

INTRODUCTION

As one of the last students to have benefitted from the teaching of Peter Collins and as an editor of *THE FIFTH COLUMN*, it seemed to me important for us to present a selection of his finest writings. The legacy that Prof. Collins left has particular relevance in the architectural debate of the present day—in his consistent and outstanding manner, he upheld views that were often unpopular in his time, but which have, under the current onslaught against the Modern Movement, become accepted as norms.

We began the project by enlisting the help of Prof. John Hancock of the University of Cincinnati, a former graduate student of Prof. Collins', to be the guest editor for this issue. Subsequently, a search through Prof. Collins' files unearthed a wealth of material. Together with Prof. Hancock, a final selection of articles was made under four main groupings—Theory, History, Criticism and Classicism. The resulting collection includes many of his best essays, two book chapters, three lectures and a selection of newspaper articles, book reviews and building critiques.

This monograph does not attempt to be a rigorous and scholarly assessment of Peter Collins' career, but to be, instead, an accurate volume of selected writings—writings which deal with many of the ideals that he so passionately and wittily attacked and defended.

—Graham D. Livesey

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BIOGRAPHY

Peter Collins, Professor of Architecture, McGill University, died after a brief illness at home in Montreal on June 7th, 1981. His wife, the former Margaret Taylor of Ottawa, had predeceased him in December the previous year. An ideal teacher, always well prepared himself, he encouraged a rigorous attention to detail among his students. He will be greatly missed by his colleagues, friends and many others interested in architecture. He had a swift and accurate mind and the ability to write exceptionally well. He is surely to be remembered for his books, *Concrete, the Vision of a New Architecture* (translated to Italian as *La Visione di una nuova architettura*), *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* (translated to Spanish *Los ideales de la arquitectura moderna; su evolución*) and *Architectural Judgement*; and, as Editor of the *SAH Journal*, 1967-68. In addition about a hundred essays and reviews have appeared over his name in most of the architectural periodicals in North America and England, and for a time he was architectural correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian*. He also wrote the article "Architectural Theory" for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. One of his essays was reprinted in Dr. Bissell's Centenary Anthology: *A Century of Great Canadian Writing*.

Early in his career Peter Collins developed a special love and knowledge of the architecture of France. This gave him standards to measure and comment seriously upon all kinds of architectural events, but in other areas an eye for humbug always aroused a quick response in him, sometimes leading to unexpected adventures. His Department of Trivia and Ephemera once caused great merriment and more than a little caution at McGill. His Montreal Philogastric Institute provided a few stiff exercises for local chefs and much pleasure as well.

Born in Leeds in Yorkshire in 1920, his architectural studies at the Leeds College of Art, begun in 1936, were inter-

rupted in 1939 by seven years in the British Army. For two years he was a Trooper in the Yorkshire Hussars; then for three years, an Intelligence Officer, Middle East and Italy; and finally, Captain, General Staff, The War Office, London. Upon discharge he returned to Leeds and obtained a Diploma in Architecture with Distinction in 1948. He went then to Switzerland and France to work on the design of reinforced concrete structures—mostly on Auguste Perret's reconstruction of Le Havre. In 1951 he returned to England to lecture in Architecture at Manchester and later to begin graduate work there under Professor Cordingly. His M.A. thesis, "The Development of Architectural Theory in France in the Mid-eighteenth Century," was completed in 1955. The year before that he received a Silver Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects for an essay on "Jacques-François Blondel." During this time he was frequently in Paris and on one occasion, in August 1953, he married the charming Canadian who was later responsible for his coming to Canada.

The year he completed his work at Manchester he received a Fulbright Travelling Scholarship and an appointment to lecture in Architectural History at Yale University. In 1956 he was appointed an associate professor at McGill, where he became responsible for reorganizing the undergraduate courses in the history and theory of architecture. It was at this time that he completed the book inspired by his work with Perret, *Concrete, The Vision of a New Architecture*, which earned him the Henry Florence Architectural Book Scholarship in 1960. In 1962 he was appointed a full professor of Architecture at McGill and made a permanent member of staff—by coincidence it was the year he became a Canadian citizen. In 1964, by foregoing holidays and some telescoping of his duties at McGill, he was able to accept, with well remembered pleasure, a visiting professorship at Smith College. In 1965, what appears to have been his most successful book, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, first appeared. Of the three subsequent editions, one was in Spanish. The following year he was a visiting lecturer at Cambridge University. In 1967-68 he was editor of the *SAH Journal* and, during the summer vacation, a visiting professor at the University of California-Berkeley. In 1968 he received the Hitchcock Medalion from SAH-GB.

That same year, a sabbatical leave from McGill permitted him to surprise his friends by returning to Yale as a Research Fellow to begin study in the University Law School—one suspects his interest in law had been aroused by a desire to contemplate the history and theory of architecture in conjunction with the history and theory of another discipline. Begun at Yale, these law studies were completed in Montreal, at Queens, when he obtained the Master of Laws degree in 1971 for a thesis on "Amenity, a Study of Jurisprudential Concepts which Affect the Legal Control of Urban Environments, and Their Relevance to Canadian Constitutional Law." In the same year his last book was published, *Architectural Judgement*, a comparative study in decision-making in architecture and law. In 1972 the award of the AIA's Architecture Critic's Citation marked his eminent contribution to architectural thought in America, a fitting final tribute to a distinguished man.

One must add that Peter Collins was an honorary corresponding member of the *Société des architectes diplômés par le gouvernement*; a *membre de l'ordre des architectes du Québec*, and a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

—John Bland

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