

Olimpia Niglio
Eric Yong Joong Lee *Editors*

Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation

A Dialogue between Ethics, Law, and
Culture

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A Dialogue between Ethics, Law, and Culture

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 Springer

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A Living Heritage: The Villa E.1027 by the Sea



Luis Manuel Palmero Iglesias and Graziella Bernardo

Abstract The work tells the story of a holiday home with a mysterious code name E.1027. The house is in one of the most beautiful places on the French Riviera, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, a few kilometers from the Italian border. The villa was designed in 1926 by Eileen Gray in collaboration with her lover of the time, Jean Badovici. The name of the villa is an alphanumeric code with the initials of their names. Gray planned every little detail of the house, from the garden to the furnishing, and built a place where guests or permanent resident can relax and feel comfortable. Gray claimed that “Entering a house should be like the sensation of entering a mouth which will close behind you.” The Villa E.1027 is a masterpiece of modern architecture that overcomes the cold rationalism of Le Corbusier with the passion of a clever woman. Between 1938 and 1939, Le Corbusier wanted to take revenge on this woman by painting obscene sexist murals on every white wall in the house and he spent his life to control the villa’s fate. Today, after a long period of neglect and memory loss, we can finally visit the house, which has been restored to its original beauty and intimacy by a critical restoration that preserved also the Le Corbusier’s murals.

*L’invitation au voyage
Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
Aimer à loisir,
Aimer et mourir
Au pays qui te ressemble!*

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*The invitation to travel
 My child, my sister,
 Think of the sweetness
 To go over there and live together!
 To love at leisure,
 Love and die
 To the country that looks like you!*

Charles Baudelaires, Les fleurs du mal, 1857

1 A Journey Through the Architecture of the Last Century

Every place we visit leaves permanent signs, emotions, echoes, and whispers, that we can continue to feel when the journey is over. Architecture with its volumes, shapes, colors, odours, is both container and content of memory. The smell of mothballs, the scent of real wood, the crack in the wall, the dust on the floor, the heavy curtains that turn off the sun, the silent piano, all these things are just waiting for us to come back. And that's where we will return to see what we couldn't see at the moment. It will be a glance, a color, a smell that itches suddenly to keep alive the desire to enjoy those opulent containers of life, designed by someone even for us, unaware travelers. Architecture is history told with the powerful language of objects created by human ingenuity at a certain time and in a certain moment of one's life.

The last century was full of unimaginable changes and cultural and social controversy. What society has ever been capable of seizing the opportunities of the industrial revolution, advancing with courage and losing everything in a war, and then survive and fall back after a few years into another war even more devastating than the first one? While all this was happening, Modern architecture developed with a plurality of expressions that translated the prolific drive toward the future of positivism, coining a new language with a close dialogue between science and art (Read, 2002). This was the time of a culture revolution that led to a modern humanism with a new aesthetics, involving all fields of arts, that we define with our own neologism as the epoch of the *archi-revoluculture*.

In 1908, Adolf Loos theorized the fundamentals of the new aesthetics in his essay *Ornament and Crime*, an invective against what he called the ornament epidemic. He spurred people to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the essentiality of all useful objects, not just of the buildings (Canales & Herscher, 2005). During a sumptuous dinner with pompously decorated dishes, the Austrian architect could have shouted *take the decorations of turkey and pheasant off this plate because I can't tell what I'm eating!* Architecture was taking off his sumptuous clothes, leaving behind the superfluous and the "false luxuries" (Loos, 1908). The aesthetics of the ornament had contaminated without mercy all the social, cultural, and architectural contingencies of the time, but its days had numbered. It was borning the aesthetic of essentiality of the raw architectural component, without coatings, without additions or camouflaging,

in which the reinforced concrete, the most innovative material of the time, had its maximum expression.

On February 20, 1909, the multifaceted Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* the Manifesto of Futurism. This avant-garde artistic movement rejected tradition and celebrated the new beauty of the speed, machinery, and industry. “We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire” (Marinetti, 1909).

In the second decade of the last century, the most primitive rationalism began to spread with quite a few doubts and criticisms. This new architecture exalted the purity of straight lines without decorations in a formal coherence dictated by the function of the spaces, focusing for the first time on the interior design. A new design approach based on technical principles rather than on conventions and empirical rules of the past spread all over Europe, giving architecture the tools for a freedom of expression that would satisfy the aesthetic canons of the modern industrialized world.

Rationalism in its conceptual genesis of defending function finds its unexpected roots in the book “*Histoire d’une maison*” published in 1873 by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. He is known as a restoration theorist, but his theories have also made a great contribution to modern design. He proposes an ideal model of home that should be “neither stately nor monumental,” reflecting the personality of its inhabitant who finds his happiness there (Viollet-le-Duc, 1873). He describes the construction materials and their function. He also stresses that decoration must be an integral part of architecture and not a mere addition, sometimes helping to solve structural construction challenges.

Between the two world wars, architecture contributed to overcoming the social conflicts exacerbated by the serious economic crisis with a remarkable development of social housing and urban planning. In this dramatic and yet so prolific historical moment, the *archi-revoluculture* led to a naked architecture, devoid of ornaments and classical symmetry. In this period, the avant-garde of figurative arts greatly influenced rationalism, which gave rise to a bold architectural language that went far beyond the mere search for functionality. As in cubism and the neoplastic movement, rationalist architecture expanded into a fourth dimension where geometrical forms without symmetry are suspended in a dynamic balance (Read, 2002). Modern architecture designs the construction from the inside out, giving paradigmatic models in which the principles of classical architecture, *utilitas*, *firmitas*, and *venustas*, are achieved by means technological innovations and new materials. Many rationalist architectures have been private homes that tell the personality and intimacy of their creators, becoming material and immaterial testimony of a great page in the history of architecture.

In many cases, modern architecture is catalogued as a worthless contemporaneity and not recognized as heritage. Fortunately, some abandoned and forgotten modern buildings have been restored and protected, reaching us unaware travelers. This is the case of the Villa E.1027, which is the testimony of the genius of a woman who has long remained unknown.

2 A Brave and Silent Woman. Eileen Gray

Eileen Gray was born in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, in the southeast of Ireland, on August 9, 1878. She spent a happy childhood with her four siblings in a simple house surrounded by greenery. She missed her father who spent long periods of time in France and Italy as an amateur painter. It was thanks to him that she had a passion for art since her early age. Her mother, always close to her shyness and fears (*I am afraid of spirits and people*, Eileen said), gave her calm and values that will accompany her throughout her life. *Never falling into self-pity*, she told her mother repeatedly, forming a personality with a strong-willed temperament (Adam, 2009). When Eileen was fifteen, her mother inherited a noble title from an uncle and became Baroness Gray.

The Baroness Gray decided that the new social rank required a new way of life and a new home. In 1895, the bucolic house where Eileen had spent her childhood was demolished and, in its place, the luxurious red brick Tudor-style house was built as new residence of the Gray family. Our protagonist was sorry to leave a magical and welcoming world for her. She lived without enthusiasm the new social status and continued to think silently about the world she would have wanted with a fervent mind and a brave heart. The wealth of her family and her restless and curiosity allowed her to travel a lot. In 1900, she visited with her mother the Universal Exhibition of Paris. Eileen dazzled by the allure of the trendy city as well as by the striking innovations of the Paris Universal Exhibition. This trip had a considerable influence on her life's destiny (Adam, 2009).

In 1901, she attended in London the Slade School of Fine Arts, a painting school for high society youngsters. In 1902, she went to Paris to study drawing and enrolls at the Atelier Colarossi and later the Académie Jullian (Cap Modern Association, 2014). She learned the art of lacquering by the Japanese Seizo Sugawara.¹ She mastered this technique of great patience and skill that gave her fame as a creator and designer of lacquered furniture. Her activity began with refined and elegant screens and lampshades, such as the famous *Via Lactea*, and continued with original and modern furniture.

In 1907 he went to live in the apartment at 21 rue Bonaparte in Paris where she died after a long life on 31 October 1976.

In 1909, after a trip to Morocco with the cellist Evelyn Wyld, Eileen's chatty love, she decided to make rugs. Her fervent mind led her to start new trades and entrepreneurial initiatives, an attitude she maintained throughout her life.

In 1913, she exhibited her creations at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs (SAD) where she met the couturier Jacques Doucet who ordered a major supply of furniture with the clear intention of being her only customer.

The beginning of his career as creator designer was awfully hard. Critics ignored the promising work of a young female artist. The turning point arrived in 1917,

¹Seizo Sagawara (1884 Sakata-1937 Machi, Japan). Artist of Japanese origin, nationalized in France, who had the merit of spreading the ancient Asian lacquering technique in Europe. With Jean Dunand and Eileen Gray, he was a key figure in the plastic arts of the early twentieth century.

when Madame Mathieu Lévy gave her the task of designing the interior of the whole apartment on rue de la Lota. Eileen dedicated a lot of time and all her creativity to this first important commitment (Constant, 1994). It gave her the success she deserved. Eileen managed to gain notoriety as designer at a time when a woman could at most aspire to become a weaver or decorator. Eileen's creations had a *new look*. They were elegant and useful and often surprising. Eileen used new materials, such as aluminum, introducing teamwork methods and collaboration between different skills, never seen before.

In 1922, she opened the Galerie Jean Désert, a non-existent name born of his fervent imagination, where she exhibited screens, rugs, and modern furniture with a clear influence of the Dutch avant-garde De Stijl.

In 1924, Eileen met Jean Badovici, a young and brilliant architect of Romanian origin known in the fashionable circles of Paris and Jean began a professional collaboration, and they fell madly in love. Eileen was attracted by the ambitious character and strong personality of the young architect, fifteen years younger than her. On the other hand, Jean was fascinated by Eileen's notoriety and wealth, which could have helped him realize his dreams and projects. In the same year, Eileen began to frequent Adrienne Gorska, one of the first female architects, who introduced her to architectural design (Loye & Raynaud, 1984).

From this moment on, Eileen will have a long and extraordinary career as designer and architect. Unfortunately, this visionary, modern woman has not had the honors and notoriety she deserved. Perhaps because history is still written by blind and arrogant men, while clever women remain silent when they should scream, and mediocre women speak when they should be silent.

3 The Villa E.1027 by the Sea

Eileen Gray spent several months and several travel to the French Riviera to choose a place to build a holiday home. When she arrived in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, a few kilometers from the Italian frontier, she found what she was looking for, a place to live with her lover, Jean Badovici.

The place is a natural oasis of peace and quiet. You could get there by only one street and once you get there you never come out. The smell of pines and lemon trees numb your senses and you stay there motionless looking at the sea which has a shade of blue like nowhere else.

In 1926, Eileen in collaboration with Jean designed their holiday home that she called E.1027. The name of the villa was a coded message and a proof of the intimate complicity of the couple: E for Eileen, 10 for the J of Jean, 2 for the B of Badovici, 7 for the G of Gray.

Jean had a friendly relationship with the Master Le Corbusier, already famous at the time, who often wrote in the magazine *L'Architecture Vivante* published by Badovici.

Now we have all the protagonists of our story: Eileen Gray, Jean Badovici, and Le Corbusier. But what makes the intricate feelings between them and a villa by the sea so worthy of attention?

The design of the house was an exciting challenge for Eileen. She spent hours and hours analyzing every single line and corner of the future construction, planning every detail of both the interior furnishings and the open spaces with the magnificent garden. She defined the compositional distribution of the spaces according to their function, the orientation of solar radiation, and the view of the sea that should be always present in that house.

Eileen head every phase of the villa construction, sharing the entire day's work with the workers at the construction site. Her practical vocation mocked prejudices and began the revolutionary path of women's independence. Eileen put into practice the wise motto that ensures the success of any work, the boss must always be an additional member of work team (Espegel Alonso, 2013).

The construction of the Villa E.1027 ended in 1929. Under French law at the time, Eileen, unmarried and foreigner, could not be the owner of the house that she entirely financed with her money. So, Eileen decided to donate the holiday home to her lover Jean.

The silent Eileen designed a masterpiece of modern architecture. The housing model of Eileen can be defined *le theatre à habiter*, as opposite to *la machine à habiter* theorized by Le Corbusier (1923). Eileen Gray's seaside house is a place for human entertainment, where the inhabitants dialogue with a permanent stage set consisting of live objects that hide their usefulness in sinuous and elegant forms. Her design philosophy was full of passion and opposed to the cold intellectualism of the aesthetics of the machine that that blurs the wonders of life. "The poverty of modern architecture stems from the atrophy of sensuality," Eileen said in an interview in 1929 for *L'Architecture Vivante* (Willette, 2017).

The villa E.1027 with a total area of 120 square meters stands through columns on an artificial terrace. The front façade broken up by a series of balconies and verandas has an amazing view of the sea that is right down there (Fig. 1). You can believe that are not in a house, but you are crossing the ocean with a transatlantic liner. The doubt is more than founded looking at the sea from there. It is one of the special effects of the *theatre à abiter*.

The large windows with a screen-like opening system allow natural lighting and ventilation of the building (Fig. 2). This design solution allows conditions of internal comfort without wasting energy and without the use of the too obvious brise-soleil shielding. The *stage-house* has an open curtain and the actors-roommates will live a new adventure every day with the blue sea as a background.

The villa in reinforced concrete has the typical appearance of modern building with cantilevered elements and plain blank solid walls (Espegel Alonso, 2016). The white color of the villa stands out among the lush greenery and the blue sea of the French Riviera (Fig. 3).

Everyone must be able to feel free and independent. This is the dogma that guides the project of the interior of the villa (Espegel Alonso, 2016). Each room has its own balcony with access to the outside and a guest or permanent resident



Fig. 1 View from the sea of the Villa E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (Gray & Badovici, 1929)

could have privacy, comfort, and peace. As Eileen explained on the special issue of *L'Architecture Vivante*, “Entering a house should be like the sensation of entering a mouth which will close behind you” (Gray & Badovici, 1929). The garden extends the intimacy of the villa on the seaside, hosting an outdoor drawing room sheltered from the wind by maritime pines on the southwest side and an outdoor kitchen surrounded by citrus fruits on the north side.

Throughout the home, from room to room, there is comfort and a meticulous attention to detail. Every complement and piece of furniture of the house is works of arts of Eileen’s creativity, like the famous *Bibendum* and *Transat* chairs (Fig. 4). Eileen designs every component of the interior of the house, considering not only its function, but also its ease of use and using the most suitable materials.



Fig. 2 Detail of ribbon windows with a screen-like opening system, Villa E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Picture by Kasper Akhøj (Akhøj, 2017)



Fig. 3 Back of the Villa E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Picture by Kasper Akhøj (Akhøj, 2017)



Fig. 4 The Bibendum Chair (left) and the Transat Chair (right). Villa E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (Willette, 2017)

4 The Story of an Obsession

It was the summer of 1938. Gray and Badovici were no longer a couple, their love had ended a few years earlier. Eileen had left the house she had lived with Jean. The couple kept in touch with each other as well as with their famous friends of yesteryear. That summer the Master Le Corbusier accepted the invitation of Badovici to spend a few days of vacation at his holiday home in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. We wonder if the Master noticed that the Villa E.1027 had all the five points of modern architecture that he had theorized: the pylons, the free plan, the roof garden, the ribbon windows, the free façade (Le Corbusier, 1923) (Fig. 5).

All we know for sure is that Le Corbusier wrote a letter of congratulations to Eileen. “I am so happy to tell you how much those few days spent in your house have made me appreciate the rare spirit which dictates all the organization inside and outside. A rare spirit which has given the modern furniture and installations such a dignified, charming, and witty shape” (Adam, 2009).

These words certainly flattered our silent lady. The most famous architect of the moment Le Corbusier praised her work. But something serious was about to happen.

Between 1938 and 1939, the Master went back to the Villa E.1027 and painted obscene sexist murals on every blank wall he could find on the inside of the home. One of the murals covered also the message of welcome in the entrance, *entrez lentement*, painted by Eileen to invite guests on a journey into the intimacy of her home. Le



Fig. 5 Murals by Le Corbusier. Villa E.1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Picture by Kasper Akhøj (Akhøj, 2017)

Corbusier also had himself photographed naked while he was painting the murals, taking pleasure in his brutal rape (Fig. 6). It was an awfully hard blow to Eileen, another one inflicted on what remained of her great love story. Now even the house was no longer hers and no longer represented her. The Villa E.1027 has just become the desecrated container of a betrayal. Eileen's never setting foot in it again.

Le Corbusier took revenge on a woman who had that had made the cold rationalism vibrate with a great passion and love for life. The villa E.1027 was a masterpiece and it was not his work. In addition, it was designed by a woman. The great Le Corbusier had to remedy what was an unacceptable affront to him. And he found the remedy by painting obscene murals, putting together the acrimony for a woman smarter than him and another one frustration, the painting. He wanted to be a great painter, but he was just recognized as one of the greatest architects of the time.

From this moment on, the relationship between Le Corbusier and Gray will be broken forever. Le Corbusier raped the intact whiteness of the Villa E.1027 and invaded the whole scene of the *house-stage*. Badovici allowed this violence and was pleased. The murals of the great Le Corbusier had increased the value of his home.

During the war, the Germans occupied and vandalized the house. At the end of the war, Badovici was quick to inform Le Corbusier that his murals were safe. But Gray wanted Le Corbusier to take those hideous murals off her house. In a letter dated December 30, 1949, which according to Peter Adam was written by Gray herself, Badovici asked the Master to repair the damage he had done. "You luck generosity toward me. A correction from you seems necessary, if not, I will be forced to do it myself to re-establish the original spirit of the house by the sea" (Adam, 2009).



Fig. 6 Le Corbusier in the Villa E.1027 (Willette, 2017)

Le Corbusier refused to remove his murals and carried out a smear campaign against Gray's work. His anger toward that woman did not subside and that villa by the sea was a real obsession he could not get away from (Colomina, 2018).

Probably for this reason, in the year 1952 he designed Le Cabanon, a small refuge a few meters from the villa adjacent to the restaurant L'étoile de mer by the Italian Roberto Rebutato (Prelorenzo, 2013). According to Le Corbusier's biographers, Le Cabanon was simply a birthday present for his wife, but Beatriz Colomina tells another terrible truth. "By imposing his vision from above, he established his domain on the site of Gray's house. The cabanon was just an observation platform, a kind of house for watchdogs" (Colomina, 2018).

In that small house, so naïf made of tree trunks, the perfect antithesis of his model of the *machine à habiter*, also without bathrooms, he spent his time painting, his other obsession. And he also spent a lot of time in Gray's house, even for long periods, especially after his wife's death (Prelorenzo, 2013).

The villa by the sea that Le Corbusier wanted to hide from the whole world soon became famous for its murals. A strange twist of fate that was preparing the final counterpoint. The house was considered a cult object, a heritage to be preserved,

which many attributed to Le Corbusier himself. After all, who could have designed a house like this in 1926? Gray's name always remained unknown, just as Le Corbusier wanted it to be.

When Badovici died in 1956, E.1027 was inherited by an aunt nun living in Romania who had to give up it. A great opportunity then presented itself for Le Corbusier who continued to be obsessed with the villa. Among international intrigues that even involved the wealthy shipowner Onassis, the great manipulator Le Corbusier arranged for the villa to be bought at auction by one of his admirers, Madame Schelbert. The new owner believed that the villa E.1027 was one of the works of the great Master and Le Corbusier never denied it.

But the sea, that blue sea of southern France, knew the truth of the story of Gray, Badovici, and Le Corbusier. In 1965, Le Corbusier died while swimming near the Villa E.1027 that had been the obsession of his life.

After Le Corbusier's death, the Villa E.1027 continued to be haunted by bad fortune. The villa carries a troubled history with it for decades to come. A dissolute owner arrived to turn it into a crime scene, ending up dead on the living room floor. All the original furniture was sold at auction, and what remains of the house, abandoned and in ruins, is looted and vandalized (Figs. 7–8). Sounds like the end of the line, but it was not.



Fig. 7 House entrance of the Villa E.1027. Picture by Kasper Akhøj (Akhøj, 2017)



Fig. 8 Drawing room of the Villa E.1027. Picture by Tim Benton (Benton, 2016)

5 A Happy Ending Travel

Since the 1970s, the French Government has considered that the villa should be preserved thanks to the presence of Le Corbusier's murals. In 1999, the house has been included in the list of the architectural heritage of France.

From 2004 to 2012, the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs of Provence and the Conservatory of the coast have carried out restoration work to prevent the house from suffering further serious irreparable damage. These preliminary works have left visible the marks of history in accordance to the conservative restoration. In 2014, the non-profit organization Cap Moderne has started a long critical restoration that now, after 6 years of work, had restored the villa to its original state (Cap Modern Association, 2014; Benton, 2016). The restoration has involved the reinforced concrete structure and facades of the building, the reconstruction and remake in the form of copies of all the furnishings, and the restoration of the garden.

Finally, the Villa E.1027 can be visited and seen just as Eileen Gray had carefully designed it in every little detail. One hundred years after its construction, the house is a living heritage that fascinates and welcomes us with its warming rational and sensual grace. The Villa E.1027 has been restored to its original beauty, except for one single, not insignificant detail, those rough murals that still disfigure it. However, we believe that it is right they are still there. The obscene murals will be a warning against human stupidity and will tell us, unaware travelers, the story of a woman that was a great architect and the story of a man that was hostage of his wicked narcissism. But to understand the story all the way through, you must go to French Riviera, look at



Fig. 9 View by the sea of the Villa E.1027. Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Painting by the author (Palmero Iglesias, June 2020)

Eileen's house from the sea and experience the intimacy of a masterpiece of modern architecture (Fig. 9).

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Olimpia Niglio · Eric Yong Joong Lee *Editors*

Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation

A Dialogue between Ethics, Law, and Culture

This book provides a substantial contribution to understanding the international legal framework for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage. It offers a range of perspectives from well-regarded contributors from different parts of the world on the impact of law in heritage conservation. Through a holistic approach, the authors bring the reader into dialogue around the intersection between the humanities and legal sciences, demonstrating the reciprocity of interaction in programs and projects to enhance cultural heritage in the world. This edited volume compiles a selection of interesting reflections on the role of cultural diplomacy to address intolerances that often govern international relations, causing damage to human and cultural heritage. The main purpose of this collection of essays is to analyse the different cultural paradigms that intervene in the management of heritage, and to advocate for improvements in international laws and conventions to enable better cultural policies of individual nations for the protection of human rights. The editors submit that it is only through open dialogue between the humanities and jurisprudence that the international community will be able to better protect and value sovereignty, and promote cultural heritage for the development of a better world. This collection is relevant to scholars working in areas relating to law, management and policies of cultural heritage conservation and protection.

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