

Eileen Gray and the Semiotics of her Unique Modern Design

Fátima Pombo¹, Anna Marie Fisker²

This title mirrors the research the authors have been carrying out for a couple of years regarding the study of Eileen Gray (1878-1976) iconic home E-1027 (1926-1929) and her concept for dwelling, addressing the pioneering modernism in disagreement with Le Corbusier's oft-quoted line about a house being *a machine à habiter*. E-1027 is a place full of ingenious thinking, leading down mystically from a small staircase to a brilliant view over the Mediterranean Sea and Monte Carlo. She designed many of her most famous furniture pieces, including the low-slung *Transat* armchair and the iconic *Satellite* mirror as response to specific needs and purposes of this space. The interior is a vivid combination of comfortable and inventive design, articulating several functions in a large open plan, a dining area, a place for tea, a place for siesta. Beds fold into walls, a table becomes a desk, and the hall has her written instructions for visitors – *Entrez Lentement* and the ironic *Défense de Rire*. (Fig. 1) In

effect, our *in loco* research also focused on what we denominated *the semiotics of her own* through the interpretation of words spread indoors, in particular the sentences close to furniture, by calling the categories of icon, index and symbol distinguished by Pierce. The nautical map in the living room wall stencilled with the quote of Baudelaire *Invitation au Voyage* (Fig. 2) forms the centrepiece of the main room, requesting the visitor to resonate with the stay at her home. It comes into our articles' arguments that Eileen Gray's legacy is the evidence that a pure intellectual response falls short of emotion and beauty. If there are recognized common features to modernist architecture, the emancipation and impact of house E-1027 relies upon the unveiling of the realm of art, design and architecture as a privileged crossroad to access the notion of identity. Gray expressed her contribution to space's plurality and flexibility of use by creating gender-free working and living sceneries.

.....
1 – Department of Communication and Art & ID+, University of Aveiro
2 – Department of Civil Engineering, Aalborg University
.....

FIGURE 1
Words of Eileen Gray ©F. Pombo

FIGURE 2
Nautical Chart Collage ©A. M. Fisker

