



Anthony Vidler (1941-2023)

Remembering the scholar, teacher, multifaceted author, and highly influential figure, who was consistently engaged in the current issues of the architectural profession

The death on October 20, 2023 of Anthony Vidler, a distinguished educator of architects and widely-read author of numerous publications on architectural theory, eighteenth-century French architectural utopias, and modernity, was followed by a great fanfare balanced between praise and sorrow from former colleagues and students.

Vidler taught widely, at Princeton (where he was also Dean of the architecture school) at Cornell and UCLA, and at Cooper Union—among the highest-rated institutions of higher learning specialized in architecture. In his 2018 lecture that inaugurated the doctoral program in architecture at the Autonomous University of Lisbon

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbnTLJed-T4>], Vidler named his closest mentors and intellectual companions—Colin Rowe, Reyner Banham and Manfredo Tafuri. Rowe had taught Vidler at Cambridge University; Rowe together with Banham eased Vidler's career-making move to the US, where the 1960s and 1970s saw the arrival of many distinguished British academics. Vidler began his decades-long university career, as an instructor in architecture in 1965 at Princeton, quickly rising in the ranks thereafter. Here he was involved in founding the doctoral program in architecture and ensuring its subsequently exceptional impact. His many graduates

constituted the “Princeton school,” comparable to and competitive with the coetaneous PhD program at MIT, and spread Vidler’s teachings across the USA.

The moves between various universities and administrative positions – Deanships at Princeton, Cornell, and at Cooper Union architecture schools, chairmanship of the department of art history at UCLA – expanded Vidler’s audience among students and colleagues, and he was recognized widely as an exceptional pedagogue and generous interlocutor.

Vidler’s abiding interest in eighteenth-century French architecture led to the publication of his acclaimed monograph Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (first published in French, 1987, first English edition 1990, numerous reprints and a second edition, 1992-2021) which received the highest book awards from both the Society of Architectural Historians and the American Institute of Architects in 1991. He revisited this work several times in further expansions and translations (German, Japanese, Spanish), and curated two definitive exhibitions of the architect’s work at the Saline Royale in Arc et Senans (1988-91, 2005).

Vidler had a profound sense of “architectural thinking,” recognizing the intellectual contributions of thoughtful practitioners. This conceptual turn, combined with deep research in architectural history, theory and criticism, distinguish his many other books. These include generous examinations of contemporary architects such as James Stirling (2010) and Antoine Grumbach (1996), and the Freud-influenced essays collected in *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992, 1994).

The subtitle of that book, *Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, suggests something about Vidler’s origins and character. He had started as an architect himself, as his drawing talent became evident when he was still an adolescent. Vidler was attracted to complex ideas, but enjoyed a British taste for puns (Freud’s *unheimlich* becoming “unhomely” as well as “uncanny”) and a command of modern languages learned at Brentwood School in Essex, where he also played rugby.

Vidler’s talents and numerous publications were rewarded with a raft of awards: the centennial award of ACSA [the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture], a senior Mellon Fellowship at the Canadian Center of Architecture [Montreal], election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a senior Fellowship at the Getty Center, the John Guggenheim Fellowship and the Graham Foundation Fellowship, to name only the most competitive sources for research funding in the US. His extraordinarily impactful service to the community included membership on editorial boards, of *Oppositions*, *October*, and *Lotus International*, among many others.

Anthony Vidler's articles, books reviews and contributions to multi-author volumes, published between 1967 and 2022, amount to almost five hundred, and vigorously testify to sustained engagement with the current concerns of the architectural profession. They chart Vidler's phenomenal understanding of the changes in architecture during his lifetime, and would constitute the basis for a detailed intellectual biography.

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Nata in Transylvania (1951), ha conseguito la laurea in architettura all'Università Cornell e il dottorato al Massachusetts Institute of Technology di Cambridge. Insegna Storia dell'architettura presso il Dipartimento di Storia dell'arte dell'Università dell'Illinois a Chicago. Ha pubblicato libri sui trattati di architettura italiani, su Torino nel Seicento e sull'urbanistica barocca. Già curatrice delle recensioni per il «Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians», è corrispondente del Giornale dell'Architettura dal 2003.

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