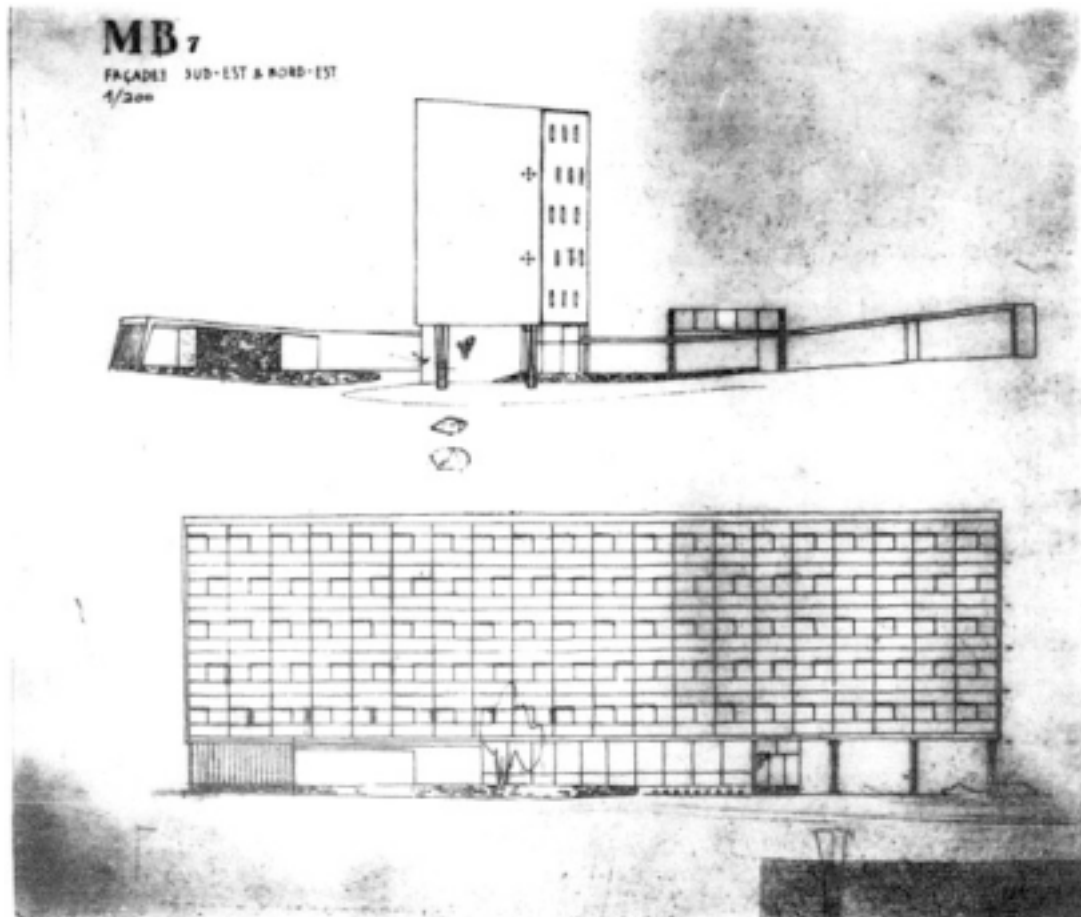


**The mannerism of Le Corbusier's Atelier in the 1950s**  
**La maison du Brésil: project, construction, restoration**  
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The Maison du Brésil at the Cité Universitaire of Paris was built in 1957-59 on the basis of a plan that Le Corbusier and his own collaborators had previously conceived thanks to an original idea of the Brazilian architect Lucio Costa in 1953 (fig. 1). This building was a fairly evident anthology of compositive elements of the lecorbusierian language which were circulated within its atelier. Even today, it still represents the most obvious example of the inner mannerism of the Atelier itself at the end of the fifties.



South-east and north-east facade. Lucio Costa January 1953. FLC 12986

This study concentrates on the various phases of the conception, speculates on the desires of the client, reflects on specific questions like: "Which factors led to the final idea?"; "In what measure has the preliminary proposal of Lucio Costa been respected?"; "What proportion of work was performed by Le Corbusier, by André Wogensky or by the collaborators of the studio?"; "What kind of technical problems were faced?"; It also analyzes the logics of bargaining and compromising that are at the base of the realization of every architectural object.

This research comes to the conclusion that in the case of the Maison du Brésil, the mannerist aspect is an element which we cannot disregard, up to the point of having to face the problem of the authenticity of the architectonic work. The careful examination of the plan and of its genesis shows that, even though the final solution (fig. 2) has substantially affected the initial project of Lucio Costa, it does not reveal the original and creative mark of Le Corbusier - whom Costa and the Brazilian client considered the maximum interpreter of the new architecture. On the contrary, it is the product of the partially conventional language of the Atelier and is, in some way, the inevitable result of its inner organization.



East facade at the end of construction. June 1959. FLC L 2 643

The interpreters of the master's language imbued this building with his elements, employing them as if they were quotations, where their non-pertinence and incongruity synthesize the main problem. In the end, it is the draft of an exercise in style.

We should recognize that in truth this process concerns a particularly delicate aspect of the architectonic object: its own authenticity symbolizes the measure in which an object expresses an idea or an ideology in its shape, in its materials and in its functions. It nearly compromises the unicum. "What is lacking is what can be summarized with the aura notion; the devaluation of hic et nunc is determined."

At present, the authenticity of the work is once more compromised by the important project of restoration now under way which aims to recover the building functionality (still used as a university residence). The plan envisages a series of massive interventions concerning both the interiors and the exteriors; like, for instance, the complete remaking and reconstruction *à l'identique* of all the facades that we have inherited in a serious state of degradation and with no possibility of restoration (fig. 3).



Demolition of the walls of the west facade. December 1999

We are therefore faced with a double problem of authenticity. The importance of the necessary interventions of restoration introduces the second problem regarding the safeguard of the authenticity and the dilemma between preservation and remake within the limits of a work, whose primary authenticity has been questioned. One of the main problems characterizing the debate on the recovery of contemporary

architecture in recent years focuses on the old *querelle* between 'restoration' and 'preservation'. Such issue had previously been studied and the problem concerning the recovery of antiquities had already been solved.

Here the problem arises with all its force and implications of great uncertainty, because the functional recovery must remedy, with substantial remakes, the fragility of the techniques employed. In fact, on the one hand, Le Corbusier and the structure of his Atelier scarcely mastered them; on the other hand, such techniques were not sufficiently developed at the time of the construction. Still, according to the proposals of Le Corbusier, they should have been the point of departure and were going to supply the radication, nearly the justification itself, of his architectonic poetics.

Le Corbusier did not include the first projects for La Chaux de Fonds in the Oeuvres Complètes, because he thought that "the didactic emphasis of the collection would be compromised." Similarly, the Maison du Brésil should not figure in the volume because of its so fugacious paternity and its strong mannerist accent, which we identified with our project. Still, it was included in the collection. But, even though Le Corbusier decided to encompass it in the total panorama of his own production, we cannot avoid to place it among his minor works. Unfortunately, critics have not yet investigated them; however, such works also require a comprehensive analysis. This study means to place the basis for a critical analysis of this type.

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