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René Furer's Semantic and Syntactic Analysis: Venturi and Vignola at ETH Zurich

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the response of the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH Zurich) to the student unrest of 1968. Specifically, it analyses the teaching of Swiss architect and educator René Furer on architectural theory. One of the key examples is Furer's lecture on mannerism, in which both sixteenth-century and contemporary projects were used to illustrate "semantic" and "syntactic" dimensions of architecture. The terminology and pluralist content of the lecture show how mannerism was related to the notion of architecture as language and to nascent postmodernism. By highlighting this episode, the paper challenges the prevailing narrative of Swiss architecture as a bastion of modernism, suggesting that teaching at ETH was more in tune with international developments than previously thought.

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Introduction

On June 29, 1968, a demonstration in downtown Zurich escalated into a violent confrontation with the police. The so-called "Globus riot," named after the vacant department store before which it took place, became emblematic of the Swiss 1968 movement.¹ During the events of the early summer and in the years that followed, politically engaged students campaigned for increased democratic participation and curricular reform (fig. 1). The movement was part of a larger social revolution, as seen in cities such as Paris and Prague, which also marked a watershed in architectural debate.² It was the beginning of what Swiss art historian Adolf Max Vogt refers to as a "critical threshold" between 1968 and 1973, which called "the self-image of the years of reconstruction and prosperity into question," leading to a rejection of the "functional determinism" once propagated by Sigfried Giedion and the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).³

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Figure 1. Protest at the ETH main building in 1968. Source: Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRF.

Crisis Management and Teaching at ETH Zurich in the Aftermath of 1968

The unrest of 1968 reverberated at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH Zurich) in the years that followed, with public discussions, strikes, and protests. Bernhard Hoesli, Dean of the Department of Architecture from 1968 to 1972, was criticised for teaching an increasingly outdated canon of modern architecture.⁴ The period of political radicalism led to an experimental phase in which new teaching methods were tried out and new faculty were appointed.⁵ Most prominently, Aldo Rossi began his first term as a visiting lecturer in 1972.⁶ During the same phase, the subject of architectural theory was introduced, which filled a perceived “theoretical vacuum” and was taught by the Swiss architect and educator René Furer.⁷ This paper explores the extent to which Furer’s teaching responded to the politically charged situation after 1968 and how it related to new tendencies in architecture, especially to nascent postmodernism.⁸ It focuses on Furer’s lecture on mannerism—an “untimely” stylistic movement, which was disseminated in connection with the ideas of Robert Venturi (1925–2018) and Denise Scott Brown (b. 1931). Furer’s teaching presented new pluralistic architectural examples that were in step with international developments in the theoretical discourse about architecture, which went beyond the modernist canon. The examples were pluralistic in an aesthetic and cultural sense, and can thereby also be seen as political, as they resonated with the demands of the protest movement. They can be understood as part of a larger shift in architectural culture in the wake of 1968.

By highlighting this episode, this paper challenges the dominant narrative of Swiss architecture as a bastion of modernism, offering a more nuanced and diverse interpretation of recent history.⁹ Beginning with a brief commentary on the twentieth-century reception of Mannerism as an epochal term (rendered here

with a capital M), it continues with Furer's teaching on "semantic" and "syntactic" mannerism (lowercase), and ends with an example of a Swiss mannerist building of the 1970s. It suggests that at least part of the teaching at ETH—and by extension, Swiss architectural discourse—was more progressive than previously thought.

From Sixteenth-Century to Lowercase Mannerism

The period term Mannerism was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, initially used to describe the painting and sculpture of the late Renaissance (1525–1620). The term was applied to architecture in articles such as Rudolf Wittkower's "Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana" (1934) and Nikolaus Pevsner's "The Architecture of Mannerism" (1946).¹⁰ Mannerism has been seen as a direct consequence of events such as Luther's Theses in 1517, the sack of Rome in 1527, and the Counter-Reformation movement, and therefore as a response to a crisis of worldview after the balanced and self-assured High Renaissance.¹¹ The reading of Mannerism as a phenomenon appearing "automatically," as a consequence of historical events, has been criticised in favour of a focus on the agency of the practicing artist.¹² Ultimately, the emergence of what was called Mannerism was likely due to a combination of factors, both aesthetic sensibilities and historical events. In the mid-twentieth century, the notion of lowercase "mannerism" as a recurring phenomenon, an "art of crisis" repeated throughout history, would spread. This is seen in Colin Rowe's "Mannerism and Modern Architecture" (1950), where he acknowledges a mannerist attitude in the work of Le Corbusier and refers to a "very human desire to impair perfection when once it has been achieved ..."¹³ Rowe points out that, paradoxically, the very reaction against "perfection" (for instance in the shape of High Renaissance) simultaneously deepens "the awareness of the pre-existing order."¹⁴ For a revolt to take place there must be an established system to revolt against.

The reception of sixteenth-century Mannerism intensified in the 1960s with publications by Bruno Zevi, Manfredo Tafuri, and Robert Venturi.¹⁵ Venturi and his partner Scott Brown shared an early interest in Mannerism, which they would later refer to as the "art of breaking the rules."¹⁶ Their definition is similar to that of Linda Murray, who writes that it "concentrates on violations of the rules governing accepted usage of the classical orders and on irrational and unpredictable disposition of space, combinations of features, [and] treatment of surfaces."¹⁷ Murray's definition and the notion of rule-breaking fit well with the radical moment of 1968, with its critique of orthodox modernism. At ETH, Furer discovered sixteenth-century Mannerism through the art history professor Erwin Gradmann, whose teaching was given new credence by Furer's simultaneous discovery of "Venturi" (the name often referring to the office's work and his collaboration with Scott Brown).¹⁸ Gradmann's uppercase Mannerism was thus juxtaposed with the lowercase mannerism of contemporary architecture.¹⁹ Like Rowe and others, Furer understood mannerism as a recurring phenomenon that is essentially a critical transfer of cultural content with "slight twists and shifts."²⁰

René Furer's Lecture on Mannerism

Furer was born in 1932 in Dotzigen, a small village outside Bern, into a family of craftsmen. He began his career at ETH in 1962 as an assistant to Bernhard Hoesli,



Figure 2. Bernhard Hoesli and René Furer at the ETH main building in 1968. Photograph by Paul Erhardt.

who was instrumental in Furer's promotion to lecturer in 1970 (fig. 2). As a teacher in his thirties, Furer was closer to the students in age than most faculty and shared the younger generation's interests. The fact that he was largely self-taught and not an academic historian might have contributed to his popularity with students in the anti-hierarchic atmosphere of the time (in contrast to more established professors, who were often described as "aloof" and "aristocratic"). According to art historian Jacques Gubler, an assistant at the Architecture Department in the early 1970s, Furer was the "most knowledgeable, subtle and stimulating teacher" but was disparaged by some professors as "a mere lecturer."²¹

Furer taught Architecture Theory (AT I–IV) and the elective course Design Theory (GT I + II) to third- and fourth-year students between 1970 and 1994.²² As a teacher of a new subject with no predecessor, Furer had to invent his approach and pedagogical methods. His teaching built in part on his experience as Hoesli's senior assistant, but with a vastly expanded use of imagery. Each lecture was based on hundreds of slides, many from photographs which he had taken during his travels around the world, as well as from books and magazines such as *Architectural Design* and *Architectural Review*.²³ His lectures were organised thematically along formal, spatial, or theoretical lines, showing images from various contexts, often not chronologically, accompanied by "pointed remarks, associative comparisons and unexpected questions."²⁴ Furer maintained a value-free approach that seems to have been refreshing to the students, inspiring them to think critically and form their own opinions.²⁵

The Terms “Semantic” and “Syntactic”

Beginning in 1972, the spring semester of Furer’s Design Theory course was entitled “Contemporary American Architecture” (“Amerikanische Architektur der Gegenwart”) and featured the work and ideas of Venturi and Scott Brown.²⁶ The lectures addressed such figures and topics as Louis I. Kahn, Las Vegas, diagonal organisation, the ordinary house, pop art, and mannerism. The lecture on mannerism, entitled “Venturi and Vignola: The Old and the New Mannerism—The Difference between a Semantic and a Syntactic Manner,” was repeated annually in the 1970s.²⁷ Although Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola (1507–73)²⁸ is singled out in the title, the focus was primarily on architecture’s “semantic” and “syntactic” dimensions, which were considered timeless and applicable to both contemporary and historical architecture.

By applying this vocabulary, Furer connects aspects of mannerism to the notion of architecture as a language. Analysis based on linguistic discourse—as a way out of the “crisis of legitimacy of modern architecture”—was a significant tendency at the time, also at ETH.²⁹ Furer’s first assistant Bruno Reichlin had edited a “semiotic survey” (“Werk-Umfrage über Architektur und Semiotik”), published in three issues of the journal *Werk* in 1971, which included translations of excerpts from semioticians such as Umberto Eco, Gillo Dorfles, Geoffrey Broadbent, Roland Barthes, Giovanni Klaus Koenig, and the American Charles W. Morris.³⁰ Morris’s theory of semiotics, as described in *Signs, Language and Behavior* (1946), was central to the discourse.³¹ It was the foundation of Koenig’s teaching in Florence, by which Reichlin was heavily influenced. Morris is known for his subdivision of semiotics into three fields, namely “syntactics (dealing with the relations between signs), semantics (dealing with the relation between sign vehicle and object), and pragmatics (dealing with the relation between sign vehicle and interpretant).”³² Semantic mannerism thus deals with architecture as a “sign vehicle,” a carrier of meaning, and its relations to concrete objects, such as elements of historical architecture. Although Morris’s work and terminology were well-known in specialised circles in Europe at the time, Furer does not mention him or explain the origins of the terminology.³³ Asked about semiotics in 2023, Furer commented that he “did not have a monopoly” on the topic, which suggests that he did not share the deep interest of some of his colleagues.³⁴ Apart from within the lecture on mannerism, there are few references to the subject in his teaching. Furer might also have been inspired by more popular articles from the architectural press, such as an essay by Mario Gandelsonas and David Morton, “On Reading Architecture” (1972), published in *Progressive Architecture* (fig. 3), in which the authors compare the “semantic” strategy of Michael Graves to the “syntactic” approach of Peter Eisenman.³⁵

Exploring Semantic Mannerism

On June 14, 1974, Furer delivered one of his lectures on mannerism, in a lecture hall in Gottfried Semper’s ETH main building, perched on a hill above central Zurich. An audio recording was made on this occasion, which allows us to follow Furer’s speech in its entirety (fig. 4). Furer begins with “semantic” manipulations of references, of doing something “*à la manière de*.”³⁶ The idea is illustrated by two still-lifes painted by Roy Lichtenstein: one in the manner of Pablo Picasso (1964) and the other in the manner of Fernand Léger (1968). Furer points out that Lichtenstein’s adaptation of European painting, the fusion of

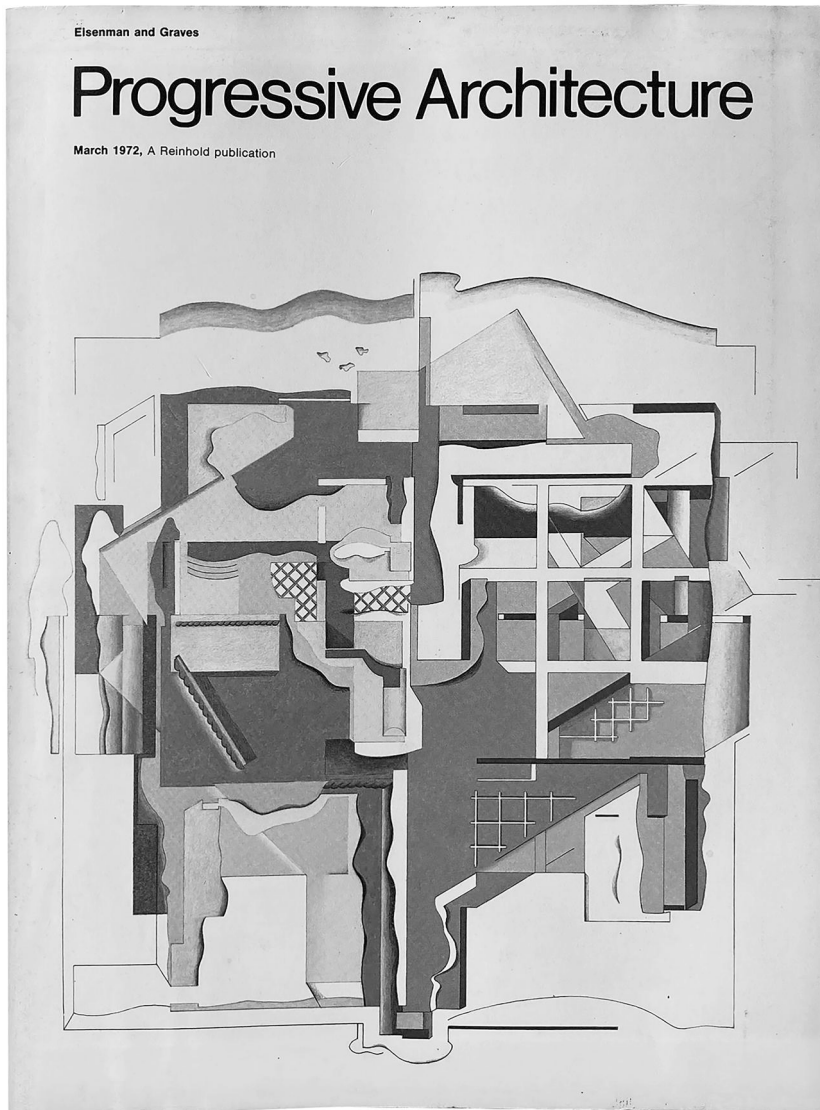


Figure 3. *Progressive Architecture*, March 1972.

American and European culture, is more than mere repetition—it is a mannerist strategy, and a challenge to the abstraction of late modernism.³⁷ Furer’s use of painting makes the adoption of a manner explicit and emphasises the figurative quality.³⁸ After the examples by Lichtenstein, Furer turns to contemporary architectural mannerism, which he sees exemplified by Venturi’s Guild House (Philadelphia, completed 1963, [fig. 5](#)) and the Vanna Venturi House (Chestnut Hill, completed 1964). Both include manipulated quotations from an existing repertoire: the first with its integrated Italianate palazzo on the street front, and the second with a series of elements such as broken arches and pediments. Furer comments that these elements give the impression of papier-mâché replicas, which make them appear “unreal” and underscores their function as symbols, or sign vehicles. For Furer, Venturi’s



Figure 4. Audiotape recording, “Gest. Th. 14.6.74: Venturi, Vignola und die Maniera.” René Furer, private archive.



Figure 5. Guild House, Venturi and Rauch, Philadelphia, 1963. René Furer, private archive.

architecture was another example of American and European cultural transfer, similar to the initial Léger–Lichtenstein example. The introduction of Roman references into the Philadelphia context was also a clear departure from orthodox modernism.



Figure 6. Palazzo Zuccari, Federico Zuccari, Rome, 1592. René Furer, private archive.

Furer contextualises Venturi’s “semantic” manipulations by presenting historical examples, some of which he is critical towards. One positive example is the Pitti Palace (Florence, begun 1457), where the uniform rustication of the street façade is in sharp contrast to the elaborate “semantic” courtyard façade, with a more classical articulation. Negative examples include the façade of the Chiesa di San Moisè (Venice, 1668) with the obelisk under the thermal window, which Furer calls “terribly incoherent,” and Sebastiano Serlio’s portal for Cardinal d’Este at Fontainebleau (1548), in which the “difficulties of cultural transfer” from Italy to France can be seen. Furer ends with what he refers to as the “epitome” of “semantic mannerism”—the Palazzo Zuccari (Rome, completed 1592, [fig. 6](#)), where a large, monstrous mouth is plastered around the entrance portal. Furer acknowledges a certain exuberant quality of “semantic mannerism.” In a 2022 interview, he retrospectively refers to this tendency as a “second-degree *maniera* of sculptural alienation and flirtation.”³⁹ In the 1974 lecture, he compares it to Susan Sontag’s term *camp*, which she introduced to describe a 1960s tendency in popular culture.⁴⁰ For Furer, camp is “one of the most interesting recent interpretations of the mannerist theme,” helpful in understanding Venturi’s rich and complex architecture. The aesthetic tension present in both camp and in Venturi’s work clearly resonated with Furer, even if he could not appreciate it unreservedly.

Exploring Syntactic Mannerism

The second part of Furer’s lecture focuses on “syntactic” manipulations. Although he does not explain the origin of the term, he focuses on spatial configurations and the relationship between the interior and exterior in architecture. According to Morris’s

definition, “syntactics” is the study of “the ways in which signs are combined.”⁴¹ As such, it does not deal with content, but with autonomous systems of rules and relations between parts. Gandelsonas and Morton find an example in the work of Eisenman, who “places special emphasis on the generation of form, while the relationships between architectural form and context, which are characteristic of the semantic dimension, are suppressed or absent from his work.”⁴²

Furer’s discussion of “syntactic mannerism” starts out with a comparison of the façades of the Palladian Casa Cogollo (Vicenza, 1559) and Le Corbusier’s Villa Schwob (La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1916), both of which feature blank central fields.⁴³ The remaining part of the lecture focuses on spatial configurations, however—an interest that can be seen as a continuation of Hoesli’s figure-ground dialectic of “hollow and full form.”⁴⁴ The first project is Venturi’s “extraordinarily significant” competition proposal for Copley Square (Boston, 1966), which foresees filling the space with trees.⁴⁵ This would create an “anti-square,” an inversion of a conventional design for an urban space. Furer’s spatial understanding of “syntactic mannerism” shows that both Hoesli and Venturi are present in his thinking. Furer quotes Venturi’s description of two projects by Vignola from *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*:

In ... the Villa Farnese at Caprarola (186), and the Villa Giulia (187), the courtyards dominate because they are large and their shapes contrast with the shape of the perimeters. They make the primary space; the rooms of the palaces are leftover space.⁴⁶

Using his own photographs, Furer presents the spatial sequence of the sixteenth-century Villa Farnese (Caprarola) and Villa Giulia (Rome, completed 1553), the latter of which, according to Furer, is “a garden built as a villa, or a villa that is a garden.” The built structure is essentially a “wall between the inside and the outside,” that encloses a series of semi-circular garden spaces (fig. 7).⁴⁷ Here the primary space is the hollow form, in contrast to the Copley Square proposal, where the designers “filled up the space to define the space.”⁴⁸ Furer concludes his discussion of “syntactic mannerism” with a third project of Vignola’s, namely the sixteenth-century Villa Lante (Bagnaia, Viterbo), which he calls “an inhabited garden and nothing else.” The visitor searches for the main building in vain and passes two pavilions and an orangery, but encounters fewer and fewer buildings during the walk through the garden. This is the antithesis of the ideal villa: Vignola’s Mannerist gaze reinvented the typology and reversed the conventional organisation. Furer shows Giuliano da Sangallo’s Medici Villa (Poggio a Caiano, completed 1520)—the epitome of a Renaissance villa surrounded by a park—to remind his students of the standard solution, which is subverted by Vignola’s composition.

Diener & Diener’s Haus zum Sodeck

Furer’s annual “Contemporary American Architecture” course introduced a generation of Swiss architects to mannerism through the work of Venturi and Scott Brown. Among Furer’s students was Roger Diener (b. 1950), who graduated in 1975 and the following year joined the architectural office of his father Marcus Diener to form Diener & Diener.⁴⁹ Diener has referred to Furer’s lectures as “cultural events,”⁵⁰ undoubtedly due to their popularity with the students and their theatrical quality. One of Diener’s first projects was the Haus zum Sodeck (Basel, 1978)—a “mannerist” project, according to the description in



Figure 7. Villa Giulia, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Rome, 1553. René Furer, private archive.

Werk-Archithese: “tensions and inconsistencies that arise from the juxtaposition of classic and modern motifs ... want to be understood in terms of mannerism.”⁵¹

The architect responsible for the design, Walter Zürcher (1940–2016), had left Diener & Diener before the project was completed. Roger Diener and his young colleagues endeavoured to implement his design “as authentically as possible,”⁵² taking their cue from a booklet prepared by Zürcher in 1974. Furer’s teaching on mannerism may have contributed to the acceptance of Zürcher’s design, which stands out remarkably in Basel’s historic city centre. The expressive façade features a central bay window, large intersecting arches, and German windows, which can be interpreted as semantic elements (fig. 8). Although Zürcher also worked as an assistant at ETH in the 1970s, it is not known whether his design was directly inspired by Furer’s teaching. Zürcher does mention Venturi, however, and refers to *Learning from Las Vegas* as “considerable for the discussion” of his work.⁵³ Many questions remain unanswered regarding the radical design of Haus zum Sodeck, which has been both sharply criticised and admired.⁵⁴

The Threefold Role of Furer’s Teaching in the Context of 1968

In conclusion, and to return to my initial question about how to understand Furer’s teaching in the context of the 1968 upheaval, I suggest that his role was threefold. First, his promotion was part of the university’s crisis management after the student rebellion. Furer was a stabilising and apolitical presence who was trusted not to radicalise the student body. Furthermore, his approach was partly related to Hoesli’s interest in formal manipulation, as seen in his use of the figure–ground dialectic.⁵⁵ He was trusted to continue teaching in the spirit of Hoesli, engaging in “timeless” formal manipulations,



Figure 8. Haus zum Sodeck, Diener & Diener, Basel, 1978. Photograph by Frida Grahn.

while adding “untimely” content which appealed to the younger generation. On a personal level, Hoesli could count on Furer’s loyalty: he was grateful to Hoesli for his promotion to a lectureship, and they had experienced the dramatic events of 1968 together. Furer took on an ambivalent role as Hoesli’s protégé, but also as a young, accessible teacher—a link between the senior faculty and the student body.

The second important aspect was Furer’s function as a mediator of discourse at a moment when the modernist canon had become increasingly obsolete, and a new theoretical foundation was needed. His course on American architecture was for many a first introduction to the architecture of Venturi and Scott Brown, and to currents such as pop art and mannerism. Mannerism was presented as an available, creative strategy, present in contemporary as well as historical architecture. The term had connotations of being an “art of crisis,” resulting after the destruction of a worldview, after High Renaissance or orthodox modernism, respectively. Furer’s “semantic” and “syntactic” terminology was indebted to the rather fashionable theoretical discourse on architecture as language, which was part of the international

conversation of the time. He was thus a transmitter of current theoretical topics into the Swiss architectural context.

The third aspect to highlight concerns Furer's teaching method. As we have seen, the content of his lectures was disseminated in a "firework of images" ("Bildfeuerwerk").⁵⁶ This can be compared to what Zeynep Çelik Alexander calls the replacement of "knowledge acquired by reading with knowledge that was attained by looking."⁵⁷ The images were presented in a value-free and un-academic, accessible manner. Furer kept his analyses to a minimum, leaving his students to draw their own conclusions. Furer's ambivalence is comparable to Venturi and Scott Brown's undogmatic, "gray" approach, evident in their love-hate relationship with Las Vegas,⁵⁸ and their acceptance of "the richness and ambiguity of modern experience."⁵⁹ They were strong advocates of deferred judgment—in itself a paradoxically polemical stance. Furer took a similar approach, presenting the ideas of Venturi and Scott Brown in a "deadpan," matter-of-fact manner. This was in keeping with his humble nature, but could also be explained by lingering modernist ideals that may have prevented him from embracing the radical message unconditionally. Nevertheless, despite his ambiguity, Furer was appreciated by most students. His "ballet of images"⁶⁰ certainly met the demands for more pluralistic content—it was a window to the world, opening the door to architectural history and what became known as postmodernism.

Notes on contributor

Frida Grahn is an architect and architectural historian. She holds a Master of Science in Architecture and a Master of Advanced Studies in the History and Theory of Architecture from ETH Zurich. Her writing has appeared in journals such as *Archithese*, *Werk*, *Bauen + Wohnen*, and *Wolkenkuckucksheim*. She is the editor of the anthology *Denise Scott Brown: In Other Eyes – Portraits of an Architect* (Birkhäuser 2022) and initiated "Denise Scott Brown: A Symposium" at Yale School of Architecture in February 2023. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Institute for the History and Theory of Art and Architecture (ISA) at the USI Accademia di architettura in Mendrisio. Her doctoral thesis, "The Swiss Reception of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, 1968–2000," centres on the history of postmodern architecture and transatlantic exchange.

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. The demonstrators' demands were diverse and included "new forms of living together." At the same time, there were protests at the ETH main building in favour of democratisation, against the conservative "ETH law" passed by the Federal Assembly.

- Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, “Vor 50 Jahren: Der Globuskrawall und sein Umfeld,” July 17, 2018, <https://www.sozialarchiv.ch/2018/07/17/vor-50-jahren-der-globuskrawall-und-sein-umfeld/>; SRF Archiv, “Globuskrawalle in Zürich (1968)” [“Rundschau” July 3, 1968], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USzPrgGcJY4>.
2. In Switzerland, the unrestrained functionalism of the postwar economic boom was increasingly subject to critique. Lucius Burckhardt and Walter Förderer, *Bauen—Ein Prozess* (Niederteufen: Niggli, 1968). See also Michael Koch and Bruno Maurer, “Zauberformeln: Episoden auf dem Weg der Schweizer Architektur in die Welt 1939–1968,” in *Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert: Schweiz*, ed. Anna Meseure, Martin Tschanz, and Wilfried Wang (Munich: Prestel, 1998), 35–72. Martin Steinmann confirms the significance of 1968 for the development of Swiss architecture. Martin Steinmann, “Neuere Architektur in der Deutschen Schweiz,” in *Architektur in der Deutschen Schweiz 1980–1990. Ein Katalog und Architekturführer*, ed. Peter Disch (Lugano: Verlag ADV, 1991), 10–17.
 3. Adolf Max Vogt, Ulrike Jehle-Schulte Strathaus, and Bruno Reichlin, *Architektur 1940–1980: Ein kritisches Inventar* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein; Propyläen, 1980), see esp. 25–26 and 66. CIAM, the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was founded in 1928 and discontinued in 1959. On page 45, Vogt mentions the Vanna Venturi House as an example of an “independence from the CIAM-codex.”
 4. Pia Simmendinger, “Heinrich Bernhard Hoeslis Entwurfslehre an der ETH Zürich. Eine Untersuchung über Inhalt, Umsetzung und Erfolg seines Grundkurses von 1959–1968” (PhD diss., ETH Zurich, 2010), 4, 21. Hoesli introduced a novel “basic course” (1959–82), which sought to make modernism teachable, and which influenced generations of students. He is known for his teaching at the University of Texas at Austin with Colin Rowe, and for his German translation of Rowe’s and Robert Slutzky’s essay “Transparency” in 1968. Hoesli writes that “the *idea of the Modern* in architecture had faded and begun to lose its power.” Bernhard Hoesli, “Kommentar,” in Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, *Transparenz: Kommentar von Bernhard Hoesli*, Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur 4; Le Corbusier-Studien 1 (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1968), 45–71, here 71. Hoesli describes discussions with students that turned out more like “interrogations” of professors. Bernhard Hoesli, “Entwicklung und Herausforderung,” in *ETH 1855–1980. Festschrift zum 125jährigen Bestehen* (Zurich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1980), 92–104, here 97–99. See, too, Alexander Caragonne, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
 5. The design studio “Göhnerswil. Wohnungsbau im Kapitalismus,” led by lecturers J. Janssen, H. Zinn, and H.-O. Schulte, was a centre of controversy in 1972. Koch and Maurer, “Zauberformeln,” 44; Hoesli, “Entwicklung und Herausforderung,” 104.
 6. The foundation for a new educational concept was laid out at the Architecture Department conference on March 24, 1972. Hoesli, “Entwicklung und Herausforderung,” 104. Rossi had to agree refrain from discussing politics during his time at ETH. His first tenure spanned 1972–74. Hans-Peter Bärtschi, et al., “Viele Mythen, ein Maestro: Kommentare zur Zürcher Lehrtätigkeit von Aldo Rossi,” *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen* 84, no. 12 (1997): 37–44, here 39; Angelika Schnell, “Von Jörn Janssen zu Aldo Rossi. Eine hochschulpolitische Affäre an der ETH Zürich,” *ARCH+* 215 (2014): 16–23; Ákos Moravánszky and Judith Hopfengärtner, eds., *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz. Architektonische Wechselwirkungen* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2011), 12.
 7. Angelika Schnell describes the climate as “hostile to theory.” Schnell, “Von Jörn Janssen zu Aldo Rossi,” 19. Also: Philip Ursprung, “Die Rückkehr des Realen. Rossi und Herzog & de Meuron,” in *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz*, ed. Moravánszky and Hopfengärtner, 197–207, here 199. Furer taught the subjects of Contemporary Architecture Theory (Architekturtheorie der Gegenwart) and Design Theory (Gestaltungstheorie) from 1970 to 1994. In the initial semesters, the subjects were referred to as *Unterricht* (“Teaching”) instead of “Theory.”

8. To answer these questions, I have conducted extensive research on unpublished sources and held interviews with Furer and his assistants and students. The most detailed documentation of the lecture on mannerism is an audio recording from June 14, 1974, which can be evaluated in combination with a list of slides from the 1976 version. The corresponding slide box, entitled “*Zwei Manieren*” (“Two Manners”), has been altered repeatedly over the decades, preventing exact reconstruction. This paper presents an excerpt from the lecture’s content.
9. Part of this notion is the limited attention given to Venturi and Scott Brown in studies on Swiss architectural education. See, for instance, the otherwise excellent Ruth Hanisch and Steven Spier, “History Is Not the Past but Another Mightier Presence.’ The Founding of the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at the ETH Zurich and Its Effects on Swiss Architecture,” *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 6 (2009): 655–86.
10. According to Wittkower, “in recent years a general agreement has been reached to use the term Mannerism to cover the style of the period of about 1520–1600. Investigations of Mannerism have left architecture out of account and applied the term exclusively to painting.” However, in note 188 on page 214, he refers to recent attempts “to characterize Mannerist architecture. Voss (*Die Malerei der Spätrenaissance in Rom und Florenz*, Berlin, 1920, pp. 10ff.) and Dvořák (*Geschichte der italienischen Kunst*, Munich, 1928, II, pp. 113ff., 197) [who] emphasize the unity of style between Mannerist painting and architecture. Particular manifestations of Mannerist architecture were collected by Dagobert Frey in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, III (1924), p. 98, and Walter Friedlander in *Repertorium f. Kunstwissenschaft*, 1925, pp. 56f. ...” Rudolf Wittkower, “Michelangelo’s Biblioteca Laurenziana,” *Art Bulletin* 16 (1934), 123–218, here 213–14. See also Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1949). According to Pevsner, “Mannerism had for a long time been used to designate certain schools of painting and sculpture in Italy, carrying on the manner of late Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio and other Renaissance artists, and an Italianizing school in the Netherlands; so the word could easily be widened out to be applicable to the whole style of Italian and perhaps European painting and sculpture of the later sixteenth century. In this new sense Mannerism was first used and its extent and character defined between 1920 and 1925. (Dvorak 1920, Pinder c. 1924, W. Friedlaender 1925, Pevsner 1925.)” Nikolaus Pevsner, “The Architecture of Mannerism,” in *The Mint: A Miscellany of Literature, Art and Criticism*, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946), 116–38, here 118. Pevsner refers to his article “Gegenreformation und Manierismus,” *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 46 (1925), 243–62. Another important early use is in Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg 5 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1924). See also Peter Murray, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Batsford, 1963); James S. Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (London: Zwemmer, 1961); Ludwig H. Heydenreich and Wolfgang Lotz, *Architecture in Italy: 1400 to 1600* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974); Gustav Rene Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth. Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst. 1520 bis 1650 und in der Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957).
11. Arnold Hauser, *Der Manierismus. Die Krise der Renaissance und der Ursprung der Modernen Kunst* (Munich: Beck, 1964).
12. Anthony Blunt would change his reading of mannerism from an early focus on “society and class” to one on artistic autonomy, in line with Wittkower’s understanding. See Matthew Critchley, “Mannerism and Method: Class and Artistic Agency in the Writing of Anthony Blunt, 1934 to 1949,” *Architectural Theory Review* 24, no. 2 (2020): 164–81, here 169.
13. Colin Rowe, “Mannerism and Modern Architecture,” *Architectural Review* 107 (1950): 289–98.

14. Examples of this can be found in the work of Venturi and Scott Brown, which “seeks architectural meaning in the play with convention.” Maarten Delbeke, “Mannerism and Meaning in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,” *Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 3 (2010): 267–82, here 271.
15. Paolo Portoghesi and Bruno Zevi, ed., *Michelangiolo architetto* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964); Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966); Manfredo Tafuri, *L'architettura del Manierismo nel Cinquecento europeo* (Rome: Officina, 1966). On Tafuri's book, see Andrew Leach, *Crisis on Crisis, or Manfredo Tafuri on Mannerism* (Basel: Standpunkte, 2017). Furer was an admirer of Bruno Zevi. In his lecture on mannerism, Furer quotes Zevi to explain how contemporary architecture relates to history. Bruno Zevi, “I nani ai piedi dei giganti,” *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* 140 (1969): 73.
16. For more information about Venturi and Scott Brown's approach to mannerism, see Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems: For a Mannerist Time* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004). See also Denise Costanzo, “Text, Lies and Architecture: Colin Rowe, Robert Venturi and Mannerism,” *Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 4 (2013): 455–73; and Andrew Leach, “Dilemmas without Solutions,” in *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty: On Robert Venturi's “Gentle Manifesto”*, ed. Martino Stierli and David B. Brownlee (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 98–113.
17. Linda Murray, *Late Renaissance and Mannerism* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 31.
18. Erwin Gradmann, *Aufsätze zur Architektur* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1968); Erwin Gradmann, *Baustilkunde* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1956). Mannerism was also disseminated by other professors, such as Adolf Max Vogt. Venturi “discovered” architectural Mannerism towards the end of his Rome Prize Fellowship at the American Academy in 1954–56. What is less well known is that Scott Brown studied Mannerism under John Summerson at the Architectural Association in London at the same time. Andrew Leach, “Encountering Architectural History in 1950s London,” in *Denise Scott Brown: In Other Eyes – Portraits of an Architect*, ed. Frida Grahn (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2022), 58–69.
19. References to mannerism in the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s can be found in publications such as Omer Akin, “A Style Named Post-Modernism,” *Architectural Design* 7–8 (1979): 224–26. See also Ray C. Smith, “The Permissiveness of Supermannerism,” *Progressive Architecture* (October 1967): 169–73; and his *Supermannerism: New Attitudes in Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977). See also Hocke's *Die Welt als Labyrinth*, where mannerism is referred to as a recurrent phenomenon.
20. René Furer, audiotope recording, “Gest.th. 14.6.74: Venturi, Vignola und die Maniera,” ETH Zurich), box of slides “Zwei Manieren” (“Two Manners”). René Furer, private archive.
21. Interview with Jacques Gubler, May 10, 2016, by Mira Heiser and Linda Stagni. Translation from the German original. “Zum Beispiel, der bestinformierte und subtilere und stimulierende Dozent über moderne Architektur war nur Dozent: das war René Furer. Er wurde von oben herab behandelt: er war nur Dozent.” Furer would remain a lecturer without a full professorship until his retirement in 1994. He was succeeded by Francesco Collotti and Wilfried Wang from 1994 to 1996 and by Ákos Moravánszky from 1996 to 2005 as Lecturer and from 2005 to 2016 as Honorary Professor in architecture theory. See Simmendinger, “Heinrich Bernhard Hoeslis Entwurfslehre an der ETH Zürich,” 205.
22. Architecture Theory became a compulsory subject for the diploma in architecture in the 1970s, as seen in the official ETH curriculum of 1975–76. ETH Zürich, *Architekturabteilung ETHZ: Wegleitung (provisorisch); Stand WS 1975/76: Lehrplan ab 74/75 im 1 + 5. Sem. neu; ab 75/76 für alle Semester; Prüfungsplan erstmals HE.75/1.Vord., ab HE 76 alle Prüfungen*, 1975–76, here 12.
23. The slides were projected in pairs, as was customary at ETH at the time, following Heinrich Wölfflin's double projector system. Furer's extensive image archive, organized

- in metal boxes on shelves along the walls of his office (from 1976 at ETH Höggerberg, HIL D 70.7 and later HIL F 74.2), has become legendary. Unpublished lecture documentation, such as slides, notes, syllabi, and audio recordings, is meticulously kept in Furer's private archive. The recordings allow detailed insights into the content of the lectures. René Furer, private archive.
24. Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer, quoted in "Bilderballett im Hörsaal," in *Landschaften: Eine Architekturtheorie in Bildern von René Furer*, ed. Ina Hirschbiel-Schmid (Zurich: Edition Hochparterre, 2012), 309.
 25. Marc Angéilil, quoted in Hirschbiel-Schmid, *Landschaften*, 311.
 26. The description reads: "II: The American contemporary scene. Differences between regions. Interpretation of this reality in the thought and work of R. Venturi. European references. Interaction between the cultural ambience and statements from architects." ETH Zürich 1975–76, V/8, Engl. trans. by the author. Scott Brown (and other collaborators) was not duly credited, despite having been a partner in the architectural office since 1969. For more information, see Denise Scott Brown, "Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Having Words* (London: AA Publications, 2009), 79–89. The office was known under various names: Venturi and Short 1960–64, Venturi and Rauch 1964–80, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown 1980–89, Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates 1989–2012, and VSBA Architects and Planners since 2012. Venturi and Scott Brown's ideas were introduced in the Swiss-German context through a German translation of their article on Las Vegas, published in *Werk* 1969. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "Der Parkplatz von Atlantic & Pacific oder: Was lehrt uns Las Vegas?," *Werk* 4 (April 1969): 257–66, first published as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "A Significance for A&P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas," *Architectural Forum* (March 1968): 37–43. In addition, there was intensive reception of Venturi and Scott Brown in the Swiss journal *Archithese* by its editor-in-chief, Stanislaus von Moos. Von Moos's writings were highly influential and still shape the perception of Venturi and Scott Brown in Switzerland to this day. However, apart from a few contributions by Furer in *Archithese*, there were few exchanges between Furer and von Moos. See, for instance, Jean-Marc Lamunière, Vittorio Gregotti, and René Furer, "Einige Echos," *Werk-Archithese* 64, nos 7–8 (1977): 63–64. See also Frida Grahn, "Beyond Realism: The German-Swiss Reception of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown," *Wolkenkuckucksheim* 42 (2022): 181–200.
 27. René Furer, audiotape recording, "Gest.th. 14.6.74: Venturi, Vignola und die Maniera" (ETH Zurich), box of slides "Zwei Manieren" ("Two Manners"). René Furer, private archive.
 28. On Vignola, see for instance Bruno Adorni, *Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola* (Milan: Skira, 2008).
 29. "The 'linguistic turn' also influenced the field of architecture. Indeed, many architectural scholars turned to semiotics in the 1960s and 1970s, in response not just to the overall surge of structuralism but also as a possible way out of the widely perceived crisis of legitimacy of modern architecture."—André Loeckx and Hilde Heynen, "Meaning and Effect: Revisiting Semiotics in Architecture," in *The Figure of Knowledge: Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s–1990s*, ed. Sebastiaan Loosen, Rajesh Heynickx, and Hilde Heynen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 31–62, here 31. German translations of key texts on semiotics were published in Alessandro Carlini and Bernhard Schneider, eds., *Architektur als Zeichensystem* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1971).
 30. The "Semiotic Survey" was edited with Fabio Reinhart. Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, "Die Aussage der Architektur. Werk-Umfrage über Architektur und Semiotik—Teil 1," *Werk* 58, no. 4 (1971): 242–54, 269–70; Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, "Die Aussage der Architektur. Werk-Umfrage über Architektur und Semiotik—Teil 2," *Werk* 58, no. 6 (1971): 384–99; Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, "Die Aussage der Architektur. Werk-Umfrage über Architektur und Semiotik—Teil 3," *Werk* 58, no. 10 (1971): 682–92.

31. In his contribution to the survey in *Werk*, Koenig describes his personal experiences of introducing semiologic methods while working as an architecture assistant in 1958, which were based on the work of Morris. Giovanni Klaus Koenig, “Zur architektonischen Semiotik,” in Reichlin and Reinhart, “Werk-Umfrage über Architektur und Semiotik—Teil 2,” 386–90. See also Giovanni Klaus Koenig, *Architettura e comunicazione* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1970).
32. Loeckx and Heynen, “Meaning and Effect,” 37. The authors refer to Charles W. Morris, *Writings on the General Theory of Signs* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).
33. Dorfles mentions Koenig’s reception of Morris in 1967. See Gillo Dorfles, “Ikonologie und Semiotik in der Architektur,” in *Architektur als Zeichensystem*, ed. Carlini and Schneider, 91–98, here 93 (German trans., Ital. orig. published 1967). The semantic-syntactic terminology is found in writings by Eco and Barthes during the 1960s. Umberto Eco, “Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture,” in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge), 182–202. Originally published as “La funzione e il segno. Semiologia dell’architettura,” in *La struttura assente. La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale* (Milan: Bompiani, 1968), 189–249; Roland Barthes, “Éléments de sémiologie,” *Communications* 4 (1964): 91–135.
34. René Furer, interview with the author, July 12, 2023. Furer’s private archive does, however, contain a folder entitled “Semiology” with articles on the subject published in the 1970s, including Reichlin and Reinhart’s 1971 study.
35. The authors quote Morris’s *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), saying that semantics “deals with the relation of signs (something that refers to something), to their designata (what is taken account of) and so to the objects which they may or may not denote. ... Syntactics [is] the study of the ... relations of signs to one another in abstraction from the relations of signs to objects or to interpreters.” Mario Gandelsonas and David Morton, “On Reading Architecture,” *Progressive Architecture* (March 1972), 68–87, here 71. Republished in *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture*, ed. Geoffrey Broadbent (New York: Wiley, 1980), 243–73.
36. Furer’s conception of mannerism, of doing something “à la manière de,” can be compared to Giorgio Vasari’s use of the term *maniera* (for instance, the Renaissance as the *maniera moderna*). See Erwin Panofsky, “Two Facade Designs by Domenico Beccafumi and the Problem of Mannerism in Architecture,” in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 226–35. For further discussion on the many uses of the term *maniera*, see Marco Treves, “Maniera, the History of a Word,” *Marsyas* 1 (1941): 69–88. My gratitude goes to Matthew Critchley for making me aware of these sources.
37. An interview has been cut out and glued into Furer’s copy of Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, in which Lichtenstein comments that “[o]riginally, we, the generation of Pollock and de Kooning, were still looking for our role models in European painting.” Private archive of René Furer. The quotation was taken from Erika Billeter, “Pop im Examen: Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, Rauschenberg, Segal,” *Speculum Artis* (Constance) 9 (1965): 28–33.
38. The explanation of architecture by means of painting was nothing new, however. It can be seen both in the pedagogy of Hoesli and in Rowe and Slutzky’s articles on “Transparency,” in which Léger is cited as an example. Jürg Jansen, et al., *Architektur lehren: Bernhard Hoesli an der Architekturabteilung der ETH Zürich/Teaching Architecture: Bernhard Hoesli at the Department of Architecture at the ETH Zurich* (Zurich: ETH gta Verlag, 1989); Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal,” *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 45–54.
39. René Furer, interview with the author, May 31, 2022.
40. Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 277–93.
41. Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, 219.

42. Gandelsonas and Morton, “On Reading Architecture,” in *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture*, 258.
43. See Rowe, “Mannerism and Modern Architecture.”
44. For more information about Hoesli’s figure-ground dialectic, see Jansen, Hoesli et al., *Architektur lehren*.
45. Venturi and Rauch, Gerod Clark and Arthur Jones, 1966. Published in Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 128.
46. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 82.
47. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 89.
48. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 128.
49. Martin Steinmann, “Die allgemeinste Form: Zur Entwicklung des Werks von Diener & Diener,” in *Diener & Diener: Bauten und Projekte 1978–1990*, ed. Ulrike Jehle-Schulte Strathaus and Martin Steinmann (Basel: Wiese, 1991), 25–31.
50. Roger Diener, “Hommage. Essay von Roger Diener,” in Hirschbiel-Schmid, *Landschaften*, 12.
51. “Die Spannungen und Ungereimtheiten, welche durch die Gegenüberstellung von teilweise ironisch zitierten klassischen und modernen Motiven entstehen, wollen im Sinne eines Manierismus verstanden werden.”—“4. Eingriffe. Eine Typologie,” *Werk-Archithese* 25–26 (1979): 48–56, here 51.
52. Roger Diener, email to the author, July 1, 2022.
53. Zürcher mentions Venturi in his article about his design for a square in the town of Baden: “While I find Venturi’s ‘Praise of Folly,’ for example ‘Learning from Las Vegas,’ considerable for the discussion, I have my reservations from the misjudged practice of a European educational traveler...” (Orig.: “Ich finde zwar Venturis ‘Lob der Torheit,’ zum Beispiel ‘Lernen von Las Vegas,’ für die Diskussion erheblich, habe aber meine Vorbehalte aus der verkannten Praxis eines europäischen Bildungsreisenden...”). Walter Zürcher, “Bahnhofplatz Baden,” *Werk* 6 (1975), 581. See also Walter Zürcher, “Galerie Trudelhaus: synthetische Argumente zur Architektur,” *Badener Neujahrsblätter* 46 (1971): 15–23; Urs Tremp, “Walter Zürcher: Gestalter des Badener Bahnhofplatzes,” *Solothurner Zeitung* (April 5, 2016), <https://www.solothurnerzeitung.ch/aargau/baden/walter-zurcher-gestalter-des-badener-bahnhofplatzes-ld.1546922>
54. See for instance *Architektur Basel*, “Nein, Schönheit ist recht objektiv,” August 5, 2022, <https://architekturbasel.ch/nein-schoenheit-ist-recht-objektiv/>; Patrick Marcolli, “Früher war alles schöner: Der Basler Heimatschutz auf Irrwegen,” *bz – Zeitung für die Region Basel*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/basel-stadt/neue-broschuere-frueher-war-alles-schoener-der-basler-heimatschutz-auf-irrwegen-ld.2324819>
55. Compare Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).
56. Gabrielle Hächler, quoted in Hirschbiel-Schmid, *Landschaften*, 312.
57. Zeynep Çelik Alexander, *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 64.
58. Scott Brown refers to the “non-judgmental attitude” as the “greatest invention of the twentieth century.” Denise Scott Brown, “On Pop Art, Permissiveness and planning,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (May 1969): 184–86. Scott Brown’s article was included in Furer’s course bibliography.
59. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 22.
60. Benedikt Loderer, quoted in Hirschbiel-Schmid, *Landschaften*, 314.