

In May 2018, at the final review of the Enrique Walker studio, one critic amicably questioned the premise of the studio, which took unfinished modern Japanese architectural masterpieces of the 1960s as its starting point. Reinhold Martin questioned the students’ intervention in such masterpieces. “Who, then, is the author, the student or the original architect?” Reinhold’s incisive question changed the course of the discussion and led to an extremely animated review. The question of “What is the Author?” was back.

Four months later, our Fall 2018 studio takes up this challenge. Is there such a thing as “the death of the author” in architecture today? Has the architect been resurrected at a time when “signature architects” and “archi-stars” populate the mass media in both cultural and commercial marketplaces? Or will digital hyperrealist software and Revit standards kill off the author-architect? Does “culture” dominate and predetermine architectural originality, anyway?

#### Program Hypothesis: The Manhattan “World Museum Block”

The site will be a generic block in an area of Manhattan not yet subjected to extremes of real-estate economic pressure, hence in a “neglected neighborhood.” The site has been selected to house six major international organizations.

At a time when global politics have taken a sinister nationalistic and protectionist turn, a number of major worldwide organizations have assumed enlarged roles and adopted broader responsibilities so as to ensure the survival of Planet Earth.

While the World Health Organization (WHO), Human Rights Watch, International Red Cross (ICRC), European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Trade Organization (WTO), and many other entities have headquarters in Geneva, it has been suggested that developing outposts—individual museums dedicated to explaining their histories—in different world cities might help them communicate their messages.

These outposts will be located on our generic block and designed by our Studio as we simultaneously explore theoretical concerns about concept and authorship and try to give proper identities to each organization.

#### Theoretical Hypothesis: What is an Author? What is a Concept?

As a quick reminder: The two short texts “What is an Author?” (Foucault, 1969) and “The Death of the Author” (Barthes, 1968) radically questioned the clichéd notion of literary authorship throughout history. Transposed to architecture, these texts suggest that architecture may not originate from the subjective creativity of a master author-architect, but rather exist within an objective and somewhat neutral cultural field whose significance is given by the user-viewer.

This radical questioning opens up a number of issues: Is contemporary architecture the product of a master/creator/author/architect? Or is it, instead, a cultural concept that is materialized by real exterior constraints? Does the architectural work stem from the architect, or is it equally or even primarily the result of pre-existing cultural precedents as well as “fundamental” tectonic elements—walls, columns, windows, roofs, etc.?

Our Fall Studio aims to investigate these concepts within the context of our Manhattan World Museum Block.