

## Notes on the Publication of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*<sup>1</sup>

Peter Collins, one of this century's most important architectural historians, was among the first to link architectural history and theory. As early as December 1958, "PC" (as his colleagues affectionately called him) wrote to Faber and Faber, the publishers of his first book, *Concrete*, that he had been "seized with the desire to write a new kind of history of modern architecture." The manuscript of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, which he described as "essentially a history of ideas," was completed in August 1963. In May 1965 it was published by Faber and Faber in Europe and by McGill University Press in North America.

*Changing Ideals* was awarded the prestigious Hitchcock Medallion by the Society of Architectural Historians (Great Britain) in 1969 and, not surprisingly, since it was based on Collins' popular course in architectural history at McGill, quickly became a successful textbook, especially in North America. Kokusai Kenchiku began publishing the Japanese translation of the book in serial form in 1967 and it appeared in Spanish in 1970 and in Italian in 1973. In the meantime, Collins, a devoted francophile, searched for a suitable French publisher.

Infamously difficult to please, Collins was notably happy with and proud of his longstanding relationship with the London-based Faber and Faber—the formality of a traditional British firm obviously suited his temperament. Although he became a Canadian citizen in 1962 Collins, born in Leeds, England, in 1920, had deep roots in Britain. In a biographical statement sent to Faber and Faber early in 1962, Collins wrote that he had decided to become an architect at the

---

1. I am extremely grateful to Aurèle Parisien of McGill-Queen's University Press for his comprehensive research on the publication history of *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*. Collins' personal papers, including correspondence, lecture and research notes, and post-card collection are part of the Canadian Architecture Collection, Blackader-Lauterman Library, McGill University. The quotes from his correspondence included in these notes are mostly taken from the Faber and Faber file.

## THE PUBLICATION OF *CHANGING IDEALS*

age of nine during an afternoon spent in Canterbury Cathedral. He was educated at the Leeds College of Art (1936-39 and 1946-48) and at Manchester University (1952-55). His studies were interrupted by seven years in the British army, during which he served as a trooper in the Yorkshire Hussars (1939-41), an Intelligence Officer in the Middle East and Italy (1941-44), and a Captain of the General Staff in the War Office (1944-45).

After the war he pursued his interest in architecture through practice, first in the Fribourg office of Denis Honegger, a former pupil and chief assistant of Auguste Perret, and subsequently on Perret's reconstruction of Le Havre in the office of Pierre-Edouard Lambert. His life-long interest in reinforced concrete structures and French architecture seems to date from this period.

The architect-based perspective so central to *Changing Ideals* derives from this period of intense practise. His Canadian connection can also be traced to this time, since it was in Paris that he met and in 1953 married Canadian Margaret Gardner Taylor. After Paris the Collins moved to the United States, where PC lectured at Yale University (1955-56), and then to Montreal in 1956, where he joined the faculty of the School of Architecture at McGill.

Collins' love of minutia was legendary. It was one of the reasons, no doubt, that he was such a conscientious scholar. In a letter dated 11 March 1964 he thanked Faber and Faber for their "forebearance with my fussiness." Collins was clearly aware of his eccentricities and frequently remarked on them with self-deprecating humour. His wit was legendary. In the early 1970s, for example, he created the tongue-in-cheek Department of Trivia and Ephemera, investing himself and several of his colleagues with honorary titles—PC was the "Interdisciplinary Co-ordinator." His intermittent memos ranged from picnic invitations—"Déjeuner sur l'herbe"—to sharp satires of academic bureaucracy and university affairs, probably much to the consternation of the deans and vice-principals to whom they were sometimes addressed. In 1972, for instance, he offered to donate an annual prize to the university for the "briefest relevant non-quantitative thesis submitted for the Ph.D. degree." His students remember fondly the high standards he set for their term papers, his demand for precision in general, and his rather unusual classroom style. Collins liked students to sit in alphabetical order and expected essays to be hand-written in perfect script. His lectures were pointed, intellectually rigorous, and well-rehearsed.

Not surprising, given his interest in details and sharp powers of observation, PC involved himself in every aspect of the publication of his beloved books, particularly *Changing Ideals*. For example, after he received the typeset "specimen pages" from Faber and Faber in January 1964 he asked the publisher to adjust the proportions of the book in order to make them more appealing to architects. "I am particularly anxious to have a book which, as regards its physical appearance, will be a source of pride (since this may well prove to be its only merit),"

xvi

### THE PUBLICATION OF *CHANGING IDEALS*

he wrote. He found the 7.5" × 10" page size initially selected by the press "extraordinarily unattractive" and pointed to the proportions of the page used in the Pelican History of Art series as a handsome alternative. He agreed to settle for simply decreasing the width of the proposed size by half an inch while retaining the original margins.

In February 1964 he sent off another missive to his publisher, worrying that 33 ems was "an excessive length of line when using 11 point type, in the sense that it is fatiguing to read." Could they reduce it to 30 ems? With remarkable generosity and forbearance, Faber and Faber invariably accommodated their exacting author.

The legibility of the book's typeface was a constant concern to Collins, long after the first appearance of *Changing Ideals*. Faber and Faber were sympathetic and in 1970 they decided to reprint the paperback edition of *Changing Ideals* in a larger typeface. Collins was delighted with this decision: "Several of my students have pleaded eyestrain as the cause of their inability to master the more involved obscurities of the text: henceforth I shall be able to distinguish more fairly between intellectual malingerers and those who really are myopic."

PC's concern over the book's design also included the illustrations and the cover. He had not included any illustrations with the manuscript but Faber and Faber convinced him that the volume would sell better if illustrated and in May 1963 proposed including up to thirty-two pages of images. Collins readily agreed and hoped that these could be arranged in groups of four pages distributed evenly throughout the book. In August he inquired whether one group of five images illustrating Victorian polychromy could be printed in colour. While Faber and Faber agreed to distribute the illustrations in groups, they declined printing any in colour since this would increase the price of the book.

Collins' correspondence with his publisher indicates that the book's illustrations (their number, arrangement, and relationship to the text) became increasingly important to him over time. Later in August, once he had completed the manuscript, he wrote to Faber and Faber concerning the illustrations to say that "Having carefully studied their composition, it is clear to me that it is essential that I be allowed *ten* such groups" of four pages rather than the eight suggested previously and that he was busily at work obtaining photographs. A letter the following February indicates that once the photographs were collected he "sketched out a possible arrangement for each page of illustrations and captions." In May 1964, once he saw the book in proof, he changed his mind about the regular spacing of the illustrations, saying that this would be "less satisfactory than spacing them so as to relate more closely to the text." He included a precise list of where each group of illustrations should appear, bearing in mind that they had to be placed in the centre of the signatures to be sewn in. Once again his publishers accommodated him and the book included seventy-two illustrations on forty pages of coated stock distributed as he instructed.

xvii

Collins, P.. *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950*.  
Montreal, QC, CAN: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1998. p 18.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/mcgill/Doc?id=10135092&ppg=18>

Copyright © 1998. McGill - Queen's University Press. All rights reserved.  
May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

## THE PUBLICATION OF *CHANGING IDEALS*

When the British and Canadian publishers began to plan a "paper-covered" edition in 1966, PC selected a reduced set of illustrations. Not surprisingly, he played an active role in the book's design, sending Faber and Faber an "alternative proposal" concerning the illustrations in July of that year. "As you will see," he explained, "I have selected them so that facing blocks will be antithetically meaningful."

For the paperback edition, the size of the book was also reduced from 7" × 10" to 6" × 9" and only sixteen of the original seventy-two illustrations were included, reproduced on sixteen pages of uncoated stock grouped together at the front of the volume. Particularly surprising in retrospect—given PC's penchant for details—is that Faber and Faber neglected to revise the index to the illustrations and consequently until now all the plate numbers and references in the paperback edition of *Changing Ideals* have been incorrect. The present edition restores the book's original size, as well as the number and placement of the illustrations.

For the book's original cover Collins envisaged a photograph "of some part of London in which buildings of several eras are juxtaposed, with post-war buildings and nineteenth century buildings next to one another." PC eventually suggested using "part of a photo taken from the 3rd floor terrace of New Zealand House, Haymarket, published in the July 1963 issue of the *Architectural Review*," suggesting that the theme of the photograph was "19th century architecture viewed through 20th century architecture." In 1966 he requested a cropped version of the same photograph for the cover of the forthcoming paperback edition, but asked that the cover itself be printed "in less gloomy colours."

Collins had been extremely dissatisfied with the original black-on-blue Faber and Faber cover design; in 1966 he described its illegibility as "catastrophic." "The black-letter titling was virtually invisible against the dark blue background from a distance of more than five feet." He asked the publisher to print an explanatory note about his choice of photograph inside the cover of the paperback edition, which they neglected to do. McGill-Queen's was able to locate the photo Collins had chosen for the cover and it appears on the newly designed cover of this edition, accompanied for the first time by his explanatory paragraph.

In addition to insights into the publication of *Changing Ideals*, Collins' correspondence underlines how clearly he saw the book as a critique of other historians' work. In his initial December 1958 proposal to Faber and Faber, he provided a lengthy analysis of both *Space, Time and Architecture* by Siegfried Giedion and Henry Russell Hitchcock's *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. In general, Collins disapproved of Giedion's and Hitchcock's art-historical perspectives and articulated what he saw as the urgent need for a history of modern architecture written from the perspective of the architectural profession:

xviii

Collins, P.. *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950*.  
Montreal, QC, CAN: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1998. p 19.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/mcgill/Doc?id=10135092&ppg=19>

Copyright © 1998. McGill - Queen's University Press. All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

### THE PUBLICATION OF *CHANGING IDEALS*

After a good deal of reflection on this matter, I have become more and more convinced that architectural developments after 1750 can only be explained effectively as a sequence of ideals. Modern architecture is essentially an ethical art, so that it is only intelligible historically in the light of the ideals of those who designed the buildings. However much the modern art critic may dislike committing himself to subjective qualitative assessments, and prefer chronological classification by means of the identification of shapes, the architectural historian must recognize the fact that goodness and badness, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, have been the judgements which have led all worthwhile architects to employ one form rather than another, and that it is only by reference to the architects' own criteria and integrity that their buildings can be classified and assessed.

A third art historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, had a close and confusing relationship to the book. Shortly after Collins' initial submission to Faber and Faber, Pevsner visited Montreal and apparently discussed the project with Collins. In a letter to Collins upon his return to London, Pevsner indicated that he wrote to the "Fabers" in support of the book. At precisely the same time, however, Collins wrote to the publisher, to their consternation, withdrawing his proposal to write the book "after discussing the matter with Dr. Pevsner, who was recently in Montreal."

Pevsner's ambiguous relationship with *Changing Ideals* continued after the book appeared. He reviewed *Changing Ideals* for *The Manchester Guardian* 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 he found that "the argument ... is not so convincing."<sup>2</sup>

Pevsner also seems to have pointed out some errors to Collins privately. When the paperback edition was being prepared, PC made a special request of Faber and Faber to change his reference to Ludwig II on page 89 to Ludwig I, "a minor error to which Dr. Pevsner has kindly drawn my attention." And in an intriguing, undated note to himself entitled "Changing Ideals: Future modifications," the first of six points is "Pevsner's factual errors," suggesting that the mixup over the Bavarian monarch was not the only one.<sup>3</sup>

PC was never given the opportunity to revise *Changing Ideals*, although as early as October 1969 he had expressed interest in expanding the book. (Always worried that the book would usurp his usefulness as a lecturer, Collins

2. This publication is particularly interesting since Collins was for some time the architectural correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian*. See Nikolaus Pevsner, "Architects on Architecture," *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (3 June 1965), 10.

3. The other numbered points are (2) to discuss "Revolutionary" at length, (3) Influence of Painting, (4) Decorative arts, (5) Add to mechanical analogy, (6) Rewrite biological analogy and add a musical analogy.

THE PUBLICATION OF *CHANGING IDEALS*

continuously revised his courses, which may have led him to new ideas for the book.) His hopes for a revised version of *Changing Ideals* never waned. Just a year before his death, troubled that the book had gone out of print in Europe in 1977 without his knowledge, he wrote to Arthur Drexler, asking the famous American museum curator's advice on finding another publisher to produce an illustrated edition of the book. It was, after all, his magnum opus. Another great disappointment was that, despite his frequent efforts and several near successes, the long-sought-after French edition had never materialized. Hopefully this edition's return to a format closer to PC's original intentions in size, number and placement of illustrations, and statement on the choice of cover photo will bring renewed attention to a landmark publication in the history of architecture.

ANNMARIE ADAMS  
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
MCGILL UNIVERSITY  
February 1998

Collins, P.. *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950*.  
Montreal, QC, CAN: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1998. p 21.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/mcgill/Doc?id=10135092&ppg=21>

Copyright © 1998. McGill - Queen's University Press. All rights reserved.  
May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.