

• High Altitudes •

DREAMLAND ALPS

*"Flying on your motorcycle,
Watching all the ground
beneath you drop [...]
You broke another mirror,
You're turning into something
you are not"¹*

¹ RADIOHEAD,
High and Dry, from the Album *"the Bends"*
(1995, Parlophone, UK)



*SUPERSTUDIO,
Continuous Monument: an
architectural model for total
urbanization
(1969-1970, Florence, Italy)

17-18
five

*Julia Backhaus
Pedro Pitarch*

DREAMLANDS

Until the late 18th century the Alps were a source of fear to travellers and of mystery to scientists. They were an uncharted wilderness at the heart of the world's most crowded continent. Yet, within a remarkably short space of time, they became one of the earliest tourist destinations with the crossing of the Alps 'the Grand Tour' seen as a sublime experience for the European elite. Soon, mountains became the source of wonder and inspiration and attracted mountaineers, pioneers, writers, engineers, architects and scientists alike. They came for adventure and monumental panoramas, for fresh air and fresh milk, –escaping tuberculosis and smog in the cities. The Alps and Switzerland in particular became spa central, a place of health enthusiasts, luxury retreats, desire and an elevated rush of adrenaline.

MANUFACTURED WILDERNESS

Our fascination for these unique wilderness areas has been partly based on their remoteness, inaccessibility and epic aesthetic experience. Yet, today, the perfect picture postcard elements that attract people to mountains – clean air, pristine landscapes and rich biodiversity are not as permanent or static as one would assume: Underpinned by infrastructure and fueled by climate change, Alpine landscapes are heavily manufactured by new climate modification technology and efforts to control weather. They undergo dramatic seasonal transformation: not only through the shift from the iced cap of skiing slopes to hiking paradise but also through the ancient practice of 'transhumance' – the shifting of grazing livestock between the valleys in winter and the high mountain pastures in summer.

LANDSCAPE FOR SPECULATION

Increasingly, the Alps are big business. In the spa town of Évian, France, the people who bottle its mineral water send 1.6 million gallons of liquid Alps out of their plant every day. The mountain range produces millions of cubic meters of timber, hundreds of thousands of tons of iron and salt, spectacular quantities of milk butter and cheese, wine, and apples, athletic challenge, artistic inspiration, spiritual insight, and many forms of expensive and risky amusement. Since the invention of winter tourism some 140 years ago, the Alps have become an enormous factory of fun.

The Alps are a landscape for speculation – currently mainly for profit. Could it also become a speculative testing ground for future use?

FUTURE ALPS

Paradoxically, the Alpine terrain – once an escape and refuge from the cities, is now in danger of turning into an abundance of bubbling tourist hubs where the valley seasonally resembles an orgy of multitasking: factories, train tracks, hotels, houses, churches, ski lifts, parking lots, lumberyards, stores, restaurants, and boutiques, all bundled together. Scientists warn that global warming is accelerating glacial melt on the peak; Yet the tourist board is marketing the old happy Alpine themes—Heidi, yodeling, cheese with holes in it whilst focusing on vistas in which nature still appears omnipotent and largely undisturbed.

Is this a new type of nature? How can we as architects engage with the landscape without harming its fragile ecologies?

ALPINE TYPOLOGY

The **Alpine Convention** is an international treaty between the 8 Alpine Countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland) as well as the EU, for the sustainable development and protection of the Alps. This September the alpine convention holds its 10th Alpine conference, where it discusses the future of the Alps fragile ecology and decides on legislation. In 2018 a 20 year local ban on new resorts in the Alps will end – making this a vital time for the region.

Is there a new Alpine typology, a re-wilding of the area where new ways of collaborating between habitat, tourism and production can preserve the natural environment?

Full of history, technological underpinning and curiosities - the Alpine landscape is uber-productive and will become both your site and source of inspiration. Our research and architectural response will be situated between nature and technology, culture and instinct. We are interested in exploring the fragile relationship between human occupation and the mountainous wilderness.

Topographical and geological environments, technological strategies, weather, climate, local culture/tradition, food production and either science facts or fictions will define your proposals.

THE TRIP

In the spirit of the grand tour we will travel the Alpine arch by plane and train - starting our journey in Switzerland, the land that produced Le Corbusier and precision measurement. Bordering with 5 countries it is a landlocked island that has staved off membership with the European Union and preserves 4 different languages and 26 semi-autonomous cantons. From here we will crisscross the Alpine scenery by train making our way to Milan and the warmer Mediterranean shores of Venice. On our way we will visit the remote villages, ski resorts and the Cern collider but also see architecture by Zumthor, OMA, Le Corbusier, Scarpa, Tschumi and SANAA as well as visiting the ETH Zurich.



*RHONE GLACIER,
Covered Landscape,
(Swiss Alps,
Switzerland)

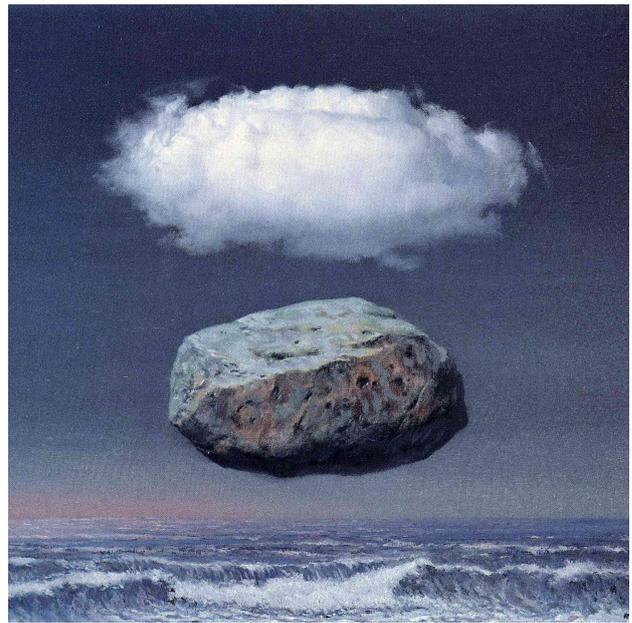
Future Alp Souvenir

TWO WEEKS

• P1

In anticipation of our journey to the Alps, we will study the Alps and the Swiss Alps in particular from afar. To warm up, we start with a short 2-week project in which you will develop your own Alpine souvenir. This project is seen as a playful, experimental yet multilayered exercise to study and analyze essential Alpine ground conditions, cultures, traditions or technologies and condense your findings in form of a critical object or postcard.

Your areas of interrogation might reach from cheese making to weather control and artificial snow canons, from health retreats to disguised Swiss military infrastructure, from high altitude chalet architecture to the reflective space of an alpine echo.



* RENE MAGRITTE,
Les Idées Claires
(Clear Ideas),
(1958, Bruxelles,
Belgium)

Interface

SEVEN WEEKS

Fed by research, curiosity and a subject area to dive in – you will then start to explore the architectural and cultural Alpine landscape with your own individual design methods. Your proposal will be a spatial response to your findings and interrogates the dual relationships between landscape and culture. **Your proposal might be a provocation, a form of refuge or an instrument that tests the site. A carefully crafted model will be the outcome of project 1.**

For the end of the year show your models will accumulate in a physical super site model, a speculative miniature Alpine convention, defining our areas of intervention.

Alpine Delight

TWO TERMS

• P2

Informed by term one the 2nd project will be a continuation of our research into the Alps. What is our relationship with mountains and their iconic vertical dimension? What reality can we preserve to protect them as a source of inspiration, wonder but also livelihood? What is our spatial response to the dynamic yet aggressive economic development and harsh seasonal weather change? Can this landscape still act as a place of delight or unique retreat within the vast lines of production? What typologies or communities can we imagine to emerge?