Chapter 9

A queer analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027

Katarina Bonnevier

On a terrace in the steep rocky landscape about 50 meters from the Mediterranean Sea you find E.1027, architect Eileen Gray's house of dense liveliness (Figure 9.1). It is a project that defies simple divisions and proposes another way of living. It is a luxurious project, designed into detail, but built with the ambition to find ideas to be multiplied. Eileen Gray sought "to create an interior atmosphere in harmony with *the refinements of the intimate modern life*, all by using the resources and the possibilities of current technique."[1] E.1027 is a house filled with secrets, pockets in walls, sliding passages, and tempting clefts. Gray's architecture hides and reveals simultaneously. It is out in the open but still closeted. It tells the story of the visually exposed that remains overlooked if you are not familiar with the codes.

This chapter is an attempt to interpret some codes hidden in the heterosexual matrix of architecture. Simultaneously, it raises the question of opposition and transgression of normative orders. Eileen Gray's building E.1027 is read through queer theory. It is in terms of seeking "leaks" in the boundaries of heteronormative architecture and interpretation that some interesting differences occur with E.1027. I see E.1027 as an architecture of a nonstraight position.[2]

There's something queer here

The architect and designer Eileen Gray (1878–1976) came from Ireland but lived and practiced in France. Between the years 1926–1929 she designed and built her first entire house – E.1027 in Roquebrune Cap Martin, close to Monaco on the French Riviera.

Copyright 2005. Routledge.
All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES
AN: 140178 ; Hilde Heynen, Glsm Baydar.; Negotiating Domesticity : Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture
Account: s5591646.main.ehost

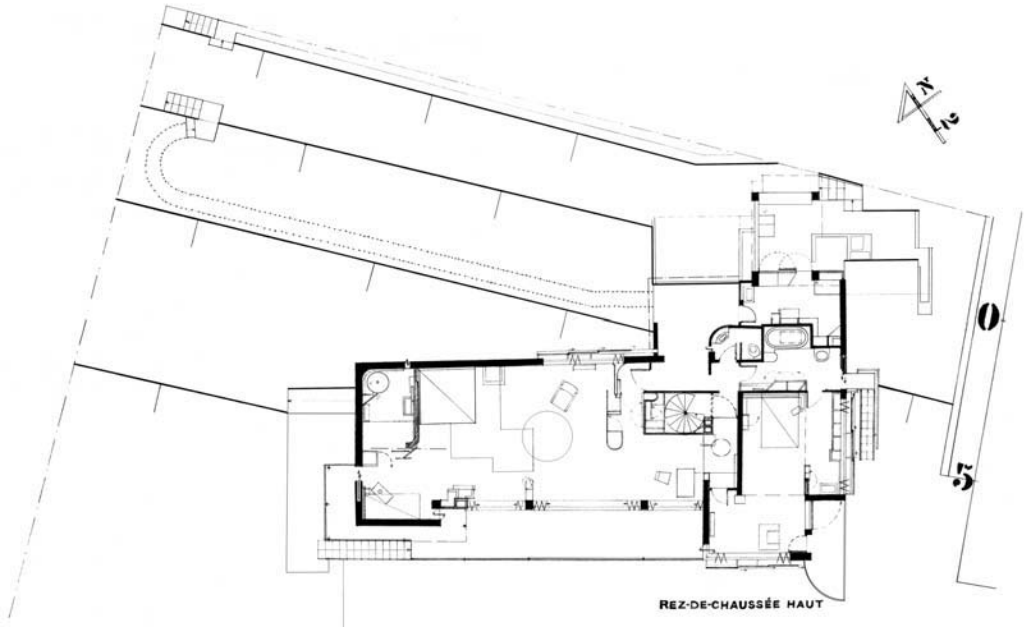
9.1
View of E.1027 from garden

E.1027 has two floors, named *rez-de-chaussée haute* (upper ground floor, Figure 9.2) and *rez-de-chaussée bas* (lower ground floor, Figure 9.3). Walls, floors and garden, furniture, closets and fittings, screens, windows and textures, names, movements, and colors – all are designed into a detailed composition. Gray's architecture is an exploration of texture and color, folds and layers, drapes and inexact repetitions. In her architecture there are screens transformed into walls and rugs combined with floors. It is as if she folded the surfaces into spaces, into entire interiors, to a complete building – E.1027. It is a queer architecture of surfaces where a division between interior decoration and building is impossible. It is a carpet that won't stay put.

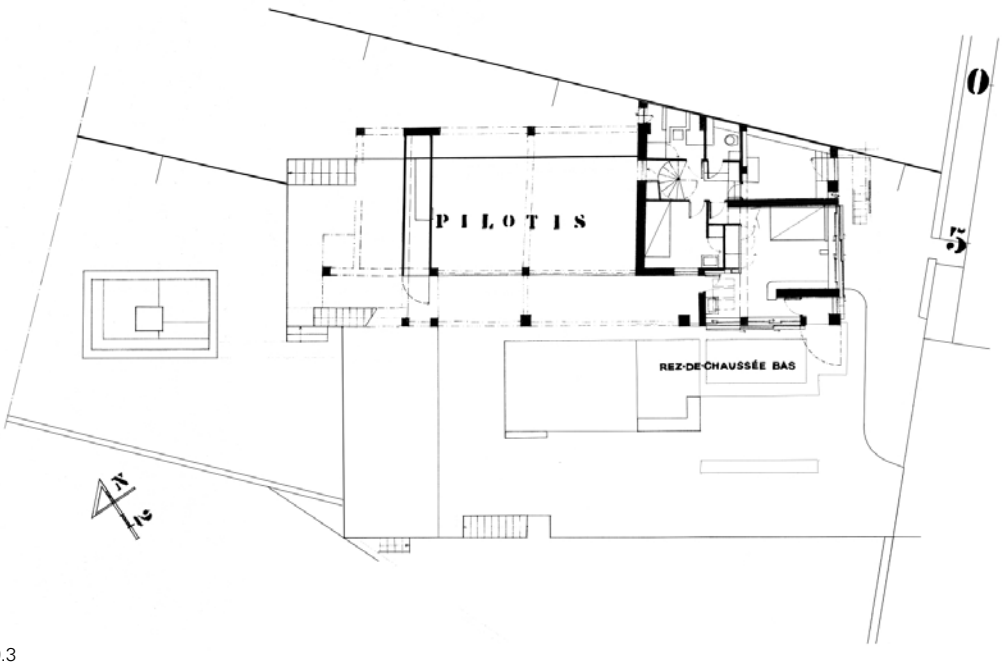
The house is entered from above. It guards the privacy of the inhabitants since they had to go through the house to reach the lower floor and the garden terraces. Only one small fraction of the composition, the lemon tree garden and the kitchen, is on the explicitly public side of the building. Apart from the kitchen, there are on the upper ground floor a main living-room with terrace, a hidden chamber with balcony, a proper bathroom, and a separate toilet. On the lower ground floor are the friend's room, the maid's room, the gardener's room, a toilet, a service closet, and, underneath the living-room (which stands on pilotis), a secluded terrace.

All representations I have seen of E.1027 have left me wondering about certain things.[3] There are pockets in the walls that are only hinted at in the drawings. There are differences in floor levels and terraced surfaces that on a plan only show as lines and can be very easily confused with a line

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use



9.2
Plan of upper ground floor and gardens



9.3
Plan of lower ground floor and gardens

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

marking a change in materials. A number of corners and viewpoints are absent in the images.[4]

The building has become surrounded by myths and anecdotes, but I am going to focus on a story that has been little analyzed. Since Gray's part in the canon of modernist design and architecture has been recognized, she has become a female hostage of sorts and is often promoted when the "absent" women in architecture are to be rescued from the historical dust of oblivion.[5] What has been safely disregarded and excluded from interpretations is Gray's sliding sexuality, her non-heteronormative lifestyle and how these might have an effect on her ways of disturbing the order of things. To think about E.1027 in queer[6] terms brings forward the queerness *in* the building. This does not mean that queerness is some sort of essentialist core, or the only truth; the point is, as Alexander Doty writes about mass culture, that "only hetero-centrist/homophobic cultural training prevents everyone from acknowledging this queerness."[7]

Lynne Walker writes in the anthology *Women's Places*, "In most recently published work on Eileen Gray, her lesbianism and bisexuality have been recognized, but little analyzed. It seems less important what her sexual activities were than to try to explain the role that sexuality played in her life."[8] That in 1902, at the age of 24, she escaped social and sexual conventions, the family in Ireland, marriage and motherhood, and started to move in the circle of lesbians in Paris, who were the leaders of the literary and artistic avant-garde, have implications for the understanding of her production. However, before we proceed, comes my confession: I still have a need for heroines in architecture. And I have a crush on Eileen Gray. This nonconformist architect and designer awakes my desires and dreams, like a triumphant mirror sending sparkles to my own everyday life and professional practice in the male-dominated and heteronormative regime of architecture (Figure 9.4).

9.4
Living room with view of Monaco

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

La "living-room"

E.1027 can be read from the bed. Gray designed the habitat out of the formula of the "living-room" which would offer all inhabitants a total independency, and permit rest and intimacy. A generous bed makes up the largest piece of furniture in the *grande salle*, which is the main section of the building that composes half of the upper ground floor.[9] Singled out as a separate volume held by pilotis (while the rest of the *rez-de-chaussée haut* rests on the *rez-de-chaussée bas*) and the first space you enter as a guest, it is evident and visible from both inside and outside. This portion of E.1027 shows what the formula of the living-room could mean, and I will hereafter refer to it as the *living-room.* The living-room can be understood as a development of Gray's display at *XIV Salon des Artistes Décorateurs* in 1923 which she named *Boudoir de Monte Carlo*. The boudoir was proposed by Gray to be a multifunctional space for all aspects of life – pleasure, rest, studies, business meetings, and parties. The generous day-bed was the centerpiece.

Historically, the boudoir is the first domestic space devoted exclusively to female use and can be compared to the male marked study or cabinet. The term "boudoir" has not only feminine connotations but is charged with sexual pleasure and privacy.[10] The term "boudoir" raises a problem since it reinstates women in the body and sensuality part of the traditional dichotomy where men are associated with mind and rationality. In Boudoir de Monte Carlo and the living-room of E.1027, Eileen Gray counteracted and slipped this gendered simplicity into ambiguity. The boudoir in her interpretation became the most public space of the building, as well as the most intimate. There is no spatial opposition between these two categories; in fact, there are no such absolute categories, rather the "Grayian" boudoir supports a multitude of situations. Visitors are greeted and entertained in this space, but one can also settle in. No simple norm decides what kind of space this is. That which is being performed in the space, with the help of the architecture, decides what space it is.

A central term in queer theory is "performativity" – that we become in and through the act. The term underlines how meaning is created in the process of making. Gender or sex are not preconditions; the categories man and woman are not automatic – we are made to become men and women. This does not mean that these categories are voluntary, but are brutally (re)inscribed.[11] The building as an act is ambiguous, open to interpretation, not confined within normative constraints. Gray considered E.1027 as tentative, "a moment in a much larger study."[12]

Queer theory is a critique of the "heterosexual matrix." The heterosexual matrix describes an invisible norm which does not appear to be constructed but comes through as "natural" – a norm that defines everyone and everything as heterosexual until proved differently. The norm inscribes

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

other ways of living with unnaturalness, deviance or invisibility. The heterosexual matrix is a precondition for how we understand our built environment. In other words, buildings participate in the construction of norms, but they seem to be about bricks and mortar – nothing else. In domestic building activity, the heterosexual matrix is often blatantly obvious, despite the fact that "a number of kinship relations exist and persist that do not conform to the nuclear family model."[13] E.1027 acts nonconformist.

Repetition plays a crucial part in the construction of norms and by repetition the norm seems natural, a given truth. Political philosopher Judith Butler underlines "norm acquires its durability through being reinstated time and again. Thus, a norm does not have to be static in order to last; in fact, it cannot be static if it is to last."[14] By repeating the same principles for homes over and over again, these principles are naturalized. At the same time, an escape route presents itself in the fact that an exact repetition is impossible. The act of building can be a way to develop new realities. In this sense, some architecture, such as E.1027, can be performative; it takes place within a given frame but manages simultaneously to stage something new. The inexact repetition is consciously pushed a step further.

Gray calls the habitation "*un organisme vivant*."[15] A person can set the house in motion. No motor powers this living machine – a player/actor is called for. The architecture prescribes a behavior where the body is engaged with the building elements. Walls and screens can slide aside and windows flip into disappearance, the bar can be folded into the wall, tables can be linked, folded and extended, sideboards and drawers pivot – motion is everywhere. The building calls for action, it underlines the performative aspects of all built environment. Gray's architecture constructs another kind of person; it is body-building. Through the in-built motions the norm for how houses usually work is broken, which helps to make another sociality possible.

Gray's English term for the spatial quality of E.1027 underlines the performative queerness – it is a living room – and lacks the evident erotic undertone of the boudoir. Meanwhile, the architecture of matter is suggestive; in the innermost corner of the living-room, behind the large bed, is a shower niche, separated only with a screen that does not reach the ceiling. The space is somewhat masked because the screen was painted in the same pale yellow color as the wall behind it. A strip of mirror in the corner of the screen and the other wall enhance the confusion, as the reflection produces an effect of looking beyond the wall. You cannot be seen when you take a shower, but the sound of water pours through the room (Figure 9.5).

Gray's architecture displays a great attention to the surface, the exposed and the masked. Nineteenth-century architect Gottfried Semper considered architecture as mask and decoration. He even wrote that the artist "in times of high artistic development also *masked the material of the*

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

9.5
Living-room shower corner

mask."[16] Another important idea in Semper's thinking is the primary importance of cladding, *Bekleidung.* Semper reversed the hierarchical order where cladding is secondary to structure. He argued that structure is there within the wall, but the importance of the wall is the visible spatial enclosure. Gray was sure of her focus: "The thing constructed has greater importance than the way one has constructed it."[17] Semper's idea of space connects to the texture of the enclosing wall. In other words, it is the dress that decides the architecture, not just the clothes-hanger.

The relation between body and architecture is associated with the visible cladding. Walls define bodies in the same fashion as costumes define bodies, or masks operate, from the outside and in. Walls provide a second container, after dress, for the body, but the wrapping also constructs the identity of the inhabitant. To follow queer theory, the self is constituted in the relation with people (an audience, a lover, or a kinship relation) and in interaction with things (a mirror, a chair or a flight of stairs). Material queerness is situated in the surface – that is, in the interrelation between built matter and the active subject.

The living-room floor of E.1027 is tiled in white, except a section in black tiles. The black tiles, as in a folded extension, continue in a rectangle on the whitewashed wall. The bed and a woollen carpet are thicker surfaces placed into this folded composition. A padded surface on the wall mediates

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

between bed and wall-tiles. Eileen Gray argues that "The architecture itself should be its own decoration."[18] In her architecture, everything is part of the composition. A removable painting was considered by Gray to be noxious to the overall harmony.

The upper floor terrace is a rim along the house towards the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 9.6). The division between the living-room and the balcony is movable and variable. It consists of an accordion glass wall that can be completely folded aside. The instability of the wall has been further emphasized by the lack of frame or height difference between the balcony and the living-room. It is one continuous floor, clad in the same white tiles.

Gray furnished the exterior. On one of her photographs, in the 1929 winter issue of *L'Architecture Vivante*, "E.1027: *Maison en Bord de Mer*," she staged the upholstered *transatchair* on the *marine d'abord* carpet in the balcony extension of the now open-air living-room and invited the spectator to take pleasure in the view of Monte Carlo and the sea. Here she also set up a dining table with a cork top (to reduce the noise of the silverware) and an adjustable lamp on a brush carpet.[19] Through the unpredictable outline the balcony-fringe becomes part of the center, and the living-room becomes part of the outside. E.1027 is folded around itself – the interior is wrapped around the exterior. Gray does not only reverse inside and outside, but she also shifts

9.6
Balcony fringe and terrace carpet

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All u

the meaning of being in or out. The simple division and the connotations of inside and outside are disturbed – queered.

Architect Jennifer Bloomer, among others, has furthered the ongoing discussion concerning the dichotomy of structure and ornament by pointing out how structure has been marked as masculine and ornament as feminine. With this dichotomy, it follows that ornament has been, and still at large, is considered superfluous and structure essential. Bloomer asks us to reflect on the inseparability of the terms; of artefacts both ornamental and structural.[20] Queer works to destabilize divisive regimes based on binaristic thinking and perception; the thinking that constructs male and female as hierarchical oppositions, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual.

Queer has come to mean dissonance, but as Butler has argued, the term should not be completely defined to remain a critical device to transgress categorization. Nevertheless, to think about queer as dissonance is a way to understand more easily how queer disturbs the clear-cut. The dissonance appears time and again, and messes up the boundaries.

Gray's name-giving and play with texts are significant. She uses language provokingly, as if to promote other ways of thinking of her designs and spaces. In E.1027 she stenciled texts onto the architecture. Underneath a strikingly phallic lamp that pokes out of the entrance screen she wrote "DEFENSE DE RIRE" (laughing prohibited).[21] There are two possible entrances, but Gray is helpful; the text borrowed from the language of road signs, "SENS INTERDIT" (forbidden direction), points out the wrong way – that entrance would take you to the intimate parts of the building. The text plays with double meanings, "forbidden feeling," but if said loud it sounds like the opposite, *sans interdit*, without prohibition. Gray teases the visitor. "ENTREZ LENTEMENT" (enter slowly), is written on the wall of the proper entrance. She evokes, as Sylvia Lavin observes, "types of movement uncontainable by architectural interiors."[22] Meaning is created through such performative acts. Gray's mixture of techniques, texts on openings and screens, destabilize given rules. It is a strategy to create a distance to the granted, a dissonance.

Another dissonance is on the personal level of the architects involved. If Gray had designed the house for a female lover or entirely for herself, E.1027 could have been set into the realm of a separate homosexual culture. Instead, there was Jean Badovici who was not only a client of Gray, but also an assisting architect and an intimate friend. The term "queer" unsettles this dichotomy of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Even if the building process of E.1027 also includes Badovici, in respect to their separate production, the building can be attributed to Gray.[23] The construction of the name E.1027 can also be interpreted as a comment on this: E is for Eileen; 10 for the tenth letter in the alphabet, J; 2 for B and 7 for G; one architect framed by the other. He was her protégé and Gray's generosity towards Badovici is well

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

recorded. A severe blurring of gendered roles is going on here which defies a simple division into "normal" relations.

In the living-room fold of surfaces Gray also fixed a marine chart of the Caribbean on which she printed "INVITATION AU VOYAGE" in big letters. The normal interpretation of this is that the inhabitant should feel like a tourist and dream of distant places. The building's marine and boat-like connotations underline this. Its mobile parts give it a kind of nomadic quality which Gray called "*le style* '*camping*'," [24] but an interpretation does not have to stop there. Gray's stenciled text is also a reference to Charles Baudelaire's poem, *L'Invitation au voyage*, from the 1860s.

Baudelaire wrote some of his poems to lesbians, in which he romanticized their outlaw status and decadence.[25] His books were popular in Paris of the 1920s. In *L'Invitation au voyage* Baudelaire asks his child, his sister, to join him where "*tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté*," [26] which can be interpreted as a description of the distant Greek island-haven of Lesbos. Gray's friend, Natalie Barney, and some of her kin shared a utopian desire to establish a lesbian colony there.

The poem had also inspired to a surrealist short film *L'Invitation au voyage* from 1927, written and directed by Germaine Dulac. Dulac, another woman loving woman, was a central figure in 1920s' French avant-garde cinema. Film theorist Anneke Smelik writes that Dulac does not stand alone, but is part of a tradition of gay and lesbian film-making within early cinema. She also tells us that Dulac's films have been read as critiques of heterosexuality.[27] Fantasy plays an important role in this tale of a married woman's night out at a cabaret. Thus, the stenciled text not only invites you to far-away countries, but reminds the spectator of the fantasies of Parisian nightlife.

Closet

A spiral staircase runs right through E.1027, but it is only visible from the outside where it shows on the roof terrace. Despite the central position in the house, the stairs are masked behind screens and walls, and cannot be seen when you are inside. To reach the stairs from the main spaces next to it, you have to turn round a corner and open the secret door behind which the interior path to the lower ground floor is hidden. A new guest will be under the impression that they have to go outside to reach the lower floor. The staircase is not treated as a sculptural element in the interior or as a motive in the façade; instead, the beauty in the curve of the spiral concrete, enhanced by the sweeping light from the roof opening, does not reveal itself until the door is found (Figure 9.7).

The masked staircase conceals pockets of closets in its walls, some reached from inside the encasement and others from the surrounding spaces – a kind of double interiority, as well as a double concealment. The

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

9.7
Closeted staircase with closet in the case of stairs

9.8
Staircase door and passage between overt and hidden boudoir

biggest secret of E.1027 is that it offers spaces for secrets, having layers of interiors within its interiors.

The "closet" is an important architectural metaphor that billows out of the heterosexual matrix. You are in the closet when you are hiding your homosexuality and you get out (of the closet) when you state your homosexuality. Several theorists such as literature critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick[28] have reflected on the term "closet". Architecture critic Aaron Betsky attempts in *Queer Space, Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* to regard the closet not only as a metaphor, but also as a material space.[29] Ways of thinking and norms become more obvious when they are visualized through architectural metaphors. They are just as difficult to shift, challenge or tear down as our built environment.

When architect Henry Urbach in his essay "Closets, Clothes, disClosure" compares the metaphoric closet and the material container of clothes, he finds that they are not as different as they might appear.[30] The homosexual closet helps heterosexuality to present itself with certainty in the same manner as the storage space houses things that threaten to soil the room. He stresses that the stability of these arrangements depends on the architectural relation between closet and room. Their interdependency would mean that when their architectural relation is queered, becomes dissonant from the expected, the solid norm also gets destabilized.

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

Urbach defines the material closet as a kind of wall cavity. It differs significantly from wardrobes, chests, and armoires which are freestanding, mobile objects that encase clothes within the precinct of the room. The closet, beyond but adjacent to the room, is rarely elaborated as an own space. It is set within the wall but said to be "in" the room. In the *chambre d'amis* (the room of friends) on the lower ground floor of E.1027, you find an elegant built-in closet. It makes up an entire wall, but the wall comes through as a piece of furniture. Gray's wish was "That the very furniture, by loosing their own individuality, merge with the architectonic ensemble!"[31] The conventional division between interior decoration and building is pointless since this architecture is made up by how they blend together. The furniture turn out to be architecture.

The closet door conventionally gets concealed with the same wallpaper or paint as the surrounding wall; a closet should be accessible but inconspicuous. But, as always, the mask reveals and hides at the same time. A gap between the wall and the door, the door hinges and handle, or the unfurnished space in front indicate the space behind. The staircase in E.1027 is also closeted by its door, which is set flush into the wall of the passage next to it. The door has no frame or decor on its planar surface. Furthermore, when the door is fully opened, it becomes part of another wall that closes the passage between the service area of the building and the living-room (Figure 9.8). This door is thus a masking device that by intervention can divide the one building into two separate buildings. When open, the passage is a dense mediator between the more secluded parts of the building (the chamber, the bathroom and the lower ground floor) and the overt living-room. It is as if you move within a wall. When shut, the distinction between private and public is more explicit, as convention, developed during the previous century, would prescribe.

Salon

Before the analysis of E.1027 resumes, I need to make a detour to Paris. During her years as an art student in Paris at the beginning of the 1900s, Gray was escorted by her girlfriend Jessie Gavin.[32] Gavin passed as a man and therefore they could move in public, in places and at times impossible for two "lonely" women.[33] Gray embodied the New Woman: self-assured, professional, with short-cut hair. She had love affairs with both women and men, but lived most of her life with her servant Louise Dany. Such a family constellation counters the norm of the nuclear family, but reinstates class difference.

The New Women of Paris in the early 1900s contested the construct of women as private.[34] They smoked in public, sat around in bars and cafés, and drove cars.[35] Such scenes suggest, in art theorist Griselda Pollock's words, "the social revolution associated with women's sustained re-invention of themselves."[36] Even if they were considered decadent, 50 years earlier

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

such scenes in Paris would only have signified the women's prostitutional status. The nineteenth-century model of the respectable domestic woman is the background to why interior decoration became gender-marked as feminine. Architecture historian Penny Sparke writes:

> The interior decorator began to occupy a middle ground, maintaining her commitment to the cultural links between domesticity and femininity but operating outside the home in the context of the "masculine", public sphere of work defined as professional rather than amateur.[37]

Gray criticizes the avant-garde architects who are interested in the exterior at the expense of the interior architecture: "The exterior architecture seems to have interested the avant-garde architects at the expense of the interior."[38] Her statement has gendered implications, since the exterior had a higher status as it was marked masculine and the avant-garde architects to whom she probably refers were most likely male. She thought that the interior should command the exterior and not be the accidental consequence of the façade.

Eileen Gray was a welcome guest in the salon that Natalie Barney staged in her home on 20 rue Jacob in Paris. In *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case writes about the salon as a personal theater and a place where women have been important forces in the shaping of a public discussion.[39] The salon takes place in a salon, but it is the event that makes it into a salon. Thus, the salon of matter, "the theater salon," props and backdrops, and the enactments – dialogs, flirts, readings, portrayals, *tableaux vivants* – are woven together by the participants' engagement in a moment in time. It is a performative architecture achieved through bodies and walls, conversations and costumes, furniture and intrigues.

There is a blurred distinction between theater and life as the audience, consisting of friends and acquaintances, were also the actors, and the place for the salon was the house where the salonière lived. The salon is part of the public sphere, but takes place in a private space. Case points to the class aspect of the culture of the salon – the women of the salons were privileged – but argues that there might be other oppressions that make the salons into places of disturbance. Barney's salon was important in the staging of a lesbian lifestyle which counteracted the invisibility of lesbians in everyday life. Homosexuality in France at the time was, if shocking, at least not criminal. Constant writes:

> Gray remained discreet about her relationship during the early 1920s with the famous singer Marisa Damia (pseudonym of Marie-

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

> Louise Damien). Parisian society would tolerate such unconventional behavior so long as outward forms of decorum were maintained.[40]

Barney had another attitude: she considered a scandal the best way of getting rid of nuisances.[41] There is a multitude of stories of her publicly staged love encounters, in Bois de Boulogne, at the opera, or in her own garden temple, *Temple de l'Amitié*. Lesbianism has, as queer theorist Judith Halberstam puts it, "conventionally been associated with the asexual, the hidden, the 'apparitional', and the invisible."[42] There is a heteronormative effort to clean lesbians from sexual activities. When we take the example of Barney who was marked by a kind of hyper-visibility, the disappearing tendency in respect to lesbians comes through as a normative denial. The "indecent" sexual activities are not "less important"; they are at the heart of why same-sex desire was, and still is, provoking – they always nestle within the analysis.

Aaron Betsky, who mainly refers to the cultures of homosexual men, argues that the closet is the fundamental principle for queer space. I think that it is one principle out of many, but not necessarily in every spatial expression of queerness. To insist on the closet limits queer space to a dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality. The act of closeting is a normative way to dismiss queer space to the fringes of normalcy and contain it within the deviant other.

The picture becomes different if the cultures of female same-sex desire are not only added but taken as starting points. Since in Paris of the 1920s women who loved women, such as the poet Gertrud Stein and the interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe, were able to be open, if discreet, to make them and their spaces less visible than they were is an oppressive mistake. They fought, and became role models, for the freedom to appear independently in public and professional life. The central role of this network in refining and redefining the founding principles of modernism has often been overlooked.[43] To put them in the closet only serves homophobia. This explicit lesbian culture was much more at the center of mainstream culture than normally is recognized by historiography. In the 1920s, Gray was among the leading designers in France and did not at all play the marginalized part later ascribed to her.[44]

It is correct, of course, to think about the closet also with regard to lesbians, but it seems just as important to relate the spaces of this group to the life in privacy ordained to *all* women by nineteenth-century ideology. It was maybe not an entirely homosexual network of women, but definitely a female homosocial environment that much shaped the domesticity of modernity. Sparke observes that de Wolfe had an "overwhelmingly female"[45] network of friends, supporters, and clients: "While her homosexuality undoubtedly brought her into close contact and friendships with a number of women

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

[. . .] it was her 'homosociality' that was more significant in bringing her professional projects."[46] De Wolfe's strategy was a mutual admiration between architect and client in which the creative project became a reciprocal confirmation. Indeed, it might not be possible to make a clear distinction between homosexuality and homosociality.[47]

This was the context in which Gray could establish herself as a designer and producer of lacquer works and carpets. In 1921, she opened the interior design shop *Jean Désert* – her masculine pseudonym – from which she sold her designs for furniture, carpets, lamps, and mirrors. Since the start, *Jean Désert* had a group of supporting customers in her network of women who loved women. For instance, the painter Romaine Brooks, Natalie Barney's lover, and the proprietor of the English bookstore Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach.[48] Elizabeth de Gramont, one of the most frequent guests at Barney's salons, was the first person in France to write about Gray's work in 1922.[49]

Women are often constrained to create a room of their own within a structure built by men. The interesting thing about both Barney's salon and Gray's house is that they do not stay within the limits, but rework the very border of the fixed place. Barney's salon was a "queer space," both in the performative sense and in the physical architecture, since it created a dissonance in the spaces of heteronormativity. Her salon was not disguised in the sense of being hidden, but was extravagantly masked within the dominant culture. The theater of the salon and the strategies of E.1027 resist the simplistic division of private and public. Not only do they reverse the hierarchical order between the feminine marked inside "the private" and the masculine marked outside "the public," but they also make them slide.

Boudoir

There is a doubling of the boudoir theme on the upper ground floor of E.1027 – the living-room and the "boudoir-studio."[50] The former provokingly exposed, with the big bed as a centerpiece, a place to entertain guests, and the latter closeted, being well-hidden from the living-room by a screen and an overlapping wall which contains a foldable bar. Just like the extrovert living-room, the hidden chamber also performs as a multifunctional "Grayian" boudoir, complete with an extravagant bed that emerges from the wall dressed in fur and colored drapes that, even when drawn back, would keep it elegant, a studio portion arranged with a writing table, diffused light and an intricate filing cabinet; and behind the shimmering aluminum-clad "coiffeuse," a slim screen-like cabinet, running water, a washbowl, and a fold-out mirror with a satellite tray for "CHOSES LEGÈRES" (light things). Unlike the extrovert living-room, however, the chamber is hidden away within the body of the building.

A private balcony with a summer bed supplies the chamber with an exterior hideaway – protected by the corner of the building and out-of-sight

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

from the long balcony of the seaside. Behind the bedroom is another place to wash yourself – a proper bathroom well separated into its own distinct space of the greatest privacy in this sequence of closeted spaces. A small exterior stairway makes it possible to exit into the lower gardens; despite the closeness of the bathroom, its independence is assured.

Gray made a great effort to moderate the visibility of the chamber and its adjacent spaces so their presence did not seek the attention of the guests in the overt living-room. The narrow passage to the disguised spaces is a recess of the living-room. To get to the chamber, guests must go into the wings around corners. When displayed, the bar Gray fitted into the walls of the passage masks the possible spatial link even more. Nonetheless, the passage-niche can also be viewed as a stage with the bar as part of the scene. Attention is thus attracted to what might be slumbering behind. The one who wants to see will see. We can compare this to the "invisible" lesbian: two women holding hands might not just be friends, the one who knows the codes will wonder if they are lovers.

There are three alternative ways out from this interior hidden within an interior: through the bathroom, the living-room, and the balcony. Additionally, Gray hid the exits from within the chamber. "Thanks to the disposition of this room (by overlapping) the doors are invisible from the inside."[51] The possibility both to reach the chamber and leave without being seen evokes games of hide-and-seek, secret love affairs, and safe escape routes. Despite the extreme interiority of the chamber, there is no sense of being confined. In fact, all the spaces in the building, except the maid's room, have several possible links, as well as a direct connection to the garden. The links between the rooms can be seen as built-in codes for movement. You never enter directly into a room, but always move around corners. As Sylvia Lavin observes, "E.1027 is, in fact, riddled with what might be called secret passages, hidden escape routes that have little to do with conventional windows and doors."[52] Doors and windows are normally privileged architectural elements. In Gray's architecture, the doors are hidden and windows are subordinated to ventilation or made to disappear.

Curtain

E.1027 can be understood as a performative challenge to the heterosexual matrix. It is clearly recognizable as a house to live in; simultaneously, it does not conform to the nuclear family. You live in another fashion here; the building is sexually charged and ambiguous. E.1027 seems, in Sylvia Lavin's words, "to offer access to a life outside the rules of civilized behavior and conventional architecture."[53] If architecture aggravates cultural norms, there is much to be learned from such an instance of subversion. In my opinion, Gray's house offers a built suggestion for a nonstraight lifestyle.

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

Gray sought to build out of sensibility, but "a sensibility clarified by knowledge; enriched by ideas."[54] She opposed, through the search for complexity and nuances, a simplistic architecture of oppositions, the division between thought and body, surface and structure, the beautiful and the practical. Gray did not see the pleasure of the eye as opposed to the well-being and comfort of the building's inhabitants. E.1027, depending on the cultural context, can be understood as a feminist critique of the culture of architecture, a culture that has a dubious relation to (homo)sexuality and maintains a mainstream normative masculinist taste.

Notes

I would like to thank the following people for helping me to advance this essay: Marie Carlsson, Karin Drake, Tiina Rosenberg, Eva Vaihinen from the group at the Gender Studies Department at Stockholm University, Catharina Gabrielsson, Katja Grillner, Lars Raattamaa, Malin Zimm, and the others of the research group of critical theory in architecture, *xakt*, at the School of Architecture, KTH.

1 My translation of "*à créer une atmosphère intérieure en harmonie avec* les raffinements de la vie intime moderne, *tout en utilisant les ressources et les possibilités de la technique courante*" (my emphasis). Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, *L'Architecture Vivante,* no. 26, 1929, p. 23.

2 Film- and mass-culture theorist Alexander Doty uses the terms "queer" and "queerness" as "a range of nonstraight expression in, or in response to, mass culture. This range includes specifically gay, lesbian, and bisexual expressions; but it also includes all other potential (and potentially unclassifiable) nonstraight positions." Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer. Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. xvi.

3 The list of literature on Gray and E.1027 is long. My main references are two biographies: Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect, Designer: A Biography,* London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987, and Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray*, London: Phaidon, 2000. Ethel Buisson's and Beth Mclendon's analysis have been of great importance to my understanding of E.1027: Buisson and Mclendon (1996), "Eileen Gray"*, Archérie*. Online, available at www.irish-architecture.com/eileen_gray (accessed 30 December 2003); as well as Lynne Walker, "Architecture and Reputation: Eileen Gray, Gender, and Modernism," in Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke, eds, *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860–1960*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003; and Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, *L'Architecture Vivante-E.1027: Maison en Bord de Mer* (The Vivid Architecture -E.1027: House at the Brink of the Sea), no. 26, 1929.

4 Some of these uncertainties were answered on a site visit October 17, 2003, even though the building looks very different from its heyday. E.1027 has been abandoned and left to decay, but fortunately Christine Coulet from the Municipality of Roquebrune-Cap Martin, the owner of E.1027, informed me that it will be restored, with all the details, colors, and furniture of 1929 – the year when Gray considered E.1027 completed – and opened for visitors.

5 Many know E.1027 not because of its norm-bending architecture, but as the building that Le Corbusier was obsessed with. Architecture historian Beatriz Colomina has written about Le Corbusier's desire for E.1027 and Eileen Gray in "Battle Lines: E.1027," Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, eds, *The Sex of Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996, pp. 167–182. Le Corbusier tightly framed the previously solitary E.1027 when he built on the adjacent site. He also marked the very walls of E.1027 with a number of murals. Even if this story is important, it victimizes Gray and the attention is pulled away from her architecture to the dominant male architect. This standpoint is further argued by architecture historian Sylvia Lavin in "Colomina's Web: Reply to Beatriz Colomina," *The Sex of Architecture*, pp. 183–190.

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

6 "Queer" in the meaning deviant from the expected or normal has been used earlier as an offensive slang term for an openly homosexual person. For decades, "queer" was used solely as a derogatory adjective for gays and lesbians, but in the 1990s the term has been semantically reclaimed by gay and lesbian activists as a term of self-identification. The word is used as a term of defiant pride to overcome limiting identities.
7 Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer,* p. xi.
8 Walker, "Architecture and Reputation," p. 104.
9 Measuring 6.30 × 14 meters, the living room is the largest interior of E.1027.
10 For further discussion on the idea of the boudoir in modernism see Chapter 16, "The Modernist Boudoir and the Erotics of Space" in this volume.
11 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
12 My translation of "*un moment dans une recherche plus générale*," Gray and Badovici, "Description," p. 28.
13 Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?", *Differences*, no. 13.1, 2002, p. 14.
14 Ibid., p. 37.
15 Gray and Badovici, "Description," p. 28.
16 Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Harry Francis Mallgrave, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 257.
17 My translation of "*La chose construite a plus d'importance que la manière dont on la construit*," Gray and Badovici, "Description", p. 23.
18 My translation of "*C'est l'architecture qui doit être à elle-même sa propre décoration*," Gray and Badovici, "*De l'éclectisme au doute*" ("From eclectism to doubt"), p. 19.
19 Gray and Badovici, *L'Architecture Vivante*, poster 37 (the carpet, in color, is also presented on poster 50) and p. 39.
20 Jennifer Bloomer, "Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tabbles of Bower," *Assemblage*, no. 17, April, 1992, p. 12.
21 This interpretation was given to me on my visit to E.1027 by Christine Coulet who had this from Renaud Barrès, the local architect involved in the restoration of E.1027.
22 Lavin, "Colomina's Web," p. 187.
23 Walker discusses the problem that, in a collaboration between a man and a woman, the building often gets attributed to the man. "Cultural assumptions about women's auxiliary role and subservient nature take over." Walker, "Architecture and Reputation," 2003, p. 100.
24 Gray and Badovici, "Description," p. 25.
25 Elizabeth Wilson, "The City of the Floating World," *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992, p. 6.
26 "All is order and beauty, luxury, calm, and delight" (Cat Nilan, trans.). Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, 1869.
27 Anneke Smelik, "Feminist Film Theory," Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, eds, *The Cinema Book*, 2nd edn. London: British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 353–365. Online, available at www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/anneke/filmtheory.html, Universiteit Utrecht, 15 (accessed December 30, 2003). Some clips from Dulac's film are shown in Greta Schiller's documentary *Paris was a Woman*, Peccadillo Pictures, 2000.
28 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.
29 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space, Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, New York: William Morrow, 1997.
30 Henry Urbach, "Closets, Clothes, disClosure", Katerina Rüedi, Sarah Wigglesworth, and Duncan McCorquondale, eds, *Desiring Practices. Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996.
31 My translation of "*Que les meubles mêmes, perdant leur individualité propre, se fondent dans l'ensemble architectural!*" Gray and Badovici, "*De l'éclectisme au doute*", p. 20.

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use

32 Adam, *Eileen Gray*, p. 34.
33 For further reading on the possibilities that male attire could bring to women and the importance of cross-dressing to the feminist achievements, see Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Cross-dressing in Early Modern Europe*, Houndsmills and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, and Tiina Rosenberg, *Byxbegär* (Pants-desire), Göteborg: Anamma, 2000.
34 As Dolores Hayden and Griselda Pollock, among others, have revealed, the respectable woman during the nineteenth century is construed as private. The female domain became the interior, where she was part of the decor to mirror male property. The honorable man was active in public life, while a "public woman" was the term for women who sold sexual services. See, for instance, Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, Routledge: London and New York, 1999, p. 179.
35 Gray bought her first car, a Chenard & Walcker, in 1908, Adam, *Eileen Gray*, p. 65.
36 Pollock, *Differencing the Canon,* p. 179.
37 Penny Sparke, "Elsie de Wolfe and her female clients, 1905–15: gender, class and the professional interior decorator," in Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke, eds, *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860–1960*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 48.
38 My translation of "*L'architecture extérieure semble avoir intéressé les architects d'avant-garde aux dépens de l'architecture intérieure.*" Gray and Badovici, "Description," p. 23.
39 Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, London: MacMillan, 1988, "Personal Theatre," pp. 46–61. Many scholars have studied the importance of the salon as a place where women shaped and participated in the political and social agenda of their time – for instance, Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters, A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994.
40 Constant, *Eileen Gray*, pp. 9–11.
41 Meryle Secrest, *Between Me and Life: A Biography of Romaine Brooks*, London: Macdonald & Jane's, 1974, p. 275.
42 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 56.
43 Shari Benstock makes a closer examination of this subject in relation to literature in *Women of the Left Bank, Paris 1900–1940*, London: Virago, 1987.
44 Walker, "Architecture and Reputation," p. 95.
45 Sparke, "Elsie de Wolfe", p. 49.
46 Ibid., p. 50.
47 Compare with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thoughts about male bonding: "The importance of the category 'homosexual' comes not necessarily from its regulatory relation to a nascent or already-constituted minority of homosexual people or desires, but from its potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 86.
48 Constant, *Eileen Gray*, p. 51.
49 Elizabeth de Gramont, "*Les Laques d'Eileen Gray*," *Feuillets d'Art*, no. 3, March, 1922, pp. 147–148. Gray's work had previously been published in *Vogue*, late August 1917, "An Artist in Laquer," p. 29. Constant, *Eileen Gray*, p. 248.
50 Gray and Badovici, "Description," p. 31.
51 My translation of "*Grâce à la disposition de cette chambre (par désaxement) les portes sont invisible de l'intérieur*," ibid.
52 Lavin, "Colomina's Web," p. 187.
53 Ibid.
54 My translation of "*une émotivité purifiée par la connaissance; enrichie par l'idée, et qui n'exclut point la connaissance et l'appréciation des acquisitions scientifiques.*" Gray and Badovici, "De l'éclectisme au doute", p. 17.

EBSCOhost - printed on 11/14/2023 3:05 PM via UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES. All use subject to https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use