world, seems to constitute an anguished form of contemporary identity.»²

The action begins with two spaces — the kitchen and the living room — permanently illuminated, which, due to their social function, assume a neutral tonality, while the more intimate spaces make use of more intense colours. This chromatic differentiation structures the reading of the section, articulating degrees of exposure and isolation. On the intermediate floor, the spaces associated with introspection acquire dramatic density through the colour red, evoking loss and the presence of death, while the upper floor concentrates the spaces of rest, where the action becomes more restrained. The articulation between light and colour not only qualifies the environments, but also constructs the inhabited section itself, guiding the gaze and intensifying the perception of spatial relations.

The narrative develops through everyday gestures, creating a proximity between the inhabitant and the spectator's experience, transforming the house into a projection of the

2 Jones, Wes, "D'une origine l'autre", in *Exposé, revue d'esthétique et d'art contemporain*, n° 3, (Orléans: Éditions HYX, 2003), 112.



subject, in which, according to Gaston Bachelard, inhabited space articulates physical and imagined dimensions, between memory, identity, and experience.³

In *European House*, this dimension is externalised: the spaces directly reflect the emotional states of the characters, establishing correspondences between colour, light, and feeling. Light reveals, anticipates, and hierarchises the spaces, functioning as a structuring element of the narrative. By revealing or concealing rooms, it reinforces tensions and accentuates the voyeuristic character of the experience. It is the conjunction of light and colour upon the inhabited section that tells the story. The complexity of the device resides in this continuous exposure of domestic space. The inhabited section allows for multiple simultaneous actions, transforming the house into a mechanism for reading society. It is at this point that the section of a house surpasses the condition of a scenographic device and becomes an instrument for reading dwelling, transforming the house into a total image — a world condensed at the domestic scale:

«The house is a complete world drawn at the scale of domestication. [...] Everything that is invisible can become visible.»⁴

³ Gaston Bachelard, *A poética do Espaço* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1989), 47.

⁴ Richard Nonas, "La maison loin de la maison: la sculpture et l'extension de la maison", in *Exposé, revue d'esthétique et d'art contemporain*, n° 3, (Orléans: Éditions HYX, 2003), 88.

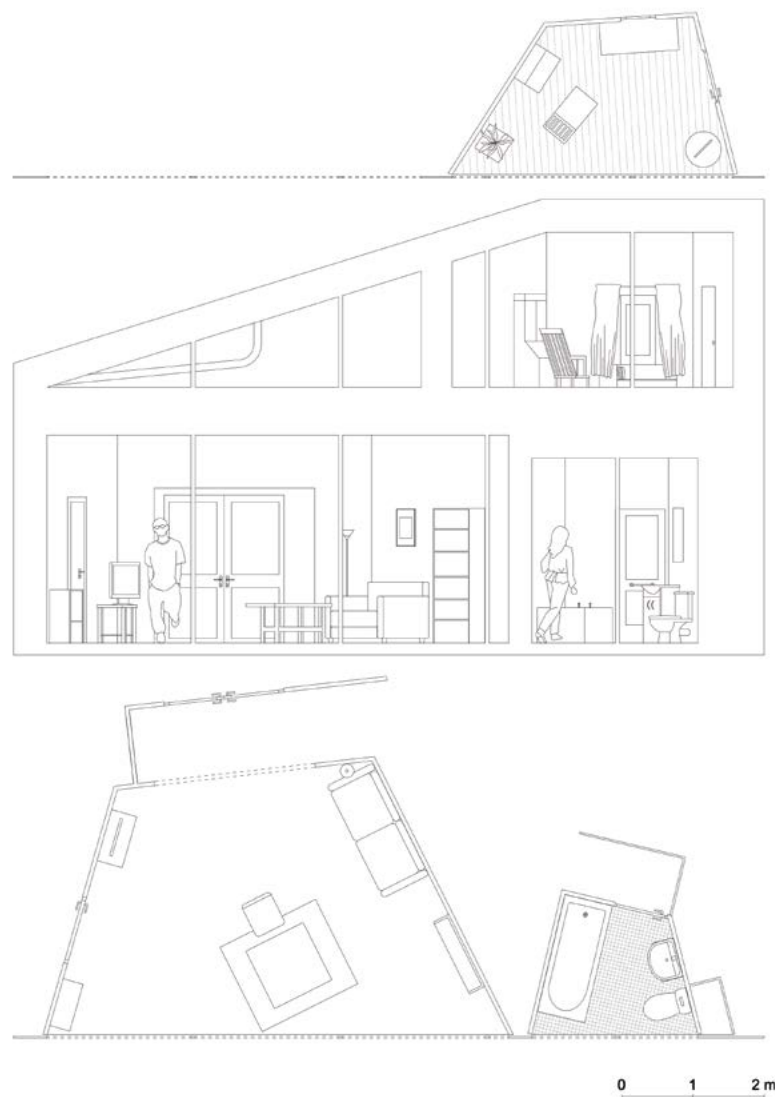
³ Photograph of the set for "European House". © João Tuna

⁴ Set design drawing for "European House" produced by the author

By eliminating the elevation and exposing the interior, the inhabited section transforms the domestic into an object of observation and interpretation of social relations, routines, and conflicts, by making visible what normally remains hidden. In this work, the inhabited section exposes intimacy through a transversal logic of European dwelling, which, through the observation of domestic actions, creates a sense of familiarity in the spectator. In *Saturday Night*, the domestic space depends on the spectator's gaze, transforming the very act of seeing into a central condition of the scenographic device. Rather than merely exposing domestic space, the device constructs a voyeuristic condition in which seeing implies interpreting.

The scenography presents, from the outset, a fundamental inversion: the audience has immediate access to the section of the house — still empty — while the future inhabitants remain outside, attempting to understand the space they are about to inhabit. This dissociation establishes two distinct positions in relation to the same object: those who see and those who do not yet know it, those who can inhabit it and those who can only observe it; and, in this sense, the section is progressively revealed.

Visibility is, at an initial stage, limited. The house is revealed through a controlled light source — a torch held by the couple — which fragments the space and prevents a total reading, compelling the audience to attempt to understand what space is being opened before them. As the couple occupies the house, the spaces are gradually appropriated: the living room becomes the centre of action, while other rooms accommodate everyday and intimate gestures. The absence of verbal language reinforces this condition — the spectator



5
Set design drawing for
"Saturday Nigh" produced by
the author

6
Photograph of the set for
"Saturday Night". © João Tuna



does not hear, only sees — and is therefore forced to interpret emotions and relations through body and space. The section does not communicate directly: it demands an active reading. In this sense, the relationship established between the spectator and domestic space approaches a voyeuristic condition, grounded in a fundamental asymmetry: seeing without being seen. This exposure of the interior was amplified through the use of glass; according to Beatriz Colomina, excessive transparency makes the house visible from the outside, functioning as an "X-ray" that exposes private life, altering the spheres of public and private life and transforming what is seen into a "public representation of domesticity".⁵

In *Saturday Night*, the replacement of the elevation by a transparent surface enables visual access to the interior, transforming the house into an object of observation, as in *European House*. However, here the gaze is unstable: the fragmentation of light, the simultaneity of actions, and the absence of sound and of a foundational narrative prevent a direct reading, forcing the spectator to construct their own interpretation of what is being observed; the aim is not to use the section to show space, but to destabilise the idea of privacy, exposing everyday life as an observable construction. The scenographic design reinforces this intention. The angular and disjointed spaces are conceived to maximise visibility, allowing the spectator to access all rooms. The inhabited section is thus designed from the point of view of the observer.

The house is organised across two floors with distinct natures. On the lower floor, the most intense spaces — the living room and bathroom — are concentrated, where the main actions unfold, from the construction of domestic life to moments of greater conflict. On the upper floor, a parallel, more enigmatic action introduces a dimension of uncertainty and imagination, further complicating the overall reading. The spectator observes multiple simultaneous actions, without privileged access to any of them. This condition reinforces the active nature of the gaze, which must select, interpret, and construct a narrative from what is seen. In this context, the inhabited section asserts itself as a critical device: by exposing the domestic interior without making it fully intelligible, it transforms the spectator into an observer responsible for the construction of meaning. Seeing becomes an incomplete act, conditioned and necessarily interpretative.

The play ends with the fading of the light and the disappearance of the section, returning to the initial image of the torch searching for the house. This gesture suggests a continuous repetition: dwelling as a process in construction, always observed, yet never fully apprehended. Thus, in *Saturday Night*, the inhabited section does not merely reveal domestic life; it problematises the very act of observing it, questioning the limits between exposure and intimacy, between seeing and understanding.

The inhabited section presented in *Castro* simultaneously recalls two previously explored dimensions: the continuous exposure of domestic space present in *European House*, and the interpretative condition of the gaze developed in *Saturday Night*. However, here the device adds a new layer of complexity by overlaying distinct historical times within a single inhabited structure.

In *Castro*, the inhabited section functions as a device of superimposition: a contemporary house that simultaneously accommodates a fourteenth-century narrative, merging times and modes of dwelling. The action begins with the projection of a face onto the domestic scenography, anticipating the spaces of tragedy. From the outset, a displacement is established: the house is recognisable and contemporary, yet the discourse and action belong to another time. This friction constructs a simultaneity between past and present that only becomes fully intelligible through the inhabited section, as a device that allows the continuous perception of the coexistence of these temporal layers.

5 Beatriz Colomina, *La domesticidad en guerra* (Barcelona: Actar, 2006), 168.

The scenography, designed by Fernando Ribeiro, presents a dwelling organised across two floors, composed of familiar spaces which are traversed by the characters without ever intersecting. Although they share the same house, Inês, D. Pedro, and the King inhabit isolated planes, unable to establish contact. The inhabited section renders this paradoxical condition visible: by exposing all rooms simultaneously, it reveals the fragmentation of relations. Each character thus approaches a condition of “space-character”. The house ceases to be a unity and becomes the superimposition of three distinct houses, corresponding to different emotional and political states, intensifying the relationship between inhabitant and house.

«The house thus becomes a scenography of everyday life, an unfinished product, with an endless history, where others have lived, where we keep our memories and our objects, which speak about us and become an extension of ourselves, a projection of the inhabitant.»⁶

6 Marina Romero, “Editorial. Escenarios domésticos. Entre lo visible y lo invisible” in *Basa, Publicación Del Colegio De Arquitectos De Canarias*, n.º 29, ed. Fernando Guerrero (Barcelona: Ricardo Devesa, 2006), 18.

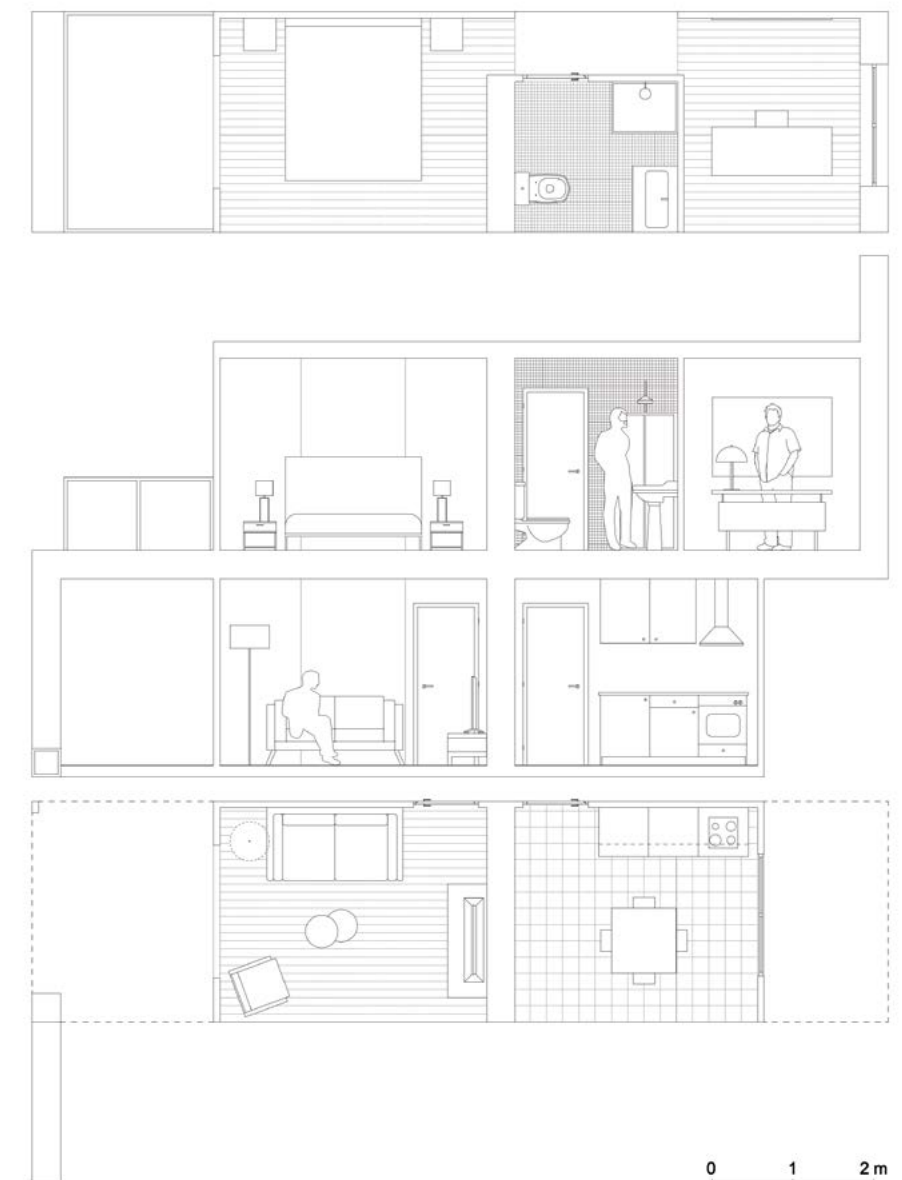
7
Photograph of the set for
“Castro”. © João Tuna

8
Set design drawing for “Castro”
produced by the author

Unlike the previous works, in *Castro* the house is not inhabited by the characters; rather, the characters embody different houses that coexist within the same scenographic space. This exposure of domesticity across different social statuses inevitably raises the question of the boundary between private and public. As Georges Teyssot observes, the modern house is not an isolated space, but the result of a constant tension between interior and exterior, between the intimate domain and its social representation. By removing the elevation and opening the house to the gaze, the inhabited section reconfigures the domestic interior as spectacle. In this sense, what the section constructs in *Castro* is a critical vision: it allows the simultaneous perception of what, in everyday experience, is fragmented and concealed. The lack of communication between the characters thus becomes legible not despite the section, but because of it.

The domestic organisation reinforces this reading. The shared spaces host moments of exposure and discourse, while the more private spaces concentrate introspection and emotional climax. This gradation, clearly legible in section, structures the narrative and intensifies its progressive dramatic narrowing.

The only moment of full confrontation occurs outside the house, in an undefined exterior space — the courtyard — which breaks with the logic of the section. This exit highlights, by



contrast, the role of the device itself: while the interior is framed, visible, and simultaneous, the exterior escapes this condition, becoming a space of conflict and indeterminacy. By presenting a historical narrative within a contemporary domestic environment, the work reveals the persistence of structures of dwelling. However, it is through the inhabited section that this continuity becomes legible: by condensing different times, spaces, and actions into a single image, the device reveals both continuities and ruptures. Thus, the inhabited section asserts itself as a critical reading mechanism, capable of transforming the house into a field where dwelling becomes visible and questionable.

In *Eraritjaritjaka*, the section appears as a progressive revelation of an initially hidden space; in *European House*, it stabilises as a continuous exposure of domestic intimacy; in *Saturday Night*, it becomes dependent on the spectator's interpretation; and in *Castro*, it turns into a mechanism of temporal and spatial superimposition. The diversity of these operations demonstrates that the inhabited section corresponds to a variable condition of representation and reading of dwelling.

Despite the different scenographic approaches, all the examples explore the possibility of opening the house to the gaze, converting the domestic interior into an observable image. The simultaneous visualisation of rooms, actions, and relations brings the inhabited section closer to an architectural and performative experience. Space transcends the condition of scenography or support for action to actively participate in narrative construction, articulating scales, temporalities, and relations of intimacy. By eliminating the elevation and exposing the interior, the inhabited section transforms the house into a cultural image of contemporary dwelling.

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