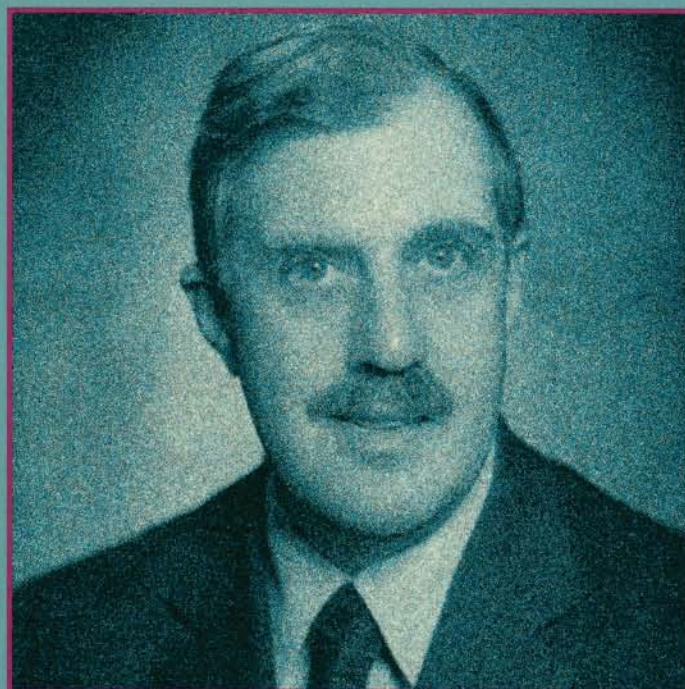


A R Q

ARCHITECTURE • QUÉBEC



P R O F I L
PETER COLLINS

ARQ

A R C H I T E C T U R E . Q U É B E C

ÉDITORIAL

- 5 PETER COLLINS, UN ARCHITECTE, PROFESSEUR ET HISTORIEN
FRANCE VANLAETHEM

PROFIL: PETER COLLINS

- 7 L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE PETER COLLINS
MARTIN BRESSANI
- 10 UNE LECTURE DE CONCRETE. THE VISION OF A NEW ARCHITECTURE
RÉJEAN LEGAULT
- 14 L'ENTREPRISE INTELLECTUELLE DE PETER COLLINS
JEAN-PIERRE EPRON
- 18 IMAGES FROM THE PETER COLLINS COLLECTION
ANNMARIE ADAMS
- 20 PETER COLLINS, PROFESSOR AND COLLEAGUE
DEREK DRUMMOND'S PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
- 20 SOUVENIRS EUROPÉENS
TÉMOIGNAGE DE MARIE-THÉRÈSE HONEGGER RECUEILLI PAR RÉJEAN LEGAULT
- 21 BIOGRAPHIE / BIBLIOGRAPHIE
ANNMARIE ADAMS ET RÉJEAN LEGAULT

ÉVÉNEMENT

- 24 EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE AND
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PANORAMA OF SAN FRANCISCO. 1850-1880
UNE EXPOSITION AU CCA VUE PAR RICARDO CASTRO

MEMBRES FONDATEURS DE LA REVUE

PIERRE BOYER-MERCIER, PIERRE BEAUPRÉ,
JEAN-LOUIS ROBILLARD
ÉDITEUR

PIERRE BOYER-MERCIER
RÉDACTRICE EN CHEF
FRANCE VANLAETHEM

MEMBRES DU COMITÉ DE RÉDACTION
PIERRE BOYER-MERCIER, JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD,
RICARDO L. CASTRO, ÉRIC GAUTHIER,
FRANCE VANLAETHEM

MEMBRES DU COMITÉ DE RÉDACTION TRIMESTRIEL
PIERRE BOYER-MERCIER, JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD,
RICARDO CASTRO, PAUL FAUCHER,
TERRANCE GALVIN, ÉRIC GAUTHIER,
NICOLE LARIVÉE-PARENTEAU, ALEXIS LIGOGNE,
RODRIGUE PAULIN, MARK PODDUBIUK,
FRANCE VANLAETHEM
COORDONNATRICE ET RÉVISEUR
NICOLE LARIVÉE-PARENTEAU
PRODUCTION GRAPHIQUE
CÔPIA DESIGN INC.
DIRECTION ARTISTIQUE
JEAN-H. MERCIER

REPRÉSENTANTS PUBLICITAIRES:

JACQUES LAUZON ET ASSOCIÉS 
• MONTRÉAL: 785, RUE PLYMOUTH, BUREAU 310
VILLE MONT-ROYAL, QUÉBEC, H4P 1B3
TÉLÉPHONE: (514) 733-0344, FAX: (514) 342-9406
• TORONTO: 60, WILMOT STREET WEST, UNIT 7
RICHMOND HILL, ONTARIO, L4B 1M6
TÉLÉPHONE: (416) 866-4141, FAX: (416) 886-9175

ARQ EST DISTRIBUÉE À TOUS LES MEMBRES DE

• L'ORDRE DES ARCHITECTES DU QUÉBEC ET DE
• LA SOCIÉTÉ DES DESIGNERS D'INTÉRIEUR DU QUÉBEC.

DÉPÔT LÉGAL:

• BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU QUÉBEC,
• BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA.

LES ARTICLES ET OPINIONS QUI PARAISSENT DANS
LA REVUE SONT PUBLIÉS SOUS LA RESPONSABILITÉ
EXCLUSIVE DE LEURS AUTEURS.

© CÔPIA DESIGN INC

ISSN-0710-1162

COURRIER DE LA DEUXIÈME CLASSE, PERMIS NO 5699

ARQ EST PUBLIÉ SIX FOIS L'AN PAR

CÔPIA DESIGN INC

LES CHANGEMENTS D'ADRESSE, LES EXEMPLAIRES NON
DISTRIBUABLES ET LES DEMANDES D'ABONNEMENT DEVRAIENT
ÊTRE ADRESSÉS À

CÔPIA DESIGN INC

1463, RUE PRÉFONTAINE

MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC

H1W 2N6

TÉLÉPHONE: (514) 523-6832

ABONNEMENTS: LUCIE VALLÉE

• AU CANADA

- 6,93\$/NUMÉRO

- 41,60\$/6 NUMÉROS

- 69,34\$/INSTITUTIONS ET GOUVERNEMENTS

NUMÉRO D'ENREGISTREMENT T.P.S.: R 102 208 469

NUMÉRO D'ENREGISTREMENT T.V.Q.: 1001146203TQ0001SS

• HORS CANADA:

- 6,00\$/NUMÉRO

- 48,00\$/6 NUMÉROS

- 60,00\$/INSTITUTIONS ET GOUVERNEMENTS

ERRATUM

DANS LE NUMÉRO 74 D'ARQ, IL AURAIT FALLU LIRE QUE LE PROJET DU
MONUMENT NATIONAL A ÉTÉ RÉALISÉ PAR LA FIRME
BLOUIN FAUCHER AUBERTIN BRODEUR GAUTHIER PLANTE.

"WITH THE PRECISION APPROPRIATE"

IMAGES FROM THE PETER COLLINS COLLECTION

ANNMARIE ADAMS,
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE
AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Just months before his sudden death in 1981, Peter Collins set his undergraduate students at McGill University an unusual test: "Pretend you are sending to your best friend five picture postcards during a tour of Europe. Those who do not recognize the image projected on the screen should say so. They will thus benefit from a reward of 40% for their truthfulness. Those who know something will write it with the precision appropriate for the back half of a postcard." (1)

The professor of «History of Architectural Theory, 1750-1950» then projected individual slides of postcards showing European buildings for eight minutes. This exam question from Collins' final course was characteristic of his emphasis on the visual aspects of architectural education and architectural history. British by birth but inspired by all things French, he stated the question in both languages. He asked his students to identify themselves by number only, always keenly aware of the dangers of favouritism. Honesty and concision, qualities Collins had admired in architectural scholarship throughout his long and prolific career, were recognized and rewarded in his last midterm exam. In the undergraduate curriculum, in innumerable references to his scholarship and character during lectures, design presentations, and casual conversations, in assorted memorabilia scattered throughout offices and hallways, and in the archive of his documents, «The Peter Collins Collection», Collins' legacy lives on in McGill's School of Architecture. (2) Most revealing of Collins the man, however, are his personal collections of slides and postcards, which offer insight into his evolving views of architecture and history. An active library used for teaching and research, the slide collection is a constant reminder of Collins' enormous influence on architectural education at McGill; the postcards, a collection of which few of his colleagues were even aware, is an as yet untapped source of information on Collins' life.

THE SLIDE COLLECTION

Collins travelled throughout his career, most frequently to Paris and Rome, but also to Palestine, Egypt, Italy, Turkey, Spain, Germany, and Switzerland. (3) Like most architectural historians of his generation, he systematically documented buildings and cities he visited in 35mm colour slides for the purposes of research and teaching. When he joined McGill's faculty in 1956, Collins added his own burgeoning slide collection to the School's existing library of large-format, lantern slides. This original collection had been initiated by Stewart Henbest Capper in the late 1890s and subsequently enlarged by Percy Nobbs and Ramsay Traquair. (4)

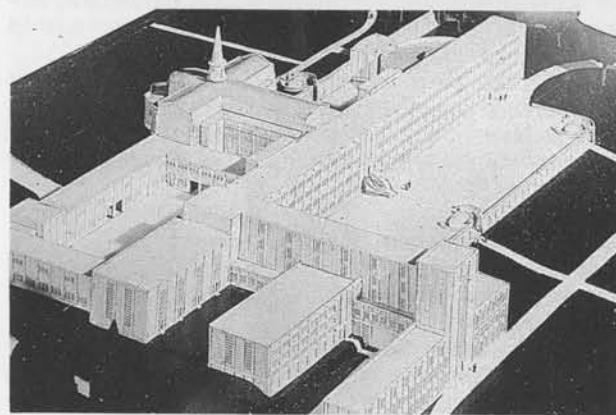
Collins' papers underline the importance of the slide collection to his daily life at McGill and his ongoing research projects. In personal letters, official university documents, and his curriculum vitae, Collins frequently placed his supervision of the slide collection on an equal footing with his teaching responsibilities and publications. In a letter written in 1967, for example, Collins explained to a university administrator: "When I was appointed eleven years ago, I had two main duties: (i) to lecture on the history of architecture, and (ii) to classify, supervise and enlarge the slide collection." (5)

There is much evidence, too, of the vast amount of time Collins devoted to the slide collection and its organization from his earliest days at McGill. He arrived in Montréal in 1956 a month prior to his official appointment in order to put the slides in an "orderly, clearly-marked sequence," having found them "piled precariously on top of the filing-cabinet, or distributed at random in the drawers." (6)

Several incidents during the 1960s and 1970s also illuminate the high priority Collins accorded to the collection. When the University refused to hire a special slide curator for the slide library in 1967, for example, Collins asked the Principal to reduce his own salary to cover the costs. (7) From 1967 to 1973, Collins supervised a massive program of re-labelling and mounting the entire collection in glass mounts and initiated a card-indexed classification system which lists every slide within basic headings. In 1968, he abandoned his system of hand-lettered identification labels, requesting a special typewriter with minuscule characters for use by the slide curator. (8) These projects anticipated, on Collins' part, an eventual computerized information retrieval system—never implemented—to be modelled on one then used by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. In 1973, he proudly described the collection as "one of the largest collections of slides on this topic in Canada," modestly ascribing its value to the fact that the majority of photographs were original, taken by "those who have successively taught the history of architecture in this School during the past seventy-seven years." (9) Collins also devised a system to indicate a slide's category by marking each with a narrow, coloured tape, ensuring that misfiled slides were evident at a glance. This system did not guarantee, however, the observation of missing slides. Perhaps this deficiency in his system explains Collins' close protection of the collection, despite the fact that it was the official slide library of the School. (10) He set the rules of conduct carefully. Slides were only permitted out of the library if they were to be used immediately for a lecture or taken directly to Collins' own office; in cases of lectures to be given outside the university, Collins required the curator to exact from other faculty members a «complete and detailed list of all the slides borrowed, together with the date they are taken and the promised date of return.» (11) Perhaps because of Collins' vigilance, most other faculty members expanded their own personal collections for teaching, rather than relying on the slide library. (12) When a faculty member from a neighbouring university asked for borrowing privileges, Collins wrote without delay to the university administration, demanding an official policy statement on the sharing of university facilities. (13)

In all these ways, Collins' slides are much more than a record of his travels. They are evidence of his deep dedication to architectural history, his personal investment of time and money, his concern that McGill's teaching materials match those of other universities, and his life-long campaign to exact university support for what he considered fundamental teaching tools in the education of architects. The slides are also evidence of the important role played by Margaret Taylor Collins, his wife, who appears in many of the slides as a «scale figure». Mrs. Collins frequently travelled with her husband and acted as his most scrupulous editor. (14)

The slide library is also evidence of Collins' personal «canon» of architectural history. The historic periods, building types, and individual buildings he chose to photograph, to develop, and lovingly to mount in glass and silver frames, and then meticulously



to label and to file are testament to his own highly personalized vision of the past.

Collins' slides show, for example, how he was concerned, above all, with the appearance of buildings, rather than their use or context. His photographs most often document the formal attributes of architecture—how buildings looked—rather than how structures worked or their relationships to specific contexts. Like many historians who developed their ideas in the postwar era, he adopted a classification system for slides based on architectural «styles.» The system employed by Collins at McGill was modelled on the slide library at Yale University, where he had been a Visiting Lecturer in Architectural History in 1955-56. (15) Almost all Collins' slides are of public, high-style buildings; housing and vernacular architecture had no place in Collins' canon. (16) Not surprisingly, there is a great emphasis in the collection on eighteenth and nineteenth-century French architecture, the period through which Collins understood all of modern history. In fact, Peter Collins' slide collection clearly illustrates the argument of his best known work, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* of 1965. In that book and in his mandatory courses, Collins articulated in a densely-packed thesis that nothing short of a complete architectural revolution had occurred in or about 1750, forever changing the relationship of architecture to engineering, history to theory, and structure to function. Collins felt strongly that North American students should study architecture developed only subsequent to the discovery of America, and thus taught earlier architecture only as it related to eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century structures. (17) Fascinated throughout his career by the derivation of words, Collins also included in the collection a relatively large number of slides of «text,» intended to prompt discussions in class about the relationship of architectural theory to built form. (18) Extremely valuable sections of the collection include slides of the development of reinforced concrete, on which Collins was an expert, slides of his own 1948 thesis project for a national seminary, and slides of the work of Auguste Perret, for whom Collins had worked in 1951 and 1953. (19)

THE POSTCARD COLLECTION

Collins' postcard collection, which is as yet uncatalogued, offers a different picture of the travelling historian and a much less clear link to his scholarship and teaching. Packed in seven manila envelopes, the collection of some 1200 postcards is ordered roughly by geographical location. (20) The postcard collection is much more

1. Coloured slide of the mosque of Sultan Ahmed, Istanbul, Turkey. This view is typical of Collins' photographs, with his wife Margaret Taylor Collins in the foreground as a scale figure.
2. Slide of model from Peter Collins' thesis of 1948 for a National Seminary, Leeds College of Art.
3. Coloured postcard of Siena, Italy. Aerial views of cities were collected by Collins for reproduction in the slide library.
4. Black and white postcard of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, in which Collins spent considerable time. National Seminary.



inclusive and wide-ranging than Collins' slides; the images include many shots of French architecture since the eighteenth century—from Versailles to Ronchamp—but also photographs of rural villages in Europe, famous and not-so-famous paintings, buildings in North America, and several unidentified black and white photographs of architectural details. It is clear from subtle references on the reverse sides of some of the cards that Collins intended to copy them for the slide library. An aerial view of Siena, for example, fits nicely in his precisely defined category in the slide library, «General: Miscellaneous: Urbanism.» Indeed, McGill colleagues who travelled with Collins remember his appreciation of the difficult views readily available in postcard images. The photographers of postcard images could return to their subjects at ideal times, when mid-day sunlight, for example, might cast sculptural details in high relief or in winter, when architectural ensembles were less hidden by greenery. Not surprisingly, many of the cards are of aerial views and interiors of buildings, often inaccessible to the general public. (21) Collins may also have collected postcards as evidence of a city's self-image; for him they may have indicated the monuments of which a city was particularly proud, regardless of architectural lineage. (22)

Whatever its meaning, the postcard collection, for Peter Collins, was clearly a different sort of project than the slide library. It was never catalogued, never precisely ordered, and rarely seen by other faculty. Despite its rather secretive and ad hoc nature, several themes surface in the postcard collection. Collins was fascinated by lavish architectural decoration; there are hundreds of postcards of baroque and rococo interiors, showing in great detail the effects of light on modulating wall surfaces. There are many paintings included in the collection; again, throughout his career Collins was fascinated with the world of high-style painting. More surprising, perhaps, is the large number of images of American architecture—for which Collins often voiced disinterest—and views of American pop culture. Niagara Falls, Hearst Castle, and the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco, for example, are represented in the collection. Collins' postcard collection, no doubt, occupied a very special place in his larger reserve of visual material. It seemed to be, on the one hand, a fairly enigmatic reserve of images from which he could borrow for the more official collection: the slides. On the other hand, the images represent, as Collins himself was obviously aware, a far more democratic and accessible perspective of the landscapes in which he travelled, far less encumbered by the weight of historical

styles and acceptable periods.

Given the complementary natures of his two collections, Peter Collins' final midterm test, referred to at the beginning of this essay, in which he demanded students to identify and interpret slides of postcards, was quite rare. It was the only time, as far as his records show, that Collins made direct links between postcard images, slides of architecture, and the experience of real buildings. The exercise acknowledged both the «souvenir» aspect of a postcard, as well as the minimal space allotted on the «back half» for a note to a friend. Most importantly, however, was the challenge implicit in the professor's question. Collins' exam demanded an extremely difficult operation he himself had deftly mastered by this time: the «precise» and «appropriate» pairing of word and architectural image. Both, he believed, had a place in the history of architecture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Ricardo Castro, Peter Gossage, Jay Hiscox, and David Theodore and also to thank Maureen Anderson, Norbert Schoenauer, and Pieter Sijpkens for generously sharing their memories of Peter Collins.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This is the entire text of the exam, 4 March 1981, The Peter Collins Collection of McGill University School of Architecture (PCC), apart from instructions about timing and student identification.
2. See RYBCZYNSKI, Witold, *Looking Around: A Journey Through Architecture*, Toronto, HarperCollins, 1992, p. xv-xviii.
3. For biographical information on Collins, see *SAH Newsletter* XXVI, April 1982, p. 4-5.
4. These slides are 3 1/4 inches x 3 1/4 inches. See SCHOENAUER, Norbert, «McGill's School of Architecture: A Retrospection,» *McGill: Schools of Architecture and Urban Planning Prospectus*, Montreal, McGill University, 1986, p. 6-7; Collins also continued to purchase large format slides for McGill; see letter to Dr. Helen Rosenau, 23 January 1957 (PCC); estimates on the size of the slide collection vary. In a memo to Derek Drummond, Director of the School, 11 April 1973 (PCC), Collins stated the collection comprised 14,356 slides, half of which were large format. In various memos and letters, he claimed to have added about 200-300 slides per year.
5. Letter to G.A. Grimson, dated 31 March 1967 (PCC); during his sojourns at Smith College and UC Berkeley, Collins noted both the difficulties and benefits of using other slide collections. See letter to John Bland, 24 December 1964 (PCC).

6. Memo to Drummond, 11 April 1973 (PCC).
7. See letter to Dr. H. Locke Robertson, 29 March 1967 (PCC); the appointment and responsibilities of a qualified, bilingual slide curator greatly preoccupied Collins and is the subject of many letters and memos, particularly in 1967, 1970, and 1971. Marilyn Berzan was employed as the School's first curator in July 1967.
8. Letter to Marilyn Berzan, 22 April 1968 (PCC). Collins realized the slides would move under the heat of projectors and become unfocused when he brought them from McGill to teach at UC Berkeley; many of the changes enacted in the slide collection after 1968, particularly in materials, were suggested by the slide curator at Berkeley. See letter to Marilyn Berzan, 3 June 1968 (PCC).
9. Memo to Drummond, 11 April 1973 (PCC).
10. Collins kept the slide collection in his own office until the hiring of Berzan, at which time he relocated his office to another room.
11. Letter to Marilyn Berzan, 3 June 1968 (PCC).
12. Stuart Wilson, who never used slides in his teaching career at the School which spanned over four decades, but emphasized sketching instead, suggested in 1969 that slides purchased by the university should be stored in a library located «on the other side of campus» and «available to anyone who is a member of the University.» Memo from Stuart Wilson to John Bland, 22 September 1969 (PCC). The suggestion inspired a sharp rebuttal by Collins indicating the enormous travel expenses he felt he had invested in the slide collection, while the university provided only the film. See letter to John Bland, 26 September 1969 (PCC). For more information on Wilson, see SCHOENAUER, p. 18-19.
13. In the mid 1970s, Collins feared that Quebec's Ministry of Education was attempting to put McGill «out of business.» He attached the utmost importance, therefore, to the immediate preservation of the university's material assets. See letter to Vice-Principal Frost, 1 December 1973 (PCC).
14. Interview with Norbert Schoenauer, 7 June 1993.
15. Even when Collins recognized the failings of classifications by style, he remained committed to the Yale system. As Collins stated, «I propose to maintain this system, for the same reasons which have forced the McLennan Library to abandon its foolish enterprise of reclassifying all its existing holdings to conform to the newly-adopted Library of Congress system.» (Emphasis in the original) See memo to Drummond, 11 April 1973 (PCC).
16. This may seem surprising, as McGill's School of Architecture was an early centre for research and teaching of Housing. Collins maintained throughout his career, nonetheless, that vernacular architecture was a subordinate and primitive form of building. See his file labelled «Vernacular» (PCC).
17. See Collins' undated statement, «The teaching of the History of Architecture in the first two years of the Professional Five-year Course in the School of Architecture at McGill» (PCC).
18. These slides cover major architectural theorists, such as Vitruvius, Durand, Laugier, Ruskin, Pugin, texts representing systems of architectural education, manifestoes by individual architects, and quotes from architectural histories.
19. The Peter Collins Collection also includes a substantial set of photographs and negatives, many as yet unidentified.
20. There are five envelopes labelled in Collins' distinctive handwriting: Paris and Versailles, France excluding Paris and Versailles, Italy/Germany/Turkey, 20th Century, German Rococo. Two envelopes are unlabelled; 141 postcards are loose. There are several series of black and white photographs interfiled with the postcards.
21. Pieter Sijpkens, who travelled with Peter Collins on student trips to Paris and Rome, remembers Collins' special interest in these characteristics of postcards.
22. I am grateful to Norbert Schoenauer for this speculation.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Annmarie Adams teaches Architectural History at the School of Architecture, McGill University. She was a student in Peter Collins' classes, 1980-81.