

ARCHITECTURE OF RISK

Winter 2018 Research Studio – Jeannie Kim

This semester's theme, "Architecture of Risk," explores the potential for architecture to seemingly manage risks and, in doing so, suggests the possibility of the capacity of design to mediate social and cultural transformation. While new technologies charged with identifying, analyzing, and mitigating uncertainty hold the promise of the ultimate dematerialization of space into 'pure' information, we as architects will view this as an opportunity to reassert the territorial claims of the discipline.

The concept of risk management emerged in the 19th century as a financial instrument for insuring against the possibility of unforeseeable catastrophic events while transporting commercial goods across the seas. As capitalism and risk have matured (and travelled inland), individuals have become more dependent upon financial institutions, markets, and increasingly abstract forms of wealth for their security, whether these took the form of insurance policies, savings accounts, government bonds, mortgage-backed securities, futures exchanges, or stock markets.¹ Many of these institutions – and their assumed footprints in the built environment – are disappearing in the wake of technological advancement but, like the stock markets of the 19th century, the transparent market promised by cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin still demonstrates the paradoxical simultaneous desire for both individual freedom and collective institutions.

How can architecture assert itself within a milieu that assumes its obsolescence? Because it involves envisioning uncertainties and projecting possible futures, risk is always at some level imaginary, and projective. We will embrace the disciplinary tools at our disposal and their capacity to evoke these future narratives. The premise of this studio presupposes that the architecture of risk management – whether in the form of Ricardo Bofill's headquarters for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), Deutsche Bank's mirrored twin towers in Frankfurt, Swiss Re's former Foster-designed headquarters in London, or the network of jury-rigged Bitcoin mining operations housed in warehouses and garages across the globe – represents a series of forms that are not empty but, rather, filled with a highly specific architecture that has both political and social consequences.

¹ Levy, Jonathan, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 20.