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**EMBODIMENTS OF ART, NARRATIVES OF ARCHITECTURE:  
IN THE SIR JOHN SOANE MUSEUM**

**Cécile Martin**

**History and Theory Program  
School of Architecture, McGill University  
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## ABSTRACT

Sir John Soane (1753-1837) is an intriguing character. This architect has transformed his London House into a Museum. The only thing we have left of him is the House and three Descriptions of it. I will not try to put apart what Sir John Soane has done in his House but see what he has done. Soane invites us in the House, lets you visit it and be lost. Once you have dived, accepted the invitation, you have found a house full of art objects gathered to teach architecture. Art and architecture meet. The experience is haunting. Through it the architect rediscovers the story of objects to identify, the everyday story he builds. The experience of the House is a mirroring of Soane's mind. The House which makes the architect understand his projection upon others. The amplitude and generosity of his vision becomes history.

Sir John Soane (1753-1837) est un personnage intrigant. Cet architecte a transformé sa maison londonienne en musée. La seule chose qu'il nous reste de lui est sa Maison et les trois Descriptions qu'il en a fait. Je ne vais pas essayer de décortiquer ce que John Soane fait mais de voir ce qu'il a fait. Soane nous invite dans la maison, nous la laisse visiter et s'y perdre. Une fois qu'on y a plongé, accepté l'invitation, l'on trouve une maison pleine d'objets d'art assemblés pour enseigner l'architecture. L'art et l'architecture se rencontrent. L'expérience hante. Par celle-ci, l'architecte redécouvre l'histoire des objets à identifier, l'histoire quotidienne qu'il construit. L'expérience de la maison est le miroir de la pensée de Soane. La maison qui fait comprendre à l'architecte sa projection sur les autres. L'amplitude et la générosité de sa vision devient histoire

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I would most of all like to thank Professor Alberto Perez-Gomez without who's trust this thesis would have never been possible; the Sir John Soane Museum and Susan Palmer who kindly greeted me and accepted that I take pictures of the House; Terrance Galvin who has supported me throughout my research; and the CCA (Canadian Center for Architecture) for its kind library staff, and the numerous volumes of the Description I have consulted and taken two imprints from.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sir John Soane (1753-1837) has given his London house to become a National Museum. He, is the architect of the Bank of England, professes architecture at the Royal-Academy and is the patient collector and builder of the House-Museum that will give architecture to tomorrow's England.

Soane has left us with three objects: a house, an art and book collection, and their Description. The state known of the House today, after three versions of the Description is all we can judge by, in understanding the use of an art collection to teach architecture for Soane. In order to understand who Soane is, I want to respect the fact that he does not explain his acts. He solely invites others to look at them. Soane's collection is mostly one of paintings, sculptures and fragments of buildings. Architectural models as accessories appear in the last room of his house Description. Not that they are secondary but they are only the bulk, not the core of the architect's learning. Soane does not use the drawing to teach the act itself of projecting architecture unto paper. Soane uses art, not as a tool, but to share a vision. Soane explores one vision and it's many parameters, as opposed to an object and the exploration of its many uses. Soane uses art to teach architecture and to continue a self-teaching of it, not as an artist that experiences art production but as an architect who uses art to produce meaning of lives. My goal is to understand Soane's attitude through his productions, what he has intently left us with. My will is to respect this dimension and only look at what Soane has given us to look at. Here will only be stated the why of my interest in Sir John Soane. An interest in a two-century-old character, similar to the interest he had himself in the everlasting power of antiquity.

My aim is not to make another description of the Sir John Soane House-Museum. I have enough respect for John Soane that I suspect him to have already done what he thought sufficient in writing his own three Descriptions of the House. My goal is to understand why his house is still important to us today, what non-revealed secret it beholds for architects, and why Soane thought the way he did it was the best. This look at Soane will try to understand what the Sir John Soane



House is about; understand the different points of view conflicting around it. Whereas those who have tried to explain the core of Soane's work have dried him out; it seems nothing is to be searched for in Soane and maybe that is why the effect is so strong on each person entering the House for the first time and mostly on non-architects. Scholars have looked at his architecture. They have looked into his intellectual background. They have leaned upon his house. Nevertheless, to look solely at one dimension of the person, a cut taken through, is to not consider that he was many more. Soane had chosen to be this complex character in view of all the possible he had at hand in building architecture. Thus Soane becomes for many a contradictory man, very lonesome and distant, yet the organizer of candle-lit open house evenings.

Soane only exists in what we see in him, in the respect we have of his legacy, of him as being fully an architect and facing architectural questions. My attempt is to question my relation to him, my will to obsessively revisit the house and understand it. The House endlessly escapes me yet the desire to approach it never dies.

This study encircles the character. It is not a throughout study of the how, but more a questioning of the why. The experience of the House and the Descriptions behold the answer to the why and how of their use.

The question here is not asked as the answer to a theory, but like Soane, as the constitution of a tool to practice architecture. The information hidden within Soane's work is the teaching on the architecture found in it. My thesis research is structured, as Soane's own approach to architecture has been patiently accumulated.

I want to raise the topic of the relation between art and architecture: the usefulness of one for the other. Not only as how architecture uses art but as the way it sees art and sees itself. Art not only being a tool, but a revelation of the way Soane envisioned his work, his duty as an architect and architecture's place in the world. The way he finally understood the world, his place within it and his vision of it.

The architect should understand more than others in the House should. It has been intently made for him, yet the Sir John Soane is filled with artifacts of a more general culture.

As architect myself, I want to question the Sir John Soane House on three points. Name what I experience, what I see and what I understand around the questioning of three objects: the House and Museum, the art collected and the architecture to build. Two things constantly play between themselves for my study, the overlaps of time between Soane's and my own, the question of my interest and his.

However carefully arranged as to general effect, or advantageously displayed as to light and shadow, the works of Art here described may be, it is obvious, that in so extensive and various a Collection, some objects of great interest may require that the eye should be expressly directed to them. Without such guidance, many of the smaller Models and Sculptures might be overlooked, by those who will delight in tracing their happy conception and delicate workmanship, when thus led to them as subjects of consideration. But besides my hope of being a useful guide to those who visit the House and Museum, and of conveying to those who have not seen them some idea of the manner in which the works of Art are arranged and the different effects are produced, I was influenced by other motives in printing the following Description.

One of the objects I had in view was to show, partly by graphic illustrations, the union and close connexion between Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, - Music and Poetry; - another purpose is the natural desire of leaving these works of Art subject as little as possible to the chance of their being removed from the positions relatively assigned to them; they having been arranged as studies for my own mind, and being intended similarly to benefit the Artists of future generations. This Description, however, was chiefly written for the advantage of the Architect, who will, I trust, become sensible, from the examination to which it leads him, that every work of Art which awakens his ideas, stimulates his industry, purifies his taste, or gives solidity to his judgment, is to him a valuable instructor; and may probably lay the foundation of that knowledge which may enable him to become an ornament and benefit to his country. To secure a lasting reputation, let him constantly remember, throughout the entire practice of his Profession, that, like the virtue of Caesar's wife, his integrity must be not only pure, but unsuspected.

To render the following pages more pleasing and attractive to young minds, and to increase their love for the Fine Arts, pictorial and poetical remarks on some of the most prominent features of the House and Museum, written by a Lady, have been embodied with my own Description.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1835. Exordium, p. vii-viii.

Description of the Plates, &c.

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- plate I. Page 1.  
 perspective view of the entrance front of the house.  
 plate II. Page 1.  
 plan of the ground floor.  
 plate III. Page 3.  
 view in the breakfast-room.  
 plate IV. Page 3.  
 view in the recess behind the Apollo.  
 plate V. Page 5.  
 plan of the basement story.  
 plate VI. Page 6.  
 view in the parlor of padre giovanni.  
 plate VII. Page 8.  
 view of the room adjoining the sepulchral chamber.  
 plate VIII. Page 9.  
 view of the sarcophagus in the centre of the sepulchral chamber.  
 plate IX.  
 some of the details of the sarcophagus.  
 plate X. Page 14.  
 view of the picture-room.  
 plate XI. Page 19.  
 view of the north end of the dining-room.  
 plate XII. Page 20.  
 view of the south end of the library.  
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 view of the Shakespeare recess.  
 plate XIV. Page 22.  
 plans of the first floor, chamber floor, and attic.  
 plate XIV.\* Page 22.  
 view of the loggia in the south front, communicating with the drawing-room.  
 plate XV. Page 23.  
 view in the tivoli recess.  
 plate XV.\* Page 24.  
 view of the loggia in the south front, communicating with the principal chamber.  
 plate XVI. Page 25.  
 view of the model-room.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832. Description of the Plates, &c. Throughout quotes taken from Soane's different versions of the Description of his House, the numbers set between brackets refer to the corresponding Plates listed at the beginning of the prints and inserted between the pages of the volume.

## CHAPTER 1 A House or a Museum, Soane's Legacy.

### 1.1 an object given to posterity: a house, a museum and three descriptions.

#### 1.1.1 Two Descriptions of the House: the 1830 and 1832 versions.

John Soane had been collecting art within his House and Museum for many years when he decided to write and publish a Description of it.

Description of the House and Museum on the North side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane, Professor of Architecture in the Royal Academy; One of the Architects Attached to his Majesty's Office of Works; Architect to the Bank of England and College of Surgeons; F.R.S. R.A. F.S.A.; Grand Superintendent...<sup>3</sup>

And two years later, he repeats the strain:

Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane, Professor of Architecture in the Royal Academy; One of the Architects Attached to his Majesty's Office of Works; Architect to the Bank of England and College of Surgeons; F.R.S. R.A. F.S.A.; Grand Superintendent of the Works of the United Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of England; Member of the Academies of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, in Parma and Florence. London, 1832

The titles for the first two Descriptions of the House written by Soane are similar. Within them holds a multiplication of dimensions. John Soane presents himself as a character; one singular yet playing many roles. The many dimensions named are impossible to grasp as a whole, identify as related. The reader needs to be within the House to experience them, name the way these differently meet; through an encounter with the house the professor, architect and collector has lived in, within both the residence of an architect and a Museum. The visitor will then define his understanding of Soane.

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<sup>3</sup> Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields: the Residence of Sir John Soane, &c.* London, 1830.

Sir John Soane is a practicing architect, one collecting art and teaching architecture through it. Sir John Soane is above all architect and professor. He is an architect collecting art. His house is both the product of these multiple characters incarnated within one actor and the link to an understanding of why these specific ones ultimately connect.

Description of the Residence of John Soane Architect; with some general remarks on the State of Architecture in England in the nineteenth century, and on the qualifications and duties of an architect, Etc. Etc. Etc. London, 1830.

As clearly mapped out within the above sub-title, this first version of the Description contains two parts. One consists of the tools the reader will use and need to know in order to explore who is John Soane. This first part beholds an *Introduction*, an *Index to the Plates*, and the *Description*, &c. itself. An *Appendix* constitutes the second part of the print, as an after-thought or thought to be brought after one has been driven through the House. This part is a kind of guideline to the thoughts brought about as the reader sets himself within the world his visit has disclosed. After having described his House as an experience to live from within, Sir John Soane raises the more general aspect of architecture as a practice.

At the end of the *Description*, &c is repeated a passage from the *Introduction* through which device is the first part wrapped up. To Soane's own writing are added quotations from Alberti, three from Vitruvius and one from Roland Virloys printed in their original language. Mostly for the purpose, as Soane confirms in the 1832 version of the *Description*, that:

Vitruvius teaches us what architects should be; and Monsieur Roland Virloys, recognising the sentiments of Vitruvius, tells us what Architects now are.<sup>4</sup>

After having gone through the art collector's House, the text places itself into a more general architectural discourse, borrowing to timeless architects their look upon architecture. The *Description*, &c then ends by Soane's own writing printed in a smaller font.

If the foregoing statement is applicable to England, we may easily believe that Architects sometimes associate with contractors and their subalterns; if, unfortunately for

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<sup>4</sup> Soane, John. "Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields: the Residence of Sir John Soane, &c." London, 1832, p29&30

Architecture, this be the fact, the statement of Monsieur Virloys is applicable to England, the practice of Architecture can no longer be considered honourable to its professors, or advantageous to the employer. O Architecture! thou Queen of the Fine Arts, -- my first love, -- my friend through life, and the prop of my declining years, how art thou fallen, fallen, fallen!

An *Appendix* seventeen pages long follows the *Description*. Within it different topics are approached. These appear in a simile-classified alphabetical order. Painters, artists and architects, as well as rooms within the House are listed. As varied topics as: *Architecture (...) in all its different stages of rise, progress, and decline; Bonaparte, Portrait of, and description of the circumstances under which it was painted; That I am no enemy to fair and open competitions, will be seen by referring to one of my Lectures*, and many others appear.

A listing of the artists or objects to be seen within the *Description* accompanies the pages containing them. This section ends with eight pages presenting the "divided Architects into five classes". At the end of it all, one can read:

Much more might be said respecting the state of Architecture in England, in the nineteenth century, and on the situation in which Architects are now placed, but "le temps dévoilera bien des choses; alors on saura pourquoi je me tais." -- ROUSSEAU

THE END<sup>5</sup>

#### Description of the Residence of Sir John Soane, Architect.

The 1832 version's short title has John Soane's name transformed into Sir John Soane. The author has been ennobled. This confirmed character adds a supplementary distancing of Soane from his work. It is a consequence of what patient endless labor can bring; to become an architect is a skill demanding task, but further more, a whole man demanding one. It is the way to become anew this man.

The 1832 *Description* has condensed its contents as the short title has. Pages have been narrowed down from 56 to a total of 27. The *Description* now contains new sections. The three

*Introduction, Description of the Plates, &c.* and *Description, &c* known parts of the first version are now the bulk of the print. What used to be assembled in a second half of the Description is now presented with fully individualized headings as *the Names of the British Artists Whose works are in this Collection.*, *Names of the Foreign Artists Whose works are in this Collection*, the *Napoleon Bonaparte*, the *Belzoni Sarcophagus* and *the Guanches* related story placed before the *Description, &c.* They are squeezed between the *Introduction* and *Description of the Plates, &c.* A plate 0 with an engraved Bust of Sir John Soane and a dedication to Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex have appeared in the first pages of the volume.

This version of the *Description* now ends by Soane's own words. His engraved bust makes him also more present and visible. The English and Foreign artists Soane has collected, impose themselves more upon the reader in the way they are named and listed. Although through the narrative of Napoleon, Soane states his interest in the character, Soane also states his own difference from foreign identities. The Description still titles with an *&c.*, the process of constitution of a totality assumed character is not yet ended. The House is not yet finished.

In the preceding pages the situation of the several rooms in the House and Museum have been traced by reference to the figures on the several plans, --some of the works of ancient and modern Art have been noticed, --and the connexion between the Fine Arts has been shewn by graphic illustrations.

I have now to add, that this House, Museum, and Library, will be open two days a week, during several months in the year, for the inspection of Amateurs and Students in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture.<sup>6</sup>

Soane is in search of a knowledge recognized by others. One that he has the capacity to give to all for their own personal interest and sake.

In this second version, the core of the text, the act of collecting and assembling a Museum justifies itself as an architectural act. Beyond the act itself, the essence of architecture, the attitude of an honest architect is to be seen. It can show itself to the world and be shared once

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<sup>5</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1830, p 56.

<sup>6</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832, p.26.



the act of writing the *Description* is fully assumed. The text of the *Description* has not changed, apart from a few phrase adjustments. John Soane bores the architect within him and makes him visible. Quotes, reference to others' sayings on architecture disintegrate. Soane is a full character. One visible, defining himself as he opposes to, shows in order to make a clear difference to what he is not: an artist, or a foreigner. If the 1830 *Description of the House* is a statement on architecture, by 1832 it has become an act of incarnation of the architect. Soane defines foreigners to him as limiting and opposed influence.

#### Names of Foreign Artists Whose Works are in this Collection<sup>7</sup>

And for that sake, death icons, fragments of antiquity, paintings, books, all objects accumulated within the House represent what Soane is not, has not done or experienced.

The *Description* is about experiencing movement from one dimension to another from one space, from one room, corner or painting to another. Soane names a movement and orientation. He talks of objects the reader does not see. Ones he only reads about. Soane does not only describe this object through its naming. He tells its story. The essence of the object lies beyond its appearance on completed listings. The reader is induced to be conscious of all he does not know. The *Description* is not an end in itself, a minute description of all the artifacts within the House. The *Description* of the Sir John Soane House carries a meaning within. Each reader will experience it differently. This experience constitutes the roots of the Museum. The experience lived as the reader goes through the book is parallel to the one to be felt, encountered within the Museum. The *Description* really tells us about the Museum. More than if the whole collection had been filed.

#### 1.1.2 the Act of Parliament: the House turning into a Museum

Once Soane has written the last *Description* of his House, it has turned into a Museum. The act of collecting becomes history; a story that is not Soane's anymore.

In 1833, the Sir John Soane Residence on the North Side of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, London, becomes National Museum of England by Act of Parliament. It is to this day the smallest of them. Usually museums emerge from a unique vision that gathers similar artifacts to their view. The Sir John Soane Museum is the house of the collector, in which took place a patient gathering of a heart's enlightenment. Each room within the Museum has a specific character; a particularity of its own. The characteristics are marked and bring about, a labyrinthine walk where each room is a different piece in itself.

The visitor keeps memory of his path. He will walk away with a disorienting experience. It is then possible for him to visit anew the Museum, walk through it in his mind, through his memory of it. The collection has been frozen by Act of Parliament yet the experience of it has not stiffened. It will live anew with every visitor it welcomes. The Museum exists solely because the visitor sees, perceives or takes a certain angle in meeting it. As he passes through the House, objects gathered present themselves on all sides. The visitor has no time to take knowledge of them all. Each new visit gives him time to discover other collected items and views. Each new visit will disclose new objects and new relations between them. The visitor builds the narrative specific to this walk that will reconnect them. This guest has not been invited in the House only to admire the thoughts of another.

The Sir John Soane Museum is a tool to reveal objects beyond their first level of appearance. The complexity Soane has struggled with all his life throughout is crystallized. The Museum begins a new life. Sir John Soane becomes the owner of an embodied Museum visible to others. He can now proudly present himself, his masterpiece, his bust. His creation has a whole life of its own. As John Soane states this ownership, he credits his limited power over his creation and its becoming.

### 1.1.3 after the House, a Museum: 1835.

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<sup>7</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832.

After the Parliament has recognized John Soane's masterpiece, his House and Collection take on the part of a fully assumed act of architecture.

In the year 1833, the House becomes object, has solidified. It has turned into matter, becoming a Museum. It has frozen into an object.

In 1835 Soane then writes a third version of the *Description*. This last version has been printed yet will never make it to the publisher. A hundred and fifty copies are printed, enclosing both a French and English version of the text. This third version is a collector's item, an object in itself, identifiable, owning a personal story.

Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane, Professor of Architecture in the Royal Academy, one of the Architects Attached to His Majesty's Office of Works, Architect to the Bank of England and College of Surgeons, F.R.S. R.A. F.S.A. Grand Superintendent of the Works of the United Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of England, Membre Honoraire de l'Academie Imperiale et Royale des Beaux Arts en Vienne, consigliere corrispondente della Ducale Academia di Belle Arte, Parma, &c. &c. &c. With Graphic Illustrations and Incidental Details. Not published. Only 150 copies printed. London, 1835.

If the unrolling of the title to the *Description* has not changed, the qualifications attached to Sir John Soane's name have expanded its frontiers. Soane has more confidence, trust in his character. The Plate 0 still presents his bust.

In the 1835 *Description*, Soane disappears from the Museum. His mind appears. The text includes the *Appendix* of the second version in its core, bringing it to 107 pages. Soane affirms himself. The House turned into a Museum has turned into an object distanced from the creator. The House has built a character -- others share the Museum.

With its 107 pages, the *Description* becomes a poetic and illustrated version of the House. Other points of view are inserted inside the text. Soane has an increasing confidence in his work; he invites others to confront in the chore of the text itself. Quotations disappear.

A Description of the Residence of Sir John Soane Architect. Written by himself.

The short title here becomes more concise and Soane names the possibility of other descriptions to which he opposes the "Description (...) Written by himself".

The structure of the text has changed, now containing:

- A dedication *To His Royal Highness Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, &c. &c. &c. &c.*
- An *Exordium*.
- *List of Plates*, with added vignettes by B.H.
- *Divisions of the House*
- *Names of the Artists whose works are Contained in the House and Museum.*
- *Description of the House and Museum.*
- *Conclusion.*
- *Act of Parliament.*

The House is no more in search of an identifiable wholeness to be defined. It can exist in full expansion of itself, close to its essence. It can then explore all the roads as thus. The *Description* becomes a real invitation: a text for the reader to enter and take possession of, as his woman friend poet has.

No more foreign artists are listed, or identification to Napoleon. Lists are straightforward and the *Introduction* of the 1830 version becomes the end statement of the *Conclusion* in the last version. Now the naming is more confident of its power. It lies beyond any opposition, confrontation to as did appear in Soane's second version of the *Description of the House*. A confrontation securing John Soane from any misinterpretation, non-visibility; as he hid from any direct attack. John Soane has become a full character.

A learned Lord is to fit to every situation encountered, yet be himself. Refinement is to be visible yet let the freedom to others to express their view. The text ends no more by references, it ends by a poem by B.H. Soane does not need the help of distant thinkers any more but the look of a contemporary, a woman poet to ground his masterpiece.

## 1.2 experience the house as a whole, a context in itself

### 1.2.1 a visitor lost within accumulated objects

A central character.

The Sir John Soane Museum is befitted to teach architecture. It conveys meaning. Yet the interest does not lie in what objects or architecture the House beholds but in the core of the Museum: the ersatz of architecture. Collected, accumulated objects within the walls remind the visitor to what Soane points out. The meaning of architecture is not within the architecture of the House. Soane is not in search of a better shaped, complex, functionally fitted to its purpose architecture. The essence of what he says does not lie in the dimensions of the objects visible at first encounter.

The House of Sir John Soane and the Descriptions he has written of it are built as narratives into which the visitor is the central character. His feelings and moving through the House are the only facts he can rely on as he cuts through this overcrowded collection. Passing through the House-Museum, the invited guest recognizes familiar experiences. Having left the Museum, he remembers the place because he sees himself wander through it again. He revisits his memory, the experience he beholds of the place.

Objects he has met with teach him on his relation to the world. He recognizes them as meaningful. These objects he can reveal and play with as he visits the architecture. Each art object bores a different dimension. These come together again, as they would be brought together in the world yet this time in a manly production, a creation of architecture, a space of togetherness to be lived in infinitely different ways yet to be met with other's experiences. Meaning exists in the presence of these objects for a reason beyond the encounter itself. Within the House, each meaningful dimension named by the art pieces is placed back in a general gathering bored by the architecture of the place.

The pictorial effects, from the catching lights and shades, will be duly appreciated by the students and lovers of art<sup>8</sup>

The *Description of the House* invites the visitor to follow the discovery through the plan or the

actual walk through the House. The text is filled with participating invitations.

From this part of the Museum you enter another part thereof (...) Returning from the Oratory, you proceed to the Parloir of Padre Giovanni (...) <sup>9</sup>

Inside the Museum, not one reason to the collection is at reach. The visitor must know where he wants to go, where he wants to stand and at the same time be completely opened. He stands within equilibrium of opposites. This uncertainty reveals other points of view to him; those enclosed within the art pieces. Within this uncertainty, the visitor names his own look upon things and goes ahead. He heads towards something he does not know; he is acting for a reason unknown to him. The real core is not visible. There possibly is not only one reason to the happening, the assembling of the collection.

Sir John Soane writes a *Description* where objects and rooms of the House fuse.

The entrance into the centre division is distinguished by cinerary Urns, &c.; and the Ceiling, in compartments, is highly ornamented with Casts from the Antique, and from Fragments preserved of modern buildings. <sup>10</sup>

The story is built along. The House is a grid, a situation of named rooms. Within this structure, transition from one room to the other becomes an issue, that's where the observer stands, sees himself and decides of the meaning of his path. He realizes where he stands by looking at himself within. His meeting the different elements structures the different characters, but not more. This meeting is no means to an end.

The visitor passes through the rooms, looks at the various details along the way. Only the memory of an imprinted effect on his mind and senses carries him through. He goes from one room to the other, following the sun and orienting inscriptions nailed above the doors. He constantly reorients himself. He looses all his marks and focuses on the constant memory and awareness of where he stands.

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<sup>8</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832, p4.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, p 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, p 4.

On the north side is a Statue of the Ephesian Diana; and on the south, the deified Esculapius, a small Statue of Venus, &c. (...) From the south side of this part of the Museum you enter the Recess. (...) Leaving the Recess (8), descending three steps, in the Colonnade (9), you enter the north aisle of the Museum (10).<sup>11</sup>

The visitor placing himself in constant opposition to the surrounding elements raises the narrative. This never-ending opposition of parameters builds the House. An opened room will lead him to an enclosed one. A room filled with paintings will be totally slick in its architecture, the next being filled with shelved sculptures that come at him. The windows, views, sky openings, as well as a view into the next room's skyline give the needed escape to this overcrowding coming at him. As he enters the deepest place in the House, filled with the Sarcophagus, he passes under the greatest descent, light well and next to a stage, surrounded by balconies like in an Italian garden. The experience of this other place is recreated with the artifacts involved.

After shadow comes the brightest glow. If the House stays incomprehensible to many it is because the generosity of Soane's attitude has revealed a whole world, a trace of the world. The greatness of the Museum does not lie within its size, but within a non-sizable complexity. The Sir John Soane Museum gives the one who rides along constant stepping stones that identify him. Nevertheless, these are instantly put back into context, relayed by others. Only his senses can guide and orient him. Consciousness solely gives the visitor no power of understanding.

If he follows the indicated path, the overcrowding of objects touches the visitor lightly.

### 1.2.2 a scholar lost within too much information: a deviated relation to the House.

Depending on the point of view adopted upon Sir John Soane's work, the different traces of his life left behind, can appear to be as many fragments.

Whereas "the breakfast Parlor is the most discussed space in Soane's Museum"<sup>12</sup>

"Mrs. Hoffland has nothing to say about color in the Breakfast Parlor"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, p 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> ISOSAKI, Arata. "Sir John Soane's Museum. A Conversation Piece Without a Family." *Apollo*, CCCXXXVIII

Sir John Soane is indiscernible, full of contradictions. He expresses himself in various ways yet says nothing. This most unusual characteristic startles those who feel Soane as an architect who does so much, yet of whom one approaching his work can never totally grasp what it is he is doing. Soane stands both as a character overall impossible to outline or grasp in totality, yet total. He seems to be present everywhere, deeply grounded; yet endlessly escaping any enclosing definition.

John Soane opposes himself to Arthur Bolton whom in 1930, at the time he was at the head of the Sir John Soane Museum, republishes the 'Description of the House'. John Soane would not have been the one to either publish an extensive *Catalogue of the Library in Sir John Soane's Museum*. As it has been *printed for the use of the Trustees in London, in the year 1878 [Not Published]*. This volume covered in over 415 pages, the nearing 8000 volumes of the Soane collection. Sir John Soane would neither have thought of a:

*Concise Catalogue of Architectural Drawings at Sir John Soane's Museum.*

As published by Margaret Richardson of Cambridge in 1996. These scholars carefully list all the objects enclosed within the Museum yet they evince the core of the collection, which is the patient experience. Soane's choice of an object to include or place it within his collection follows no rational path. Scholars, without naming the reason of their own work, omit to name their vision, relation to the collection. They do not respect the *Description* written by Sir John Soane as a whole, an object to which they confront. An object that they surround yet never see on all sides at the same time. These authors never position themselves as characters playing within the House. They never really question what they are learning through their study, what they are really studying or hope to teach through their labor. They disassemble Sir John Soane's masterpiece to bring it to the level of their own limited vision.

Soane does not show or explain the detailed meaning of separated pieces of art, of plates inserted into the *Description* itself. No explanation, rational demonstration or detailed meaning is shown through the pages. The meaning of each art piece, the reason of its having been placed there is beyond what story it illustrates. The story within the representation is a means, as

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(1990).



Soane's own *Description of the House* is a story. Some parts stay in the shadow, to be doubted or imagined. Most of all, the art needs to be experienced through the House. An art piece is more than an object, an influence on the surrounding.

Soane's collection seems to cast a non-ending vision of fragments to the agreeing scholars. Each identifies the House as the remembrance of another timely or spatially displaced world. Each fragment is, in an agreed convenient way, analyzed separately then put back, reassembled in either Soane's House, or the *Description* of it.

One striking feature of the three editions of the *Description* of Soane's collection that he published between 1830 and 1835 is the fact that he chooses to travel through the house by different routes.<sup>14</sup>

Sir John Soane is either a collector, a practicing architect, a professor, or many more, as the title of the *Description* states it. Yet never is he perceived as being all of these at the same time, reconciled in the eye of the analyst. Only the House seems to embody the wholeness of the character. The *Description* holds the key to this mysterious connection.

Yet any analyst must look beyond the formal aspect of the plan to what is Soane's concealed intention, as what the name of each room discloses for instance. The House is more than a simple internal play of organization within the Museum, a third dimension emerging from a "vertical layering of plans"; different layers of grid and space not visible from the outside.

Soane's point of view seems to be strongly stated. Yet there lies in his work a repetitious process questioning scholars as to his capacity of innovating. Soane has paintings of the same projects endlessly commissioned, when he himself copies elements of architecture he admires. And he has three versions of the same *Description* reprinted and published. Soane does not seem to be going anywhere yet no one can doubt that he knows what he is doing.

The importance lies in the keeping of this paradox -- even if Soane himself does not escape the copying of shapes he encounters. Soane's teaching and quest goes beyond the first relation to the object. The essence of Sir John Soane's work, to be found within the Museum, goes beyond

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<sup>13</sup> THORNTON, Peter. "The Soane as It Was (and Will Be)." *Apollo*, CCCXXXVIII (1990).

<sup>14</sup> ELSNER, John. "A Collector's Model of Desire: The House and Museum of Sir John Soane." In: *The*

a simple formal analysis of shapes or given data that would have enabled the creator to manage dimensions of reality. These analysis, as they surround art or architecture, mortify them until they become nothing more than simple objects. In the House, Soane transmits at once to the visitor, a teaching for life, for all possible situations: the one that has art and architecture meet in which is kept a vision and endlessly questioned the viewer's relation to the world.

Soane sets a global vision. The writings on him leave a whole side of his power non-revealed. Soane's world beholds a strange power, which releases no interpretation of itself without the naming of the viewer's personal look upon it. One is forced to name what is of importance to him, the meaningfulness of this experience.

No list can exhaustively name all the objects contained within Sir John Soane's House & Museum. This is not Soane's concern. The first pages only list the artists worthy of notice. This writing does not will to be a cultural encyclopedia.

The House is built upon a global vision of the world and not on a fragmented one, being made of different systems. It is consequently possible to see contradiction as a unifying factor and not as a separator of things. Contradiction exists internally to each system and externally: it is the universal law that ties things together, a law issued by Soane's view of things. This movement towards a global vision accounts for Soane's own behavior and to how he is linked to the world. It also renders possible to not search for systems, for one truth, but for the right middle as variation accorded to the situation and to a changing attitude within the House.

The *Description* becomes an awareness for the visitor of what he has perceived, and for Soane of what he produces. Awareness then emerges of the relation between the objects, and of their meaning not solely enclosed within objects themselves but within their gathering seen as a whole, through Soane's attitude of gathering and displaying them together.

My own aim has quite been opposite to the one scholars have adopted. I have been following Soane's guidelines of trusting my senses and digging into the Museum by incessant visits or

walks through it. My related experience takes place at different levels: reading of Soane's own *Description*, visiting the House, taking pictures, reading comments, and relating my own perception of it all.

I could not know beforehand what I was looking for, where I was going. I was unable to canalize my energies towards the essential questions because I did not know them beforehand. They rose from my constant revisit of the House.

There exists a difference between an accumulation of objects of reference, set as a securing of one's thoughts, and a conscious experience of these objects' presence in one's realm. The consciousness given through a lived experience is different from the one given by the analytical observation of objects or of facts surrounding these. The visitor is to name the experiences he lives with, and name the meaning enclosed within them. Experiences are memories to be carried to other situations, and not limitations to a single encounter. Meaning given through the memory of an experience in an art piece, painting, in materiality opposes itself to meaning held within life itself. One identifies the objects surrounding these experiences in order to reuse them, capture them to be revealed anew in non-related times.

The art piece is imprisoned within a unique level of meaning when perceived as a scientifically labeled object or one meant to produce an experience of consciousness.

The visitor goes through the Museum, crosses it. The purpose of this ritual is not about the objects the visitor is going to meet or that he can name. Whether he meets with an ancient, new object, or any other one labeled under a specific tag, the visitor will experience the passing from one to the other as an accumulation as if viewing a frozen snap-shot of the different rooms. Whereas the teaching is about equilibrium the visitor can feel as he goes through the House, a felt serenity within him, an unnamed center. Architecture is this unnamable center. The visitor feels architecture as he embodies it.

### 1.2.3 Soane's collecting process: choosing to get lost, experience himself in all situations

Soane experiences a likewise wandering within his collecting process. Only the visible traces of this proceeding stay. Only as he dives into the experience of the House, is revealed the path taken by Soane and to be experienced once more by those entering the maze. Only this will to commit lets the guest enter Soane's own track. Leaving him with the freedom of personal interpretation, fed anew of his own positions forever different and yet always the same: a naming of him.

The placing of the objects in the Museum has been set as an instantaneous shot of Soane's mind. This act has not been done in accordance with any organizational pattern. It more so beholds an organic structure. Soane does not place himself in a specific place within his House. He is undeniably present in every corner of it yet he remains impossible to grasp in totality. The revelation is first and foremost one of himself as the viewer looks at Soane.

Soane is a practitioner yet he builds a theory, or at least questions it. Soane shows his house, his vision, to create long-term persistent meanings; not to produce a handbook to induce a religious repetition of his work. Soane's legacy is everywhere, paradoxical and stays a mystery to careful scholars. As when Soane turns his House inwards, away from Lincoln's Inn Fields, one of the few London parks, burying it. John Soane creates a maze in which flickering sun beams descending from the rooftop's zenithal skylights, caresses the overcrowding of objects hanging off the walls. The visitor hears distant echoes of other visitors he will rarely cross. The House turned on the inward produces a feel of being in a garden.

Soane in that regard names elements, never the contradiction, the relation between them, the meaning of their meeting. If he did so, he would stiffen, freeze their meeting in a specific time and situation whereas the goal is to be able to reuse it in any other time and context; narrowing down their meeting to one level.

Meanwhile, Soane is very conscious of global issues of meaning at stake. These he constantly keeps in mind as he plays with entwined details. Thus the House is visible as a totality, but only through the unnamable intrinsic quality of each detail.

The House of Sir John Soane is not built starting from a formal pre-conception of what it would look like. It has been conceived from the inside. Every detail leads the visitor to understand the

global view at stake. No global starting point has led Soane to resolve problematics down to the most minute one. The Museum is a response to a wide range of factors out of which the shape of it has come.

Everybody recognizes the Picture-Room as the most achieved of Soane's rooms within the House. Objects move and the one present can sit, observe. Objects move and he reassuringly perceives them from all sides. He is left with the sense of having grasped the bulk of the experience. Yet the Picture-Room regarding the rest of the Museum is to be recognized, absorbed as a temporary rest without chairs. The meaning of these moving walls within a whirlpool of rooms may seem obvious. Yet it is not so easily perceptible up-front in regard to how Soane plays in the rest of the House at distorting, blurring the perception of the accumulated given factors. Architecture adapts to the objects it beholds: a change of room, a change of theme, a change of architectural treatment, of openings, shelving, and pathway. The Picture-Room sustains stability; the visitor sits and admires revolving panels that disclose representations of other realities. The Dressing-Room, on the other hand the visitor does not really want to stay in, as it reminds him of the intangibility of life, its fragility, the faking of appearances. He needs to escape from it. He has an open view on all sides, yet he cannot sit to admire the room. It is unstable. The visitor is destabilized. The slick walls are yet porous on every side. The Writing Room next to it is on the other hand an enclosed room. No views come out of it. Windows are clustered, paintings do not ornate the room. Sculptures are arranged on shelves that advance into it. This room inspires. The visitor turns around to himself as he expresses the meaning of the experience he has gone through in the rest of the House.

Even if only this latter can permit him to tell, retell, relive, transmit, and will to build this memory to live anew infinity and share. Only consciousness sets this man in temporality, in opposition to the everlasting peace of nature. Yet only consciousness enables him to bypass this condition.

Soane accumulates objects. He does not just project in thought, theorize on architecture. Soane does not paint. The object is a gatherer of lived experience. He accumulates named data. He observes the world within which he is submerged. If it is impossible to perceive Soane's world

other that caught inside it, yet only this world can tell us whom he is and where he stands. Only the experience of the House can reveal the intricacy of readings within it.

The duality of conflicting factors surrounding Soane transmits meaning to the visitor. Soane places himself within, experiences the situation in order to transmit this state of being.

Soane uses art, not as a tool, not to show what he is but to share a vision. Soane shows one vision and its many parameters as opposed to one object and its many uses.

He uses art to teach architecture and to continue a self-teaching through it, not as an artist that experiences art production but as an architect who uses art to reveal meaning in the realm of life.

Soane, shows himself through the frozen act of a collection turned into a Museum. He brings about his position, his relation to an environment. He wills to act in a meaningful, profound way, one that shakes the other. Soane does not show the other what he should be. He relates to elements for himself. He shows himself to others by the elements he relates with and by how he relates to them.

Soane has built in his House, an ongoing process, frozen at one stage, yet continuing to live on its own once it becomes matter, pure matter never solely exists without another level of substance inhabiting it.

Experience should be felt as a conclusion and not as a base for constructing a significant masterpiece. Soane builds for a meaning, not for a feeling. Otherwise, he would limit himself to a unique level of experiencing the object. He would build a structure for a life only possible in accordance with a fixed story.

Words describing the House cannot account for this thickness of experience. Soane does build up lists of objects inhabiting the space, yet his *Description* is not aiming at an exhaustive recollection, listing of all the accumulated items, as has been attempted in more recent descriptions of the House. Soane seems to be having this attitude when he is listing his own experience of the world, as an architect, as a reader. But when transmitting is at stake, he is only concerned with tempting the apprentice with building up the parameters of his own conscious experimenting of the world. Thus in his lectures, or the *Description* of his House, does Soane always leave the

apprentice with a frustrated feeling of something more being there. Something he never names. He urges this latter to take his own position within the world, be conscious of it: something more than the appearance level of things.

Soane is not only producing a sensation. He makes each visitor name the meaning of it. The one lying at a level beyond sensation. The sensation is not a means to an end, but one Soane wants to reproduce, live again. One he can share. Meaning should not be named but felt. Meaning being the same for all visitors in the end, a question of experiencing the limits of one's mortality, of one's time-bound conditions. A meaning no one names the same way; each person bearing a different interior landscape, situation; each person being a different character. Yet this does not mean all visitors cannot share the same stage. Each one needs the liberty to discover new issues to the play, to be surprised when discovering within what he stands: within contradictions - and without in the end. Because he invariably stays the center, an ever moving, changing, evolving center; yet one with constant beliefs, and perceptions.

Soane writes about his House as a discovery, a series of elements, not read as a list but as a text. The reader will put forward certain elements, not all of them, imagine others. These connections emerge differently at each reading; regarding the pace of lecture, the reader involved with all his personal background of experiences, or any other element being an active part of the context. These relations exist but are not told. The objects are put in place; they are not the issue of the meaning, yet they remain keys given to build the story.

### 1.3 the builder of the collection: the character.

#### 1.3.1 Sir John Soane: distancing himself to transmit an experience to others

Yet a difference remains between the experience for others and for Soane of the House. The House is given to us. It is in a finished state. The core of the House resides within the personal experience of it.

Soane does not travel, he collects objects he finds around London. He does not paint either; he has Turner, Canaletto and Piranesi come to him. Then when he deals with his own projects, he has his friend and painter Gandy or his students repetitiously reproduce them. Nevertheless no mention is made to the author of the engravings in the different versions of the *Description*. They could eventually be credited to John Soane.

In 1832, the *Description of the House* holds a Plate 0, facing the title page. This first full page is engraved with the bust of Sir John Soane. Soane stands as an imposing figure, beginning his masterpiece's tribute. In the same way, an actual bust raises itself above the sculptures assembled in the Domical part of the Museum: an emblem set along a pedestal, overlooking the Belzoni Sarcophagus, and the basement floor, the most central part of the Museum. The figure of Sir John Soane as the collector of the whole, the master and owner, imposes itself. Yet Soane seems to evince himself when the engraved bust stares without eyes, when John Soane omits to name the presence of this bust in the *Description of the House*; this same bust which is central within the House and the experience of it. The bust of the owner of the House, of the collector, the one whose essence is ungraspable, totally present yet endlessly escapes. Soane names his presence yet does not impose his look upon the world; he has this last one meet in his eye, inside his bodily experience of it. A way of leaving enough room for the others and their personal interpretation of the master's art.

Soane's House has another particular story to tell. The one of Padre Giovanni illustrates the 'John' character's Italian tribute.

Returning from the Oratory (12), you proceed to the Parloir of Padre Giovanni (13). (...)

From Padre Giovanni's room (13), the Ruins of a Monastery (14) arrest the attention.

The interest created in the mind of the spectator, on visiting the abode of the Monk, will not be weakened by wandering among the ruins of his once noble monastery. (...)



The Tomb of the Monk, composed from the remains of an old monument placed over the vault of the Bosanquet Family in Laytonstone Churchyard, adds to the gloomy scenery of this hallowed place, wherein attention has been given to every minute circumstance.<sup>15</sup>

It is not as much the mixture of collected objects and the fantasizing of Soane upon the story of the Monk that arrests the attention here. Soane detaches from reality and builds a story mirroring his loneliness. By doing so, he distances from himself and looks at his life as the story inhabiting any book or painting. Soane has become an object, support to narratives. One to be seen by others. Soane incarnates a narrative, showing the visitor his capacity to build and experience his own. Soane only achieves this goal when having lost control over himself and led the visitor within an overcrowding of perceptions; after the House has opened up a world filled with a multitude of visions. Soane has not narrowed down, enclosed views for a close-up around a character. The fictitious Padre Giovanni is alive.

Soane's focus is the transmission to others. He does not tell anyone who he is, or who he should be. No one can be told who he is, but amidst what he stands - what world he would have built for himself. Only the one Soane has built for himself can be made visible. Through it he can explain what he feels and why, how he feels. The sensation produced through the encounter with the finished product is loaded with meaning as a possibility to communicate with others a-temporally. Soane disappears from the Description. Soane's House is not solely about the building of a possible orientation within his creation but of Soane's generous dreams given out to others, those he names as he identifies himself, his relation to the world.

The labyrinthine quality of the House does not come from the shape of the architecture, the changes of space direction imposed within. The House as totality, enclosing the endless act of collecting, has reached a scale to which it is no more submissive to the shape it takes on. The meaning of the House stands within an active global meaning, a story that transforms it into an object. The House has the capacity of transposing the visitor to another world, time, space of meaning through his senses, a perception in evolution disclosing itself every minute. One the

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<sup>15</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832, p 5-6.

wanderer cannot preconceive, but live only if he is present. The visitor discovers the story of another character within him. Soane can only transmit this sense of otherness to someone living it himself.

The Description of the Sir John Soane Museum is submitted to the good will of the architect to let the other penetrate his house. Through both the Museum and its *Description*, Sir John Soane names his point of view. He has set a path through which one visits, inserts himself in the House. Soane names what must learn and be an architect: projecting within the world in accordance with his personal experiences. Soane names himself strongly, not to convince anyone. The interpretation of the House remains free.

### 1.3.2 the visitor building character, distancing of time and experience

Everyone today, and not only architects agree on one thing regarding the Museum: it speaks, is meaningful when it talks about a past time, the concerns of an architect of the Eighteenth Century. Nevertheless John Soane's eldest son George, upon which lies all his faith in carrying forward his ideas, for whom he assembles his house to educate him with his beliefs, does not respond to his father's efforts, and even anonymously publishes a vehement article against the Museum.

The most extraordinary instance of this perversity of taste and dullness of invention is to be found in this artist's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The exterior, from its exceeding heaviness and monumental gloom, seems as if it were intended to convey a satire upon himself; it looks like a record of the departed, and can only mean, that considering himself as defunct in that better part of humanity -- the mind and its affections -- he has reared this mausoleum for the enshrinement of his body.

The interior of this building forms a ludicrous contrast with its external appearance. The passages glow with the deepest red: the lower room, is converted into a library, a second satire upon the possessor, who must stand in the midst of these hoarded volumes like a eunuch in a seraglio; the envious and impining guardian of that which he cannot enjoy.

On the left is a small room intended for a study, and beyond is a narrow loft cave, yeilded the museum; it is lighted at the top by a lantern of stained glass, forming a strange medley of Gothic and Grecian taste. Its contents, in a moral point of view, are truly valuable; here are urns that once contained the ashes of the great, the wise, and the good; here are relics broken from the holy temples of Greece and Italy; here is the image of the Ephesian Diana, once the object of human adoration, but now only valued as a rarity, that bits high price may feed the groveling pride of the possessor.--

We are not architects, nor do we pretend to more knowledge in the art than common observation can supply, but we aspire, however unworthy, to that higher character which unites moral feeling with those inanimate objects, and does not basely admire a column because its proportions may be just or its marble be pure.<sup>16</sup>

George Soane's saying is the same as John Soane's: the collection is not an end in itself. Yet George adopts another point of view. John gives his son the freedom to name his own story. George does not yet know he owns one, does not name it. George does not see, recognize himself through the House, and does not see his own story within it. He is still in the process of defining himself. He opposes his father, as a frontier to him.

### 1.3.3 "house as mind"

The Sir John Soane Residence is a magical House in which each one feels secure, in intimacy. This wrapping is not due to the functionality of the House, but to the surrounding of intimate thoughts, the most profound, confidential, contradictory and yet non-revealed ones. A house set beyond the public figure to incarnate.

Soane never says anything, never imposes a mood, a taste or an act. He always lets the reader free of deciding alone if he wants to see. He does not teach him anything except if he is capable of seeing by himself. He only surrounds the reader with the elements of shared culture and

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<sup>16</sup> SOANE, George. "The Present Low State of the Arts in England, And More Particularly of Architecture." *The Champion*, 24 September 1815.

dreams, of man's dreams, of objects naming dimensions that bypass him as joy and death, yet make him feel alive.

If the House is an imprint of Soane's mind, it becomes public once he detaches from it, freezes it, objectifies it.

Soane not only produces sensation but also thrives to understand the effects he produces upon visitors of his house.

The act of collecting is the recognized premise of the Sir John Soane's Museum. Nevertheless, the origin of this collection goes beyond the enshrinement process, as any other mausoleum of previous collections. The act of collecting is not merely a process guided by an apprehensive goal.

## CHAPTER 2 The Painting, Soane's Act of Collecting

### 2.1 painting space and time representations

#### 2.1.1 A linear discovery: in the House or the Description

Even if Soane says he is building his house mostly for architects, his house is a gathering of art works. The text gives importance to objects by having them start with a capital letter. Rooms, paintings and sculptures are of that nature. They become objects through the story they behold. Objects pass time because they behold a story within. The artist should detach from the object of his work. He can then build a story around his character. He can reach out to the power enclosed within the object.

The viewer's relation to the image exists once he dives into it. In the *Description* of his Residence, John Soane does not show plates of art pieces themselves, regardless of his love and commitment to each collected item. Meaning is set in the unlimited meeting of various items in the single room represented. As objects gathered enhance architecture, architecture is the stage of their meeting. Meaning comes out of the object to encounter the viewer's senses in reality. The same gathering, as the one set along the text, brings together items in the plates. All assemble in one final space, the one of the book or the one of the framed image. The plates tell a story. One in which is emphasized the becoming, through which is brought about the future.

Meaning comes out of a confrontation of different time and space dimensions.

The only art piece Soane presents as a whole, alone on a full plate is the Sarcophagus, which is a complete story in itself, the full story of a whole civilization and its intricate minor meanings.

Within the House the viewer defines his path as he follows it. He beholds the freedom of accessibility to the paintings. He experiences the narrative of his perceptions as he stands between the paintings. He places himself within the span of ideals represented.

Through the *Description* he follows Soane's path to reach the liberty of diving in the engraving and live within the representation. Soane's narrative continuously frames his experience and brings him back out of the image. The viewer has identified an experience and can name his will to extrude himself out of it to explore other worlds

The Museum reveals itself like an image. Its story-program is not told as a whole. The visitor builds it as he walks along. He looks at a painting and as he turns his head, sees another. When no path can be followed, given by the House or its *Description*, the House gives the impression of being within an overcrowding.

Soane is not in a problematic of naming the sensation. This latter is central, yet is unnamable and only a consequence of habits relating us to our surrounding. Soane names the different elements producing the sensation, which makes the visitor feel it. This latter then reproduces this sensation within another time and space. The meaning behind the sensation bores an infinite and continuous dimension. It is then possible to name the elements that make of each situation a particular context. Sensation is to reveal meaningful situations. Too many parameters being at stake, the continuous experience of these situations reveals the essence of meaning to be reproduced. Soane perceives the accumulation of art objects as an identification of the visitor's relation to the world.

The engravings in the *Description* show overall views of crowded rooms within the Museum. They follow a linear narrative path of discovery through it. When the reader experiences a walk through this same Museum, his own discovery bounds him. Within a continuous path of discovery, his condensed look lays upon objects encountered through his sensations.

The path taken to encounter Art frames it. The viewer can take a piece of the imaginary back to reality through this frame. The story is a mirroring of the experience of reality rather than a cut from it, a jump into the imaginary without coming back from it. The frame is the rite of passage, a link between the imaginary and real worlds.

### 2.1.2 confronted to a general time.

The experience within the House is to be regarded as a whole.

Soane avoids naming architecture but focuses on the elements surrounding it. He escapes from a formal definition to reach a more profound meaning.

Whereas the chosen topic of the painting is important, it is not an end in itself. The representation is only a limited vision, point of view of the world projected in an elsewhere. Soane is building himself as a character filled with all the visions he has collected around him. Parameters he lays along are so contradicting, opposed, that they frame, name a look upon things. These define the limits of the character. Art beholds a vision shared beyond the time and space bonded situation the visitor stands in. Certain topics are meaningful to any man, out of regard for his era, origin, and culture. Hence Soane is looking for the ultimate meaning for himself. The one he can find within yesterday's art, and share within today's. Finally one he can present as meaningful for tomorrow.

Whereas accumulation in a drawing is representative of a single point of view, intention, the accumulation of objects found in the Museum opens up an infinity of experiences.

The House is the place to find oneself, in which can be discovered ultimate and extreme meanings.

Numerous Antique objects gather within.

On each side of the door is a delicious antique Fragment, in the true *gusto antico*, &c.<sup>17</sup>

As are displayed the most contemporary one's.

Hogarth, William.

Four Pictures of an Election

Eight Pictures of the Rake's Progress

Etching of the Laughing Audience and a Musical Party

The whole of the Engraved Works.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832, p 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, p X

Within the 8000 volumes mentioned earlier constituting Soane's library, are encountered as ancient a book as Seneque's writings, or Homer, Esop, Plato, Ovide, Plutarch; and still meet with Addison, Byron, Gay, Burke or Newton.

Contradiction can be understood as an apparent opposition.

Soane constantly places things in duality. The House faces a park yet is completely closed to it. It deliberately turns away from the facade it could occupy on both the neighboring house fronts owned by Soane, to built itself from the inside. The House is in fact buried. This opposition creates a tension where, the House is sent away from where it stands, in another place.

Only consciousness sets the visitor in temporality, in opposition to the everlasting peace of timeless architecture as fixed surrounding. Yet only consciousness lets him bypass this mortal condition to dive into the timeless stories represented in the art pieces.

Soane collects Ancient books, artifacts that still have meaning to his contemporaries as well as productions of his time: those acts that behold the bewildering power to pass time in a meaningful way. They are linked to a profound meaning, narrative that transforms into history.

Soane sets up the finest record of present and past situations to help the visitor define his own sense of being situated. Soane does not stand on the verge of his visions, turned in a one-sided orientation towards the future, but is in a situated time. The past and present play as lenses through which to see and build the future in the present. Tomorrow is seen as a continuum of today, absorbing the present. Inversely, past and future are defined to better live the present, the unnamable meaning of our present, merely felt.

I want to inquire about Soane's relation to the painting as he himself never did paint but has always had architects, artists, friends of his, or students take care of this dimension. Throughout his life Soane has commissioned new versions of existing paintings. Projects of his are endlessly represented. Actual buildings are shown in ruins. The ones, which behold the everlasting essence of architecture, the ones existing when their fleshing out materiality is no more but a trace.



### 2.1.3 the architectural drawing versus the painting

Soane is neither a collector of data or a producer of it himself. He is not the central substance of his work, but architecture itself is. Soane's work is not about understanding, surrounding his own point of view. Soane opens up to the acknowledging of other worlds, others' worlds. He experiences other people's productions. He does not only catalogue them, but everyday experiences the interlocking contradictions within them, within the dreams these project and the reality the viewer lives.

Architects have to deal with the duality of research and production. They are both searchers and artists. They both look upon the world and change, act upon it. The meeting of these two sides is only possible in the act of drawing architecture, a drawing that is not a reproduction yet not to be produced exactly as it is. This in-between is not possible in the painting of reality. Using painting as an experience only limits the viewer to a single point of view. The architect on the other hand has to open a whole new world to others, one of ungrounded dreams. The only ground in this projection lies within the beliefs he has in the essence of this dream he is giving to others, the openness of it. The architect has to admit anybody's point of view to serve as basis for the nourishment of everybody's personal blossoming, in his or her unpredictable personal manner.

The architectural drawing is the basis for a very specific experience.

Architecture lies between the present and a projection within an elsewhere. The architectural drawing projects the viewer completely into an elsewhere in order to produce identical perceptions as the one's inside of him. It is the stage for the recognition of the viewer's dreams, something personal yet never named.

The architectural drawing is not a representation of finished architecture. Representations show things not for themselves but for their soul. The drawing shows another dimension of architecture, making it palpable. All does not become visible. The frame is only an envisioning of the architect's capacity to see himself in the landscape, looking at it: see himself elsewhere, his look lost within it.

The experience given by the production of a painting cannot be superimposed upon the experience of an architectural drawing. This latter is projected upon reality. The essence behind the architectural production is a sense of timeless meaning non-flattened. Whereas the experience of the painting is one of naming a single point of view, a collection of data put into one piece. The act of producing architecture is one of putting together meanings that will infinitely play together. The architectural drawing is the place where the experience of collecting and of producing a new meaning meet. They are not a simple identification of a vision and of all the parameters that evolve around it, but of a generosity beyond that.

## 2.2 the framed object: a distancing, subliming

The distancing from the object is a statement through which the viewer identifies it. Each painting is detached from the wall, stands within a frame. Each piece is the frame to a different story.

Art beholds a power that can be a teaching to architects. Architecture embraces too many dimensions. Art names, identifies a specific point of view through each work.

Soane uses the precise parameters of a specific place in order to sublime its context. Art has the capacity of naming a specific context, the one it frames. Identified art pieces displayed in the Soane Museum each name a specific dimension, set of contradictions to the viewer.

Distancing from reality is needed to lead the visitor within this accumulation. The possibility of naming very strongly reality makes it possible for the viewer to distance himself from it, live elsewhere. He reassembles different parameters in another world, to build a dream. The visitor set within the accumulation of the Museum experiences the essence of architecture. He is framed by it, walking inside the parameters it has revealed.

To confirm the existent dream is an artistic aim; to confirm the structure underlying this existing is held within theory. Both tie up different points of view carried upon reality. One cannot exist without the other.

All the play is in the bringing into consciousness of the dream, of its effect, not to reproduce it as it is, but in order to emerge with the named will to build it and to be at a lost, simply fulfilled by it.

If there is a part of reasoning within the practice of architecture, one to be learned by the architect, it is not one of being decided upon his acts. It should be one in which the architect has the right vision, places himself in the right angle of vision, putting together things that do belong together. The architect finds the reasons for this vision to be fixed in reality. Art helps him experience many different angles under which perceive the same vision.

### 2.2.1 scholar's relation to the painting: identify the object.

The theoretician studies the art piece someone else produced. He stops at the first formal level of facts he can analyze. The piece of work he studies, he perceives as a limited structure. The parameters lying all over the meaning of its existence are not expressed. The essence of a work is to bypass reality, the mortal condition of limited temporality and spatiality. The art piece expresses the limited condition of man's materiality. The person analyzing a work does not limit himself to showing the use of a certain matter and of what it produces. The experience of an art piece is superior to words. The essence of the act is not within the structure itself. No one type of structure beholds a superior meaning over another. Art is a tool. Art names the origin of a need. It expresses and makes the feeling pass.

The artist sets up the substance. The analyst sets the frame through which this substance can be reproduced and shared, the way in which it can become significant beyond the strictly formal frame of the piece and its identified, named setting. To name as many possible characteristics of a situation does not give any more span to it. Meaning will remain limited, finding no way to access an elsewhere, another time or place, another person.

An artist plays with, produces, and creates an object. No one has the right to write about this object, analyze it, formally put it apart in a way the artist would not have done it himself and destroy the essence that renders possible the assembling of all these dimensions. To respect the artist is to let him act the disassembling himself. Matter and thought consciousness exist. The artist starts with matter and reaches out to an elsewhere, confirming it in the present. He confirms a capacity to rise above matter to reach a play that takes place between the already done and

what stays to be done. The artist invites the viewer to follow his track and get lost within matter to find the meaning of himself anew. No scholar whatsoever has the right to fix a prefigured meaning over the art piece. None has the right to rob this one from the infinity of experiences it can deliver, the endless revelations it can disclose for the viewer today or for the infinite number of encounters it will face until its matter dissolves. Meaning can be produced once the object is fixed. The play of the analysis is to understand the piece in order to reproduce its meaning. A meaning reproduced beyond the material limits, the named situation, of the existing object that bores it, as detailed as this latter can be.

Soane never explains or puts words on the meaning of his acts. The collected objects are no means to an end. Nevertheless Soane carefully chooses the collected artifacts set inside his house. Soane sets careful repeated acts of cardinal orientation and zenithal lighting. He invites the visitor to constantly move, dance through the House as he lets himself overcome by the folly of the process. My quest is to go against the flow of those that put an interpretation on Soane's work and close down the mystery inherent to this masterpiece. They destroy the mysterious labyrinth of personal understanding, constant reorientation of the visitor within the Museum, one analogous to the constant relation to the world he is bathed within.

### 2.2.2 meaning within the existing narrative: the viewer

The visitor should understand nothing apart from the incessant movement from consciousness to non-consciousness.

Soane's non-acting is an act in itself. He is not collecting pictures, items in order to put his own words on them, his own look upon them. This attitude would narrow down the object to a single experience, an explanation, and a conscious process. Soane respects objects as they contain a whole universe of dimensions within their story, the memory they nourish, the dimension of all the possible within them.

For Soane the frame to an object's perception is the world itself as a whole. Soane reassembles frames to the world that artists have already named. He then attains a meaning superior to any of

them, a meaning to the secret power of objects and of the place they occupy. This one will feed forever and infinitely a multiplicity of feelings. Objects attain a power beyond all state they are in, beyond the story they carry or framing they reveal.

It is often thought that the story of the object, or historical dimension is the framing to it. Whereas it is the meaning, the look set upon the world through it, the relation set between an object and the surrounding ones, which enables the viewer to enter a story and come back from it, into his own reality. The surrounding is a frame to the object, to the story imprinted on it as object; in the same way as a frame is used in regard a painting.

Inside the House, the visitor becomes the central perceptual tool connecting all the elements he comes across. Every room crystallizes a different theme. Every object placed in it is in relation, opposition to the surrounding ones. Sir John Soane's House is not built around the spectator so he perceives it as a whole concept. As he crosses the Museum, he builds the many stories that shape life: the viewer is not simply an individual put into a perspective device. As he passes through the House, he builds a story. Yet one he is incapable of solely turning towards himself. Soane builds the world, makes it visible. Through history, the story given to him by others through the art works, he builds his own story.

Each object contains a multitude of dimensions within. These are revelations of an elsewhere, other times and places experienced. These experiences constitute the story of each object, loaded with meaning.

In order to produce a meaning for others the architect must generously experience every bit of life, every bit of meaning expressed by others. Soane uses art to endlessly experience all these levels of life. He gathers the world's complexity to experience it.

The painting is an invitation, an opening onto somewhere else, another. Porosity takes place, an interlacing between the world interior to the representation and the world in which the painting has its place as object. The structure of presentation of the art piece becomes primordial.

The individual, as he is invited inside the House, is not central to the world's contradictions he feels. As he is placed within them, a dialogue simply takes place between the reproduced inner confrontations of the world and him, as the person placed in the middle of them. A being is not

exterior to the world, relating in turn to each side of the oppositions set before him. These relations all come at once to him. He must act upon objects surrounding him in order to sense and name his place in relation to them - or simply his own sense, place in the world. A look projected upon this object is an act placed within the realm of the viewer's perception. A dialogue takes place between the individual and the world in all its complexities, where he must take into account all the different sides of the situation, sense them. Then a raise of consciousness evacuates entire sides of the whole, experienced by the individual bathed within. Meaning appears in this dance around the objects, a swirl into which the visitor has to let himself led in order to perceive with full clarity and wholeness; in order to place himself once more in the realm of things.

### 2.2.3 meaning built between objects, contradictory representation: Death and Comedia

The visitor lays his look upon a contradiction. The scientific process is raised from a trust in the world's complexity, not in a personal position imposed upon others. The artistic process is raised from a trust in oneself, from a need to name for the act of naming, before an unstable, fluctuating world. As the logical and intuitive worlds meet, they will recognize one another as two parts of an equilibrium, of the whole that we are and feel: consciousness and the body. The drawing bypasses the limits of these realities and of their enclosed rules. Rules are non-imposed to the architect who understands the architectural drawing, the difference between its conception and the realization of a scheme.

Man acts to meet with the world from which he has separated. Art is the witness of this separation, of a first union. Art is the way to find what is within the viewer, what unites him to the world. Art is an act in itself; a look set upon a world from which man has separated.

The experience felt facing a drawing is the only level of intimacy that the viewer can imprison and carry away, bring with him. As the painter reconnects with the world in naming a single point of view, the architect is the one who can grasp all possible visions and names the correct one knows how to put it in use. For that sake, he needs to experience enclosure within a world of meanings

he can then identify and reproduce, carry forward in a displaced context.

Each frame is a link, setting in relation between the objects. Objects that are themselves separated one from the other. No device is set to put them in relation, no manly imposition, choosing of one way to look at them over another.

Soane is not only listing objects and detaching himself from them. The issue is to understand why he acts this way. The *Description* itself is an unrolling of items, of rooms, and their joining, the passing from one to the other. Listings give the possibility of interaction, relative and new meeting of the different elements, in a non-rigid way. Only the reason of their constitution is revealed, the meeting of the elements into a story, the one decided each time anew by the visitor. As he visits the House is revealed the possibility of passing and linking of all these. The story builds the frame enabling the viewer to pass elsewhere and back. The story unites all elements at hand and reaches out for another dimension.

The visitor as he experiences the present is confronted to his live desires and is in no need of projecting them upon reality anymore. He becomes the keeper and prisoner of these projections, of these visions. The architect is in that respect no common visitor. The architect builds in order to share his vision, yet it can never be without a distancing of the creator as of the viewer from it. The architect solely frames the narrative into which in turn, the other will be invited to step in and back out of. The architect achieves liberty when comes out of using this power, his look and vision before it becomes real. He then gives others the power to see beyond a situation's reality, the beauty of its duality. What keeps the architect distant from others is expressed in art. His vision he names. The frame is the way of bringing back this projection to a building in reality.

In a space less than 3.5 metres by 3.5 metres, hemmed in by walls on three sides and looking onto a light-well on the fourth as well as acting as a passage with three doors off it, Soane has created a room which gives the sensation of being in a pavilion with a view of a wide and favorite landscape.

The handkerchief dome is contained by the virtual structure and the walls are washed by light admitted through the light vaults over the connecting zone of the tartan-grid

container. (...) the structural walls are deeply indented to enhance the illusion that they are merely screens outside of the ideal canopied space. <sup>19</sup>

In order for the visitor to name his vision in relation to his dreams, he must first name all the situations in which he finds meaning. Art is a representation of fixed situations and meanings that the viewer can go fetch beyond the frame. By fetching them, he names them.

Soane is not telling or teaching others how to feel, but only awakens them to the power of their feelings. He trusts the architect in showing already existing things. Soane only points out at these. As a poet, he will show by naming. Yet according to what he wants to put forward, the naming will lay upon reality differently: the relating of sense experience is meant for the reader to realize, grasp his feelings, whereas a naming of objects is meant to create a felt experience as the reader goes through their description. Architecture shows the spectator that by being placed within, by letting himself be enveloped by his own sharpened perceptions, he relates to the surrounding.

Soane has built his Museum in order to understand and reveal to the visitor an environment, not as a theoretical deviation, but as an identification of the situation within which the guest is bathed. A heritage surrounds him with all the rituals shaping his habits.

Soane builds up real frames, virtual frames, frames of all kinds, multiple frames. His house is a flickering framing of reality. A frame is not a limiting, an object neither. The perception of it depends on how the visitor places himself in front of it. It depends on how he sees it, as an achievement in itself, or as a tool to pass beyond, reach out for the other dimension of reality. The frame attracts the attention. Soane names frames in order to put different dimensions of reality in relation to one another, reveal them one to the other.

The viewer has to be constantly soaked within the art piece in order to have a point of view upon it. He cannot understand Soane from an image of a fixed totality. Matter is fixed, yet senses are forever free, evanescent, multiple and have the capacity to endlessly change.

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<sup>19</sup>VAN SCAIK, Leon. "Walls, Toys and the 'Ideal' Room. An analysis of the Architecture of Sir John Soane." *AA Files*, IX (1985).



Frames enable the viewer to pass from one dimension to another. Without frames as stepping-stones to name the different elements involved in his perception of the surrounding, things are all continuous and without variation. Without frames, reality is slick, without depth or possible evolution. The experiences of reality are each frozen in a different dimension. The naming of each one sets a beautiful picture but impossible to live in. No story can take place, no narrative.

To remember an element all by itself is impossible, it must build itself within a surrounding. Only the organized grid enables the visitor to re-enact, retell the story, and take once more the path experienced in the House. But this one path will be different each time. The experience of the House appears when different elements meet. The overcrowding within the Museum being more for Soane traces left of a lifetime experience than the resulting production of the found purpose to the teaching of architecture. Through the story is the experience told again, transmitted. The Comedia is thus a powerful stage for endless stories to take place. Next to each art piece is placed an opposing statement. The Comedia is often the witness to the futile seriousness of a unique statement on life. The Dressing-Room for instance, is filled with corresponding topics to the futility of appearance: gems, drawings of Mausoleums, or of the Comedia with its artists hidden behind masks. The visitor walking down the Museum comes across the following that John Soane carefully extracted from the overall accumulation of art pieces to put them forward.

Danby, Francis, R.A.     A Picture representing a Scene in the "Merchant of Venice"

Howard, Henry, R.A.     Three Pictures, subjects from Shakespeare

Mortimer, J.             Five Etchings of Characters from Shakespeare

Stothard Thomas, R.A. Several Drawings, and a Scene from one of Shakespeare's Plays

Westall, Richard, R.A.   A Drawing, a Scene in "Macbeth"<sup>20</sup>

Soane has never been understood as a whole character. It would be too hard a task to understand all the dimensions contained within Sir John Soane's work. His multiple interests

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<sup>20</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832. The Names of the British Artists Whose Works are in this Collection.

have made him easy to slice up.

Soane's repetitious use of death representations is indicative of his beliefs. Death should not frighten the one confronted to it. Death is the most beautiful giving to the world, to others. Death is greater, the greatest act that is to be seen. It builds an outrageous affirmation of a character in the most ultimate act, the strongest, most demanding, symbolic for others. Death is no proof of anything except the poignant greatness of it. It is just a bursting out of corporeal and time limiting, to reach out a symbolic shared dimension. All acts worthy of this dimension are the grandest. Representations of death surrounding Soane remind him of this power beheld.

Make a screenplay out of one's own death. Before showing oneself, build a legend in order to give to others, give to one. Be of here and have elsewhere at the same time, allowing the frame to bring forward a revelation. A frame itself in constant renewal, in reorganization, ready to reveal, put in relation different layers of reality.

The dimension given through death experiences is close to the one of man confronting nature, in a state of original nakedness. Man is not opposed to nature. He interprets it through the projection of his ideals, as a limiting of him. Soane building a parallel world, full of symbols, assumes man's opposition to the world in order to live its limits.

The faculties of seeing desires that emerge from within us yet exceed us: a narrative of ourselves. Objects pass through time. They have the capacity of being more, of being significant today, tomorrow and to anyone. Meaning does not only lie within a material level of things, technical and formal. But also within their capacity to tell a story, for putting in parallel different levels, internal to what the object is, to play with communication, confrontation, sliding, and set up a ritual of approach, use, relationship.

Representation gives this power to man of creating an image mirror of reality, another dimension of reality without control. Art gives architecture the power to build its reflection within reality. The art pieces confronting within the Museum, give architecture consciousness of it's duality; an incarnated absence and presence, past and future, an in-between. Man can in turn project himself. He has the present experience of this spatial confrontation.

### 2.3 build a narrative of the object: the act of Soane

The artist dreams and expresses this dream in his art. He lives art, gives back dreams to reality. He acts the real power of man. Soane builds a house to experience art. As he goes along, the visitor has all his personal dreams revealed. These lie beyond a limited flesh condition, a limited perception, and the consciously named relation to the world man experiences every day. He lives from within expressed dreams of reality. He identifies his own and shares it. Dreams are part of a general condition of man. Artists express a common dream. That is why building upon it is the greatest of all actions.

This articulation of things accounts also for Soane's contradictory attitude towards the use of references. He distances himself from the way these are used more than what is used. The problem they constitute for Soane does not lie within the elements themselves, in how they are used, but in how is disclosed the meaning held within them.

Soane experiences different levels of building. His act of collecting reveals the world. The gathering names his relation to it. Soane reveals new levels of perception, new dimensions to the world by relating his feelings to the surrounding. Through action are displaced time and space in order to give man meaning, shake him in his unilateral world. A world of a fixed structure, within which man is in contemplation or action. The rubbing or oppositions enable the visitor to reorient himself. Space and time are uniform whereas man is an individual, a whole.

Distancing creates an aura around an object or person. All interpretations and points of view can rest upon this distancing. Yet none surrounds it. Closeness reveals the facts of its existing and the static context of its unrolling. No freedom exists as narration, real history or fiction. Narrative is the freedom from reality yet the closeness of the distant.

Beliefs are only a means to identify the viewer's relation to the world, his greater capacity of subliming. Dreams are an escape from reality against which he permanently fights. He confronts to the exterior elements created by others, to become himself, be seen and respected.

Each object tells a story, is filled with it. With the narrative of the object is built a surrounding. The one told, represented or carried by the origin of the piece, its use and ritual surrounding it. The Sir John Soane House and its *Description* talk about the visitor beliefs and ways of placing himself within it, of seeing a situation.

The architectural drawing has the duty of carrying intentions that fetch beyond the architectural reproduction as a tool. This drawing that does not behold any experience within itself. It is non-limited to a single lived experience. It cannot be taught. It is the quintessence of a whole learning of life, not a technique of reproduction. The architect is the builder of stories as he reassembles different parameters of life. A well-learned architect will be a great connoisseur of stories, history and dreams. He needs to live them in order to retell, recreate them in the world.

The drawing expresses a precise, named vision. It is useful for the architect who needs to open his perception field. The architectural drawing expresses a vision greater than reality: not merely the expression of a precise vision than a gathering of different dimensions. The drawing is a tool for the architect to loose and find himself within a discovery of the world. The architectural drawing on the other hand is the giving back of a dream of reality. The architect translates in the drawing the experience of the different dimensions of the world: the projection of the world's complexity. For others it is totally incomprehensible if it does not share a narrative that can be brought back out of the painting, on this side of the frame.

Sane fights against an objectification of reality.

Art is not for him a tool to produce, not a tool to look at things, not a tool to understand, not an architectural technical tool. Art is just a tool to produce another look upon our understanding.

## CHAPTER 3 Architecture, Soane's Vision of Architecture

### 3.1 scholar's relation to Soane: the architect

#### 3.1.1 painting, sculpture and architecture only make one: Soane writing as an architect

Soane is an architect wanting answers to questions surrounding his practice. He follows an attitude of scrupulously looking at details, and simultaneously taking some distance to have a general vision of what is going on. Both these steps are tied up by a specific vision of the world, a way of placing himself within it.

The visitor must feel overwhelmingly lost in the present to better project in the future. Feeling the present, he understands that tomorrow is a becoming. Soane builds up for tomorrow, not because he projects onto the future, but because he lies down present and past stepping stones. Meaning is then possible in the future. Soane does not alienate the present for a better view of the future, but sharpens his consciousness in the present in order to build meaning in the future.

The scholar cannot have a beforehand scientific knowledge of the produced effect of Sir John Soane's work if he has not experienced the walk through it. Soane carries around a cynicism regarding this quest for the meaning enclosed within any masterpiece. This search is a given to the scholar's incapacity to totally solve mysteries surrounding him. He will never find what he is looking for within the outside world: nothing but himself, or parameters to rediscover himself. The meaning the scholar is in search of lies in the sliding of grids of perception, of scientific analysis, with the reality of their application; and not solely in their revealed appearance as a given parameter of reality. The scholar within the House names and identifies the different sensations he lives, the one's that have a meaning, that give the scholar a conscious perspective of the entire context and of all its parameters; a reorientation lived also by the reader of the finished research or statement. The scholar has no right to enclose, stiffen it to a unique meaning. The architectural space of orientation does not lie within architecture itself and its means of

production. The meaningfulness of architecture does not lie within the conscious revelation will by the architect.

Living in a world of auto-references and projections, the scholar turns around in his own frustrations. Whereas he could live in his sensations and yet be so ungrounded. Meaning he is in search of is nowhere to be found, if not in references with a span as big as the energies going through him. Soane surrounds himself with original meanings and lives seized by his intuitions as he confronts them. Like at the origin of culture, when man could only trust his feelings to understand the world. At the same time, these primary comprehensions are those that everyone can share. In order to share, the architect must go beyond a 'sensorial' built system. He must learn how to keep his senses opened and listen to them. Painting, sculpture and architecture are stepping-stones to the revelation of another self for the architect. This primordial essence of creating meaning from matter is enclosed within the narrative the means can disclose, beyond the final product it produces. Through this production, is changed the way the viewer sets his look upon other objects. Each bears a story of its own, as a stepping-stone to the creation of the observer's own story. The one he acts around the object everyday life.

The observer, beyond acquiring a refined education, becomes inhabited. Up to the point where he carries with him, his situation, story, its harmony and its power of revealing the surrounding. Soane multiplies evidences, saying nothing of what is to be revealed and discovered.

The world for Soane, his look upon it, what he perceives from it, gets from it, gives back and builds upon is enclosed within the Description; a never-ending way "to trace, by reference (...) to notice (...) to shew (...) and lastly to evince the desire of the Possessor of the Collection"<sup>21</sup>. Soane transmits and erases himself from his masterpiece.

Soane's vision takes his desires, visions and assembles them. They then tell an ever-evolving story. It is not reality, materiality that beholds meaning, neither an overall Deity, but man and his beliefs.

### 3.1.2 objects put back together

Once the House has been frozen the visitor becomes an invited character within it, participating to the story he is involved in as he goes around.

The experience of the House centers the visitor yet asks him to already be centered. He is set within a contradictory attitude of being conscious and at the same time submissive to what is presented to him. At each step a revelation appears while he trustfully gives himself to the discovery of rooms and dimensions unknown.

The architect must swallow culture with a viewpoint, a precise vision, before placing himself in a significant way for the global meaning at hand. Soane has learned this dimension as "the almost certain successful results of industry and perseverance"<sup>22</sup>. To appropriate Soane's learning the visitor must follow his own path and constitute his own visible character. As the center of the story the architect builds along, his vision enables him to trust new happenings and endlessly relate to them, to his personal path. He builds a story.

The objects accumulated within the House are not meant to throw forward a projection of Soane's thoughts, a theorization of the world. The object is simply a beholder of Soane's lived experience.

Soane lives a sensual relation between elements of the world that are opposed but coexist. He experiences this confrontational state in his house set as Museum where coexist new and past, dead objects. Objects bearing histories of their own while they breed tomorrow's stories. Soane is not built up in contradictions as he relates to each one of them. He confronts them as a temporary choice in the infinite dimensions inhabiting the world he lives in. Every portrait of him, painted or sculpted, shows him with a little smile. Sir John Soane is contempt in his point of view. The world is a felt contradiction and the Sir John Soane House mirrors the intricate relations between its different dimensions. If one is emphasized, it is only shown. Soane on the other hand is in search of a loss of orientation equivalent to the experience of the world in which other points of view are visible. To escape every point of view surrounding him, the visitor must go

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<sup>21</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832.

<sup>22</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum ...*, London, 1832. Dedication.

beyond this first level of approach to things. If he strongly knows what he is looking for or where he stands, the House becomes a device that will help him name his quest. The spectator evolves in a dialogue with his surrounding, in which each element helps him define himself better, through each admitted opposition between elements he encounters. He has the possibility of escaping the play he has not decided to appear in. Acknowledging the surrounding, he appears as being part of what he secures. His senses, the grasping of something through his senses and understanding keeps him in the realm of the Museum: helps him understand, as felt knowledge, his situated body, reuniting anew sense and senses.

Yet, if the visitor does not know what he is looking for, he cannot commit in following, building up a path for himself as he goes through the Museum, a path, situating him within sense-loaded objects. The Museum is a guide to build a personal meaningful way. Each time the apprentice goes through the Museum, he takes a different path, his senses bring him, lead him, as he seeks to recognize familiar mile-stones, lead involuntarily to other discoveries of senses. Anyone carries his own path within, is situated within his own contradictions. A dialogue takes place with the ones meaningful. The Museum can loose the visitor. It has him lost, in its accumulation and overcrowding if he does not have a pre-figured attitude. The visitor can be overwhelmed by this partial grasping of sense, only felt, as he situates himself within the Museum; if he does not act in naming, identifying the different accumulated perceptions.

The creator defines himself, questions his nature through his relation as body in contact and opposition to the outside world. The means by which he confronts as thinking body to the body of the world and architecture are to be revealed. A relation set between him and the elements is revealed. Soane does not teach what should be seen, but sets the elements that can reveal this questioning and answer it.

The visitor should not only get lost within accumulated objects. Architecture does not need to be overwhelmingly complex. Things are put in confrontation. Soane opens a gap. The spectator has to fill it in, where his sensations make him aware of it. Beyond senses this latter will name the story brought forward, setting it at whatever level he wants it.



Soane teaches not as much a preordained principle as an attitude revealing the object in its place. Everything fits together, in contradiction or complementary meaning.

Soane is speaking about situations. He is not seeking for a narrowing down, a limiting of parameters. On the contrary, he multiplies the possible and gives freedom to things to become whatever they choose to be and what they should be. Objects are set as milestones giving the visitor the freedom to be in accordance with them or not. Their naming is a necessity to this personal orientation; one owing nothing to Soane's own delineated path as he built the collection; one owing simply to the act of rediscovering the reason of this action; one beyond a selfish concern, that can be owned for personal reasons by others. Soane's view on things is not seldom materially based. He is only naming a particular situation so it can identify itself in front of others surrounded by the diverse parameters it steps forward with. These are situated in a specific context, change as their relations to an evolving context does. Yet this is only the appearance level of things. The core is what stays still whatever the years, the place. By putting himself within the context, the observer can spot this other level: the way it puts things in relation to one another and him within it. Soane sets the context of meaning felt as an experience machine.

Each element is important, primordial for the ensemble. Every step taken can have much importance because, it discloses new perspectives on each object, it adds a whole other layer of meaning. The visitor can either be in agreement with each simple detail, or be exposed to an overall change of the flow of things, the signification of the whole.

Instead of taking an idea in which he believes, an idea he thinks is worth fighting for; instead of acting upon it and setting it in a context to which it confronts itself and looses its apprehended meaning, Soane looks at a situation and raises elements out of it. These latter he reassembles, puts in relation in a different way. Nevertheless, elements of any situation are themselves in constant transformation, evolution. These transformations are a witness to ever-changing situations. The creator thinks he does more to these because he touches them, invests himself, takes place within them. He needs to reassure himself upon his presence within the flow of things. Yet the only proof of his implication lies within his sensing, being in relation with the

parameters of the world. This is a fact, not an idea. The creator is another viewer, only laying his look upon, renaming, framing anew an existing.

The assembling of objects is a playground.

Something passes, is transmitted through time and the changing of situations, of characters involved. The visitor through a physical relation to the world brings about consciousness. By confronting to an outside world, he defines himself. The architectural object itself is simple. Only the framing of this object alters. It is the affinity between each of these frames, which can endlessly change, be declined. Immutable architecture will frame the meeting of the immutable meaning of life and the ever-evolving parameters surrounding it.

Soane is not afraid of using a formally shared inheritance, already used or existing patterns and styles. Meaning lies beyond the shape of things, a reproduced appearance. Objects only have meaning in relation to the surrounding parameters of their reality, orientation. Those are the constant evolution. An object is never twice the same, does not express twice the same thing. This perspective does not exclude the fact that the object holds in itself meaning, but not solely. This meaning will always be dependent on the context it is put in, the relation it has with the surrounding.

Soane transforms a three dimensional object into architecture. He uses it to produce architectural meaning, justness. The painting, or art object, holds within the visual relay upon which the meaning will build itself. It is at the same time, object and a means for transmission, a transformation plot. The painting is a narrative base, opening onto another horizon. Put in company of other objects, it produces the constant decentralization necessary to produce and constantly question this taken step.

History in that respect reassembles, plays with, turns around, changes meaning. History shows the duality of things, the relation between objects, a meaningful relation. This confrontation of objects has to be lived, experienced for oneself. It is not given in a linear way, but as an opening of possibilities for other interpretations: for others to relate to, for the visitor to perceive other levels of comprehension.

The situation is then in every point of view. A new situation emerges from each new look upon things. A situation is built starting from the object; bit by bit the viewer multiplies the points of view as he encounters every participating object in situation. Meaning is not in the piece itself, but in the rendered complexity of relations between the elements involved in the situation.

### 3.2 A laborious collection.

#### 3.2.1 "the integrity of the architect".

Watkin who claims Soane to believe that 'problems could be solved by return to the origins, and that truth could be attained by reason' is a bit devious to Soane's claims. Soane never refers to problems having to be solved. The only reason why Soane returns to the origin of things is to be "well informed of the primitive destination and origin of things, and on all occasions be able to trace every invention up to first principles and original causes", as Watkin himself quotes a couple of pages later. Let us not forget the fact that Soane is a practitioner and not a theoretician. He is not a critic of other's architectural production and does not point out what should have been done. His aim is to understand how to build meaningful architecture, to produce lasting architecture and be conscious for that reason of architecture's social as of it's individual importance and power. Soane is not looking for a problem naming and solving but for an essence of beauty to continue on. Soane wants to build and be part of the greater play of humanity, history. His view on history is not to be remembered and frozen, but to be given to others, as Soane becomes a link in the big chain of history. Soane thought and lived his life meaningfully enough to make it something bigger than the limits of himself.

As for Watkin's belief that Soane looks for truth through reason, Watkin again denies his own argument when he says a couple of pages later

Soane was not a systematic thinker or researcher. He was primarily a busy practicing architect whose transcriptions, translations, and annotations of architectural books were rarely sustained or coherent.

Soane is definitely looking for something in his books but not for reasoning.

The scholar contemplating facts surrounding Soane's labyrinthine mind is not taught how to produce better architecture. He is left with the sterile contemplation of somebody's lifetime struggle, not seeing the essence brought to that lifetime search for attitude in the halls of western civilization's produced thoughts.

If Sir John Soane is not driven by faith as Watkin claims it, he is not either driven by reason, by the power of an individual set upon the world. Soane is free of thought. Soane is driven by the will to loose himself within the great achievements of mankind, the timeless dreams that have become reality, that have built a tomorrow for today. Freedom lies in the recognition of the power things apply upon him. The freedom to grab these. Soane wills to get lost within the complexity, the variety, and a reality of dreams he cannot withhold. A will to loose himself in order to find and recognize his own self.

Soane makes visible things that exist within their own meaningfulness. He then makes possible for architecture to see where it stands, within what it stands. He opposes the world of lived reality and a cultural, referential world.

Soane makes an act of creation when assembling chosen objects within his House, and creating a Museum out of it. Soane becomes himself an endless visitor of his creation. The scholar in the same way creates a statement when he reveals infinite dimensions, entry paths to this world of Soane's. An act might will to unite all, state an understanding for the viewer before the object of creation discloses itself as a whole. The viewer is not trusted in his capacity to understand by himself. The creator is not trusted for having fully said what he was willing to. Only the striking encounter is searched for. Whereas an infinity of small acts that assemble will bring about a whole in the way Soane has built his Museum, through it unfolds a complexity, non-visible beforehand, a secret world of diverse experiences appearing to the viewer.

The more the space beholds this loss of references, the more the visitor experiences his own being in movement, loosing consciousness of his acts, of the world. He will find, orient, name and loose himself to the complexity of his being. Out of control, he will let himself be dominated.

Soane builds a place for the visitor to loose a conscious control, to let himself go, be bathed within the surrounding.

Attitude is the place where the world and the visitor will meet, the perfect middle: non pre-defined, non-definite, non-defined, variable. The more the situation is difficult to visualize, the better attitude can be fixed, decided upon: the visitor opposes the situation. The more the situation is of the 'middle', the more difficult it is to know where, how, what situate: the viewer's own perception and the situation are at crossroads, the subject and the object of the topic.

The architect as creator should simply be utmost part of the present. There is no need for him to start a new meaning within each creation, ad infinitum. No need to think today merely as a constant beginning.

The intensity of these devices was a product of Soane's passionate involvement with his practice and his consistent use of a small number of space types and design ideas throughout approximately 380 projects and 245 clients. <sup>23</sup>

Soane is seen as no innovator, reusing constantly the same architectural elements, one's he encounters along his own discovery of other works of architecture. This does not seem to be a problem for him.

Soane gets overwhelmingly lost in the present, within the process of creation to better project into the future. Soane could not have understood tomorrow if he has not felt in the present. He would not have been able to disclose new interests, new meanings for a twenty-first century visitor, taken that nothing new has been going on inside the Museum since 1832. Soane builds up for tomorrow, not because he projects onto the future, but because he lays down, sets and names parameters to his insertion within the present and the past. Soane believes meaning is still possible in the future; one sharable with his own sense of meaningfulness. Soane does not alienate the present for a better view to set upon the future, but he sharpens his consciousness of the present in order to build meaning for tomorrow.

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<sup>23</sup>VAN SCAIK, Leon. "Walls, Toys and the 'Ideal' Room. An analysis of the Architecture of Sir John Soane." *AA Files*, IX (1985).

The process and not the goal is of importance. It is meaningful because it discloses all. The different layers of reality reassemble into a thick meaning, not an only one sided one.

If it is impossible to see the goal, the final solution because there is too much thickness in reality's purpose, it becomes impossible to project upon a situation. Architecture is about another kind of act. You have to understand the thickness of reality to act in a meaningful way. This basic context is crucial for architects to understand because it is the basic structure upon which to build meaning, to build life. Architecture can then become the support to the building of meaning of life, of our existence.

Meaning lies within attitude, the opening of the architect's eyes, upon what is already before him. He should follow an attitude of being alive, being part of the world and not only projecting a grid of meaning upon the existent. Often he tries to name his vision as an expression of the present in context, but he in fact imposes it. The context beholds a free capacity to evolve. Naming his vision upon it, the architect is free to evolve with the situation. Naming his vision, as the one already existing within the context limits both him and the world he enters.

Soane never talks about architectural tricks he constantly reuses. They adjust to the context and are not a universal rule to apply. To understand them, to know about their use, the student architect must be set inside the situation. He then understands their intricate connection with other dimensions. Soane never extracts items from their context, they only exist, as characters, once they play a part, are visible in their relation to other elements. Yet these devices are present. They disclose a visibility between the visitor to the finished art piece and the other dimensions of the context. Soane looks at the world's production to see a reflection of himself. Following Soane's path, the visitor looks at Soane to see his own self. The architectural devices map out the encounter of the visitor and the Museum. It is time taken to revisit shared dreams, find the way to set a lasting look upon them. Art pieces are a tool to this viewing. Mirrors set all around the House increase this reflection of a self. They are never placed so a visitor can admire his own image, but as a devious way to infinitely increase the depth and multiplicity of the look laid upon objects within the Museum.

Soane's quest is not one of rationally enclosing the totality of the architect's span of action and to use this knowledge as a tool to better dominate his profession. His means are limited to the revealing process of underlying quests, grounding reasons to the architect's being, acting, feeling of continuity within his acts and at a larger scale of his place within mankind.

Within the Museum is set an incredible play with mirrors. John Soane jokes with the different views caught of the same room, confronting one or the other element in a slanted point of view.

Soane gives a lot of freedom of interpretation, of personal identification within his house. This latter is not built as a play of surfaces. The richness of meaning is beyond what lies in the House, what it is made of. The shape of it can vary without end. Whereas the Museum can be eternally frozen and yet say something different to each visitor, the appearance of it does not need to change in order to say things differently. Architecture stays as situations evolve. Every person reacts differently to a same context and carries a different experience within, one changing his relation to the world. The assembled collection, in its freezing, becomes architecture.

Yet in the end, the House says the same thing even if time passes, if the situation of epochs and the way of setting a look upon things have changed. It has only become visible to more. One superior meaning lies within the House, which makes everyone agree on the power laid within. An Act of Parliament can set the House to be unchanged, yet Soane's work escapes the analyst. Soane is in search of the best fit for a specific situation. Yet each context is new and simplified when named. Parameters involved help the analyst see better these variations simply of one aspect within different situations. This play can evolve ad infinitum and escape the analysis once more. Architecture is made of stone and should evolve to an infinity of possible situations.

### 3.2.2 disclosing the architect

Before becoming an architect, the apprentice must name himself and name his position in regard to others. One based on his capacity to have an open look upon them, not because he looks at them, but because they become visible to him. A strength which gives him no reason to be with

others than to let them become visible, as landmarks to his own changing self. As he becomes himself, he will open to others and act beyond the limited finality of his acts.

Architecture can then become a conscious act expressed for others, to be placed in their viewpoint. Instead of expressing himself to become visible, the architect should have the capacity of being. He should have something to say. The meaning to express coming from within him, out of all other considerations. The architect will then recognize himself out of his limits. He will be part of the community he acts for.

The architect discloses himself with architecture.

The architect being present, having integrity without naming himself is a proof of action made for a deeply felt reason; a reason at the level of a surviving within the world. The architect gives himself to others, not acting to simply be placed in the other's view.

The architect often acts a ritual of gathering, putting in context. John Soane, as an architect does not simply act. He names himself and produces a gathering of rituals, a distancing from others. A distancing which lets the other be himself or even pushes him into naming himself in order to be in contact with others. Soane becomes visible, recognized by others and enters a dance with them in which he names, reveals to others what they are and the meaning of this dance. The architect visiting John Soane's House is bound to name himself.

As he creates, the architect signs a point of view and retracts himself in order to give something greater, of which he loses control. The creator exists between the naming of himself and his capacity to give to others. Not for them to blindly become copies of him, but for them to find their own meaning.

### 3.2.3 a character within the bigger story of architecture

Soane looks at the story within the art piece. Many are representations of death: mausoleums or skeletons.

For some, a tomb lies next to another. Yet death is the measure of the greatest responsibilities



taken here on earth, of acts done for the best. The architect builds the burial.

Meanwhile one tombstone next to the other speaks of nothing: only enclosing meaning within an inscription on a rock itself. Yet Soane does not simply lean over the burying for the ritual. Symbols are beheld within Soane's capacity to communicate with others, of being part of a community of meaning. While expressing his own sense or at least his aspiration to grasp some, he communicates with the visitor, bringing him back to his roots, to his ancestors. A story is told beyond the formal aspect, beyond the act for the sake of laying down a stone.

Representations of laid tombstones bring the viewer back to the essential meaning of where he is from, why he relates to the past. The meaning of his being here. Death reminds him of the limits to his actions upon the world. He aspires to fetch beyond this limitation, at the meaning of his life. The visible structure of meaning is only there, built as a base for the story, for history, to set down the traces of memory. Death is a big part of this meaningful structure. Death is the ultimate experience of the viewer's limiting.

Soane is willingly bathed within. For him death is significant, not only as a relevant experience but as a proof of his need to communicate his will to die. Not that Soane is driven towards death in itself, but towards its capacity to reunite him anew with the world. The faith he carries in the uniting of different parameters of the world is the proof of his belonging to something and not simply being an abstraction set within a well-discerned range of dimensions. The world is still one yet ungraspable in all its dimensions, as Soane is, and as the viewer facing death representations is.

Soane makes a screenplay out of his own death. He builds a legend in order to give to others. He becomes Sir John Soane, the builder of the Museum. A character, distancing himself from an experience in the present. The character is set within the here and is part of an elsewhere at the same time, set within a distant story. This distancing allows the frame to reveal itself. A frame itself in constant renewal, in reorganization, ready to reveal, put in relation different layers of reality.

The representations Soane collects are a witness of the architect's commitment to crystallize a

society's recognition of death's timeless dimensions through the building of Mausoleums. Representations of an eternal spirit bypassing limits of time and space, of the experience, the confronting of the viewer. Death discloses in the viewer the memory of that something he has not lived yet, of which he has every day felt the experience as a mortal.

As a greater character giving his life to posterity, acting beyond the limits of his own existence to produce meaning and visibility for others and building the grandeur of a nation, Soane has a fascination for Napoleon Bonaparte. Soane uses many pages to quote the story of two portraits of Bonaparte and a pistol once owned by him, set in the Breakfast-room.<sup>24</sup> The story of the object beholding more than the representation it puts forward, enclosing a fascination for a power upon life.

Soane desiring to reach out to bigger limits opens up as he sets his look upon the world, and does not enclose it within a vision apprehended beforehand to relive it.

### 3.3 the architectural narrative or history built by objects.

#### 3.3.1 a relation between objects: the world's contradictions

Everyone carries with him his own duality. Thus it is possible to 'touch' everyone else; Soane builds an open narrative he can communicate to others, and engage them in. The visitor of the Museum is engaged in a discovery, because he feels the duality of meaningful elements, a duality that has meaning to anyone and reconnects us all together. The meaning of things is not in the elements. The meaning is in-between, in the relation between things. This relation, set in a temporal perspective, can be built to take the path of an improvement. Meaning is found on the long run, through the infinite possibilities of revisiting this complexity. The architect set in the middle of the complexity can create the narrative to disclose meaning, direct it.

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<sup>24</sup> SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum .....*, London, 1830, Appendix, p.35-37. Bonaparte, Portrait of, and description of the circumstances under which it was painted; Bonaparte, Pistol presented to Napoleon.

SOANE, John. *Description of the House and Museum .....*, London, 1832, p. xiii-xvii. Napoleon Bonaparte.

The collection laid within the House is assembled, chosen according to its power to bring about experiences out of our limited condition. Different dimensions brought together, at a meeting point:

Soane does not oppose situations. Whereas each beholds an infinity of variations in evolving times, each state is a complexity different from the other. Soane's aim is to chase the structure behind the possible intricacy of variables, to name the elements at work, involved and the sensations they provoke; get a hold of these, the complexity. Then have the capacity to reproduce and produce a world in harmony with his beliefs that amidst this reality he has to deal with. Soane can work, within different contexts he names. And works from the inside view of a given situation. He has a bodily and mind felt relation to his surrounding. He does not only compose or act to narrow down a classification of buildings and out of context labeled facts.

Man can apply nature's extended laws. The possible, acceptable field of their application, or at least their relation to humanized space must be named. Man lives within a law he cannot control, expressing an emergency. Some would struggle to make their dreams part of reality, yet man is feeble in naming himself and is enclosed within a limited definition of himself.

The wall is a time measurement revealed by the passing through. If the essence of the wall is in time, space revelation, in moving orientation, then the wall solely becomes the architectural tool, not architecture itself. For Soane it is a revelation tool of himself and the world, of the here and the elsewhere. These have to be identified, dissociated from the organizing frame constituting architecture. The wall reveals differences and their relationships.

Soane builds a meaningful architecture from the existing. He finds meaning within the existing contradictions of the world. Architecture grounds these opposites, makes them become meaningful because sets them as contradictions in relation to one another. The narrative of architecture, set up in reality, endlessly rebuilds the world, not elsewhere but for the visitor's meaningfulness. Architecture confronts the viewer to the way he sees it and wills to relate to the existing. Architecture names what man thinks and wants. The architect does not have the power to invent this meaning. He must learn to perceive other dimensions.

Architecture lies between the architect's personal experience of life and the producing, sharing of this experience of complexity beyond a needed structure. Architecture makes visible the point of view of the architect looking at the world, being taught and fed by the world.

To dream himself, Soane revisits the traces of himself left by obsessive notes taken within books or in his diary. He visits his memory: memory of experiences to see the story of these, tell them to himself. The display of objects freezes Soane's memory, his mind into objects he then gives to the visitor. Soane produces history, produces memory of experiences.

### 3.3.2 act architecture; build the architectural object.

The architect views the object.

A point of view can come from the architect or from a situation imposed on him. Submitting to the situation, he can dominate it, yet his point of view and act stay limited to the evolution of the situation. He is submissive to any change within ever-evolving situations. Architecture must be able to bypass this limited condition. Architecture is made out of stone.

In order to project meaningfulness, the architect inserts himself within a corpus of meaningful experiences. These he will identify and name, appropriating them. Productions created in a state of emergency express a void bypassing the limited time of a specific situation. Isolation, solitude, dreams and a greater than oneself meet. The architectural projection shapes into the building of a shared dream. Yet reality is only sharable due to the experiences that can take place within it. Architecture is then not a projection of one but of possible experiences.

Soane is a creator dealing with the world's complexity, building a narrative to be experienced. He transposes ideas into action. He invites the student of architecture to find his own place of action within the House; a recreated effect in the central narrative. A narrative of timeless nature not bounded by the timing of the action. The world's complexity and richness is recreated, through the poetry of architecture lived in the experience of the House.

Then, a dance with the world takes place. The architect goes out and experiments, de-centralizes himself in the world in order to re-centralize himself in the House. At the same time, he must

center himself, place himself within the world in order to open up again. He takes knowledge of his perceptions in the House. He can then transmit through his architecture the dialogue of a lived and meaningful life. This dance must take place in order to lay down the milestones of the world-references. These references are not theoretically fixed. They can emerge from different contexts, places and times, as long as they enclose both layers of experience within them, and as long as they are placed anew on two levels of being situated.

Soane reveals the architect's power to extract the essence of the world and reproduce it, play with it, change it. He is responsible for an increase or poverty of the world and its essence. The one the architect has built. The greatest, grandest power, above the architect's capacity to act, is his ability to produce an everlasting meaning.

The architect being conscious of his incapacity to see the goal, the final solution to the act of building because there is too much thickness in reality's purpose, gives up his projection upon a situation. Architecture is about another kind of act. The architect has to understand the thickness of reality to act in a meaningful way. This basic context is crucial for architects to understand because it is the basic structure upon which to build meaning, to build life. Architecture can then become the support to the building of meaning of life, of our existence.

The ultimate consciousness is not one of knowing where he is led to, but why. It is not a question of knowing where he will end up, what he will end up with, what he wants and to find all the tools to achieve this goal. Architects talk about building life yet they do not know what life is. Life is being where you are, in total harmony. An architect cannot build for others if he himself is not living. He achieves solely something only on the surface of things; one which, without depth cannot persist, which will fall to dust so easily.

The architectural object must be made visible.

The architect is no more battling to have his dreams imposed, appear in reality. His dreams are a product of his relation to the world. They stand within it. He cannot cut himself from the world, make the most acute study of chosen parameters for these will never be but a parcel of reality's

full extent. He cannot name his ideal and come back to project what is best for a specific abstract situation.

Architecture transmits the intensity of the intention. Architecture faces its creator with the unbearable question of ethics. His act cannot be done in isolation. As a builder, he always acts for others, is seen by everyone. His intention is visible to everyone.

Yet the intention behind Soane's work escapes many analysts. Soane creates a world of his own, enclosing the complementary bonded condition yet liberty of the world at large. Soane is in search of the best fit for a situation, yet each context is new. A simplification of parameters, a naming discloses for the visitor of this world the infinite span of simple variations of one aspect within a different plan. This play can evolve ad infinitum. Architecture is made of stone yet should evolve to an infinity of possible situations.

The dream of building architecture is a way of being part of reality. Nevertheless the architect needs art to make him dream and name himself, let him see his own dreams.

As best way to build the architect should give himself the possibility of living an ideal, a dream he would carry into reality. Nevertheless, no safe path exists between a dream and its incarnation. An infinity of obstructing parameters appear along the way. And maybe is reality only challenging for this reason. Dreams he has. Dreams he feels the need to shape and build. He carries them within, yet needs to identify them. Through art he names them. Through architecture he builds them into reality. An emerging complexity within reality needs to be accounted for. Only feelings can be of trust. The issue is not the sensation felt. In that respect, Soane does not copy down lists of reactions to a situation, but a series of identifiable facts, or objects that incarnate the narrative of his relation to the world. Dealing with dreams or narrative, a flickering quality to things is sensed. These become inviting devices whereas dealing with reality; the structure of things takes on the mask of a one-sided, unique view.

The architect acts more than what he is conscious of. Every look he sets upon the world, his being is a statement of his beliefs.

The general recognition beyond the professional, cultural, epoch limitation will be the approbation of signification within its own perceptual limitation.

The architect should act upon the world or look at it first, experience it in order to understand, situate himself in regard to others or the situation. Soane does not experience the world itself, travel all around, but relies on art's naming of meaning to expand his life. His main focus remains the collecting of infinite experiences of the world enclosed within art, to enable their blossoming within a new built architecture. Soane acts in a meaningful way for himself first, in a way which nourishes him in a lasting way.

The architect is secured when by defining parameters ahead of time, he envisions an achievement of perfection, a projection of his ideas onto reality. Yet a fitting of an ideal with reality seems impossible when the evolution of a single parameter, and so of the whole is hindered. A conceptualized project, thought of in its totality is dead even before it starts its existence. Meaning emerges from the feeling of how precious some things are, of how they can be lost the next minute.

An architect's action should be set within all the complexity of a situation. It can only take place by a prerequisite ignorance of any specifically spotted value. The architect cannot be conscious of all those at stake. No architect can be affirmative of any value, given that these mew in accordance to their relations to the surrounding. The architect should lose himself within his marks and have his senses dictate his consciousness. Meanwhile, this constant disorientation-reorientation without distancing process brings the architect to an everlasting emergency of never seeing himself, situating himself within the world he acts upon.

As the architect encounters a challenging situation, he discloses a better definition of his relations to the world, the meaning of his being placed within. Meaning emerges directly from the architect's attitude.

The structure set up does not need to be formally complex in order to greet different layers of meaning. Only the meaningful act stays within a structure that can allow different layers to fix themselves. A simple structure can be named clearly enough to open to different possibilities. It can be visible yet elusive, opened and be the basis for an unpredictable experience. As so, another contradiction for scholars has been the turnover between the complexity of the Museum and the playfulness yet simplicity of Soane's architecture.

Architecture should perceive itself as a play with different visible levels. All should mingle to reveal one and the same dimension, the essence of the act. The reason for its existence should become apparent and infinitely lived anew.

### 3.3.3 share a dream in reality out of time or space limiting

The architect's first aim is to envision the dream.

The architect can run after a very large and covering vision yet not leave room for the experience of it as revealer of reality's thickness. He then cannot fully live reality because he lies beyond it, lost in his dream of it.

There is no need for him to assume the responsibility of the whole world's becoming. No need for him to show the world what to be. The architect has no right to think one act can change the world, that acting is the ultimate meaning the finality. An architect totally assuming his faults does not save himself from the responsibility of a meaningless act.

A known dream is not a dream anymore but a goal.

Soane shows the architect a more beautiful life, opening his eyes to it. Soane makes the architect sensible to, thoughtful and respectful of different levels of reality. Soane simply shows the architect the beauty set within the world. He makes the architect dream. This latter will then find his own way of dreaming, of making the world his own, finding and naming himself.

Architecture is superior to other arts for Soane. It is not only a capturing of dreams but builds the structure to endlessly relive them in infinite different ways, as they disclose, invite the visitor to new experiences of the world. Soane produces the House and the lectures because he believes in something great and beautiful within architecture to be built. There is no right for the architect to degrade architecture and the world of its wonders. He is responsible of the world, indebted to respond to the world as it is given to him, real and imaginary.

A single element repeated endlessly can put into action an accumulation, a bringing together. Otherwise fragments are in confrontation and never unite. Reunion cannot simply be symbolic



limited and enclosed within a relation to a certain theme, or a same material. This does not build an elsewhere.

Soane is conscious of the architect's limited dimension in opposition to the world given. The architect has a constant quest to reassuringly narrow down things to meet his personal point of view. Soane builds for the architect to experience, perceive the generous openness of life and trustfully name himself as he opens up to others and accepts differences. Architecture beholds the meaning of all actions and state of being in the world. If other arts can thrive for the bribing of a superior meaning of things, architecture deals with it in the real world: a union of the real and of dreams brought down to it into meaning.

Architecture does not exist to canalize the visitor's mind towards a goal but in order to open it up to different scales, thickness of reality which play together and create a story, the possibility of a story, of history.

The architect escapes his temporal condition through dreams. Art tells him stories, keeping the viewer moving into another reality. Architecture on the other hand embraces an even more powerful strength, bringing dreams back to reality. The viewer himself is framed within the representation. When perceiving the dream, he perceives himself within it. Architecture is harder than any other art: reality and dreams are mingled and can erase one another within it.

The world opens itself with a different look set upon it. Architecture, when naming a specific view upon things, has the power to make one dream.

The architect is responsible for producing a vision for others.

The architect responding to reality's fluctuation by a formally fluctuating architecture only builds uncertainty. Soane in his House makes visible all the parameters involving his experience of life and makes them his so he can incorporate them. He does not need to make them all visible. It does not mean that they do not all exist. Their power lies beyond this formal visibility. They are part of the essence of architecture. Each element says a single thing yet holds within the memory of other past and future experiences, other situations. Only one thing at a time is said. Yet one production can say many things in different times and experiences.

Architecture builds a dream bigger than any conscious one, any projection within reality. It builds generosity, complexity of looks upon life.

The unchanging power of architecture makes its creator aware of the variations happening around it. Soane wills to see his house permanently unchanged yet names it as the tool to teach architecture's complexity. One single tool for an endless variation of possible situations.

If the narrative, the relation to the world beholds complexity of relations to the world, the object produced itself does not need to hold this complexity in its formal aspect.

In the end architecture gives the architect the power to raise the right questions as to what is the most meaningful act to be made. The act that passes time, the one that can be shared by the multitude. A present satisfaction is not enough when remaining the only question for the architect in search of an act that is really worthy of being committed.

The architect builds starting from a projection, a global vision where dreams surpass reality.

The architect should not try to put together a significant system of production of his architecture. He has the power to reveal, show and name the richness in the multiplicity of reality and of dreams, projected ideals. That is within what the architect is and within what he wants to be: free from enclosures in his state of limited, isolated creature; projecting all possibilities, to reach something bigger than himself, his dreams. He does not only build a memory of himself, of all his known, already lived experiences, but a common ground to his different capacities of being.

Different levels of reality meet through the narrative. Openness then emerges out of any action that would want to take value over time, an act imprinted. The openness is necessary to respond to variable situations. Architecture is an authentic art that discloses impostures, non-generous attitudes, which are not as great as what they name themselves. Only architecture is capable of responding to different approaches, different persons. It is in such a way, a means of communication.

Architecture's stage is reality.

Different dimensions of reality share the same stage. They are at the same time split and brought together. They play as opposites and at the same time the quintessence of all things is to remain within an infinity of parallel dimensions.

The architect is situated in time. He is in opposition to the world's a-temporality. This opposition appears once the architect detaches himself from nature's given conditions to model, dominate, and transform it into something else; make a dream of it. The architect has a power and mostly the one of standing within the present. Time is the construction of a story, the link between different parameters of his consciousness, unseen reality.

## CONCLUSION

Reason is thought to be good, but cannot exist without another awareness.

For when we define, we seem in danger of circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions, which we often take up by hazard, or embrace on trust, or form out of a limited and partial consideration of the object before us, instead of extending our ideas to take in all that nature comprehends, according to her manner of combining. We are limited in our inquiry by the strict laws to which we have submitted at our setting out.<sup>25</sup>

Soane has left us with a House to experience. He has collected paintings through which the visitor can look at meaning, at himself. Sir John Soane opens up the freedom of a path found by the architect.

Soane has not only framed the House he has inhabited, freezing it into an 'objectified' Museum. He has by the same means transformed himself into a character, an object of which the visitor sees the other side yet can never grasp the totality. He knows every side of the House and the *Description*, can enter it, turn around it yet never is his knowledge given as a final solution, a simplification.

Even if the first approach to his work may have the analyst think so, Soane is not in a problematic of naming the sensation. This latter is central, Soane constantly invites the visitor to keep trace of it. Yet it as an unnamable. Soane names the different elements producing the sensation. Those that make the visitor feel it. The meaning and sensation produced by an object are infinite and continuous. It is then possible to name the elements that make of each situation, a particular context. Once sensations are named, surrounded a situation, the unnamable, the poetry of architecture disappears.

Soane reveals reality as a gathering of objects that play between each other. These produce the narrative of their meeting and play as mirrors of one another. The narrative produces an image.

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<sup>25</sup> BURKE, Edmund (1729-1797). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. London, 1757. p. 12.

The House, as accumulation of narratives, is a mirroring of a meaningful architecture to be produced, of meaningful worlds to live in, of a stage to enact the plays.

Paintings are tortures to awake the viewer to existence, awake him to the emergency of existing, to real meaning. The viewer's ultimate goal is to hit the wall and reveal his real sorrow, of being within the world, not existing as a pure consciousness, being a prisoner of his flesh. The viewer's will is set beyond the projection of his desires upon the world, as pure formal effervescence of matter and color more or less mastered, dominated. The frame is the passage towards an elsewhere but also brings him back within the present, reality. The frame mirrors the viewer's dream.

The art piece is objectified once it is framed. The sculpture encloses a frame in itself. Architecture is the frame to the representation of reality.

As long as Soane does not stop his house, does not freeze it within a story, it does not exist as object, it does not exist for others. An object is a built thing, a story that can be reused, appropriated to build another story around it, on the fragments of the visitor's experience. The visitor in turn experiences the House and builds his own memory of it. The world opens up to all the possible stories that can take place within. Building is no more a struggle against elements but a joyful encounter. The House gives the visitor to himself. The House gives him the power of giving to others. He creates an object, a story, awakening his memory. In that respect, art as repetitious act of encounter, helps the visitor name dreams to build. The architect that has understood this power within him, can then share with others this dream and build it, as one that can nourish all differently and endlessly.

The scholars' attitude is contradictory. Each list a different point of view yet all consider it being Soane's. All agree on an interest in Soane when starting their research. They then find Soane limiting in the exploration of their specific point of view. Instead of looking at the attitude behind the character, they only look at the facts surrounding Soane. Yet studying Soane through the facts is too fastidious. One cannot in the limited time of a study, encounter all the facts of a life accumulated in a relentless collecting.

The House has been built to reveal the architect to himself, to his real quest and to how reproduce it. The architect is the only one who has named the path, can use the House to endlessly nourish what he already is.

Sir John Soane has made the existence of the architect visible and meaningful to others; in other words beyond the experience of the discovered drawing. Art is the tool that has given the architect the power of showing. Sir John Soane has revealed the world and the place of the architect within it. Yet if architecture is in need of art, it has a power of its own that is to blossom. The experience of art names this power. It can then be infinitely transformed, reproduced and shared; guide the architect from one project to another.

Architecture can change. Its evolution does not mean it has to change much in its global aspect. Variations play on the possibility of rendering things present for the experience of the visitor, and so meaningful.

Architecture is a projection, not of the architect toward an ideal but of the world toward an ideal. The ideal must not be part of reality. It is a projection not to be literally built. The architectural drawing is an experience recognizing the difference between both sides of the frame, outside and within the drawing. Architecture is only the frame of a projection of reality toward the ideal. This projection becomes tangible through the lived experience of the drawing.

Soane has the capacity to build architecture on common dreams. He has the capacity to frame a projection of reality, a dream through architecture. An architecture evolving to the liberty of forever new situations. Sir John Soane lays down a simple object, architecture.

The architect within the House and Museum of Sir John Soane lives, embodies meaning and retires with the narrative to envision a mirroring of things to become. A meaning built around what the architect is now, has been and will become.

Page I

Plate II. Plan of the Ground Floor.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832

Page II

Plate III. View in the Breakfast-Room.

The Lobby adjoins the principal Staircase through which you pass into the Breakfast-room. In the centre of this room rises a spherical Ceiling, springing from four segment Arches, supported by the same number of Pilasters, forming a Canopy. In the Dome is an octangular Lantern, with eight scriptural subjects, surmounted with a bell-light. The north and south ends of this room are lighted by Skylights, which diffuse strong lights on the several architectural and other works which decorate the walls. Over the centre of the chimney-piece is an antique Casket of bronze, found in the ruins of Herculaneum. On each side of this casket is an antique Leg of an Animal; the one of oriental alabaster, the other a modern imitation. On each side of the window to the east are Folding Shutters. Behind those shutters and on the interior surfaces thereof, are highly finished Drawings of the Ceiling of the Baths of Livia in the Imperial Palace, and the Soffite of part of a Room in the Villa Adriana at Tivoli, &c. The Fronts of these shutters, and part of the walls of the room, are decorated with Prints engraved and coloured from the remains of a Villa of Antonius Pius in the Villa Negroni in Rome. On the south side of this room are several architectural Designs; a Print, engraved by Charles Turner, A.R.A., from the Picture over the chimney-piece in the dining-room, painted by the late Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A.. There is also a splendid Print of "Napoleon le Grand" in his coronation robes; and a Portrait of Bonaparte in his twenty-ninth year, painted by a Venetian artist, and esteemed an admirable likeness. Another interesting object is a Pistol that belonged to the Emperor Napoleon. The Beautiful and highly finished weapon was taken from one of the Beys of Egypt, and presented by the Emperor Alexander to the Emperor Napoleon on the raft at

Tilsit. This pistol Napoleon took with him to St. Helena, from whence it was brought to England by a French Officer, to whom it had been presented by Napoleon. The view from this room into the Monument Court and into the Museum, the Mirrors in the Ceiling, and the Looking Glasses, combined with the variety of out-line and general arrangement in the design and decoration of this limited space, present an almost infinite succession of those *fanciful effects* which constitute the poetry of Architecture.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, London, 1832, p 1-2.

### Page III

Leaving this recess, you enter that part of the Museum which is under the Dome (6), lighted from the roof, and marked in its architectural decoration by rich variety of outline, and classical ornaments from the antique. The view from the Apollo, looking into the Picture-room, affords a rich assemblage of interesting effects. On the walls of this part of the Museum are various Casts of Foliage, and other antique Ornaments; also a Frieze of the cinque cento richly sculptured and gilt. There are likewise two Basso-relievos, in terra cotta, of the allegorical morning and evening of the Roman Empire. Between these works is another Basso-relievo, in terra cotta, brought from Italy by the late Mr. Adam. To these are to be added a Cast of a colossal bust of Minerva, the beautiful and richly ornamented marble Cornucopia, found in the Villa Adriana, &c.

From the opening in the centre of the domical part of the Museum is a bird's-eye View into the basement story, shewing the Belzoni Sarcophagus, and other works of art surrounding that splendid relic. The opening here noticed is protected by a continued pedestal, raised above the level of the floor. Upon the cornice of this pedestal are Busts, in marble, of distinguished Romans, intermixed with antique Vases, admirable in design and execution. Under the cornice, on the interior surface of the pedestal, is the Front of an antique Sarcophagus, with the representation of the Rape of Proserpine; a plaster Cast from an antique frieze in the Medici Garden; another, of the Festoon between the



pilasters on the outside of the Pantheon, &c. From this part of the Museum, a view into the Breakfast-room offers some striking effects of light and shade.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p 3-4.

#### Page IV

From this part of the Museum, you enter another portion thereof, under the students' room (7). The Museum in this part is rather solemn than gloomy; and the pictorial effects, from catching lights and shades, will be dully appreciated by the students and lovers of art. This portion of the Museum is formed by three isles. (...) The walls of the north and south aisles are decorated with a marble Bocca della verità, Fragments of antique Mouldings, Friezes, and other ancient Works; also some architectural Models, &c. of designs executed.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p4-5.

#### Page V

From this Colonnade you enter the Corridor (20), which is lighted in a manner to shew the objects on the walls to the greatest advantage. (...) In the recess is a magnificent Fragment of Grecian Sculpture, with other works of ancient and modern art; there is also a View into the Monk's Room, which displays some powerful effects of light and shade, and a rich assemblage of interesting objects.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p 12.

Returning to the Corridor (20), you enter the Picture Room (22): the ceiling of this room is most elaborately enriched with Plaster Ornaments in compartments, forming arched canopies.

On the north and west side of this room are single folding shutters, and on the south they are double, with sufficient space between for pictures, both on an inner face of the

shutters and on the wall itself: by this arrangement a small space is rendered capable of containing more pictures than a room of much greater extent. Another advantage of this contrivance is, that of allowing the pictures to be seen in every possible direction.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p 14.

The opening of these shutters presents a view of the upper part of the Monk's Room, and the Recess therein.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p 16.

## Page VI

You next enter the little study (25). This room receives its light chiefly from a window looking into the Monument Court. In the ceiling are several marble Fragments, a Cast from one of the enrichments in the frieze of the Temple of Jupiter Tonans, &c. On the north end of this room is a Drawing of the Mausoleum erected to the memory of Mrs. Soane, various Bronzes, Antique Friezes, Cornices, &c.

On the east side, the chimney-piece is decorated with three pieces of ancient Sculpture; on each side the chimney are two small cinerary Urns, an antique Pilaster Capital, and front in marble of a Roman Tile. Upon the chimney-piece are several Egyptian Divinities, part of a Greek Altar, and other exquisite specimens of an antique Aspersoir; two Metal Stirrups, richly sculptured, found near the Banks of the Boyne; the Walking-Cane of Sir C. Wren -- on the head of a small compass, with architectural instruments, and a five feet rule within, &c.

On the west side are various fragments of ancient Greek and Roman Sculptures, and Paws of Animals, of extraordinary execution. The large Fungus over the window, from the rocks of the island of Sumatra, and a beautiful Cornu Amonis, on the south side of the room, will be appreciated by the lovers of natural history. Over the door leading into the dining-room is a Cast of the Apotheosis of Homer, the work of Archelaus of Priene, and which before the French Revolution was in the Colonna palace. Under this cast are

various antique marble Fragments. On each side of the door is a delicious antique Fragment, in the true gusto *antico*, &c.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p18-19.

#### Page VII

On the east side, over the chimney-piece, is a Portrait by the late Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A., almost the last picture painted by that distinguished and polished gentleman. On each side of this picture are Bookcases.

On the west side, over the side-table, is a Picture of Love and Beauty, by the late Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A., formerly belonging to the Marchioness of Thomond, the niece of Sir Joshua. Under this picture is a Portrait of Fanny, by James Ward, R.A.

Soane, John. *Description of the House and Museum...* London, 1832, p 20.

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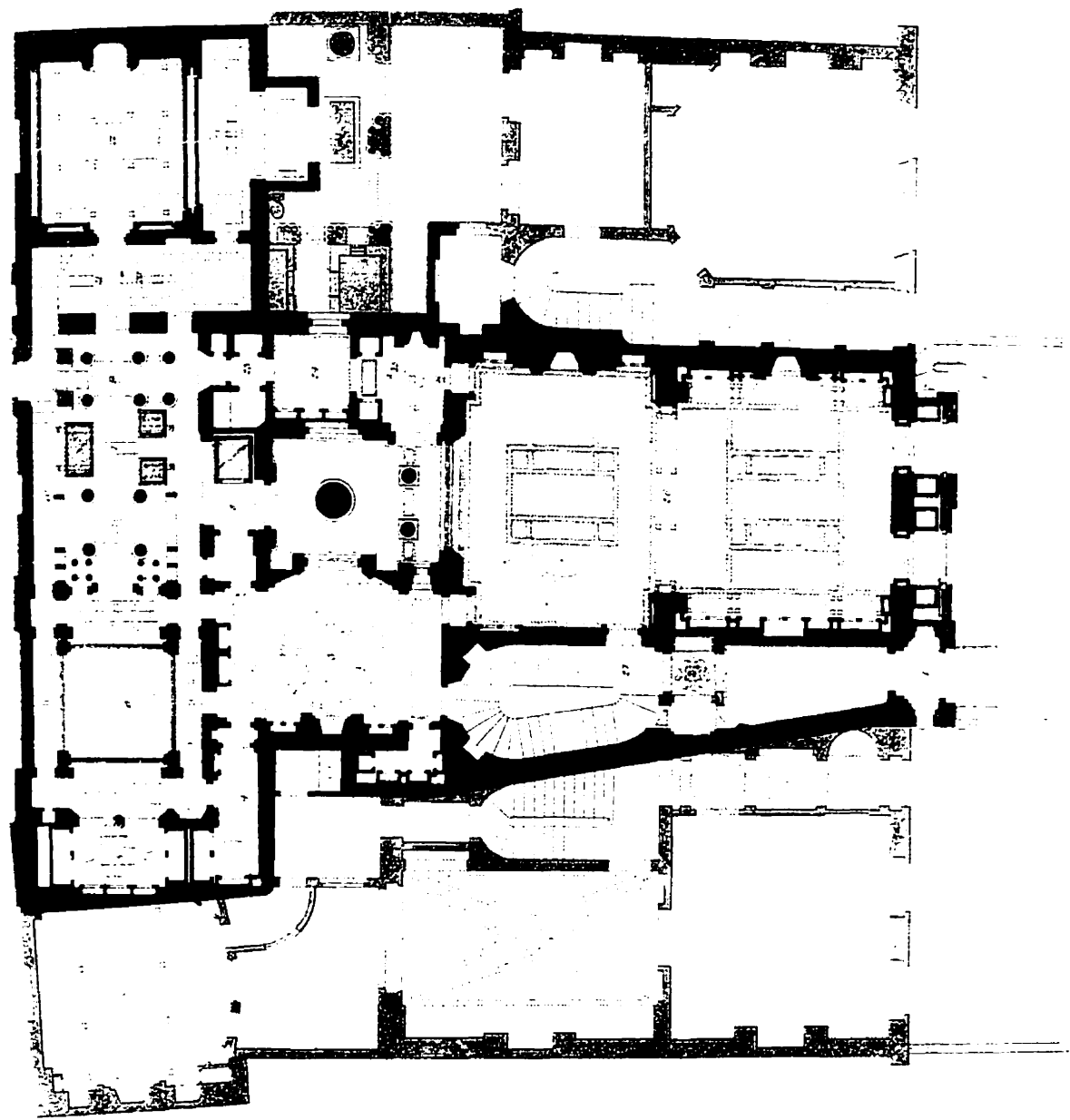
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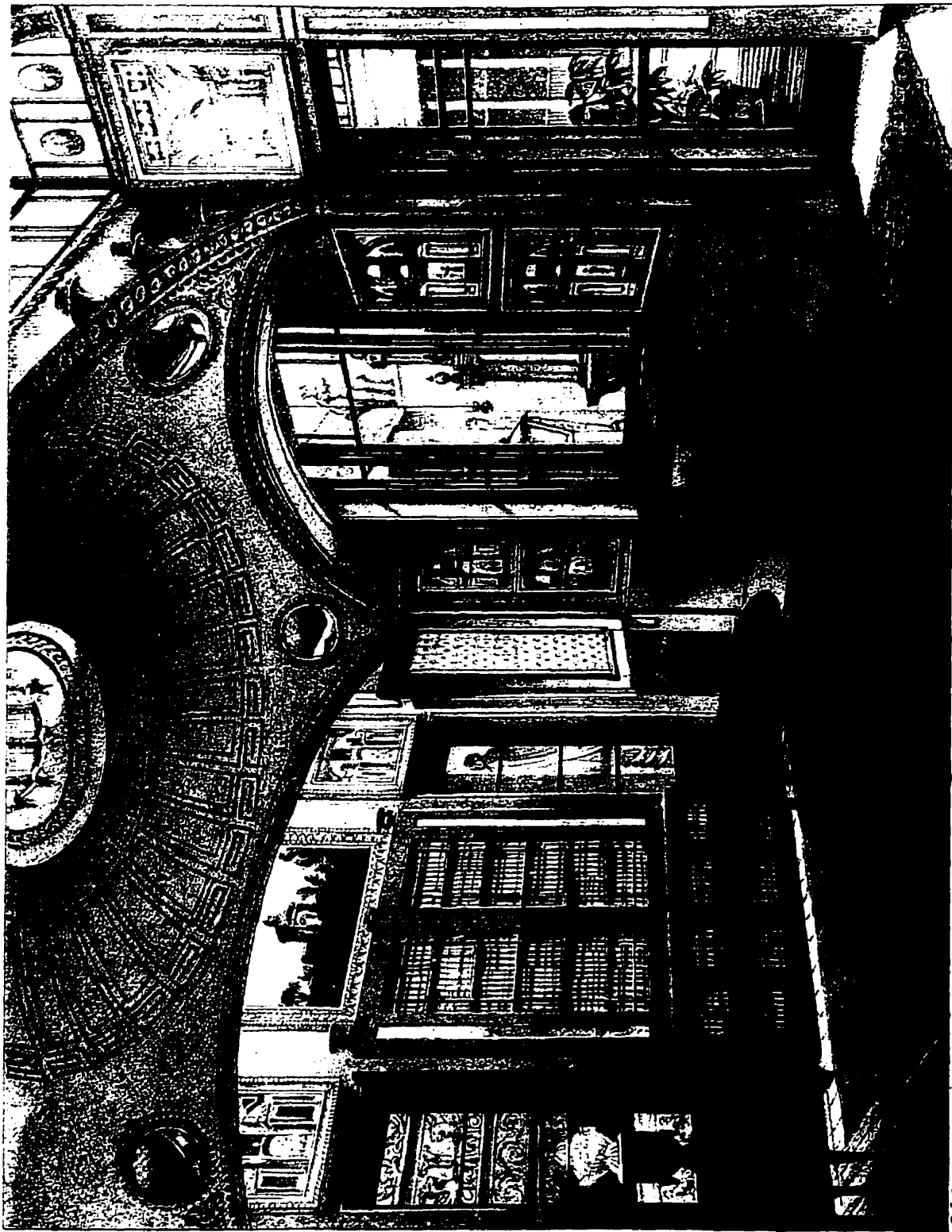
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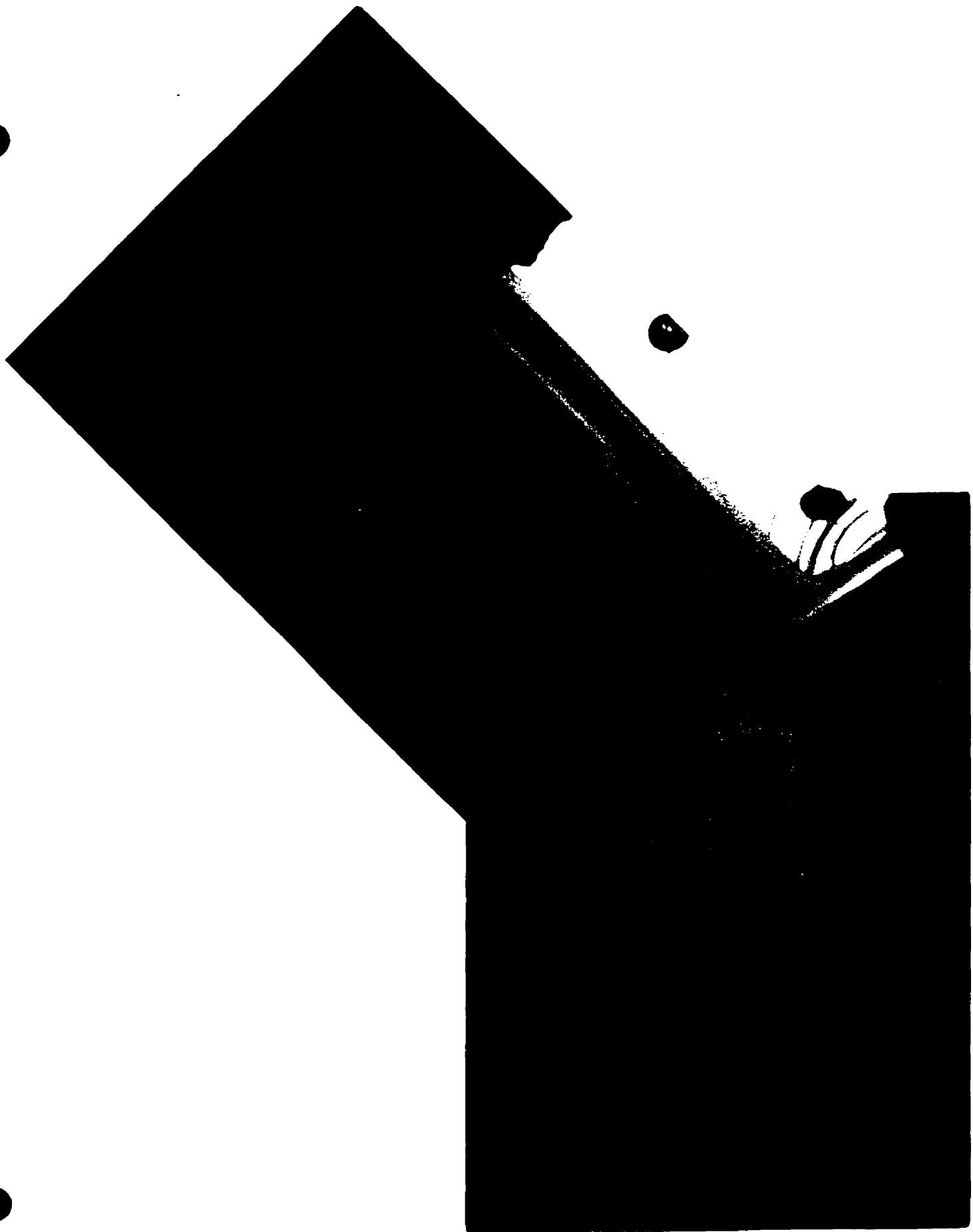




C. J. Richardson.

W. S.













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