



APRÈS-SKI

MASTERTHESIS SPRING SEMESTER 2025

CHAIR OF CONSTRUCTION HERITAGE AND PRESERVATION, PROF. DR. SILKE LANGENBERG +
CHAIR OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, PROF. ALEXANDRE THERIOT

contact: assistentz.theriot@arch.ethz.ch, wasser@arch.ethz.ch

source: Paul Kos, The Sound of Ice Melting, 1970

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contact: assistentz.theriot@arch.ethz.ch, wasser@arch.ethz.ch

source: Thomas Sendlhofer, Resterhöhe: Die Piste im Grünen hat ein Nachspiel, 2018

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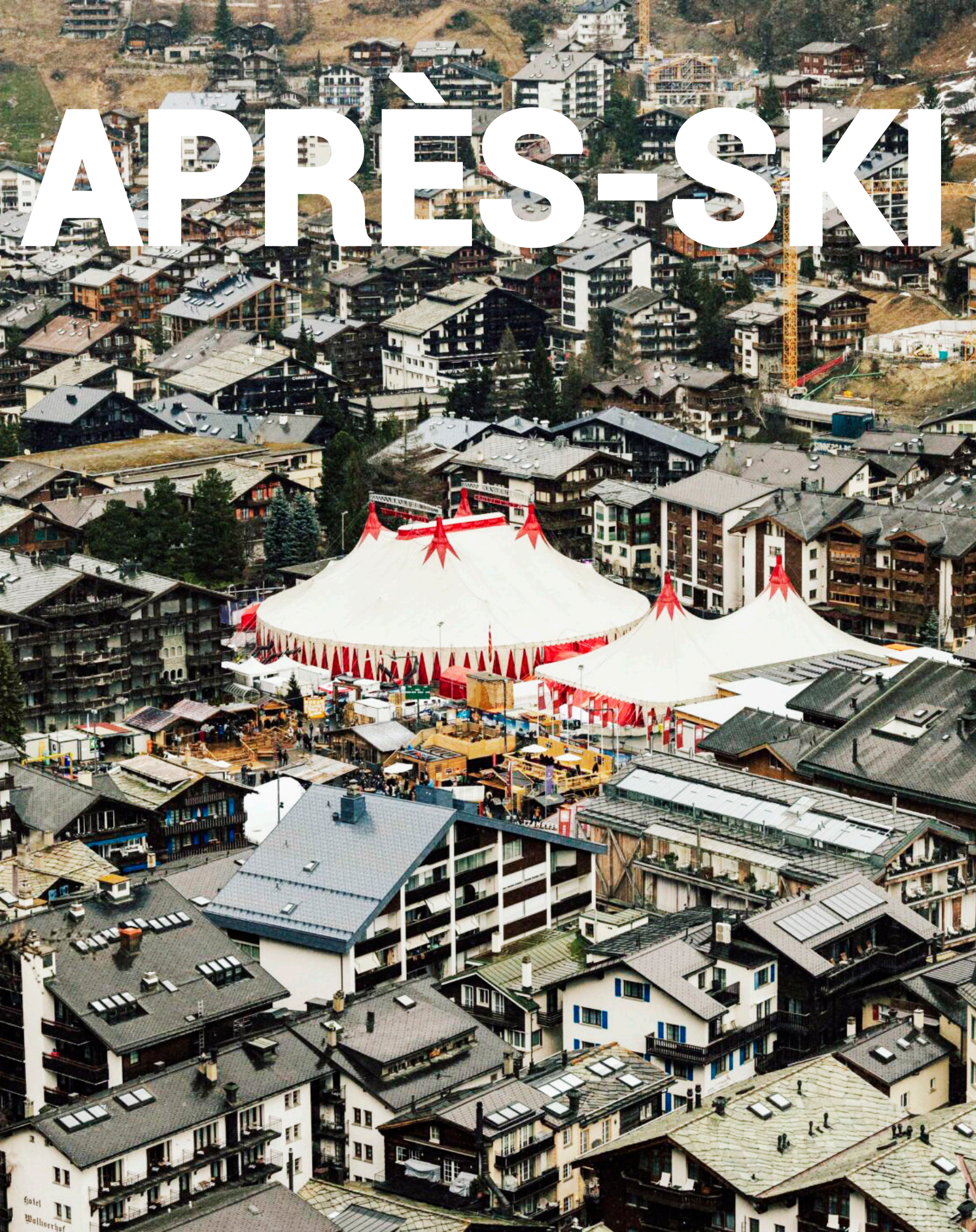
An aerial photograph of a mountain valley. A large, curved dam is visible in the lower center, with a reservoir behind it. The reservoir is surrounded by a dense forest of evergreen trees. To the left of the reservoir, there is a rocky, sparsely vegetated slope. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, rectangular structure, possibly a ski lift station or a building. The overall scene is a mix of natural and man-made elements in a high-altitude environment.

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source: Grande Dixence, Die am Ende des Matternals gelegene Pumpstation Z'Mutt (1972 m ü. M.)



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source: Anja-Zurbruegg, Zermatt-Unplugged, 2023

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source: Lois Hechenblaikner, Hansi Hinterseer Fanwanderung, Kitzbühel, Hahnenkamm, 21.8.2008

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source: Olivier Maire, Crans-Montana, 2017

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source: Felix Gross, Chamonix, Col du Midi, 2018

APRÈS-SKI

WHAT COMES AFTER THE SNOW? APRÈS-SKI?

The Alps are no longer —and probably have never been— an isolated natural sanctuary. Today, they represent an economic force, a refuge for global capital, a hub for political decisions, and above all, a highly profitable, urbanized tourism machine. However, with the growing impact of climate change, snow – the historical driving force of this economy – is retreating, leaving behind a vast array of underutilized infrastructure and housing.

The operation of cable cars in the Swiss Alps alone generated a revenue of 741 million Swiss francs, contributing to a gross added value of approximately 500 million in 2022. Ski day passes now exceed 100 Swiss francs. At the same time, Switzerland's mildest winter on record in 2022 highlights a reality where the mountains are no longer a "counter-world" to our cities but have become their direct offspring. In this context, architecture must speculate on a profound reinterpretation of these landscapes, navigating climatic, economic, and social challenges.

A NECESSARY REINVENTION

With the disappearance of snow, what is the future of the Alps? Will the mountains be abandoned to obsolescence, left to ruins and natural disasters? Or can they be repurposed, transformed into experimental grounds for a new, sustainable way of living?

SOME PATHS TO EXPLORE:

Reconversion of Tourist Infrastructure

Can seasonal hotels be transformed into permanent housing? Could ski resorts evolve into educational centers, cultural hubs, or innovative agricultural centers?

Toward New Economic Models

What could an Alpine valley produce year-round, beyond tourism? Renewable energy, climate research laboratories, or sustainable agriculture? How can we attract a permanent population to revitalize these areas?

Addressing Climate Change

How can villages adapt to new extreme weather conditions? Is it possible to reconcile nature and urbanity to create regions that both absorb climate shocks and support biodiversity?

TERRITORIES TO REAPPROPRIATE

Each case, each site, tells a different story of the post-snow Alps, addressing a specific challenge that should be faced. Such as:

CRANS MONTANA / AMINONA

Financial crises and global pressures

The commune of Crans Montana faces a 150'000m² large hole. After financial struggles and the stop of the local cable car due to a decrease in demand, the project Aminona Luxury Resort and Village was meant to revive the village and refinance a new telecabin station through foreign capital. However, geopolitical developments have put the project on hold. Putin's call to keep capital within the Russian state and international sanctions stopped the influx of money from the East. "Le trou" remains.

THYON 2000

A holiday resort with 1800 beds for 63 inhabitants

A holiday resort built at once (from 1971 to 1976) including at the time 300 apartments, one hotel, fitness center, swimming pool, two restaurants, one nightclub, one supermarket, tennis courts, ice rink, a bowling alley and 400 parking spaces. Hosting school trips, family vacations, and holiday camps; these places have made skiing popular and subject to mass consumption. It is not the sparkling champagne bars and helicopter tours that await but down-to-earth, functional locker rooms and ample parking lots to accommodate the cars of those who cannot afford to stay overnight.

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DAVOS

The single week that drives a city's entire year

Every year, heads of politics and finance and other celebrities flock to the city of Davos for the World Economic Forum. Set in a remote mountain resort, the Summit transforms the village into a geopolitical and highly capitalized curated stage for the duration of the event. The strongly military-protected conclave hosts a selected elite to discuss worldly problems without unwanted real-life interruption.

VERBIER - LE CHABLE

How Infrastructure fades from view in the valley

In order to maintain the idyllic postcard image of resorts such as Verbier, most of its infrastructure has been located on its periphery, or more precisely, in the valley. After 30 years of negotiation, Le Châble (situated right below Verbier) invested 27 million to rebuild its train station underground, with direct connection to Geneva Airport. The same strategies of placing the main infrastructure out of sight in the valley applies to wastewater treatment plant and the majority of its production activities, whether industrial, agricultural, or tertiary.

ZERMATT

The consequences of a changing climate

On June 21, 2024, the Vispa River overflowed its banks, causing landslides and floods that isolated the exclusive ski resort of Zermatt. Train and road connections were halted, cutting it off from the rest of the world. As extreme weather events like these become more frequent, what does the future hold for holiday destinations like Zermatt, heavily reliant on both tourism and climate stability?

AROSA

Modernity in the mountains and what comes next?

Probably no other ski resort in Switzerland developed as much in the 1930s as Arosa as a result of extensive building activity. This development led to a considerable architectural remodelling of the original small community, in which only a few families lived. It is striking that after an initial strong development of the village into a resort before the First World War, the building boom in Arosa before the Second World War was mainly characterised by numerous conversions and extensions due to legal requirements such as the 'hotel building ban'. How can we deal with the surviving architectural structures of this period today, particularly in view of the demographic and climatic changes that lie ahead? And how can the strategy of structural transformation be adapted to these developments and developed further?

ERST-WOHNUNGS-INITIATIVE

A speculative proposal for a legal shift

The imaginary Erst-Wohnungs-Initiative is an experiment to rethink the use of the existing building stock collectively. The proposed legal shift is a radical continuation of the Zweit-Wohnungs-Initiative, which resulted in the national law on secondary homes (ZWG), in 2016. Together with the Lex Koller—the federal Act on the Acquisition of Immovable Property in Switzerland by Foreign Non-Residents—the two Acts aim to regulate the influx of foreign capital into the Swiss real estate market.

The ZWG or Lex Weber generally prohibits the construction of additional secondary homes as soon as their share in a commune exceeds 20%. We speculate on a different reality; one where an imaginative Erst-Wohnungs-Initiative effectively led to an end of rarely occupied holiday complexes used only a few months of the year.

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METHODOLOGY

As part of this diploma studio, you will be asked to find your own method of accessing the chosen site and its themes.

RESEARCH PHASE

Determining your own approach to the research project, including the choice of tools for investigation and representation, and drawing up a timetable are the first steps in the research phase.

Your approach can include various formats: individual or group work, with field immersion, archival research, or by *dérive*.

You may rely on a range of tools: photographic documentation, physical models, film production, oral history collection, or any other appropriate method. The goal is to quickly and effectively immerse yourself in the subject to reach a level of understanding that enables tangible progress. The chosen methodology must be relevant and positively impact your project. Depending on the specifics of the site and the identified issues, you are free to define your scope of action and your position.

What will your method be?

First step: 48 hours on-site for complete immersion.

ELABORATION PHASE

In the development phase, you will develop your architectural intervention based on the program, scale, and type defined in the research phase. What does the site need, and what must be done to implement your vision? Anything can be the subject of a project. As in the research phase, you will be asked to select the relevant means to develop and represent your proposal. Different experts will assist you, depending on your needs.

GRADING RATIO

Chair Langenberg	50%
Chair Theriot	50%