MAINTAINING THE MACHINE: SERVANTS IN LE CORBUSIER'S HOUSES FOR ARTISTS

Isabelle Priest

Abstract

This essay examines the private houses Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier designed from 1922 to 1935 in relation to the work of cleaning and domestic labour. Of the fifteen houses Le Corbusier designed during the period many were for artists and avant-garde figures working in the art world. While these buildings were based on principles for a 'new' and 'modern' architecture – centred around discussions of cleanliness, hygiene, progress and equality – these were houses in which the presence and necessity of domestic servants were still taken for granted.

This essay argues that, despite their ostensible outwardly unconventional aesthetics, the social and spatial organisation of domestic labour in the houses Le Corbusier designed in and around Paris were based on conservative and traditional gender hierarchies and class roles. The essay identifies that these houses reinforced existing class and gender relationships and that despite being aware of long-running discussions to improve the burden of domestic labour, Le Corbusier's designs have more in common with the conservatizing architecture of previous centuries.

The designs staged clearly differentiated architectural approaches towards owners and servants, men and women, including in the types of spaces, size of rooms, fenestration and finishes, as well as access to washing facilities and leisure space. Le Corbusier's designs underestimated the impact of social and technical changes and, moreover, responded to contextual pressures by designing houses which rendered servants less spatially and socially visible than ever before. The essay raises important questions about how progressive and modern Le Corbusier's architecture really was.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, cleaning, servant spaces, modernism, artists' houses, Paris, machines for living in
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Biographical note

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Banner image: Detail from a view of the studio at the Barbara Hepworth gallery in St Ives, Cornwall. (Photo: Ed Clews / Alamy Stock Photo)

MAINTAINING THE MACHINE: SERVANTS IN LE CORBUSIER'S HOUSES FOR ARTISTS

Isabelle Priest

This essay examines a tension in the design of up-market domestic houses and party residences by the architect Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) between 1922 and 1935 for avant-garde figures, in relation to the role and accommodation of servants and the work of cleaning. While this architecture was mooted and justified as 'new' and 'modern', these were houses in which the presence and necessity of domestic servants were still taken for granted. Servants' domestic work was integral to the architecture and organisation of these houses, and their design was underpinned by entrenched conservative social class and gender hierarchies towards live-in staff and this type of labour.

In recent years, a good deal of research on cleaners and cleaning has been conducted in architectural history and other disciplines. Scholars including Mary Douglas, Dolores Hayden and Marion Roberts have focused on themes around dust, dirt, ritual purity and pollution, as well as the politics of cleaning and domestic work (Douglas, [1966] 2002; Hayden, 1981; Roberts, 1991). More recently, discussions on cleaning and cleanliness, as well as cleaners and domestic servants, have focused on proclaimed 'mundane' and 'everyday' settings, such as non-architecturally designed homes (Anderson, 2000; Campkin & Cox, 2007). By contrast, this essay focuses on the iconic, canonical architecture of Le Corbusier, described by Adrian Forty as 'among the most famous [for the] expression of the beauty of cleanliness' (1986, p.157). It traces assumptions inherent in the homes built for artists between 1922 and 1935 about every-day domestic work. While the architecture and occupants of these homes were presented as avant-garde and unconventional, the dependence on servants continued, based on implicit, apparently unexamined assumptions that the avant-garde artist occupants would employ servants, and that cleaning work would be undertaken according to traditional roles based on class and gender hierarchies. Hence, this investigation raises significant questions about how 'modern' Le Corbusier's architecture really was.

In the final chapter, 'A coat of whitewash: The law of Ripolin', of *L'Art decoratif d'aujourd'hui* (*The Decorative Art of Today*), published in 1925, Le Corbusier writes: 'Imagine the results of the law of Ripolin. Every citizen is required to replace his hangings, his damasks, his wallpapers, his stencils with a plain coat of Ripolin. His home is made clean. There are no more dirty, dark corners' (1987, p.188).[1] Together with *Vers une architecture* from 1923 (*Towards a New Architecture*, 1927), the book became a key manifesto for a 'new' architecture, later characterised by Le Corbusier and other architects of the period as 'international style' or 'modernism'.[2] *The Decorative Art of Today* is part of a narrative advanced by Le Corbusier in writings and architectural design against traditional crafts, ornament and decorative schemes in favour of an architecture based on cleanliness and hygiene. Yet while the rhetoric was that this was a 'clean' architecture, it was largely domestic servants, in particular lower-class unmarried women from rural areas far from Paris, who undertook the heavy burden of this cleaning work, as part of their multiple daily tasks. The roles of these servants corresponded closely to those of servants in more conventional upper- and middle-class households of the time and previous generations. This conservatizing and classist aspect of these house designs has been largely overlooked by architectural historians, who have tended to obediently look where Le Corbusier pointed to.

Architectural features introduced and justified in the name of cleanliness and hygiene by Le Corbusier and other architects of the period included: smooth white walls (an absence of sculptural decorative relief and moulding), linoleum flooring, fitted furniture, chromed steel, glass surfaces and an abundance of plumbing. The notion of hygiene came to be fetishised, guiding entire architectural decorative schemes. However, as Mark Wigley observes: 'The argument is not about hygiene per se. It is about a certain look of cleanliness. Or, more precisely, a cleansing of the look, a hygiene

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1 Translations of quotations from French to English are by the author.

Ripolin is the brand name of a hard impermeable, washable enamel paint that was invented at the end of the nineteenth century and promoted for its anti-bacterial properties.

2 By the late 1920s, architecture was becoming more international through open competitions and as architects travelled and met overseas. In 1928, Le Corbusier was one of the 28 founding members of Congrès internationaux d'architecture modern (CIAM), an organisation designed to promote a common, 'international' style based on modern principles, from which the movement got its names.

of vision itself' (1995, p.5). These changes were, he argues, treated as an image or theme of health. Nadir Lahiji and D.S. Friedman also interpreted the location of washbasins in the hallways of the private house designs by Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos as a staging of cleanliness: they have more a conceptual function 'cleansing the eye' than a practical one (1997).

This essay moves beyond cleanliness and its staging as an aesthetic, apolitical concern to examine its practical and social implications. Unlike nineteenth-century domestic service, which has inspired much historical research, these canonical twentieth-century houses have yet to be examined from this point of view. Despite increasing political pressures and social changes towards greater egalitarianism at the time, and long-running discussions from the nineteenth century about the re-organisation of domestic work to help bring about greater equality, this essay demonstrates that the houses exhibited entrenched conservative social values when it comes to lower-class people, servants, cleaning and being looked after. The houses were reliant on a body of domestic servants that lived alongside the owners, and Le Corbusier made very few concessions to the improvement of the social and spatial organisation of servants and domestic work in these houses. He also deliberately invisibilised domestic work and servants for the advancement of his architecture. And, if anything, Le Corbusier's architecture required more cleaning than ever, since although dust and dirt tended to be hidden by the colourful, patterned and deep pile fabrics used in earlier architecture, they would have been strikingly visible on the white, shiny surfaces of this 'new' architecture. Hence, Le Corbusier's designs may have created the need for a more intense cleaning and domestic programme for the servants.

Architecture for the avant-garde

Figure 2.1: Villa Fallet, designed by Le Corbusier between 1906 and 1907, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. (Photo: Florian Monheim, Bildarchiv Monheim GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo)

Already a well-established designer of private houses and buildings before 1918, Le Corbusier re-emerged in the early 1920s following a period of intense reflection. During these years, which coincided with the 1918 influenza pandemic, Le Corbusier developed his theories on art and architecture alongside Cubist artist and writer Amédée Ozenfant, soon to be one of his first clients. It was at this point Charles-Édouard Jeanneret reinvented himself as Le Corbusier. The buildings he produced after this period mark a clear aesthetic departure from his earlier heavily timbered Swiss chalet houses, weighty bourgeois villas with external carvings, wallpaper, internal ornamentation and panelling, and modest worker dwellings based on the vernacular (Fig. 2.1). In their dramatic staging of a rhetoric of modernity, ostensibly 'modern' in design, the private houses Le Corbusier designed from 1922, as well as his writings, established him as an international architect for an ambitious client class.

The architecture designed by Le Corbusier during this period required affluent, avant-garde and ambitious, mostly male, clients with cultural capital. Many of these houses were designed for clients who were either artists or were closely connected with the arts. Of the fifteen private house projects Le Corbusier designed between 1922 and 1935, seven were for painters/sculptors, including his own home on the upper floor of the Immeuble Molitor, Paris, and five houses were designed for clients working in the arts: two for art collectors; one for a novelist and critic; one for Le Corbusier's brother, a musician; and one for Le Corbusier's father and mother, an enamel artisan and piano teacher, respectively. Of the remaining three, one was for an insurer and two were exhibition houses to showcase a new domestic architecture for the Deutscher Werkbund, a German association of artists, designers and architects.

At first sight, all these houses look uncompromisingly modern and appear to incorporate Le Corbusier's newly formed theories of architecture outlined in his manifesto, the Five Points of Modern Architecture (1923). These included: raising the building on a grid of pilotis, free ground plans and absence of load-bearing partition walls, free design of facades and use of curtain walling, horizontal ribbon windows to increase light and sense of space, and flat roofs with garden terraces for relaxation and wellbeing, as well as an absence of traditional decorative schemes. Clients commissioning these buildings were socially ambitious, going against convention and clearly wanted to be seen as avant-garde, progressive and unconventional by commissioning an unconventional home. In these ways, the houses conferred on their clients a striking

degree of cultural capital. However, paradoxically, domestic servants remained an implicit part of the daily mechanics of the building, and an unproblematized expectation of this supposedly progressive client class.

Outdated and reactionary, not revolutionary

Servants and domestic staff were an accepted feature of upper-class and upper-middle-class life in 1920s and 1930s Paris. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a well-kept home with complicated to clean decorative schemes was a symbol of economic and social status, since it demonstrated that the owners employed numerous competent domestic staff. While most servants were behind the scenes, some servants, such as butlers and footmen, were on public display (Cox, 2006, pp.78–9).

Between 1926 to 1946, there were 42 entries on census and electoral role registers for live-in servants across the nine Parisian residential projects designed by Le Corbusier.[3] The people who lived and worked in these houses were, in age and origin, typical of domestic servants working in France during the inter-war years. Of the 34 servants recorded as living alongside the artists and owners that commissioned them and subsequent owners, there were 22 women and 12 men – almost twice as many women as men. Men's roles included valet, chauffeur, gardener and cook, while the women were more likely to be categorised as domestique/maid. The average age of the servants in these houses over the period also increased, from twenty-nine-years-old in 1926 to forty-four in 1946, as it did across France as people decided to avoid domestic service in favour of other work.

Had Le Corbusier wished, he could have drawn on a strong current of feminist thinking in relation to addressing the 'women problem' of domestic labour. He would not have had to invent ideas anew on how to transform or reorganise domestic work to create more socially equal and less gendered spaces. Dolores Hayden's work on material feminism demonstrates that from the nineteenth century across Europe and the United States, prominent theorists and activists argued for the rationalisation and transformation of domestic work to address wider inequalities between men and women. For Robert Owen in England, Charles Fourier in France and Friedrich Engels, the goal was moral and economic – to free women from constraints of domestic work to enable them to participate in the burgeoning industrial economy (Hayden, 1981, pp.33–56). Others, including Melusina Fay Peirce, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Livermore, demanded economic remuneration for women's household labour and a transformation of the spatial design and material culture of homes, neighbourhoods and cities (pp.62–203).

Material-feminist architectural ideas ranged from cooperative apartment buildings that, through economies of scale, could incorporate the latest innovations used on the upkeep of larger buildings such as vacuum cleaners and dishwashers. Other ideas included developments where residents participated communally in household work, or kitchen-less homes and centralised public kitchens, dining rooms, childcare and laundry services run by trained workers. Many of these theorists put their ideas into practice, including Peirce who attempted to centralise housework in a commercial project on Bow Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1869), and Ebenezer Howard and his associates Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker's cooperative quadrangle Homesgarth with 32 kitchen-less apartments at Letchworth Garden City (1909). At architect Max G. Heidelburg's scheme for the Feminist Alliance there were to be no corners, no wallpaper, only fold-down beds, built-in bathtubs and all hardware would be dull finish (Hayden, 1981, p.200). Hayden writes: 'They tended to see themselves as creating, for the first time, truly modern housing' (1981, p.229).

Historian Robert Fishman has shown that Le Corbusier made extensive marginal notes about cooperative quadrangles in his copies of Howard's works (in Hayden, 1981, p.237). Avant-garde in social terms, these communities largely used revivalist forms of architecture – half timbering, thatched roofs, leaded windows, inglenook fireplaces and panelling. However, as early as 1922, Austrian-born architect Rudolf Schindler designed for his wife and their friends a house with shared domestic workplace, private studios for each inhabitant and outdoor patios instead of conventional living rooms. It was designed using glass, wood and a concrete slat-built system. Despite this important current of feminist ideas, when it came to designing private houses for his avant-garde clients, Le Corbusier's spatial arrangements resembled the conventional houses of upper-middle classes that had preceded them, even those of two centuries earlier, described by Norbert Elias in The Court Society ([1969] 1983). Schindler House also showed that the architectural characteristics Le Corbusier used, and attributed to an architecture of cleanliness and hygiene, were not new. Indeed, by contrast with the work of the material feminists, Le Corbusier's architecture was classist and patriarchal.

3 This includes: Maison Ozenfant, Maison La Roche, Maison Jeanneret, Maison Lipchitz, Maison Miestchaninoff, Maison Cook, Maison Planeix, Villa Savoye and Immeuble Molitor.

Marion Roberts has demonstrated that from the 1920s, the ideas promoted by material feminists failed to evolve into mass-appeal solutions, and instead a more conservative, gendered ideal took root. This ideal rejected the communalised domestic work of material feminism in favour of the detached or semi-detached middle-class suburban home, and the working man and his isolated housewife who did not work and may have done her own housework or employed servants/dailies to do it for her (Roberts, 1991, pp.25–40). The houses Le Corbusier designed between 1922 and 1935 subscribed to this model of villas located on the then-green, spacious unbuilt edges of Paris. Villa Besnus (1922–3) is in Vaucresson, fourteen kilometres from the centre of Paris. Maison Lipchitz (1923–5), Maison Miestchaninoff (1923–5) and Maison Cook (1926–7) are all in Boulogne-Billancourt, a western suburb eight kilometres from the centre of Paris, as is Le Corbusier's his own home on the upper floor of the Immeuble Molitor, Paris (1931–4).

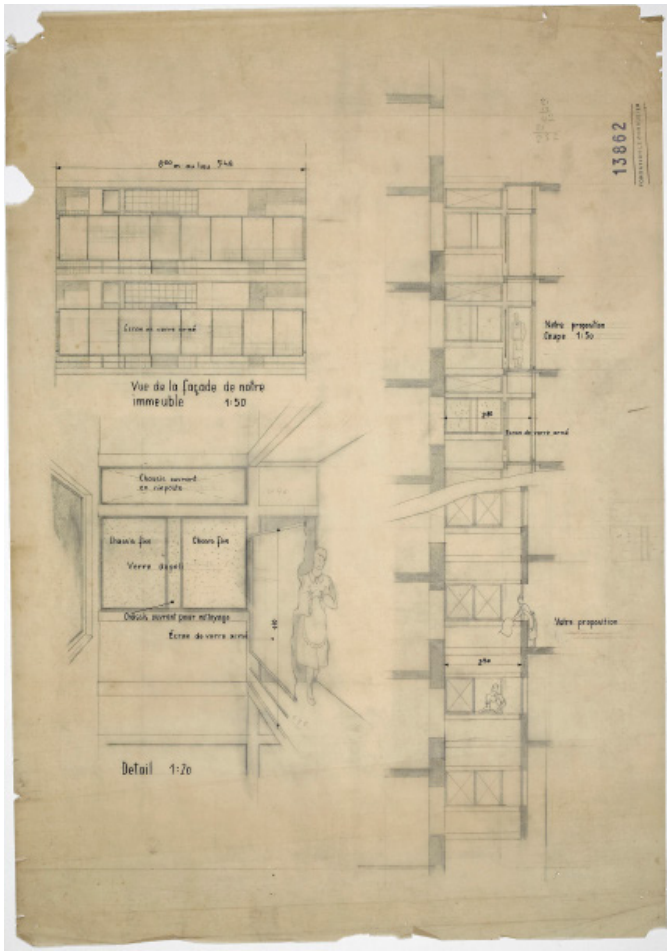

Figure 2.2: Domestic staff walking through the service atrium of L'Immeuble Molitor, Paris, designed by Le Corbusier, 1931–34. (Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP (drawing number 13862)).

Figure 2.3: Elsbeth Böklen in front of Maison Weissenhof-Siedlung, designed by Le Corbusier, in Stuttgart, Germany, 1928. (Photo: Mercedes-Benz Classic (archive number 6075)).

The houses Le Corbusier designed reinforced these social attitudes, staging clearly differentiated architectural approaches towards men, and upper- and middle-class women (mostly wives of artist-clients) and lower-class women. These emerge most directly in the comparison between one of the working drawings of Le Corbusier's own apartment block L'Immeuble Molitor (Fig. 2.2) and a published photograph of the exhibition house for the Deutscher Werkbund Maison Weissenhof-Siedlung (1927, Fig. 2.3). The drawing shows a sequence of four maids at work in narrow service passages across seven storeys of the apartment block. The women wear traditional dresses with aprons and work alone. The photograph, in contrast, shows a woman leaning against a car outside a building that exhibits Le Corbusier's 'new' architecture. Dressed in fashionable flapper-girl clothes, she appears as a woman of money, leisure, adventurous spirit and cultural capital – the kind of woman who might live in the house behind her. In essence, the houses Le Corbusier designed in this period sustained and promoted existing entrenched class-based roles for women.

An antiquated modernism

By the mid-1920s, the average new-built house included many of the technologies designed to lessen the burden of domestic work, including plumbing, heating and ventilation. These were also found in Le Corbusier's designs. Yet, despite these modern conveniences, service and servant spaces still occupied a significant proportion of the floor plans Le Corbusier designed for his artist clients. Of the nine houses he designed in the Paris area between 1922 and 1935, servant quarters comprised on average 27 per cent of house internal area – surprising given their proclaimed self-maintaining characteristics and the absence of attention afforded to domestic work and staff in subsequent research. The lowest percentage of servant space was at Villa Cook (1926–7) with fourteen per cent, before an additional maid's room was constructed in the garden in 1929. Maison La Roche (1923–5) had 20.1 per cent and Maison Jeanneret (1923–5) had 24 per cent.

Le Corbusier's designs for houses in and around Paris also incorporated approximately the same proportion of service space at the start of the period as the end. The earliest house, Maison et atelier Ozenfant (1922–4), had 33 per cent dedicated to service functions, Villa Savoye (1928–31) had 38 per cent. This is despite substantial social changes taking place, and when it might be expected for service space to decrease or adapt to non-residential staff and improving technologies. In the 1911 France census, there were 887,000 domestic workers of both sexes, whereas by the 1921 census this had dropped by 20 per cent to 707,000 (Martin-Huan, 1997 p.80). Yet, by the mid-1930s these artist-owners no longer employed the number of domestic servants as the houses had been designed for a few years earlier (Table 1). In 1931, Le Corbusier designed eleven bed spaces for servants in Immeuble Molitor, but in the space of ten years from 1936 to 1946, the numbers of servants recorded living and working in the building had dropped to just over half of the spatial capacity. Likewise, Maison Jeanneret employed two servants in 1926, then none after that. Maison Planeix employed one servant in 1931 and none from 1936. Only Villa Savoye, the home of an insurance executive, had the same number of servants across the three censuses after it was built. It was difficult for employers to fill vacancies. The socio-economic class of these clients remained largely the same, yet even within the period Le Corbusier designed these houses, it was clear from the occupancy of the earlier houses that fewer servants being employed than planned. Le Corbusier's designs underestimated the impact of social and technical changes and did not adapt to the changing context. Essentially, the designs showed a resoluteness that these clients and their homes should be cared for by servants.

The floor plans of the houses in this period also demonstrate that considerable attention went into designing the service spaces. 38 types of service space can be identified across the plans, each with highly specific uses. All the house designs had a kitchen/*cuisine*, scullery/*office*, utility room/*buanderie*, laundry

House	Maximum beds spaces for staff	1926	1931	1936	1946	Notes
Ozenfant	1	X	1	X	1	Inhabitants changed
La Roche	2	2	2	2	2	
Jeanneret	3	2	X	X		
Lipchitz	1		X	2		Inhabitants changed
Miestchaninoff	1		X			
Cook	1-2		2		1	Additional maid room added in 1936. Inhabitants changed
Planeix	1		1	X		
Savoye	7-10		2	2	2 (1945)	Other servants travelled from Paris with the Savoye family
Immeuble Molitor	11			10	6	Inhabitants changed

Table 1: Numbers of live-in domestic staff in the houses recorded in 1926, 1931, 1936 and 1946 censuses in relation to total number of bed spaces. 'X' means the information is available, but no domestic staff were present; where there is a gap, the house is not listed in that year's record.

Figure 2.4: Buanderie sink, Villa Savoye, designed by Le Corbusier, 1928–31. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

Figure. 2.5: The lingerie, Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

room/*lingerie*, garage and one maid's room/*chambre de bonne*. Many contained a flat for the concierge/*loge de concierge*/*conciergerie*, a service stair/*escalier de service* or service lift/*ascenseur de service*, service corridors/*passerelle de service*/*dégagement*, coal store/*charbon*, storeroom/*débarras*/*réduit*, cloakroom/*vestiaire*, cellar/*cave* and rubbish sluice/*vidoir*. Several had a drying room/*séchoir*, service terrace, broom cupboard, gardener's flat and chauffeur's flat.

All these spaces would have been used during the daily routine of residential domestic staff. Servants would have been designated specific responsibilities and specifically enclosed spaces in which to carry out their domestic tasks. This division into multiple rooms had more in common with the suite of service spaces Elias describes in the architectonic structure of upper-class Parisian houses/hôtels during the ancien régime (1983, pp.41–65) than the models of domestic work that followed the period as outlined by Roberts (1991, pp.43–73). Many of the spaces Le Corbusier designed for servants were the same as those that had been designed into the hôtels of the ancien régime, including servant bedrooms, service corridors, sculleries, the fruit store/*fruitier* and cold store/*garde-manger*. In the *passerelle de service*, located before the owners' spaces, servants would have awaited the commands of their employers in constant readiness both during the ancien régime and in the 1920s/1930s. Le Corbusier even added to the list of service spaces not included in Elias' account of ancien-régime hotels. These included the *buanderie* and *lingerie,* which would have been used by servants for washing laundry or ironing, mending and storing it (Figs. 2.4 and 2.5). By comparison, there were also remarkably far more types of service space than spaces provided for the artist-owners, which comprised approximately seven types of space: entrance hall, dining area, living area, bedrooms, bathrooms, sun terraces and studio/*atelier*. The many service rooms segregated servants from view of the owners while they carried out the domestic duties.

Divide and rule: separate and unequal

In multiple ways, the role and spatial organisation of these service spaces within the houses Le Corbusier designed for these artists embodied the greater importance of their supposedly avant-garde owners over their servants. The service spaces were divided into many rooms, each with a specific purpose. By contrast, the owners' spaces were often open plan and designed according to Le Corbusier's '*Cinq points de l'architecture moderne*' ('Five points of modern architecture') in *Vers une architecture*. In his own flat at Immeuble Molitor, for example, the entrance hall had two huge doors the width of walls that could be opened so that the rooms flowed freely from the atelier at one side of the apartment through the hall, sitting area and dining area at the opposite side (Figs. 2.6 and 2.7). All the spaces could be opened into one huge, free-flowing area. The kitchen, where the servant would have prepared Le Corbusier and his wife's meals, was, by comparison, next to the dining area in a separate enclosed room with an ordinary single

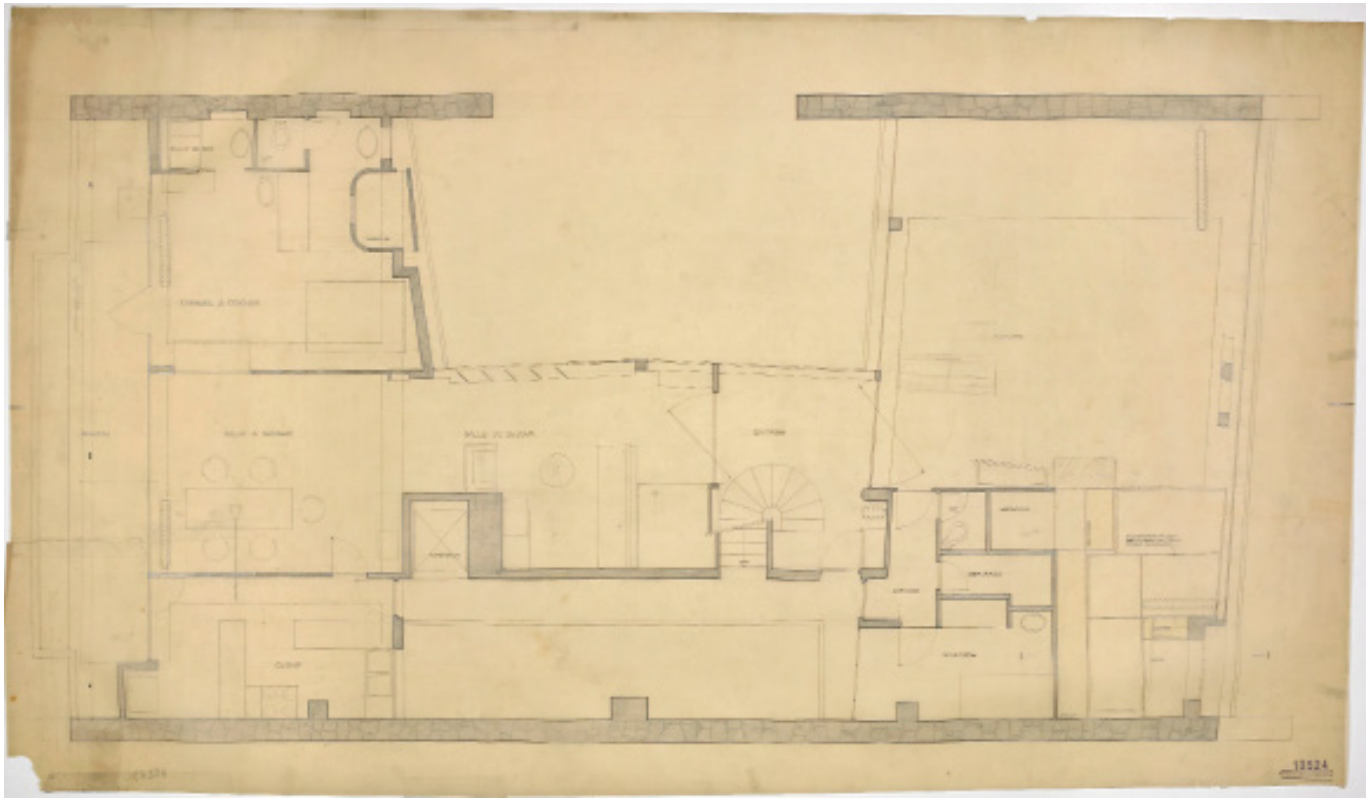

Figure 2.6: Plan of Le Corbusier's seventh floor flat showing service quarters, Immeuble Molitor, designed by Le Corbusier, 1931–34. (Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP, (drawing number 13524)).

Figure 2.7: Large doors open from the studio through to the hall and beyond, the small door to the maid's bedroom, Le Corbusier's flat, Immeuble Molitor, designed by Le Corbusier, 1931–34. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

Figure 2.8: View to the maid bedrooms past the washbasin from the main entrance. The chauffeur's apartment is behind the wall on the right of the ramp. Villa Savoye, designed by Le Corbusier, 1928–31. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

doorway. Servants occupied more individual rooms, but they could not be opened and interlinked to form bigger spaces. The individual service spaces also occupied a lower proportion of the total area of the house, so each room was considerably smaller than the owners' spaces, too. The servants had a wider range of specific tasks to carry out, they but had less space to do them.

This division of service spaces into many rooms segregated servants from each other and prevented them from carrying out tasks communally or in communication (which might have led to their pleasure and distraction). Many of the individual types of service space were highly gendered too, demonstrating a hierarchy between male- and female-occupied domestic roles. The maid bedroom, for example, would have been occupied by a female servant. Male servants employed in the roles of concierge, gardener and chauffeur, across all Le Corbusier's residential projects in the period, however, were allocated their own more spacious apartments with multiple areas/rooms, often including kitchens, WCs, shower rooms and their own front doors. The gardener at Villa Savoye had his own house in the grounds. The chauffeur had an apartment on the ground floor next to the garage (Fig. 2.8). These apartments enabled male servants to live with their families, whereas female servants would have had to leave their jobs to marry or cohabit.

There was not just a hierarchy between male and female servants, the houses carefully separated men and women from each other too, which did not occur in the owners' areas. At Villa Savoye, for example, the chauffeur's flat shared the ground floor with the maid bedrooms, but there was no direct internal doorway from the chauffeur's flat into the corridor where the maid's bedrooms were, or even into the main house. While he enjoyed a degree of privacy, his only access was via the external servant or main entrance, where he could be seen.

There were, nevertheless, some changes that Le Corbusier implemented to domestic service spaces in these Parisian houses between 1922 and 1935. In the contemporaneous home Maison de Verre (1928–32), designed by Pierre Chareau for Dr Jean Dalsace, also

in Paris, for example, the kitchen and maid quarters form a separate, linked wing at a 90-degree angle to the main building housing the owners (Overy, 2007, p.85). This model is more akin to the ancien-régime hotels, described by Elias. In those plans, the house opened from the street into a courtyard. The principal public rooms of the house were at the rear of the courtyard, and the private areas in the wings either side. The servant areas were at the front of these wings along the street boundary (Elias, 1983, p.44). Likewise, nineteenth-century Parisian apartment buildings were split with work service spaces on the ground floor or basement, multiple floors of private apartments above and servant bedrooms in the attic. Servant spaces were allocated to areas with the least attractive qualities: a lack of daylight or privacy on the ground or basement floors, or inconvenience of access, exposure to poorer conditions and extremes of temperature in the roof space. Servant bedrooms, for example, were known for their unpleasant extremes of temperature (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p.119). Within Le Corbusier's designs, there is no such standard distribution of service spaces across the organisation of the houses according to floor levels.

Le Corbusier's designs exhibited a different logic. Instead, they grouped service areas alongside other menial spaces, seemingly to rationalise workflows. At Maison La Roche, service areas were grouped over three floors around the service stair, much like the *basse cour* in the hôtels of the ancien régime. At Le Corbusier's flat in Immeuble Molitor the maid's bedroom was at the studio end of the apartment. The other service areas, such as the kitchen and scullery, were at the opposite side of the main stairwell, but there was direct access along the communal corridor without having to enter Le Corbusier's apartment (Fig. 2.6). This spatial arrangement of grouping service spaces with other workspaces, demonstrated that servants' work was an integral part of the domestic running of the house. They were designed so servants could switch between tasks quickly and efficiently. Yet, at the same time, this arrangement meant that servants were always on duty, always workers, only useful for their domestic labour. No private life or life apart from work was afforded to servants in the design of these houses, where arguably there had been some separation in previous centuries. At Maison Jeanneret, the maid's bedroom was a 5.8 square metre room next to the entrance door on the ground floor, which was shared with the chauffeur's apartment, garage and studio. The maid would have been always on call to answer the door to visitors, deliveries as well as all her other daily tasks.

Service areas were, of course, still located in the

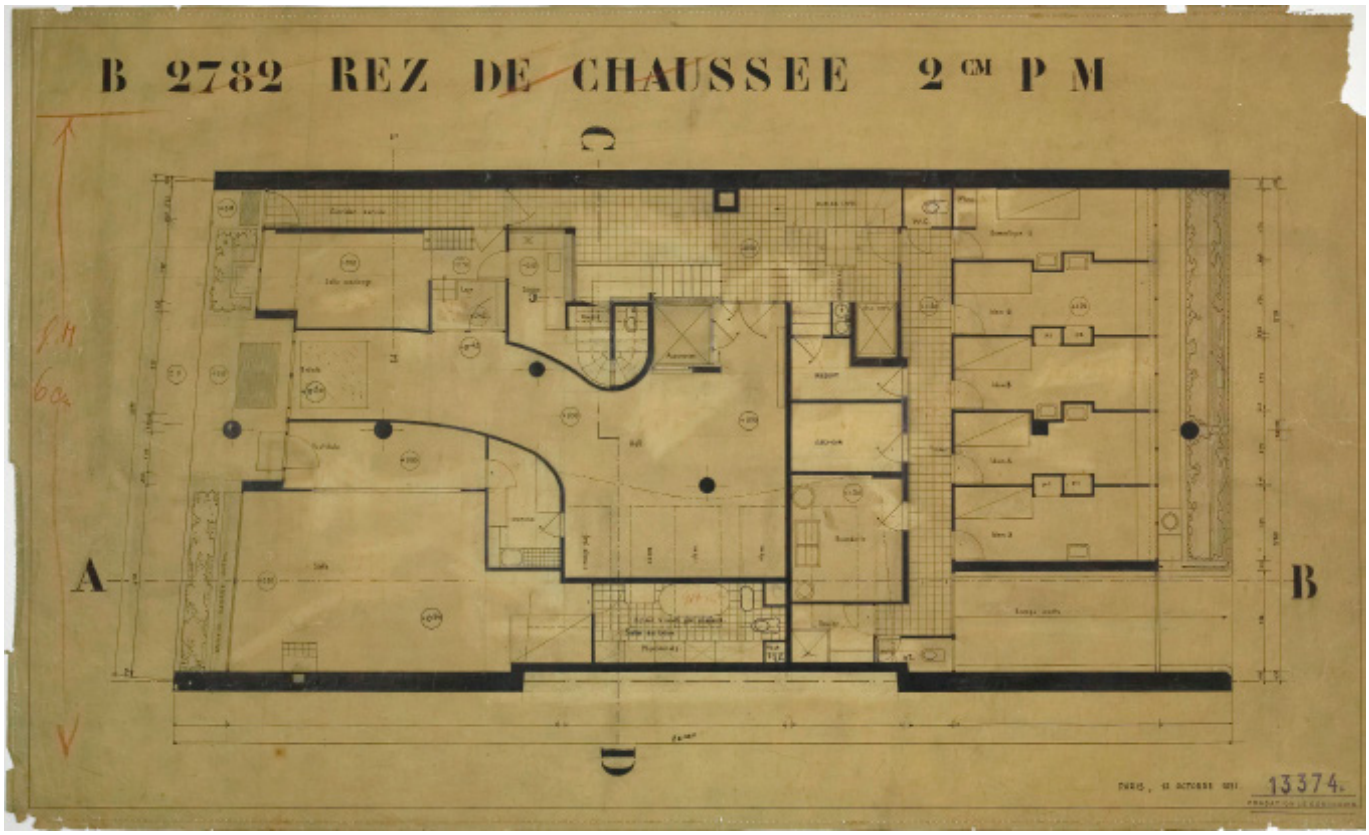

Figure 2.9: Ground floor showing the five maid bedrooms, the conciergerie, buanderie, drying room and rubbish store at Immeuble Molitor, designed by Le Corbusier, 1931–34. (Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP, (drawing number 13374A)).

Figure 2.10: Windows on landing, Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

Figure 2.11: Le Corbusier's kitchen with frosted windows, Immeuble Molitor, designed by Le Corbusier, 1931–34. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

least attractive areas of the site. However, it seemed that the priorities of what constituted an attractive area had changed. At Immeuble Molitor, Le Corbusier made a point that the maid bedrooms for the other apartments were relocated from the top floor, where they would have been in nineteenth-century apartment blocks, to five servant bedrooms on the ground floor behind the reception and *buanderie*, and five in the basement, next to the plant room and cellars (Fig. 2.9). He wrote: 'Rooms for domestic staff are located on the ground floor so that they do not have to suffer the often terrible conditions… The roofing has been reserved, as should always be the case, for the best apartment in the building [his own], in the midst of slates, flowers, grass areas and shrubs' (in Sbriglio, 1996, p.89). Relocating these bedrooms to the ground floor and basement would have meant they received less daylight, views and fresh air. At Villa Savoye, the servant bedrooms on the ground floor were shadowed further by the overhanging first floor. Maison La Roche and Maison Jeanneret were located on a mews surrounded by buildings, so less light would have reached the *conciergerie* and servant bedroom on ground floor. Le Corbusier's own maid's bedroom by his studio on the sixth floor received less daylight because the window opened onto an internal stairwell. The positioning of service spaces emphasised servants' status as second-class citizens, there to serve and not entitled to the light, views and space he promoted for clients.

This contrast between servant areas and owners' spaces was extended to almost every element of these houses by Le Corbusier. Fenestration selected for the service areas was largely characterised by vertical narrow repeated bars (Fig. 2.10) – not the expansive ribbon windows found elsewhere. Much of it was also frosted – in the *office* at Maison La Roche and in the kitchen onto the service corridor at Immeuble Molitor – which limited daylight and external views, possibly to avoid servants being distracted from their work (Figs. 2.2 and 2.11). Frosted glass prevented people seeing in, too.

There were also telling differences in the interior finishes and decoration. In the concierge flat at Maison La Roche, the servant areas were significantly more colourfully painted than the rest of the house. The bedroom area was painted light green (Fig. 2.12) and the adjoining living area was painted a pale burnt sienna. Elsewhere, the shared *vestiaire* and toilet were painted deep ultramarine and golden yellow (Fig. 2.13), while the service corridor and stair were cerulean blue and a light raw sienna. The only colour used in the rest of the house was light pink in the dining room and light blue in part of the living room. At Villa Savoye, the owners' bedroom was the most colourful internal space. On the outside, however, the service quarters' exterior walls were painted deep green, rather than white. Likewise, across the houses, the pipework in the servant spaces was left exposed, but not elsewhere. And in the basements – where the servants would have spent significant time fetching items from storerooms, operating the heating systems and doing laundry – the spaces were left with unfinished blockwork walls and exposed concrete slab ceilings, joists and floors. Another difference across the majority of the houses was the use of wooden parquet floors in the servant bedrooms only. In the owners' bedrooms, Le Corbusier's insisted on the use of linoleum for its hygienic qualities. This became a source of disagreement with Le Corbusier's client sculptor Jacques Lipchitz who commissioned Villa Lipchitz. In a letter dated 21 March 1924, Lipchitz writes to Le Corbusier that he wants neither linoleum nor parquet flooring (Lipchitz, 1924).

Likewise, the maids' bedrooms lacked separate toilets or washing facilities, which contrasted with the abundance of sanitary ware in the client spaces. Le Corbusier's own bedroom at L'Immeuble Molitor boasted a large separate shower, bath, toilet, bidet and two washbasins, all in view of the bed. The master bathroom at Villa Savoye, a lavish space, was bedecked with a sunken bath and built-in tiled chaise longue, open to the bedroom. Live-in maids would have washed at the basins in their bedrooms or in the *buanderie* (Overy, 2007, p.178). There is evidence that clients were sometimes more generous in this regard than Le Corbusier. Raoul La Roche eventually allowed the concierge at Maison La Roche, Monsieur Perrin and his wife, to use the guest bedroom opposite the *conciergerie* on the ground floor because he felt that their accommodation was not big enough (Official guide, Maison La Roche, 2012). This would have allowed the Perrins to use the ensuite bathroom (Fig. 2.13). But this appears to be exceptional, and the absence of toilet and washing facilities for the live-in maids emphasises the classed treatment of personal hygiene among household members. Servants were not afforded the same architectural opportunities to exhibit their bodies as the owners while bathing either (no open-plan ensuite bathrooms or tiled chaise longue). Not all bodies were equally worthy of display or leisure.

These different finishes and features articulated the different status of the servants. There was one architectural approach for servant spaces and another for owners' spaces, and gendered approaches between male- and female-occupied service spaces as well. Designed with the most basic features, as well as more

Figure 2.12: The conciergerie bedroom (foreground) and living space (background), Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

pared back and economical, or less hygienic, in their finishes, reinforced services areas as merely functional, productive workplaces and inferred the inferior status of servants. In contrast, for owners, the houses were places of space, leisure, relaxation, recuperation, health and artistic creativity. At a more conceptual level, the commissioning clients were served, whether by plumbed-in heating and hot water, or for food, laundry and cleaning, without any of the mechanics or working spaces on show – that is invisibly.

Through the frosted glass, a hidden servant infrastructure

This essay has demonstrated that, despite the outwardly unconventional appearances of the houses Le Corbusier designed between 1922 and 1935, the social and spatial organizing of servants was traditional. Spatially and programmatically, the designs divided owners and servants by class and gender, based on entrenched ideas and structures. The architectural designs were a continuation of existing conservative approaches to domestic labour and the treatment of service staff. They did not attempt new ways of organizing this work or challenge conventional classist and sexist assumptions about domestic labour.

Rather than remove the requirement for servants or imagine houses without them, Le Corbusier seems to have responded to upper-class avant-garde pressures by designing houses which rendered servants less spatially and socially visible than ever. Paul Overy suggests that 'after the social and economic upheaval which followed World War I, wealthy Europeans were even more inclined to mask extravagant lifestyles under a

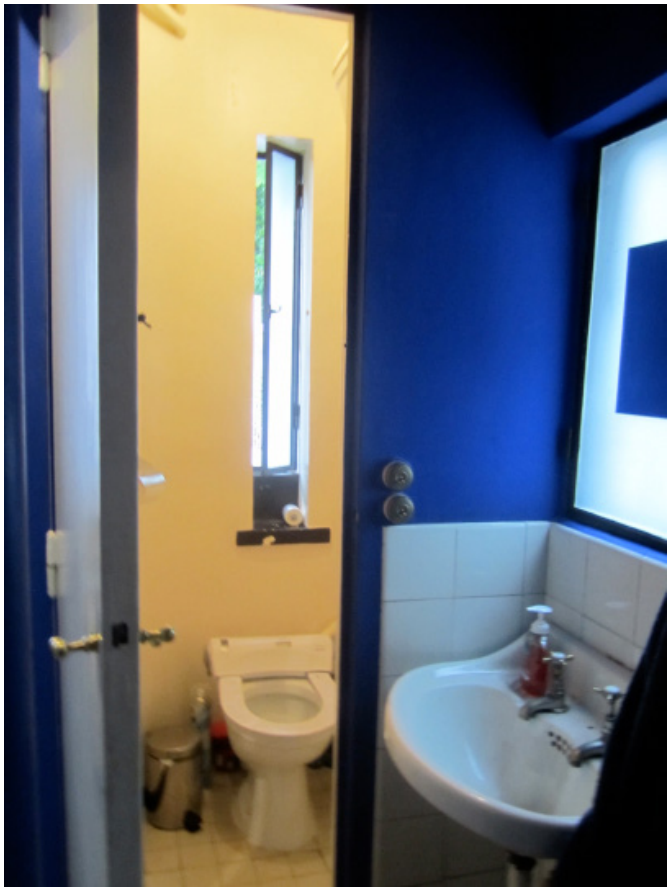

Figure 2.13: Shared cloakroom, Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

semblance of hygiene, austerity and "plain living"' (2007, p.77). Likewise, Jacqueline Martin-Huan argued 'to invest in intellectual and moral achievements' this class had to 'reject ostentatious luxury and ancillary possession' (1997, p.82). This essay's argument, therefore, goes one step further. It was no longer so acceptable, no doubt particularly for avant-garde clients, to have servants so, for the advancement of Le Corbusier's architecture, it was necessary to make them more invisible than before.

To some extent Le Corbusier's arrangement of servants around workflow efficiencies placed them in closer proximity to the owners' spaces than might be expected – and closer than those in, for example, Maison de Verre, where they were in a separate wing. The servant quarters were also often in view on first approach to the houses. At Maison La Roche and at Atelier Ozenfant, the *conciergerie* is the first door visitors seen (Fig. 2.14). However, inside and out, Le Corbusier deployed architecture to hide and invisibilise domestic servants and their domestic work.

The use of frosted glass in service areas was, as noted, one method; invisibilising through architectural promenade was another. The *conciergerie* may have been the first part of the house visitors encountered at

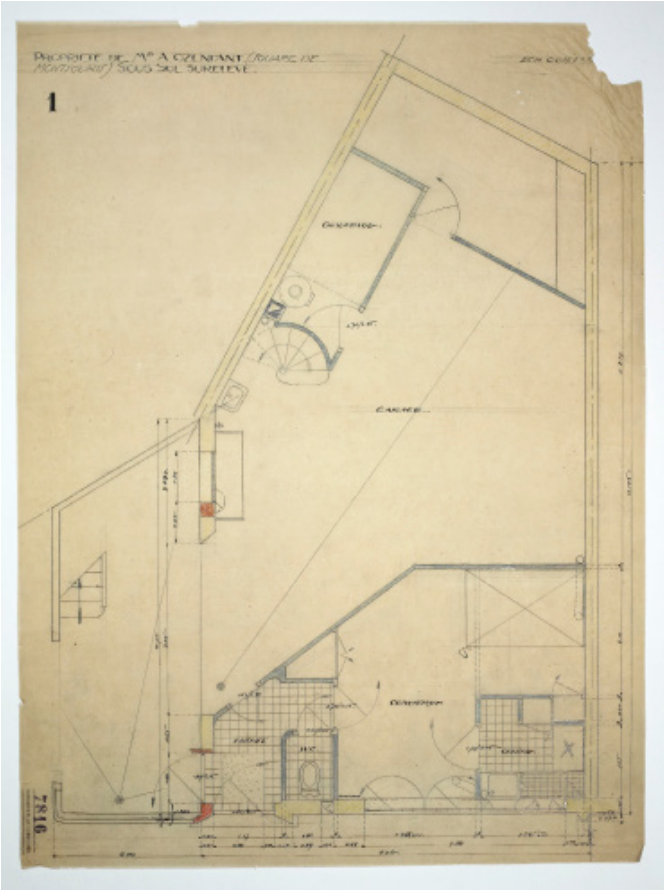

Figure 2.14: Ground floor plan showing conciergerie, Atelier Ozenfant, designed by Le Corbusier, 1922–24. (Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP (drawing number 07816))

Maison La Roche and Atelier Ozenfant, but at each Le Corbusier deflected attention away from it. At Atelier Ozenfant, attention was diverted up the spiral stair to the front door marked by a bare bulb. At Maison La Roche, the *conciergerie* entrance was so understated – a single plain frosted glazed door without architraves – it would have been barely noticed or mistaken for part of the garage (Fig. 2.15). At Villa Savoye, the *buanderie* and the chauffeur's flat were on the ground floor, flush with the floor above on the first elevation on arrival, but visitors would have passed by this elevation to the entrance on the other side of the house. Inside Maison La Roche, there were three doors off the hall (two of which led to service areas), but visitors' attention would have been drawn to a large stair to the rear that led to the *piano nobile*. At Villa Savoye, visitors would have been encouraged up the ramp directly ahead from the entrance door, away from the service spaces on the other side of the plan, behind the washbasin (Fig. 2.8).

Servants were, however, most hidden at Immeuble Molitor. The ground floor and basement service areas, including the servant bedrooms and conciergerie apartment, were accessed via separate entrances on Rue Nungesser et Coli and Rue de la Tourelle. There was a separate lightwell with a pulley system around which were the service passages, cleaning cupboards, separate toilets, *vidoir*, service stair, service lift and direct rear access into the apartment kitchens. All around these houses, service spaces were designed for maids and servants to arrive, carry out their duties and leave unseen (Fig. 2.2).

The servants and service spaces were not just invisibilised within the architecture of these houses itself, but no contemporaneous descriptions or photographs of the servants or their quarters exist either. And in Le Corbusier's own writings, domestic servants, their accommodation and the principal spaces they occupied were overwhelmingly neglected. Le Corbusier wanted people to believe the self-maintaining and self-cleaning principles set out in 'A coat of whitewash: The law of Ripolin' were principal characteristics and advantages of his architecture. Indeed, the most striking representation of these houses as modern, technologically advanced and more socially equal is in a letter he wrote to his mother. He wrote that a potential client Colette Sidonie Gabrielle (1873–1954) wanted to live in a 'Corbusière' as she believed it would allow her to dismiss her servants, whom she described as 'vampires' (in Samuel, 2004, p.29). The letter suggests that once complicated decorative schemes are removed, the need for servants also disappears. These narratives have endured and tended to be uncritically perpetuated by architectural historians in subsequent historiography – and these spaces and the stories of the servants who lived and worked in them are still ignored by the contemporary guides and publications about these buildings today.[4]

A flouter of regulations and general disinterest

Despite Le Corbusier's apparent interest in the work of the material feminists, his designs failed to engage in improving servants' conditions. Service areas were pared back in terms of materials; they were also meagre in size and provision, often flouting regulations. For example, from the end of the nineteenth century to the start of World War I, maid bedrooms were the object of significant political discussion, designed to ameliorate living conditions and encourage people into domestic

4 At Maison La Roche, where the conciergerie and kitchen were first opened to the public in 2009, the pamphlet made no reference to these areas. At Le Corbusier's flat in L'Immeuble Molitor the spaces are not given descriptions, and at Villa Savoye the servant bedrooms on the ground floor are open to the public as exhibition spaces and the chauffeur's flat and other basement service spaces are still used as offices and storerooms.

Figure 2.15 Exterior showing discreet ground floor concierge entrance door and window to right, Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Isabelle Priest, 2012)

service. Regulations introduced in 1904 prescribed that servant bedrooms had to be a minimum of eight square metres (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p.132). Yet, in Maisons Jeanneret, Lipschitz, Miestchaninoff and Villa Savoye, all the single maid bedrooms had room sizes as much as two square metres below the minimum regulations – only Maison Cook met the requirements at 10.5 square metres.

The designs of these artist houses during the period also showed that Le Corbusier believed servants' material requirements to be minimal. This is in sharp contrast to his professed views in *The Marseilles Block* that a room 'should be complete, satisfying all individual needs and encouraging personal activity, reading, drawing, sewing, weaving, pottering about, thinking, meditating' (1953, p.17). In his designs for these houses, the maid bedrooms were only provided with a washbasin, cupboard, sometimes a table and stool. These were all items required by 1900 legislation (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p.123). But, again, Le Corbusier was prepared to break the rules. The maid's bedroom at Maison Jeanneret, for example, did not have a washbasin – it was crossed out and moved to the hallway for shared use (Fig. 2.16).

Le Corbusier's clients were arguably more concerned by their servants' living conditions than he was. During the design process of Maison La Roche, for example, in a letter dated 2 September 1924, Raoul La Roche wrote to Le Corbusier to express concerns about the tightness of space in *conciergerie* bedroom (La Roche, 1924). Initially, the maid's room at Villa Miestchaninoff did not have a washbasin, until Oscar Miestchaninoff insisted on it, as outlined in a letter to Le Corbusier dated 27 March 1925, he even chose the washbasin himself (Miestchaninoff, 1925). Le Corbusier's architecture frequently disregarded regulations on servant spaces. He was apparently out of step with his client's wishes in this regard as well. It appears he was disinterested in the conditions of these spaces and repeatedly, whether about size or provision, had to be prompted to fulfil minimum legal requirements, let alone anything more which could have

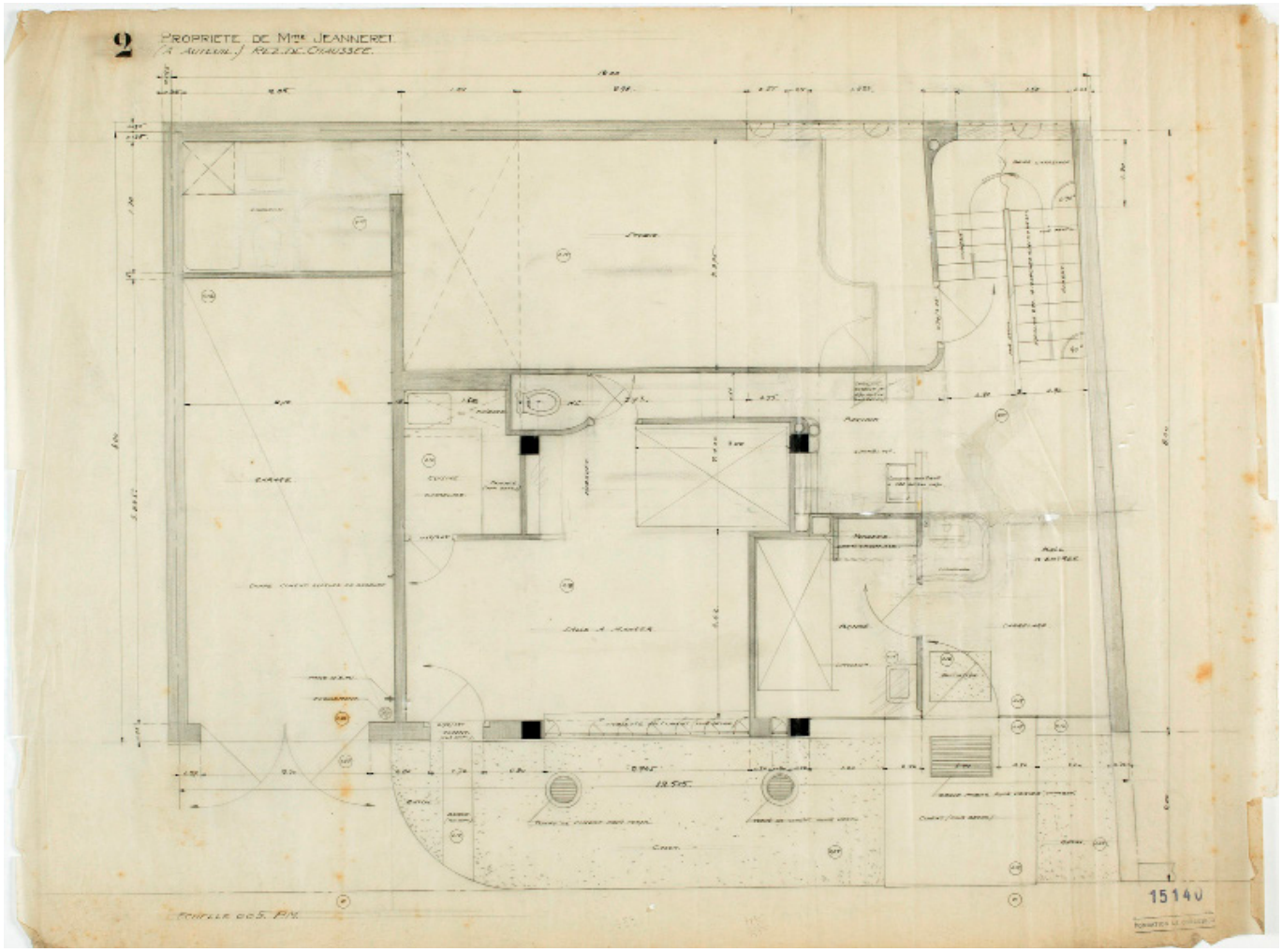

Figure 2.16 Ground floor plan, Maison Jeanneret, designed by Le Corbusier, 1923–25. (Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP (drawing number 15140))

been more progressive and socially inclusive.

Conclusion – Corbusier, the conservative

Flora Samuel found that Le Corbusier, 'when it came to advising his mother on employing a maid, he was emphatic that she should be paid well above the going rate' (2004, p.27). This evidence was used to argue for the central influence that feminism played in Le Corbusier's work. His own writings played a crucial role in propagating the image of his architecture as 'new' and modern. Cultural circles that included the artistic and arts world clients who commissioned his first private houses after World War I, and subsequent historians, were ready to adopt and support Le Corbusier's outwardly different architecture and its rhetoric.

This essay has examined the accommodations made for cleaning carried out by servants. Despite an ostensible aesthetic progressivism, it has found that the houses Le Corbusier designed for artist clients between 1922 and 1935 were conservative, even reactionary, when it came to the role of servants and the labour of cleaning. The service spaces and servants' quarters were designed to distinguish those who worked and lived in them as second-class citizens. The service spaces were arranged for work efficiency. Servants were afforded less space. They were segregated in enclosed rooms that were positioned in the least attractive areas of the house. There was a hierarchy in fenestration and use of more economical finishes. Male servants were given more space, including leisure areas, than female. Servants were discouraged architecturally from mixing with each other, particularly men and women. In short, there was a sharp contradiction between the exiguous provision for live-in domestic staff and penny-pinching servant spaces, and the self-professed claims of the 'liberated dwelling' and bold assertions such as 'a house is a machine for living in' set out in *Vers une architecture*.

Le Corbusier could have drawn on innumerate sources for ideas on how to design more progressive, even egalitarian, houses. He knew of the long-running discussions from other theorists, designers and architects, including Ebenezer Howard and Raymond

Unwin's garden cities in England. Nevertheless, the houses Le Corbusier designed between 1922 and 1935 for his educated artist clients were dependent on an invisible staff of residential domestic servants. Their labour was carefully designed into the buildings, and the buildings depended on it for cleaning, maintenance and all manner of domestic tasks, as they would have done in other conventional middle to upper class homes of the time.

Not only did Le Corbusier embed traditional, conservative approaches to domestic work and live-in servants in these buildings, he failed to foresee the social and technological changes taking place around him. By the end of World War II, these artist owner-occupants no longer employed any, or as many, servants as the houses had been designed for. His constant approach to the architecture of domestic work over the period refused to accept the changing economic and social roles of the lower and upper classes. Indeed, the correspondence between Le Corbusier and some of his clients expressing their concern for the service areas, suggests his clients were more actively progressive than he had been prepared to be. He and his wife Yvonne, after all, were one of the few households in this study to employ a live-in servant in 1946.

In spite of triumphalist claims about modernity, cleanliness and hygiene, the presence of servants in his houses proved that Le Corbusier's architecture was far from self-maintaining. His architecture sought to hide this and to screen out the servants living in these homes and their domestic work, even more than had been done in earlier architecture. They were allocated small task-specific rooms, invisibilised through architectural promenade, frosted glass and separating spaces, and then through his writings and representations of his architecture. This representation continues today. Many of the service spaces are still out-of-bounds, used as storerooms and offices for staff that open the houses to the public. These spaces have been neglected in subsequent scholarship concerned to perpetuate myths of the great modernist and moderniser male genius architect.

Architecture has frequently been the domain of the upper middle-class male. In relying heavily on Le Corbusier's rhetoric and ignoring the evidence of his buildings, architectural historians of all genders have advanced this image, too. They have allowed architectural history to be concerned with the male narratives of upper-class clients and architects, rarely incorporating servants, lower-class people, and particularly women. Consequently, the contribution of servants has largely been omitted from the history of modernism. However, the omissions are more significant than that. These houses and these architects became, through their outwardly different aesthetics, the seemingly progressive lifestyles of their owners, and because men like Le Corbusier promoted them, the model for mass housing post-war. The houses Le Corbusier designed between 1922 and 1935 helped establish the example where eventually the suburban housewife had to do all housework. That became the respectable option. As women also joined the industrial economy, this meant many had to juggle their professional jobs and the work at home as well. To whose advantage was that?

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