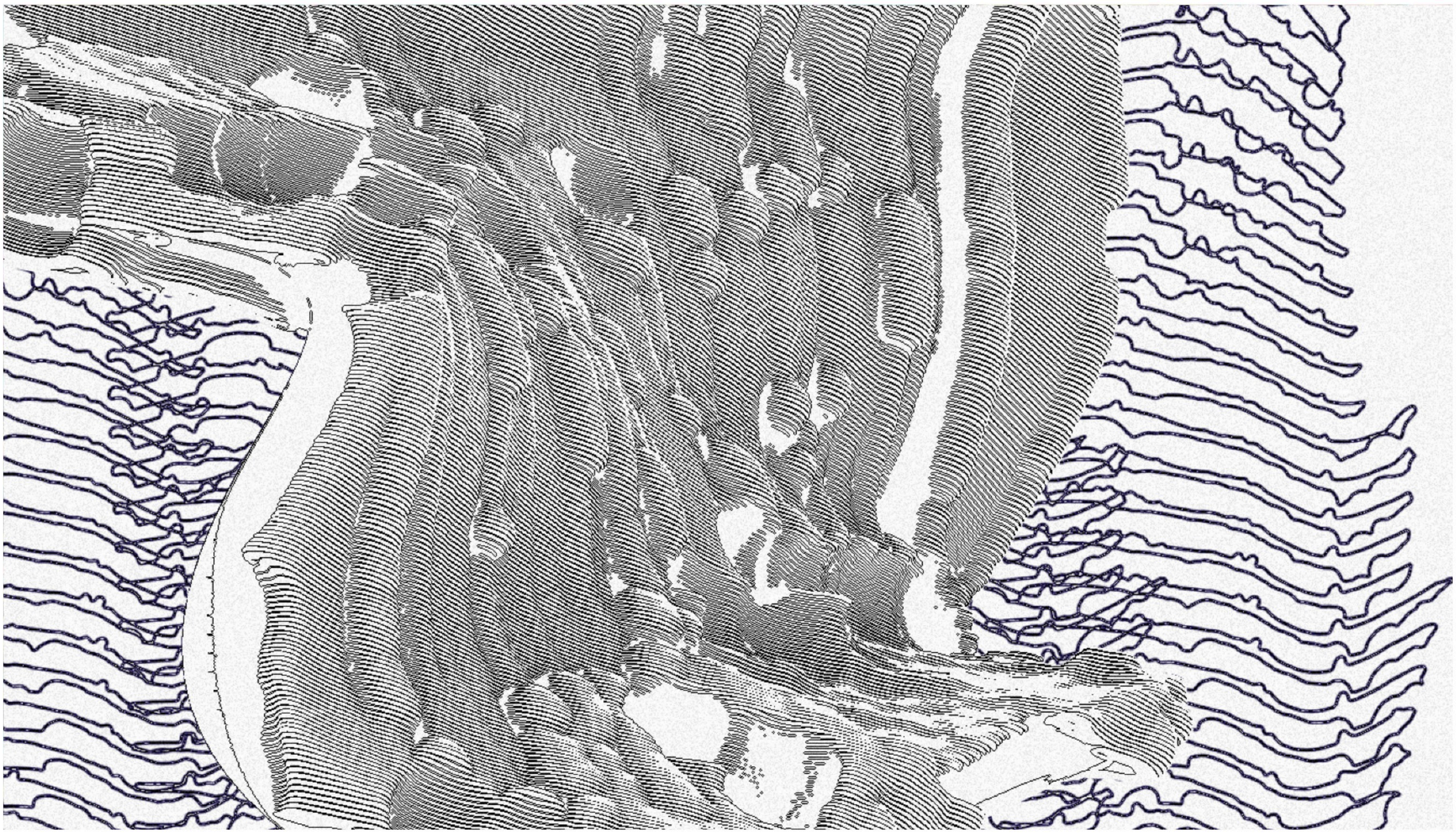


Walch Christopher, 'Flow~rish', RECODING THE OBSOLETE, EP Design Studio 2, SS26, taught by Daria Smakhtina, Geogr Gasser

APRÈS-SKI

Material Ecologies for Transitional Landscapes

848155 EP Design Studio 2 | Daria Smakhtina, Marjan Colletti

Brief

The Alps are a dynamic, living entity—a slow, beautiful performance in deep time. They breathe, shift, erode, and grow, while carrying an **accelerating layer of change**: rising snow lines, retreating glaciers, and a tourism economy built for winters that no longer reliably arrive. Ski pistes are migrating uphill into the same high ground that is becoming one of the last refuges for alpine plant and animal life—a mountain caught between two kinds of survival.

Après-Ski treats ageing mountain infrastructure—ski lifts, avalanche barriers, huts, cable car stations, etc.—as a material and **spatial reservoir** rather than cast-off artificial traces. Framing the Alps through "**socio-ecological niche construction**", the studio views the landscape as co-produced by **socio-cultural dynamics** and **natural** processes. As the environmental historians **Groß** and **Winiwarter** have shown, ski-lift operators have long practised a quiet **ecosystem construction**—reseeding slopes, redirecting water, and managing conflicts—revealing the Alps as "**socio-natural sites**" where society and nature shape the terrain together.

The studio takes that admission seriously and makes it visible. Après-Ski adopts this as its working method: every project site is read as one of these hybrids, and every design decision is understood as adding a further layer to its **ongoing co-authorship**. We will design architecture as **dynamic, time-based systems**—buildings that are never finished but always **evolving**, **adapting**, and **metabolising** their surroundings. Rather than static objects, students will propose **updatable**, **repairable**, and **reassemblable** structures that **respond** to shifting climatic conditions, changing touristic flows, and the slow rhythms of the mountain itself.

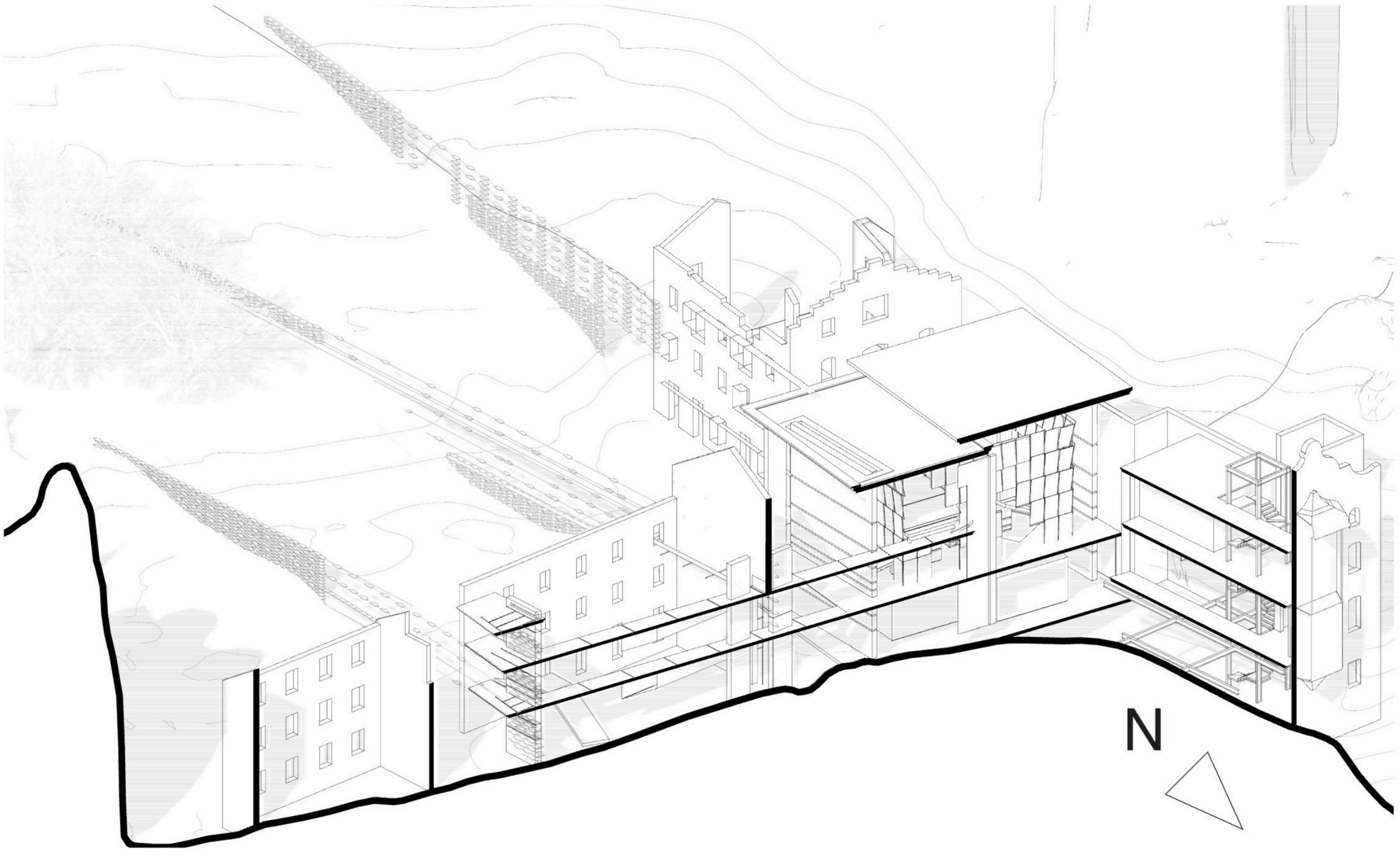
Working along a single vertical transect—from **ridge** to **valley village**—students will design **medium-scale public** or **semi-public buildings** that turn the mountain's quiet terraforming into something deliberate and sensorial. Each project will be sited at a distinct point along the elevation gradient so that the studio's collective work reads as one **instrument scanning the mountain across its full climatic and social gradient**.

The studio's core questions are: What does it mean for **architecture to construct ecosystems** on purpose, rather than merely avoid damaging them? How does the **sensorial experience** of the mountain change as skiing gives way to summer tourism, and what does that new, tactile body need from a building? And **what happens to the village** at the foot of the lift once the flows of tourists change their pace?

Methods
Students will work in groups, each assigned one node along the mountain-to-village transect, combining ecological field research, historical and sensorial research, and architectural design developed through iterative section and material studies. The 15-week-long studio is roughly structured into the following steps:

- **Deep Mapping & Site Sensing:** analysis of one selected site's ecological, geomorphological, and cultural narratives, focusing on extraction, protection, tourism, and abandonment. Identification of obsolete or shifting infrastructures as potential project seeds.
- **Infrastructure & Trail Archaeology**: close reading and documentation of the node's existing built and unbuilt infrastructure—a decommissioned reservoir, a retired lift line, a graded piste, a flow or tech mountain-bike trail—including its material composition and its current ecological performance.
- **Terramorphing Concept Development:** Translating real ecosystem-engineering practices into explicit architectural strategies.
- **Environmental Tuning**: using ecological data analysis as primary drivers for massing, orientation, structural logic, and passive performance.
- **Sensorial Tuning**: designing the embodied experience of the building around the specific bodies that will use it — the cold-adapted, gliding body of the skier, the tactile, high-exertion body of the mountain biker, or the everyday body of a year-round resident — using material, light, sound and thermal register as primary design tools.
- **Architectural Synthesis**: developing the building as both a functioning piece of ecological infrastructure and a public or semi-public space, with material and life-cycle strategies — repair, reuse, disassembly — carried forward from the studio's predecessor.
- **Temporal Resolution**: considering seasonal variation, climate trajectories, and deep-time processes. Students will define scenarios of transformation: how the project evolves, erodes, or changes program as conditions shift.
- **Final Assembly**: Production of a collective physical site model with groups' multi-material detailed models of each intervention.

Case study and site
The studio operates along a single continuous transect in the Tyrolean Alps, from a ridge to the valley village. During the first weeks, we will select together a set of sites. Each student group is assigned one site; together, these nodes form the shared brief and site matrix for the semester.



Hamid Zadeh Yasamin, Riedt Paul, Stavropoulos Jordan James, 'Grande Minerale',
RECODING THE OBSOLETE, EP Design Studio 2, SS26, taught by Daria Smakhtina, Geogr Gasser

Learning outcomes
Upon completion of this studio, you will be able to:

- Design resilient buildings that function simultaneously as ecological infrastructure and public architecture.
- Translate embodied, sensorial experience — for skiers, bikers, or year-round residents — into concrete material and spatial decisions.
- Develop a design thesis that responds to the site's climatic, ecological, social trajectory.
- Position an individual building within a networked, multi-site strategy operating across an entire climatic and social gradient.
- Articulate a material and life-cycle strategy for a project, including a seasonal or dual-use operating strategy.

Evaluation criteria
- **Innovative design solution**: Creativity and originality in translating the brief into architectural design.
- **Technical Proficiency**: Ability to develop a coherent concept and corresponding intervention.
- **Contextual** and **Environmental Sensitivity**: Responsiveness of the design to the site's specific ecological, climatic, and temporal conditions.
- **Presentation Quality**: Clarity and professionalism in presenting the design process and final proposal.

Requirements
We expect an affinity for a digital-physical workflow and specifically invite those students with an interest in these methods to express their interest. While focusing on concepts and design development, we encourage students to leverage advanced modelling and fabrication software as integral tools for design exploration and resolution.

First meeting
Wed 2026-10-07, 09.00 at SR HB West 319a (3rd floor)



Lara Geh, Eleonora Monticelli, 'Threshold',
RECODING THE OBSOLETE, EP Design Studio 2, SS26, taught by Daria Smakhtina, Geogr Gasser

Reading List

- **Roseo, F., Celada, C., Brambilla, M.** (2025) Ski resorts threaten climate refugia for high-elevation biodiversity under current and future conditions in the Alps. Biological Conservation, 301, 110890. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2024.110890

- **Groß, R., Winiwarter, V.** et al. How skiers' sensations shaped Alpine valleys during the 20th century. BOKU / Zentrum für Umweltgeschichte final report. http://www.umweltgeschichte.aau.at/index,4710,How+skiers%C2%B4sensations+shaped+Alpine+valleys.html

- **Garofalo, F., Geroldi, C., Furlan, C.** et al. (2025) Instabilities: The Shifting Alpine Landscape. Biennale Architettura 2025. https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2025/natural/shifting-alpine-landscape

- **Colletti, M., Massin, P.,** eds. Meeting Nature Halfway: Architecture Interfaced Between Technology and Environment. Innsbruck: innsbruck university press, 2018. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10150171/

- **Perlik, M.** (2019) The Spatial and Economic Transformation of Mountain Regions: Landscapes as Commodities. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/The-Spatial-and-Economic-Transformation-of-Mountain-Regions-Landscapes/Perlik/p/book/9781138784086

- **Morton, T.** (2010) The Ecological Thought. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674064225

- **Bridle, J.** (2022) Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for Planetary Intelligence. Penguin Books, London, New York. https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/317823/ways-of-being-by-bridle-james/9780141994260

- **Kallipoliti, L.** (2024) Histories of Ecological Design: An Unfinished Cyclopedia. Actar Publishers. https://actar.com/product/histories-of-ecological-design/

Podcasts

- Night White Skies - 002 Timothy Morton - Dark Ecology | 012 Geoff Manaugh - Sentient Landscapes