

A Note on Excellence

Of a springtime morning, a summer noontide, an autumn twilight, a moonlit winter eve, the Great Court of the hestelike is a place of peace and beauty. A quality of warmth and friendliness invests it, ~~and~~ its scale is human and humane, whether the lawns are filled with ~~many~~ recumbent valitudinarians, or a single sojourner is strolling the walks. I find pleasure in the fact that these things are so, and interest in pondering why. ~~What~~ What are the subtleties that, melding, consummate in beauty? To ask this is to ask what excellence is, for excellence and beauty are reciprocals.

~~Privet, grass, trees, flowering shrubs, sunlight, shadows, and the blue sky above~~ — these are elements from which subtlety may be compounded.

~~Grass, shrubbery, trees, bushes, trees in a random scatter~~

Grass, bushes, trees — these are the raw ^{elements} components of forest or jungle, yet from them subtleties may be compounded. Alone, ~~they~~ and scattered at random, they may combine to form Thoreau's "shaggy wilderness," where man has really no place of his own, and where brute nature may ~~give off a certain thrill~~ yield a certain tingling thrill of terror to the sensitive observer, but where the civil soul finds little lasting joy. ~~If subtleties are to be sought~~ The evocation of subtleties from them demands the interposition of mind, of sensibility, of aesthetic expression and response.

the beginning of
a hint, suggestion, of

2.

When this is given, grass becomes terraced greenward;
bushes, ^{shaped} ~~own~~ hedge and flowering shrub; trees at random,
ranges of pattern and stately comity; chaos, ^{an approach to} ~~cosmos~~ ~~at~~
~~best an approach thereto~~. ~~For~~ the visual cacophony has
yielded then to ^a motif, ~~and~~ ^a ~~the~~ theme ^{= suggested} ~~stated~~ in the ~~forest~~ ~~mark~~
of oak and elm, ^a ~~the~~ counterpoint of flowering crab trees,
and ~~the~~ melodies of rhododendrons blooming. — a simple
subtlety has been ~~called forth~~, ^{the} ~~human~~ scale has been ap-
proached, ^{achieved,}

Approached, yet not attained. ~~Not does a simple subtlety~~
~~suffice~~ We ask, ~~may~~ demand, more. This simple subtlety is
not a whole. At best it can no more than repeat itself
on and on to the horizon, ^{melting here,} ~~becoming~~ ~~zealless~~ through recurrence.
Man, for all his untrammelled eye, ~~is~~ ~~For~~ ~~wholeness~~
~~implies limit~~ ~~Wholeness~~ ~~For~~ a whole to be requires
a limit, and man ^{seeking} ~~the~~ ~~seeing~~ whole sees is expressing the
paradoxicality of his being, which ~~demand~~ at once demands
that it be untrammelled and ~~cries out~~ ~~it~~ pleads that it be
contained. The mountain lake, contained by hills whose
curves that ~~are~~ ^{meld as} hill and valley, ~~so~~ offers a whole
that a confid'oeil comprehends, and so speaks to man
as the incessant ~~of~~ repetition of the vast and empty open
ocean never can.

The Great Court has its beauty because it is a
whole, wherein the contained and the containing merge
in excellence. ~~The limestone houses~~ ~~Between the~~

containing masses, with their ~~upward~~ ~~aspiring~~ ~~soaring~~ verticals
 with their ~~strong~~ verticals and ~~subtle~~ ~~springing~~ verticals ~~but~~
 strong, stylized and cornice,
 The limestone mass that

Structure and site complement and sustain one another.
 The containing masses, strong in stylized and cornice,
 soaring ~~in~~ in pilaster and panel, are at one with ^{the} terraces
 and ^{the} trees they surround. Orienting the whole, the Great
 Dome ~~brings focus~~ ^{Full} The Colonnade of the entrance portico
 states the ~~whole~~ theme with central emphasis, and ~~one~~
~~joins the observer to~~ Soaring above it, the Great Dome
 orients the whole.

~~What larger subtleties are here To these greater subtleties~~

Many are the subtleties that contribute to this achieve-
 ment of beauty. The great architect who from far-away Van-
 cussion looks back with memory's eye to Cambridge has told of
 one - the date - tab on the drum of the dome, of "enormous value
 there, for without it, the dome would seem to wobble." There are
 many more. Nature does not design with square and plumb-lines,
 and so attains her subtle nuances. ~~To this principle ad-~~
~~herence to this principle Nature's example~~ Her subtle nuances
 can be traced and copied in the refinements of which architecture
 is capable. In the Court and entrance of the Institute, ~~not~~
~~only~~ the architect made all the parapet lines - spanning - the - sky
 incline gently, subtly, upward toward the culminating feature,
 the dome. ~~but~~ only Euxaxis marks the parapet edge, and melds

into the ~~apertures~~ upward lift that persuades ^{the eye of} the observer.
~~with~~ The columns of the great colonnade he set, not on a
 straight line from end to end, but on a curved line when
 the center is nine inches forward of the end points. Such
 subtleties, wedding, consecrate in beauty.

~~then~~ At the dedication of the Institute's Cambridge
 home in 1917, Ralph Adams Cross played the role of
 Merlin the Enchanter in the inaugural pageant that filled
 the Great Court with dancers, personages, and symbolism.
 Pageantry and pomp have faded into the past. The enchant-
 ment remains. It is the enchantment of beauty, of ex-
 cellence, which we owe to the artist and the per-
 ception of the Institute's architect, Walter Bosworth.

Temple 1 + 3

A Note on Excellence

Of a springtime morning, a summer noontide, an autumn twilight, a moonlit winter eve, the Great Court of the Institute is a place of peace and beauty. A quality of warmth and friendliness invests it, and a sense of pause and poise, and its scale is human and humane, whether the lawns are filled with recumbent valetudinarians or a single sojourner is strolling the walks. I find pleasure in the fact that these things are so, and interest in pondering why. What are the subtleties that, melding, consummate in beauty? To ask this is to ask what excellence is, for excellence and beauty are reciprocals.

Grass, bushes, trees--these are the raw elements of forest or jungle, yet ^a subtleties ^y may be compounded from them. Alone and scattered at random, they may combine to form Thoreau's "shaggy wilderness" where man has really no place of his own and where brute nature may yield a certain tingling thrill of terror to the sensitive ^{soul} observer, but where the civil ~~man~~ finds little lasting joy. The evocation of subtleties from them demands the interposition of mind, of sensibility, of aesthetic expression and response.

When this is given, grass becomes terraced greensward; bushes, shaped hedge and flowering shrub; trees at random, ranges of pattern and stately comity; chaos, the beginning of cosmos. Visual cacophony has yielded then to a motif, a theme suggested in the march of ~~an~~ oak and elm, a counterpoint of flowering crabs, and melodies of rhododendrons blooming--a simple subtlety has been achieved, the human scale has been approached.

Approached, yet not attained. We ask, demand, more. This simple subtlety is not a whole. At best, it can no more than repeat itself on and on to the horizon, melding never, becoming zestless through recurrence. For a whole to be requires a limit, and man seeking whole-

ness is expressing the paradoxicality of his being, which at once demands that it be untrammelled and pleads that it be contained. The mountain lake, ^{cupped} contained by curves that ^{blend as} ~~meld as~~ hill and valley, offers a whole that a coup d'oeil comprehends, and so speaks to man as the insensate repetitions of the vast and empty ocean never can.

The Great Court has its beauty because it is a whole, where the contained and the containing merge in excellence. Structure and site complement and sustain one another. The containing masses, strong in stylobate and entablature, ^{soaring} in pilaster and panel, are at one with the terraces and the trees they ^{embrace.} surround. The colonnade of the entrance portico ^{gives} states the full theme with central emphasis. ^{Rising} ~~Soaring~~ above it, the ^{Great} Dome ^{orients} the whole.

Many are the subtleties that contribute to this achievement of beauty. The great architect ^{who accomplished it, and} who from far-away Vaucresson looks back with memory's eye to Cambridge has told already of one--the date-tab on the drum of the dome, of "enormous value there, for without it, the dome would seem to rotate." ^{Lately he has told of others:} ~~There are many more.~~ Nature does not design with square and plumb-line. Her subtle nuances can be traced and echoed in the refinements of which architecture is capable. In the court and entrance of the Institute, the architect has made all the parapet lines-against-the-sky incline gently, subtly, upward toward the culminating feature, the dome. Entasis marks the parapet edge, and ^{flows into} ~~molds in~~ the upward lift that ~~persuades~~ persuades the eye of the observer. The columns of the great colonnade he has set, not on a straight line from end to end, but on a curved line where the center is nine inches forward of the end points. Such subtleties, ^{melding,} consummate in beauty.

At the dedication of the Institute's Cambridge home in 1917, ~~Ralph Adams Cram~~ ^{was enacted} played the rôle of Merlin the Enchanter in the inaugural pageant that filled the ^{Great} Court with dancers, personages,

and symbolism. Pageantry and pomop have paled into the past. The
enchantment remains. It is the enchantment of beauty, of excellence,
which we owe to the artistry and the humane perception of the
~~Institute's~~ ^{of the Institute} architect: Welles Bosworth.

--F. G. Fassett, Jr.

Prologue
to
M.I.T. Alumni Day Luncheon Address
by
President Julius A. Stratton
June 15, 1964

On the cover of the June issue of the Technology Review, there is a photograph of this Great Court; and inside, Fred Fassett has written a brief and eloquent appreciation of its charm and elegance. Our Court, he says, has in every season ".....a quality of warmth and friendliness, a sense of pause and poise, and its scale is human and humane, whether the lawns are filled -- as today -- or if only a sojourner is strolling its walks."

Those words were written as a tribute -- and as a birthday greeting -- to the architect who designed this beautiful expanse of lawn and trees and the stately buildings that surround it.

Last month Welles Bosworth of the Class of '89 observed his 95th birthday. For more than forty years -- in fact, ever since just after the First World War, when he was sent by Mr. Rockefeller to reconstruct the Palais de Versailles -- he has lived in the little village of Vaucresson just outside Paris. And those of us who from time to time have had the pleasure of calling on him there have developed a warm friendship for this delightful and remarkable man -- whose energy has seemed inexhaustible and whose ardent interest in everything that concerns the Institute has never faltered over the long span of years. Since that Commencement Day seventy-five years ago when he received his diploma, many things have changed about this M.I.T. that he has loved so much, but these magnificent buildings will remain for generations to come as a mark of his genius and

a reminder of his loyalty.

We had rather hoped that on this Alumni Day he might be with us, but since he felt it too long a journey, I have sent to him a testimonial of our affection and respect:

It reads as follows:

By this Resolution

The Corporation and the Faculty of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology send greetings to William Welles Bosworth '89

to commemorate the 75th anniversary of his graduation and to renew their homage for the gifts of his genius

Architect -- whose creative vision half a century ago -- endowed the Institute with a grand and timeless design --

Central to its purposes --

Favorable to growth -- and flexible in its mobility --

Symbolic of its aims and accomplishments --

I have promised him, too, that he would be very much in our thoughts today, and I know that you join with all of us in these good wishes.

Of a springtime morning, a summer noontide, an autumn twilight, a moonlit winter eve, the Great Court of the Institute is a place of peace and beauty. A quality of warmth and friendliness invests it, and a sense of pause and poise, and its scale is human and humane, whether the lawns are filled with recumbent valetudinarians or a single sojourner is strolling the walks. I find pleasure in the fact that these things are so, and interest in pondering why. What are the subtleties that, melding, consummate in beauty? To ask this is to ask what excellence is, for excellence and beauty are reciprocals.

Grass, bushes, trees--these are the raw elements of forest or jungle, yet subtleties may be compounded from them. Alone and scattered at random, they may combine to form Thoreau's "shaggy wilderness" where man has really no place of his own and where brute nature may yield a certain tingling thrill of terror to the sensitive observer, but where the civil ^{soul} ~~man~~ finds little lasting joy. The evocation of subtleties from them demands the interposition of mind, of sensibility, of aesthetic expression and response.

When this is given, grass becomes terraced greensward; bushes, shaped hedge and flowering shrub; trees at random, ranges of pattern and stately comity; chaos, the beginning of cosmos. Visual cacophony has yielded then to a motif, a theme suggested in the march of ~~the~~ oak and elm, a counterpoint of flowering crabs, and melodies of rhododendrons blooming--a simple subtlety has been achieved, the human scale has been approached.

Approached, yet not attained. We ask, demand, more. This simple subtlety is not a whole. At best, it can no more than repeat itself on and on to the horizon, melding never, becoming restless through recurrence. For a whole to be requires a limit, and man seeking whole-

ness is expressing the paradoxicality of his being, which at once demands that it be untrammelled and pleads that it be contained. The mountain lake, contained by curves that meld as hill and valley, offers a whole that a coup d'oeil comprehends, and so speaks to man as the insensate repetitions of the vast and empty ocean never can.

The Great Court has its beauty because it is a whole, where the contained and the containing merge in excellence. Structure and site complement and sustain one another. The containing masses, strong in stylobate and entablature, soaring in pilaster and panel, are at one with the terraces and the trees they surround. The colonnade of the entrance portico states the full theme with central emphasis. Soaring above it, the Great Dome orients the whole.

Many are the subtleties that contribute to this achievement of beauty. The great architect who from far-away Vaucresson looks back with memory's eye to Cambridge has told already of one--the date-tab on the drum of the dome, of "enormous value there, for without it, the dome would seem to rotate." There are many more. Nature does not design with square and plumb-line. Her subtle nuances can be traced and echoed in the refinements of which architecture is capable. In the court and entrance of the Institute, the architect has made all the parapet lines-against-the-sky incline gently, subtly, upward toward the culminating feature, the dome. Entasis marks the parapet edge, and melds in the upward lift that persuades the eye of the observer. The columns of the great colonnade he has set, not on a straight line from end to end, but on a curved line where the center is nine inches forward of the end points. Such subtleties, melding, consummate in beauty.

At the dedication of the Institute's Cambridge home in 1917, Ralph Adams Cram played the rôle of Merlin the Enchanter in the inaugural pageant that filled the Great Court with dancers, personages,

and symbolism. Pageantry and pomop have paled into the past. The enchantment remains. It is the enchantment of beauty, of excellence, which we owe to the artistry and the humane perception of the Institute's architect: Welles Bosworth.

--F. G. Fassett, Jr.