

pp

**Peter
Collins**

et l'histoire critique de
l'architecture moderne
**and the Critical History
of Modern Architecture**

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figure 1. Mrs. Collins at the Mosque of Sultan Achmed, Istanbul, Turkey. Courtesy School of Architecture Slide Library, McGill University.

As an undergraduate student in Prof. Peter Collins' architectural history courses at McGill, I was required to read three textbooks: Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*, and the instructor's own *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*.

These were hardly cutting-edge texts. Pevsner had first come out in 1943 and my Pelican paperback was the seventh edition; likewise, Giedion's classic book was nearly forty years old by the time I read the revised and enlarged fifth edition. Even my copy of Collins was the reprinted McGill-Queen's paperback, fifteen years old by 1980. In my mind, the texts from my other favourite course of that year, Prof. Archie Malloch's "The Victorian Novel," were equally relevant to contemporary life in Montreal.

And Collins the man, to me, seemed equally ancient. His polite British accent, dark suits, formal lecturing style, ultra-conservative politics (he was quite unpopular at Berkeley for his support of South Africa's apartheid), deep interest in heraldry, and strict classroom regulations (he locked the door as class began, we sat in alphabetical order, and our papers were written in script), seemed drawn from a different epoch. As a student from outside the School, I knew next to nothing about his life beyond McGill's Roddick Gates, like the fact that he drove a canary yellow Mustang and that he was known to most as "PC." But I will never forget how sad and how much older he suddenly seemed the day our class expressed our sincere sympathies to him on learning of the death of his wife, Margaret Gardner Taylor Collins. I felt as if I had known her since she appears in hundreds of the slides (figure 1) he had shown us in class as a scale figure. I shudder now to think he was only sixty.

This paper explores the intellectual and personal contexts of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*. It is structured in two parts, focusing on (1) Collins' vision of the popular text as a critique of other historians' work and (2) his various plans for revisions of the book. The paper relies heavily on primary sources which surrounded *Changing Ideals* and its evolution, especially Collins' beloved slide collection, with which I have had the privilege of working for the past twelve years, his personal correspondence, and his lectures (figure 2), now housed in McGill's Canadian Architecture Collection.¹

This paper will focus on his complex, and I would suggest, ambiguous, relationship with Pevsner and Giedion. The larger project from which this paper is drawn, however, also includes an interpretation of his relationship to Reyner Banham, Henry Russell Hitchcock, and Vincent Scully. They all touched Collins, the architectural historian and the man, in significant ways. As I will argue, they changed his ideas about *Changing Ideals*.

I am grateful to Aurèle Parisien and Louis Martin for their insights and research, and to IRHA for a seed grant in support of this project. Peter Collins' papers are housed at the John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University. Marilyn Berger, Ricardo Castro, Peter Gossage, Larry McCann, and Rhona Kenneally made it possible to write this paper 5 000 km away from McGill University. To them I am indebted. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Peter Collins.

1 On the slide collection of Peter Collins, see Annmarie Adams, "With precision appropriate": Images from the Peter Collins' Collection," *ARQ* (October 1993): 18-19.

116: "Vernacular"

(1) 'Vernacular' & 'anonymous' architecture

(2) 'Primitive' buildings - from fitch.

(3) Pevsner's distinction between "architecture" & "building"

(3) Important thing is relation of programme to solution: definition of housing forms, i.e. vernacular

1967: ~~London cathedral~~ (v) ← NB. floor area is about 60,000 ft².
~~Chateau Champlain~~
~~Artist studios~~ ~~cité religieuse~~ the medieval c. 1,000 ft² per pers

Military Engineering - Kingston

~~Museum & People~~ ~~Exhibition Museum~~~~U.S. State Philadelphian~~ ~~Memorials~~ ~~Exchange~~

(3) Mykissos: church [Ver.] - diocesan Romanach in Giron
 Athens: apse [Fr. Gth] (2)

Rozamador

Danish farm (See Oscar Faber (i) compounds after land from c. 1870.

Bouges

[Incense]

D'Astous: Simard House

~~Street architecture~~ ~~Lanes~~~~S. Kensington~~

Gaudi: Casa Batlló

~~Montreal: Sherbrooke St.~~~~Van Martin~~

Modern "modern vernacular".

1969-70:

(1) [D'Astous: carpenter of Simard Hn
Chateau Champlain](2) Primitive: New Guinea
Navajo Indian
Sudan(3) Fr. Gth: Bouges Cathedral
Ver.: Athens: church
diocesan Romanach in
Giron: two dialects

4 Ver.: Bouges 1/2 timber

5 [Hesse 1/2

6 [Danish 1/2

7 [Rozamador (3)

Athen: temples
Mykissos: island
Montreal: 20th and "Vernac"

(NB) In 1969-70, discussion looked

40 minutes!

CONTINUED TO NEXT
LECTURE from Item

figure 2. A typical page of notes for a lecture by Peter Collins: "Vernacular." Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

2 Draft of a letter from Peter Collins to Richard de la Mare, December 15, 1958. The final correspondence was comprised of a letter and a book synopsis.

Giedion and Hitchcock were there from the beginning. As early as December 1958 (ten years before the death of Giedion), in his initial book proposal to Faber and Faber, Collins provided lengthy appraisals of both *Space, Time and Architecture* and Henry Russell Hitchcock's *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. The deficiencies in these art history books, which he saw as being "essentially evolutionary and morphological," were the basic inspiration for his project:

At the moment there seem to be two standard approaches to the history of modern architecture, exemplified in the only two authoritative works so far published, namely 'Space, Time and Architecture' by Siegfried [sic] Giedion, and 'Architecture: 19th and 20th Centuries' (Pelican History of Art Series) by Henry Russell Hitchcock. The first method is to identify the characteristic features of contemporary architecture (metal construction, spatial integration, etc.) and trace each back to the eighteenth century. Hence the author does not have to concern himself at all with those characteristics of the period 1750-1920 which are now considered to be obsolete. The second method is to discuss impartially all buildings of the period considered important at the time, analyse their external appearance, identify the manner in which the compositional elements borrowed from earlier buildings have been transformed, and classify them by architect, country or style.²



figure 3. The Severn or Coalbrookdale Bridge, 1775-79, from Sigfried Giedion, *Space Time and Architecture* (Fifth Edition), 170.

87. ABRAHAM DARBY. The first cast-iron bridge over the river Severn, 1775-79. Span, one hundred feet; height, forty feet.

Collins goes on to pronounce Giedion as the superior scholar, since he less frequently compared buildings of one type to those of another. He chides the Swiss historian, however, for implying that Labrouste was the first to use free-standing columns and for Giedion's suggestion that the Coalbrookdale bridge (figure 3) could be compared with the Church of the Fourteen Saints. "This implication that structures which span space and structures which enclose or define space are generically the same is one which, in my own text, I hope to disprove," promised Collins.

Two other intentions cited in this early letter, I think, are extremely important to note: that Collins always saw *Changing Ideals* as a textbook ("in universities where text-books are fashionable it would perhaps be used as such on both sides of the Atlantic") and that he believed using art history books to teach architects was having what he described as a "calamitous effect on contemporary design" (he thought the best architecture had come from standardization and that art historians could only write about variety).

A particularly delightful (and frustrating) aspect of Peter Collins' own records, as well as a reflection of his own careful thinking and re-thinking of every detail, is the fact that Collins frequently revised the typewritten draft of his letters (figure 4). In this case, he extracted the first and last two paragraphs as a letter and used the rest as a book synopsis. In the preliminary version he is particularly passionate about the book project: "I have been seized with the desire to write a new kind of history of modern architecture, and I am therefore writing to explain to you why I think such an undertaking would be original, useful and profitable."

His love of language (both English and French) sharpened his wit as a book critic, and was best exercised in the tongue-in-cheek Department of Trivia and Ephemeria at McGill. A characteristic memo is reprinted in the back of the new edition of *Changing Ideals*, in which Collins wrote to the architects of the new addition to the Faculty of Law, from the make-believe division of Legal Linguistics, to suggest that their Latin notice "listen to the other side" had been fraudulent. Exacting in his own use of language, Collins was quick to admonish those with sloppier standards. Giedion was his major target. Throughout his career, Collins was consumed with Giedion's use of the term, "space-time," and preoccupied with the enduring popularity of *Space, Time and Architecture* as a textbook in schools of architecture.

In March 1961, Collins wrote to J.M. Richards, the editor of *Architectural Review* and author of *An Introduction to Modern Architecture* (1940), with an offer to write an article on the concept of space-time as used by Giedion and others, which he would conclude by suggesting his own theory of parallax

School of Architecture
3426 McTavish Street

15 December 1958

Richard de la Mare Esq.,
Messrs. Faber and Faber Ltd.,
24 Russell Square,
London W. C. 1.

Dear Mr. de la Mare:

I have been seized with the desire to write a new kind of history of modern architecture, and I am therefore writing to explain to you why I think such an undertaking would be original, useful and profitable. It would probably take me until October 1963 to produce a manuscript ready for publication, but, as with my first book, I hesitate to undertake so much labour without first obtaining a publisher's support.

should be
At the moment there are two standard approaches to this the history of *modern architecture* topic, exemplified in the only two authoritative works so far published, namely "Space, Time and Architecture" by Siegfried Giedion, and "Architecture: 19th and 20th Centuries" (Pelican History of Art Series) by Henry Russell Hitchcock. The first method is to identify the characteristic features of contemporary architecture (metal construction, spatial integration, etc.) and trace each back to the eighteenth century. Hence the author does not have to concern himself at all with those characteristics of the period 1750-1920 which are now considered to be obsolete. The second method is to discuss impartially all buildings of the period considered important at the time, analyse their external appearance, identify the manner in which the compositional elements borrowed from earlier buildings have been transformed, and classify them by architect, country or style.

The philosophies behind both are essentially evolutionary and morphological; concerned, that is to say, with stylistic development and appearance. Such an approach is mainly due to the fact that architectural histories are usually written by art-historians (rather than architects) who naturally adopt current art-historical methods. These derive largely from a historical accident, whereby in American universities, 'History of Art' courses comprise architecture, sculpture and painting. As a result, buildings are studied as if they were statues, i.e. objects in space which exist only by virtue of some artist's desire for emotional expression. Such a system works admirably for the period 1400-1750, since Renaissance artists believed that the Art of Design was, to quote Vasari, 'comune padre delle tre arti nostre, architettura,

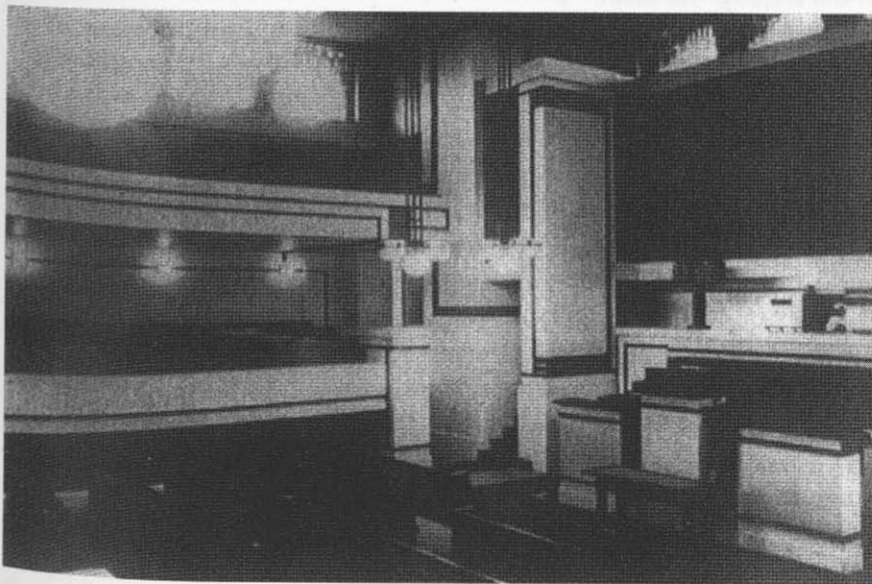
over...

figure 4. The first page of a four-page letter from Peter Collins to publisher Richard de la Mare, 15 December 1958. Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

as a more effective explanation of modern architectural space. Two images from Collins' slide collection are classified as "General: Space-Time." They are Altdorfer's early sixteenth-century "Birth of the Virgin" and a speed photo of a golfer by Edgerton of 1939, both used by Giedion (figures 5 and 6).

Collins' finished article, which was published in *Architectural Review* in December of 1962 and subsequently became chapter 24, "New Concepts of Space," in *Changing Ideals*, is classic "PC": bold in its assertions, focused in its argument, and unforgettable in its elocution. It is here where he asserts that twentieth-century architecture is essentially a reversal and extension of traditional methods of exploiting parallax (defined as "whereby an apparent displacement of objects occurs when the point of observation changes"). Le Corbusier, Gropius, Mies, Wright (balconies, mushroom columns), Perret (point supports), and Kahn, insisted Collins, realized this aesthetic revolution.

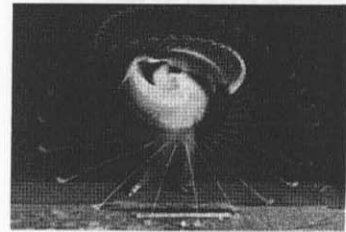
It is interesting to note that PC used no illustrations in his 1962 "Parallax" article; and few photos (figures 7 and 8), completely disconnected to the text, to explain the idea in the book. Plate 33b was of Louis Kahn's Yale art gallery, which Collins noted illustrated the effects of parallax created by screens. Unity Temple, plate 34a, was used by Collins to show how cantilevered balconies had extended the traditional method of parallax.



F. L. Wright: Unity Temple, Oak Park (1904)



figure 5. Albrecht Altdorfer's "Birth of the Virgin," Courtesy School of Architecture Slide Library, McGill University.



853. EDGERTON, Harold E. Speed photograph of golf stroke. In Edgerton's aerodynamic studies in which motion can be fixed and analyzed in arrested fractions of 1/100,000 of a second, a whole movement is separated into its successive components, making possible re-orientation in both space and time.

figure 6. Harold E. Edgerton, photograph of a golfer, from Sigfried Giedion, *Space Time and Architecture* (Fifth Edition), 853.

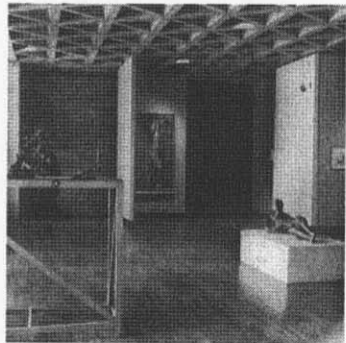


figure 7. Louis Kahn's Art Gallery, Yale University, 1954, Plate XXXIII, from Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998).

figure 8. Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, Plate XXXIV, from Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998).

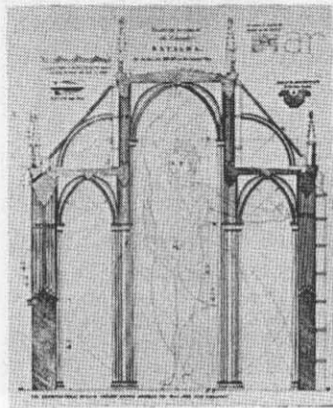


figure 9. Illustration of "Homo Modulorensis," first published by James Murphy in 1792 or 1793. Peter Collins suggested the image to Nikolaus Pevsner in August 1959 for the cover of *The Architectural Review*. It appeared in May 1960. Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

The correspondence with Richards leading up to the article is even more pointed in its condemnation of Giedion:

... Sigfried Giedion, as you know, devotes a whole chapter to "Space-Time" in his famous book, and considers it to be exemplified in Gropius's Bauhaus, Le Corbusier's Maison Savoie and League of Nations project, and (in a later edition) Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium. Thus when students or young architects here are asked if they consider "Space-Time" to be an essential notion in the theory of modern architecture, they usually reply unhesitatingly in the affirmative; yet when asked what the term means, they become hesitant and confused. I personally think this word is a good example of the cant by which so many simple architectural ideas are distorted and then misapplied; but perhaps [sic] all thoughtful architects share this view, and if we re [sic] to try to write a study of the characteristic spatial qualities of modern architecture, using Giedion's theory as a starting point, I should simply be flogging a dead horse.³

Collins went on to suggest to the journal editor that he ask architects about the concept. "You might even get a certain amount of amusement out of the enquiry," he said.

Collins' conflict with Pevsner, on the other hand, was much more personal and much less straightforward.⁴ The Collins-Pevsner correspondence was also less serious—even humorous. In 1959, Collins sent Pevsner a copy of Plate 5 from James Murphy's "Plans &c of the Church of Batalha," proposing it as a cover illustration for *Architectural Review*, and describing it as an extremely early example of Homo Modulorensis (or "Charlie").⁵ Pevsner had been editor of the British journal during the war and continued to act as one of four Directing Editors under J.M. Richards. A few months later, at Pevsner's request, PC sent along a one-page caption, explaining that Murphy was an early theorist who saw Gothic as a justification of Structural Rationalism, tracing Murphy's position back through Chambers and Soufflot. The cover appeared (figure 9) on the journal in May 1960, evidence that even at this early date in his career, PC was seen by Pevsner as an advisor of sorts.⁶

And in 1967, after reading a reprint of some of Pevsner's lectures in *The Listener*, PC penned a letter to the editor commenting on Pevsner's suggestion that the architecture of the 1950s and 1960s be called the post-modern style: "Our own architectural library, which dates from the end of the last century, classifies books stylistically and then geographically; but between Modern

3 Letter from Peter Collins to J.M. Richards, April 14, 1961.

4 There is no evidence that PC ever met or corresponded with Giedion.

5 Letter from Peter Collins to Nikolaus Pevsner, August 21, 1959.

6 Pevsner requested the notes in a letter to Collins, October 8, 1959.

Architecture and Australia our ancestors thoughtfully left space for three later styles. I suggested recently that (this space) be Future Architecture, Post-Future Architecture and Architecture immediately prior to the Last Judgement; but perhaps Post-Modern, Post-post Modern and Post-post-post Modern would be preferable."⁷

As I outlined in the "Notes" included in the new edition of *Changing Ideals*, Pevsner had a close and confusing relationship to the book.⁸ Shortly after Collins' initial submission to Faber and Faber, Pevsner visited Montreal and apparently discussed the project with Collins, who was 18 years his junior. In a thank-you letter written to Collins in February 1959, upon his return to London, Pevsner indicated that he had written to the Fabers again and that he expected "their decision ... to be favourable."

At precisely the same time, however, Collins wrote to the publisher and withdrew his book proposal, "after discussing the matter with Dr. Pevsner, who was recently in Montreal." He noted in particular the possibility that "another author (might) render my undertaking redundant."⁹ Had Pevsner suggested that he was working on a sequel to his own 1936 *Pioneers of Modern Design*, or had the senior scholar told the young PC about a competing project? Whatever his hesitation, Collins changed his mind again in 1963 and decided to continue with the book.

Pevsner's ambiguous relationship with *Changing Ideals* continued after the book appeared in 1965. He reviewed it for *The Guardian* on May 28, 1965, within three weeks of its publication. While on the one hand he praised the book for being "full of interesting and almost entirely unknown stuff, intelligently collected and presented," he concluded by saying that he found that "the argument ... is not so convincing."¹⁰

Collins may have contacted Pevsner regarding some of his comments, because within a few weeks of the review's appearance he received a detailed list of "errors."¹¹ It was classic Pevsner: informal (hand-written and signed first name only), concluding with a research question for the younger historian.

Despite this chummy correspondence, Collins was no kinder in reviews of Pevsner's *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design* three years later in *Progressive Architecture*. After some generally positive remarks, Collins accused Pevsner of "stereotyped standards of criticism," whereby anyone associated with William Morris was a good guy, and then ridiculed the German émigré's use of English: " 'Mackintosh alone could be a witness for the defense and for the prosecution of both Art Nouveau and Anti-Art Nouveau.' If the reader repeats this phrase to himself ten times, I think he will agree that the only possible response is that whilst, as a generalization, it is indubitably

7 Letter from Peter Collins to the editor of *The Listener*, January 11, 1967.

8 Annmarie Adams, "Notes on the Publication of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*," in Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998), 15-20.

9 Letter from Peter Collins to Richard de la Mare, February 12, 1959.

10 Nikolaus Pevsner, "Against novelty," *The Guardian* (May 1965).

11 Letter from Nikolaus Pevsner to Peter Collins, June 17, 1965.

pregnant with significance, there is always the possibility that the converse of its implications need not necessarily be untrue."¹²

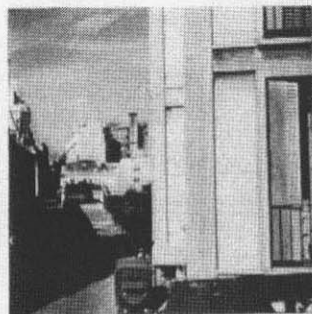
Their main point of disagreement, however, was the notion of Historicism. Pevsner's neo-this and neo-that which he articulated in his lecture at the RIBA on January 10, 1961, in fact, comprised the main fodder for Collins' diatribe on Historicism in the Epilogue of *Changing Ideals*.¹³ Here PC let loose on the art historians, suggesting that they refused to distinguish between changes of style and changes within a style, and working up to his final assertion that the principal contribution of Modern architecture has been its creation of a humane environment, ending the book with a quote from his beloved Perret. He illustrated what he called "Pseudo-Revivalism" with Perret's apartments on rue Raynouard in Paris of 1928 (figure 10).

Collins and Pevsner make a compelling comparison. Although they practised architectural history very differently, the two scholars also intersected in curious ways: they each were passionate about the architecture of a country not their own; they both had a witty sense of humour; their uncanny love of precision was noted by their colleagues and students for whom they held extraordinarily high standards (but even higher for themselves); they both relied heavily on their wives in their research and each was devastated by their spouse's early death; and, incredibly, they were both known affectionately by their initials.¹⁴ At the same time, however, Pevsner was a socialist while Collins was a conservative; Pevsner a populist, Collins an elitist; Pevsner believed passionately in fieldwork, while Collins spent his summers in the archives.

To Collins, *Changing Ideals* as an idea was constantly changing, from the moment he first imagined it until just before his death. The two-page outline (figure 11) he sent to Faber and Faber in 1959 was for a completely different book than what he published. At this stage, there was no five-part division, and perhaps more importantly, no analogies. From the letters and notes which he left regarding the book, the final structure seems to have evolved some time between 1959 and April 1963, when he submitted seven chapters of the book to the publisher.

But even after publication Collins continued to play with it. An intriguing, undated note (figure 12) PC probably made to himself listed the changes he would have liked to make to *Changing Ideals*. There were six numbered points:

1. Pevsner's factual errors,
2. an expanded discussion of Revolutionary,
3. more material on the influence of painting,
4. additions to the section on decorative arts,
5. additions to the mechanical analogy (note a second reference to Pevsner here), and
6. rewrite biological analogy (which he was



A. Perret: 51-55, rue Raynouard, Paris (1928)

PSEUDO-REVIVALISM

Illustrating the autonomy which can be achieved between a modern building and its environment without relinquishing the ideals of functional planning and new methods of construction

XXXIX

figure 10. Auguste Perret's 51-55 rue Raynouard, 1928, Plate XXXIX, from Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998).

12 Peter Collins, "Pevsner's Pioneers," *Progressive Architecture* 49 (December 1968), 144, 155.

13 Nikolaus Pevsner, "Modern Architecture and the Historian or the Return of Historicism," *RIBA Journal* (April 1961): 230-40.

14 Biographical information on Pevsner was gleaned from obituaries published in *The Burlington Magazine*, *Architectural Review*, *Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme*, *Apollo*, *Perspectives on Architecture*, *RIBA Journal*, *Progressive Architecture*, and *Metropolis*.

"CHANGING IDEALS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE"Draft SynopsisCh. 1 Romanticism

Reasons for the rejection of classical standards.

The Philosophy of the Picturesque.

Indifferentism and frivolity.

Domestic architecture between 1750 and 1800.

Ch. 2 Antiquarianism

The Idealization of the Past.

New Philosophies of History.

Public Buildings in which elements of past styles were incorporated for doctrinaire archaeological motives.

Ch. 3 The Ideal City

Buildings in France, Germany and Russia influenced by the theories of Boullée and Ledoux.

Ch. 4 Rationalism

The Influence of engineering on architectural theory.

Buildings influenced by the theories of Classical Rationalism.

Buildings influenced by the theories of Gothic Rationalism.

Ch. 5 Pieté and Sociology

The theories of Pugin, Ruskin, etc., and their applications.

Ch. 6 The Demand for a New Architecture

The Hawthorne - George Hudson
The influence of architectural historians, critics and journalists on architectural theory.

figure 11. Two-page draft synopsis of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, no date. Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

Ch. 15 New Ways of Living

The changing ideals of domestic architecture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ch. 16 Functionalism

The influence of new planning ideals on the composition of public buildings in the twentieth century.

Ch. 17 Industrialisation

The Bauhaus and its influence on America

figure 11. Two-page draft synopsis of Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, no date. Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

Changing Ideals: Future modifications.

- (1) Persner's factual errors
- (2) Discuss "Revolutionary" at length, at end of the chapter.
- (3) ~~the~~ Infl. of Painting: (a) refer back to Ren. tradition
esp. Le Des's lectures
(b) refer to V.-L.-D. and not abstract
(c) influence of "caprices"
- (4) ~~Mechanics~~ Decadent arts: discuss Redtenbacher
- (5) Add to mechanical analysis: "Progress of modern movement" - (Chambers)
Vidler & Durr
Gropius.

(6) Rewrite biological analogy.

- (6) Add musical analogy, which is not a functional analogy, explaining
 (1) why it was not popular (i.e. concerned with popular) (2) ~~open~~
 (3) why it might have been useful (technology of instruments) (4) modern
 p. 275. re Cézanne: for cubes read prisms, and classification of
 put after the word "cones". history.

add to "inventors" a resume of Louis Schwickardi's activities.

add to §5 on concrete a classification of attitudes towards
 New: re: (1) small span (2) tall buildings (3) wide span structures.

To "nationalism & Gothic" discuss (a) Vidler & Durr (Annales Architecturales 1946)
 (b) environmental learning (eg. Spence & Linn County
 King's College
 Barry's Plan of 1948).

Re: Boullée discusses { Meaning of Revolution
 practical influence of H. as: "ed. is. re. in
 and relate to de Quincy's remarks on "vision" in his dictation.

Additional remarks
 Linn
 from Ag. Pictoria.

figure 12. Peter Collins' notes outlining modifications he planned to make to Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, no date. Courtesy John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.

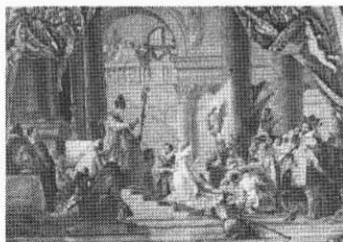


figure 13. Peter Collins was intrigued by how an eighteenth-century painter might know about a wedding dress from centuries earlier. Postcard of G.B. Tiepolo's "Marriage of Emperor Barbarossa to Beatrice of Burgundy," painted in 1752 for the Kaisersaal, Residenz at Wurzburg. Courtesy Annmarie Adams.

presumably unsatisfied with in general). Un-numbered items also appeared on the list, including the addition of a musical analogy, material on Nervi's attitudes to various structural types, an expanded discussion of nationalism and Gothic, a section on environmental harmony, and some individuals to add to the revised book's acknowledgements.

This is a remarkable document: a one-page review of *Changing Ideals* by its author, who was its toughest critic, and clear evidence that whenever Collins wrote this note to himself, he had changed his ideas about *Changing Ideals*. Always worried that the book would usurp his usefulness as a lecturer, Collins continuously revised his courses, which may have led him to new ideas for the book.

I remember, too, from comments made in class and to me personally that Collins seemed to be tinkering with the book during that last semester. Incidentally, Collins was never shy about his dislike of art historians. When I first appeared at his office door to express my interest in taking his class and explained that I was an art history major, he responded in his characteristically sharp style, "Why? So you will be able to converse at cocktail parties?" I can't remember how I replied, although I recall thinking in a naive, twenty-something way that I was already pretty good at cocktail parties. His letters to John Bland from Smith College are particularly rich in comments on the uselessness of teaching girls who have no intention of becoming architects. He does admit in one of these letters, written Christmas eve of 1964, that what he would most like for Christmas was 16 twenty-year-old daughters!¹⁵

In any case, Prof. Collins treated me differently in the class from the beginning, maybe because I was the only student from outside the School, maybe because I had to sit in the front, left corner, nearest to him, since my initials are A.A. And he propositioned me within the first few weeks of term. Instead of writing the final examination, wouldn't I prefer to work on a special research project, which I understood to be towards his planned book revisions. I was to explain, in ten pages or so, the sources for Beatrice of Burgundy's wedding dress in Tiepolo's painting of the marriage of Frederick Barbarossa in the Residenz at Wurzburg (figure 13). How did a Venetian painter in 1750-53 know about a dress worn centuries earlier?

Disappointed that the question was not more architectural, I took it on nonetheless, and he seemed relatively pleased with my explanation of what he saw, and I only partially understood, as an example of Historicism. Nonetheless, the experience of working with him, even in his depressed state near the end of his life, was inspiring enough to propel me to graduate school in architecture. No teacher I have encountered since him—and I have

¹⁵ Letter to John Bland from Peter Collins, December 24, 1964.

been blessed with outstanding teachers—has come close to illustrating the potential of architecture as a purely intellectual pursuit.

If there is any general conclusion to be drawn from these reflections, it is, I suppose, that real scholarship is a dynamic project—in the context of competing books and in the imagination of the author. Research, like buildings and landscapes, is constantly *changing*. The final book, like the photo of the building or the copy of the letter, is simply a record of a moment, no more and no less. In this way, PC's title, especially his use of the gerund "changing," was particularly fitting.

The question which continues to haunt me is this: if Collins really believed the books by Giedion and Pevsner were so bad, then why did he continue to assign them in his classes? What about the so-described "calamitous effect of art history on architecture students"?

I do not have answers to these questions. Perhaps I will come closer as I try to sort through the PC papers and collect more of the astonishing memories and artifacts related to his career at McGill. Is it possible he continued to assign the books simply in order to challenge students to think critically—that he saw architectural research as a conversation, rather than a monologue? Or did he continue to see his beloved *Changing Ideals* as a rejoinder to the older texts and worry that its message might be too oblique without their balancing effect? Or did he, as he matured as a scholar, come to think that they were not so bad?

Perhaps the ghosts of Giedion and Pevsner, like the yellow Mustang, are just further examples of the paradoxes that constituted Peter Collins.