



Remembering Graham Clarke

Graham Clarke, who has died aged 83, was a polymath and Fairbairnian whose intellectual journey took him from the drawing boards of architecture through the mainframes of early computing to the theoretical rigours of psychoanalysis and culture via the work of W. R. D Fairbairn, a trajectory that sounds unlikely until you realise that, for Graham, it was all the same question: how do structures – built or psychic – shape the lives lived inside them?

Born in Colchester on 22nd September 1942, Graham spent part of his childhood in Sydney, Australia before moving back to his hometown Colchester, Essex where he spent most of his life. He studied architecture at the Bartlett School, earning a BSc (Hons), before adding an MSc in computer science and going on to work as a systems analyst at Mills and Allen in Covent Garden and Marconi in Chelmsford. Those years were also shaped by the radical intellectual atmosphere of the 1960s: he attended the Anti-University of London, where R. D. Laing and others were dismantling the boundaries between institution and individual, and demonstrated against the Vietnam War at Grosvenor Square.

In 1986 he joined the University of Essex, where he would remain until retirement in 2006 and continued as a Visiting Fellow at Essex until his death. It was there that his two great intellectual passions found each other. Working with colleagues Vic Callaghan and Malcolm Lear on the Intelligent Buildings Project, inspired by Le Corbusier and nascent AI, he explored how emerging technologies and human psychology might together reshape the built environment, an extension, in digital form, of the architectural conviction that had shaped his earliest thinking.

He pursued studies at the Tavistock Institute, completing an MA in psychoanalytic theory and a PhD in the object relations theory of W. R. D. Fairbairn. He became one of the pre-eminent Fairbairn scholars of his generation, producing five books and thirty papers on psychoanalysis, as well as more than sixty papers on intelligent buildings.

With David Scharff and Karnac Books, he co-organised the Freud–Fairbairn conference at the Freud Museum in 2014, which gave rise to their co-edited anthology *Fairbairn and the Object Relations Tradition*. Characteristically, his scholarship never stayed within purely clinical boundaries: as an ardent cinephile, his books often applied Fairbairn's object relations theory to cultural objects ranging from films and TV such as *Memento*, *First Reformed*, *Spirited Away* and *The Singing Detective* to the broader landscape of art and literature. His final book, *An Introduction to Fairbairn's Psychology of Dynamic Structure*, was published just last year in 2025. His first, *Personal Relations Theory: Fairbairn, Macmurray and Suttie*, appeared in 2006.

He was deeply committed to CND and the anti-apartheid movement, and it was Sandra, whom he met through that activism in 1983 and married in 2002, who shared more than forty years of that life with him. He is also survived by his daughter Zoe, Sandra's children Eleanor and James, five grandchildren, and his son Ross, with whom he co-authored *The American Dream and American Cinema in the Age of Trump* (Routledge, 2022).

When illness came in 2023 and then returned in 2026, he faced it, as those who knew him would have expected, with courage and rigour. He was, to the end, a perpetual student, and one of the more original minds his field produced.

Ross Clarke