EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY CLASSICISM IN ENGLAND: JOHN SOANE'S LANGUAGE AND IMAGINATION

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From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, British architecture had slipped into a widely-acknowledged malaise brought on by the effects of increasing currents of secularisation and commercialisation.[1] Ornaments from classical architecture were used, regardless of the meanings and functions of buildings, as merely arbitrary signs. John Soane (1753–1837), architect and the Royal Academy Professor of Architecture, was a major critical voice. Typifying the Enlightenment spirit, Soane considered the crisis of architecture as a language problem,[2] resulting in the modern deviation from ancient principles—a problem which, he believed, could be solved only by a "return" to origins, by "referring to first principles and causes."[3] Soane never clearly stated what the ancient or first principles were.[4] What we do know, though, is that Soane's designs did not maintain the classical tradition. His work was revolutionary—the "picturesque interiors,"[5] the simple architectural details, as well as his approaches to representation (collection and display), all had no precedent and in various ways, as claimed by modern scholars, they prophesied the architecture of Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus.[6] This chapter aims to shed light on the paradox of Soane's architectural language in relation to first principles—which are more negated than returned to—through detailed consideration of an unpublished manuscript on his house-museum entitled *Crude Hints towards an History of my House in L[incoln's] I[nn] Fields*.[7]

The chapter will first introduce the multivalent Enlightenment discourses about first principles from the various perspectives of the linguist, the associationist and the romantic antiquarian. All these perspectives coexisted in Soane's mind and were connected by a geological concept of first principles—simultaneous destruction and creation—which formed the basis for his experimental enquiry into regenerating the classical language. This

geological concept of first principles, as embodied in the perpetual cycling of subterranean fire and water, central to the romanticist narrative of the earth, is a Soanean image of imagination and signification.[8] The subterranean force, as will be revealed, underpins the *Crude Hints* manuscript, in which images such as "the vanishing staircase" and "the chaos of fragments" represent the broken classical signification and destroyed signifiers respectively. The manuscript, a mirror of the house-museum, illustrates that Soane's effort to "return" to the origins of architectural language continues a critical line of modern architecture traceable to the sixteenth century avant-garde, in which art "only by destroying itself can constantly renew itself."[9]

Crude Hints and First Principles

Crude Hints was written in August and September 1812, when Soane was demolishing the existing house at number thirteen, Lincoln's Inn Fields, as part of his rebuilding project. Claimed to be a "history," the *Crude Hints* text is a fiction wherein Soane, disguised as an antiquary of the future, speculates on the origins of the house which has become a ruin. Various speculations are offered: a Roman heathen temple where vestal virgins were buried alive; a palace of a magician who was petrified; a burial site now merged into oblivion; and the dwelling of an architect who died from persecution.

This funereal imagery is also reflected in the structure of Soane's text. Rather than being written in a single body, the text is divided into three columns with the main body in a column down the right-hand side of the page, and a secondary and tertiary commentary in two further columns to the left (Fig. 1). Thus, the text forms a series of columns which in theory can go on and on continuously. Instead of being bound by a strict logic, these columns are rather loosely linked through associations. This unusual form is reminiscent of copies of library books which, through time, have come to contain in the margins writings by various hands, continuously receiving amendments. Moreover, just as marginalia tend to reflect the

views of different readers, in the different columns of *Crude Hints* various voices are articulated. Often, one voice argues with another.

Fig. 1: John Soane (1753–1837), *Crude Hints* manuscript (1812), ff. 30–31/ © Sir John Soane's Museum

Like the ruinous structure of the text, the house-ruin Soane describes in the text is not an enclosed entity. Rather, it is imagined as being inseparable from its foundations, a site consisting of the ruins of previous times.

> This building has been supposed to have been of much greater extent than appears from the remains now to be seen – & it is also presumed to have been enlarged at different times and, its decorations suggest, and [*sic*] in some degree formed from the ruins of others of a more magnificent and interesting description.[10]

Therefore, the ruin has become part of the ground, and the text, a "history of [the] house," seems intermingled with the history of the earth. Indeed, the geological and archaeological image of the house is central to the text. It is mentioned that "the ground has been considerably raised by the lapse of ages," and Soane compares it to Rome: "Modern Rome is at least 15 feet above the level of the Ancient City."[11] Also like Rome, underneath the present level of ground there are "various catacombs and crypts of which at present the remains are inconsiderable."[12] In this way, the imagery of the ruined house suggests rock strata, which recalls the English geologist John Whitehurst's (1713–1788) apocalyptic vision of "ruin upon ruin,"[13] and anticipates Percy Shelley's image of "infinite mines."[14] Little noticed by modern scholars, Soane's geological interest, as will be discussed later, played a crucial role in both his architectural design and theory.

This image of ruin-strata within the manuscript anticipated the visual effect which the interior of Soane's house-museum was to reveal. In his museum, Soane collected and

displayed an extraordinary number of books, paintings, architectural models, drawings, prints, plaster-casts and sculptural fragments. Notably, he did not arrange them according to classical principles of order and symmetry; nor did he follow those empirical antiquarians who were to become future modern archaeologists and historians, and employ a chronological method in organisation. Rather, the interior of the museum is, as one visitor recorded, "an immeasurable chaos of worthless fragments, of all times, from all countries, of all kinds of art, originals and copies mixed together"[15] (Fig. 2). This "chaos" of his collection resonates with the irregular layout of the interior of the house-museum. While moving around it, the visitor encounters a multiplicity of viewpoints, unexpected vistas, irregular outlines, tints and variety, and the abstract qualities of variety, intricacy and surprise. This experience approximates that of reading *Crude Hints*, where one comes across fragmented information or ideas, various voices and multivalent narrations. Thus, instead of being attributed to Soane's indulgence in eccentricity, the seemingly irrational language and arbitrariness in *Crude Hints* may be considered, rather, as Soane's experiment with language in reference to the ancient principles.

Fig. 2: Interiors of Sir John Soane's Museum / © Sir John Soane's Museum

Enlightenment thinkers debated over ancient principles. One of Soane's authorities, Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1775–1849), believed that the original principles of architecture were an essential form, or "type."[16] Similar to Plato's "idea," type is metaphysical, and all material construction is only the imperfect embodiment of this eternal form. A true type would possess character. As Quatremère conceived architecture as a language (mainly constituted by decoration), so character was a linguistic sign. Ideal architecture (like a monument), for Quatremère, was therefore capable of expressing ideas and meanings through the precise signification (of a single event or an individual) evinced by its character.[17] This linguistic account of signification as strictly controlled reasoning was

opposed by rhetorical theorists or associationists who assigned more importance to the train of imaginations in mental discourse, a process which, as John Locke (1632–1704) envisioned, is "another connexion of ideas owing wholly to chance or custom."[18] Archibald Alison (1757–1839) further asserted that it is not controlled reasoning, but the imagination or association of ideas that is "the constant connection between the sign and the thing signified."[19] Advocating that the value of art was its ability to stimulate such associations and feelings, the associationists returned to ancient principles like sublimity in their search for a new aesthetic theory grounded on the psyche. Another group of romantic and mythographic antiquarians like Pierre-François Hugues (Baron d'Hancarville) (1719–1805) and James Christie differed from both the linguists and the associationists, holding that ancient principles may be found in religious rituals and customs of ancient civilisations, which they believed had a common origin.[20] Studying ancient rituals and customs, therefore, was the way to come close to the ancients' original creativity and thus promote the development of art.

A diligent student of Enlightenment thought, Soane endeavoured to study and engage with all these discourses.[21] Ambivalent towards most, Soane nevertheless accepted many of their contradictory approaches. *Crude Hints* often features not one, but several voices quarrelling, which mirror the incongruence in his attitude towards classical language. For example, on the platform of the Royal Academy, Soane promoted the theory of Quatremère, urging that architecture must have appropriate character and meaning that are well understood.[22] However, in Soane's actual designs, like the interior of the house-museum, there is often not a clear and singular message. If the exterior of the building evokes Quatremère's "monument" (implying a singularity, or a transparent link between the signifier and the signified), the interior of the house-museum is rather like a monument collapsed into a ruin, the favourite theme of the rhetorical theorists. In *Crude Hints*, nothing is known about

those "more magnificent and interesting"[23] ruins upon which the current ruin was built. As Soane the antiquarian speculates, if it was a temple, it was to unknown gods; if it was a monastery, it was possessed by unknown persons; if it was a burial site, the graves were those of anonymous persons. All that can be taken for granted as "signified" or the "absolute" in a conventional monument is lost in the unfathomable ruin upon ruin. Only fossils, or rather, fragmentary ideas, are found entombed randomly in the text-strata, extending to the irretrievable past.

The fossil-like fragments in the text-strata reflect the fossil-like collections in the house-museum. For example, two huge ammonite fossils were displayed on the roof of the monumental court. However, the most telling confirmation of Soane seeing his collections as fossils is his self-image of "the petrified magician," alluding to the cast of Apollo Belvedere in the chapel of the house-museum. To highlight the hidden force of fossilisation or petrification of volcanoes, a further note is added: "This is not extraordinary. Lot's wife for looking behind her we all know was changed into a pillar of Salt & remains so to this day!"[24]

This focus on volcanic petrification certainly sheds light on the funereal as a central theme of the house-museum. More importantly, however, it reveals a vital link between Soane's notorious occupation with death and his interest in eighteenth-century geology, and in particular, the French geologist Georges Cuvier's theory of catastrophism.[25] An admirer of Cuvier, Soane was attracted to Cuvier's theories such as functional integration, cataclysmic extinction and the idea of revolution (periodic catastrophes), which may be seen reflected in famous Soanean ruined landscapes like the "Rotunda of the Bank of England as a Ruin" (1798) and "Bank of England" (1830). Underpinning Cuvier's catastrophism is an important scheme of subterranean fire and water which had been shaped by the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680).[26] Developing the ancient Greco-Roman notion of an eternal fire at the earth's centre through empirical investigation of volcanoes, Kircher in his *Mundus*

Subterraneus, first published in 1665, explains the opposing principles of subterranean fire and water ("the perpetual cycling of the fire and water in and around the Earth, the simultaneous perishing and coming into being") as the first principles of the eternal natural operations of the earth.[27]

In Kircher's scheme, the earth is the centre of the universe (geocosm) as an analogue of God, the original creator. The movement of subterranean forces (volcanic lava or the earth's menstruum)—the simultaneous destruction and creation—may also be seen as the original principles of any creation. As scholars have noted, Kircher is a transitional figure between mediaeval thought systems and the growing empirical movement of the scientific revolution.[28] The seventeenth-century pioneer in both geology and anatomy, Danish Catholic bishop and scientist Niels Steno (1638–1686), for example, adopted Kircher's idea with regard to the formation of crystals as a subterranean process.[29] Similarly, the Anglo-Irish natural philosopher Robert Boyle (1627–1691), and Robert Hooke (1635–1703), had provided scientific explanations of how the earth operated and produced (e.g. fossils, minerals, gems) through a process of simultaneous liquidation and coagulation.[30] In the then popular hermetic image of the mind as the earth/geocosm, imagination can thus be understood as the mind's creativity analogous to the subterranean forces of fire and water, the eternal natural operations of the earth. Realised through processes of association while reasoning is suspended, imagination or the process of signification simultaneously creates and destroys.

Soane's innovative architectural language is linked to the geological first principles of simultaneous creation and destruction. Replacing the Renaissance faith in changeless, divine proportion, the hermetic geological notion of first principles held considerable influence in the minds of European artists and patrons in an age of both geological and social turbulence from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. It was notably speculated, for instance,

that the Egyptian pyramids had originated from volcanic eruption or petrification of subterranean fire[31]—an idea which Soane took seriously. In light of the manuscript of *Crude Hints*, wherein images of ruin-strata and subterranean fire are dominant, it may be suggested that at work was an analogue between the processes of writing, of the movement of the imagination, and of artistic creation/regeneration. If classical architectural language is imagined through a monument, Soane's regenerated language is imagined through a ruin, in which the divorce of signifiers and signified is sanctioned as "natural." Like the violent subterranean lava, the artist's imagination, whilst destroying extant objects or signs and turning buildings into ruins, produces the new signs of an archaeological landscape.

The Vanishing Staircase

…it is to be observed that notwithstanding this building consisted of several stages or stories (like some of the buildings of Semiramis) no vestiges remain of a staircase of any kind – hence it is fair to conclude that the extent of the building was greater than its present remains shew – for a Staircase there must have been*

* Note. Admitted– but at the same time there is a space, well suited for a Staircase as it would communicate most easily with the different rooms now existing in the building – I am aware it has been supposed that this very space, if a staircase, could only have been one of those Carcerian dark Staircases represented in some of Piranesi's ingenious dreams for prisons: – those who argue thus forget that a staircase may be [might have been] lighted by a Skylight – & it must be recollected that this reasoning at least makes in favour of the great Antiquity of this Design which some have doubted – skylights have been long in use, and after all the want of lights proves nothing – does not Pliny speak in rapturous delight of the pleasure of writing in a Room lighted by lamps.

v. such a space
a room of one
i.e. nothing over it

This extract of the three columns from the opening section of *Crude Hints* is dominated by the image of an absent staircase, and in particular the dark staircase imagined by the Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) in *Carceri* (Fig. 3). As Manfredo Tafuri suggests, this series of prints, with the violence wrought upon the laws of perspective and the constant metamorphosis of the spaces, marked the end of L. B. Alberti's theoretical precepts of *concinnitas* and *finitio* (harmony and completion).[32] Similarly, Soane's "missing staircase" also refers to an architecture bereft of the signified. In his enquiry into Hegelian semiology, Jacques Derrida notes that within the classical signification system/semiology, the sign is understood according to the structure and movement of the *Aufhebung*, by means of which the spirit (soul/reason), elevating itself above the nature (passions) in which it was submerged, at once suppresses and retains nature, sublimating nature into itself.[33] In Plato's famous "cave" allegory, reality is presented as the dungeon where human beings are chained. Only by escaping from the cave (an image of the body/tomb) can one obtain light (an image of the spirit) and freedom.[34] Appropriated into Christianity, this classical signification system may be seen as underpinning a large corpus of works of art and architecture from the Roman Empire to the Renaissance. As an expression of vertical movement (*Aufhebung*), staircases going up or skylights opening to the heavens conveyed the meaning of guiding the imprisoned soul upwards to reason and to God. In Piranesi's *Carceri*, however, space in the darkness escapes the gaze and broken staircases cross over one another without a clear "signified." Although publically critical of the Italian artist for the excesses of his designs,[35] Soane was in fact, as Robin Middleton points out, "vitally interested" in the Italian's innovation.[36] The evocation of the carcerian staircase may therefore, as Tafuri observes,[37] be seen as Soane's response to Piranesi's pioneering research on a critical line of architecture.

Fig. 3: Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Carceri*, plate VII (first state), etching. In G. Piranesi, *Carceri d'invenzione* (1750)/ Wikimedia Commons

The carcerian image in *Crude Hints* is immediately followed by the bold claim that "skylights have been long in use, and after all the want of lights proves nothing."[38] As evidence, Soane introduces Pliny the Younger speaking "in rapturous delight" of the Greek philosopher Athenodorus' pleasure at writing in a lamp-lighted room.[39] A lamp in an otherwise dark room, in contrast to the skylight, was a familiar image used by the romantic poets for the creative force of the mind—the imagination—in their polemic against reason. The rapturous delight, the pleasure of writing, therefore, is associated with the free flowing of the imagination. Indeed Soane, writing *Crude Hints,* thus seems to be like Athenodorus writing under the lamp. Or perhaps even more like Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's image of himself as Epimenides of Knossos waking up from his long sleep in a tomb, an image from an extract which Soane copied out from Ledoux.[40] The nearly fanatical, passionate and illogical writing of *Crude Hints* illustrates Soane's effort, like Epimenides to "lift up the stone from [the] tomb." Soane's frequent juxtaposition of long phrases and the use of a large number of em dashes and colons all seem to represent how his imagination, now re-animated by "the first rays of Aurora," like the lava, claims a new process of signification through the destruction of language as *grammarie raisonnée*. In *Crude Hints*, a series of images—often only vague or elusive—are reminiscent of the lava, from Lot's wife turned into "a pillar of salt" and "the magician petrified in his palace," mentioned above, to the battle taking place on the river "banks of Scamander" between the volcano god and the river god as related in Homer's *Iliad*.[41] Like the subterranean fire and water, Soane's imagination flows freely in the depth of the mind/earth. Those artefacts collected in his house-museum, piled up in a chaotic manner, materialise his vision of the mind as the rock-strata of the earth; the seemingly chaotic arrangement of the artefacts follows the way in which things were petrified by the

volcanic lava and shuffled into layers of the earth's strata.

The Chaos of Fragments

There are no Staircase [*sic*] in the present remains, proof of the structure having been more extensive.

* A Votive foot & hand indicate this building to have been a temple – and the *cornu ammonis* designate it as dedicated to Jupiter. The Columns describe a Colonnade of a kind almost peculiar to Convents, and as these Cols: [*sic*] are of the Ionic or Feminine order it is reasonable to conclude from thence that it had been a convent of Nuns & not a Heathen Temple. The Sphinx, The Griffon & Lamb carry us very far back into Antiquity – & the flat vaulted Ceiling of the great Crypt is in itself so truly Egyptian that
[Unfinished note]

See Customs of the Ancients

Sphinx – Egyptian Griffon

This fragmentary narrative seems to infuse Soane's memory of his early years on the Grand Tour in Italy with his reflection on the first principles. With regard to his Grand Tour in 1778–9, it would be reasonable to assume that the fragments of the "votive foot & hand" refer to the colossus of Constantine the Great, then in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, which he would have seen.[42] In agreement with the common view of the progress of architecture, Soane held Constantine's reign to be a period of moral decline.[43] For Soane's contemporaries, the fragments—the votive foot and hand associated with the dilapidated colonnade of the Ionic order—would suggest the revolution in eighteenth-century architecture, initiated in Claude Perrault's (1613–1683) *Ordonnance,* which demolished the Renaissance belief that the rules of proportion in classical architecture were rooted in divine harmony.

The focus on the evolving process of architectural ornament or language is continued in the narrative, moving from *cornu ammonis* to Ionic order. Many of Soane's contemporaries,

like Quatremère, believed that architecture derived its language (as an abstract form) from (objects in) nature. The acclaimed Ammonite order, first used in 1788–9 and attributed to George Dance, Soane's mentor, is one such example.[44] In his notes for his second Royal Academy lecture, Soane uses the term *cornu ammonis,* highlighting the Ionic order's resemblance to a ram's horn, which is also an attribute of Jupiter Ammon.[45] Yet for Soane's other hero, the German art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, this evolving process rather suggests the decline of classical language. Stressing that the Ionic order had been used in "convents" of "Nuns"—a common image of repression in Gothic novels—rather than a heathen temple, which symbolises primitive and free creativity, Soane seems to resonate with Winckelmann, who famously held that architectural ornaments, "as with ancient languages […] became richer as they lost their energy and beauty."[46]

The phrase "the Griffon & Lamb carry us very far back into Antiquity" may seem abrupt, yet it may illustrate the influence on Soane of the romantic antiquarians—interlocked with that of the growing freemasonry movement—regarding first principles. While for the antiquarian group, inspiration from Egypt was seen as being from a primeval civilisation, for freemasons, Egypt had been regarded since the 1780s as the source of wisdom and hermetic mysteries.[47] Initiated into freemasonry in 1813, Soane took a serious interest in the Egyptian mysteries.[48] In his eleventh Royal Academy lecture, Soane referred to the sphinx as "emblematical of the mysteries of the Egyptian theology."[49] In these mysteries, the sphinx tears off a dead person's head and seizes their soul to drag it off to Hades to ensure their rebirth. This Egyptian myth of death and regeneration, together with the ruin-based text of *Crude Hints*, may be considered in relation to Soane's efforts to return to the origins of the architectural language following the Egyptian ritualistic approach.

From being a student, Soane had taken a strong interest in the origins of architectural ornament in religion. During his Grand Tour, he visited early Greek temples where Egyptian

mysteries had been performed. For example, at the temples in Paestum (Italy), dating from the sixth century BC, he discovered differences between the Paestum temples and the Doric temples in textbooks.[50] Realising that the real, half-buried structures were far from what he thought he knew of classical Greek temples, Soane described them as "exceedingly rude, Grecian Doric, but not the elegant taste," and "of stone formed by petrification."[51] Soane must also have been overwhelmed by the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, of which his first impression had been (by choice) in the moonlight, when entry to the site was forbidden. There he had thrillingly and illicitly sketched the temple, thought to have links to Egyptian cults and which, upon excavation, had revealed the bones of sacrificial victims upon its altars.[52]

Thus, the once familiar Greco-Roman temples turned out to be dark, vague, mysterious things. Not only is Soane's uncanny sensibility evoked in the above quotation by the contrasting aesthetics of "elegant" and "rude," but more importantly, it was provoked by his realisation that these temples had been used for staging the ancient rituals of prehistoric religions that had been repressed and forgotten by the classical world. Similarly, the elegant classical language system had suppressed the religious and historical origins of these primitive architectural ornaments and buried them in the depths of the earth. It was not by chance that Soane, like Piranesi, was interested in caves, underground passages and substructures. Rather, as Tafuri suggests, their interest in "what is hidden" in ancient architecture may be interpreted as a metaphor for the search for a place in which exploration of the "roots" of the monument meets with exploration of the depths of the subject.[53] Like many of the grand tourists, when he returned to England, Soane felt obliged to re-perform his journey into the labyrinth of history. The itinerary of the house-museum—from the basement to the chapel—as Donald Preziosi has argued, was constructed around a masonic initiatory route, from death to life to enlightenment.[54]

The fact that the above-cited paragraph on dating the fragments is unfinished probably also indicates Soane's scepticism regarding whether the ultimate origin of architecture would ever be found. Many of his contemporary architects and empirical antiquarians like Quatremère believed that it would be possible to reconstruct an entire ancient building based on a few fragments. Soane was rather satirical towards such attitudes. Long before writing *Crude Hints* with the imagery of his house as a ruin, Soane had already built an artificial ruin in his Pitzhanger Manor garden, which was immortalised by a satirical text (1804) and some drawings (Fig. 4).[55] In this text, he pretended this artificial ruin was a new discovery of a "very ancient temple." The aim, as he recalled in his 1832 book on views of Pitzhanger, was to ridicule those fanciful architects and antiquarians, such as Samuel Lysons, who believed in complete restoration based on a few remnants.[56] For Soane, the search for a new architectural language through ancient principles was not to restore the original meanings and functions of these original languages. It was clear to him that the "original meanings" were lost amidst the histories of catastrophes—both manmade and natural—and were eternally buried in the darkness under the ground, like the house-ruin.

Fig. 4: John Soane, Pitzhanger Manor, Middlesex, *c.* 1800. Artificial garden ruins/ Sir John Soane's Museum

Soane's attitude towards the lost past also contrasts strongly with the more well-known sentiments associated with a ruin—melancholy and nostalgia. In evoking the image of the votive hand and foot of Constantine the Great, Soane would certainly have in mind the "Drawing of a figure seated before gigantic antique fragments" (circa 1778–80) by Henry Fuseli, the Royal Academy professor of painting whose lectures he had attended.[57] If the latter was about admiration and nostalgia regarding the achievement of the ancients, Soane's Pitzhanger ruin instead illustrates the pleasure of a revolutionary, in a way echoing Diderot's pre-revolutionary remarks, *"Il faut ruiner un palais pour en faire un objet d'intérêt"*[58] (It is

necessary to ruin a palace to make it an object of interest), or perhaps more closely those of Piranesi:

> I will tell you only that those living, speaking ruins filled my spirit with images such as even the masterfully wrought drawings of the immortal Palladio, which I kept before me at all times, could not arouse in me.[59]

Just like the pasticcio to be erected in the house-museum's heart, the middle of the monumental court, in 1819, Soane's manuscript in many ways celebrates the loss of the primordial organicity of language/architecture and the chaos of fragments. We are shown that monumental architecture has lost its roofs and staircases; the light of the sky, or reason, has vanished; the catacombs have been destroyed; and the colossus of Constantine the Great, the symbol of divine harmony or organicity, has turned into fragments—foot and hand. The very head of Jupiter, the sun god, floats in the ruin.[60]

CONCLUSION

From the experiment of Pitzhanger to the picturesque interior of the house-museum, Soane is consistent and persistent in his experimental aspiration for a language that can serve as a universal synthesis of languages—a continuation of the disguised "hedonistic game" in the English garden of the eighteenth century.[61] In its destruction of classical signs and significations, the *Crude Hints* text is a ruin of classical architecture which is simultaneously a new signification as a ruin or archaeological landscape: fragments scattered on the earth, as the signification process turns to the underground, extending to unfathomable history, memory and the unconscious. One of the messages of the Soanean archaeological landscape is that, once freed from the authority of history, language is able to impose itself as what Tafuri calls "an in-progress criticism of language itself."[62] Instead of conveying a fixed signified/meaning, the ruin rather illustrates the process of imagination itself, the creative force which simultaneously destroys. Ironically, despite being critical of his contemporary

architects becoming degraded into "brick-layers" or commercialised, Soane's new signification manifests the natural law of capitalism as a catastrophe which involves, simultaneously, the processes of creation and destruction, as with the tenure of Soane as architect for the Bank of England.

NOTES

[1] Daniel M. Abramson, *Building the Bank of England: Money, Architecture, Society, 1694–1942* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 190–1.

[2] The analogy between architecture and language has a clear eighteenth century ancestry and Soane was particularly influenced by Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy. See David Watkin, *Sir John Soane: Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 171–6. Further quotations abbreviated as *ETL*.

[3] *ETL,* Lecture I, 491.

[4] Many classical and Enlightenment writers (e.g. Vitruvius, Marc Antoine Laugier, Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Quatremère de Quincy) discussed first principles or origins of architecture like the cave, the tent and the hut, but there is no apparent agreement. For Soane's engagement with these writers, see *ETL*, 98–183, and Andrew Ballantyne, "First Principles and Ancient Errors: Soane at Dulwich," *Architectural History* 37 (1994): 96–111.

[5] John Summerson, "Soane and the Picturesque," in John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530–1830* (London: Penguin Press, 1953), 298–99.

[6] Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1740–1950*, 2nd ed. (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 21–2.

[7] The manuscript written in 1812 is in SM AL Soane Case 31, the library of Sir John Soane's museum. It is published in *Visions of Ruin: Architectural Fantasies & Designs for Garden Follies* (London: Sir John Soane's Museum, 1999), 61–74. Hereafter cited as *Crude Hints* or *CH.* For an introduction to the manuscript, see Helen Dorey, "Crude Hints," in *Visions of Ruin*, 53–60.

[8] See Noah Heringman, "The Rock Record and Romantic Narratives of the Earth," in *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History*, ed. Noah Heringman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 53–84.

[9] Manfredo Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect: G.B. Piranesi, Heterotopia, and the Voyage," in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 39.

[10] *CH,* 61.

[11] Ibid.*,* 68.

[12] Ibid., 69.

[13] Cited in Heringman, "The Rock Record and Romantic Narratives of the Earth," 53. Soane had a copy of John Whitehurst's *Inquiry into the Original State and Formation of the Earth* (1786) in his library.

[14] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* IV, cited in Heringman, "The Rock Record," 53. Soane and Shelley moved in the same intellectual circle of poets, artists and natural philosophers in London with common acquaintances like William Kitchener, MD, the author of *Apicius Redivivus*, *or the Cook's Oracle* (London, 1817).

[15] A. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge, 1882), 164.

[16] For Quatremère de Quincy's idea of type and character, see Anthony Vidler, *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 150ff.

[17] Ibid., 160.

[18] John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* Part 1 [1689], in *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes.* 12th ed. (London: Rivington, 1824) vol. 1, chap. XXXIII. "Of the Association of Ideas, " 420.

[19] Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (London, 1790), essay II, chap. 1, 112.

[20] Pierre Francois Hugues (Baron d'Hancarville), *Recherches sur l'Origine…* (3 vols, London 1785), cited in *ETL*, 256–7.

[21] This is the central argument of *ETL* where Watkin provided substantial evidence.

[22] E.g. *ETL*, Lecture XI, 648.

[23] *CH*, 61.

[24] Ibid., 64–5.

[25] See Terrance Gerard Galvin, "The Architecture of Joseph Michael Gandy (1771–1843) and Sir John Soane (1753–1837): An Exploration into the Masonic and Occult Imagination of the Late Enlightenment," (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 61.

[26] E.g. Tara E. Nummedal, "Kircher's Subterranean World and the Dignity of the Geocosm," in *The Great Art of Knowing: The Baroque Encyclopedia of Athanasius Kircher*, ed. Daniel Stolzenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Libraries, 2001), 37–47.

[27] Athanasius Kircher, *Mundus Subterraneus* (Amsterdam, 1678), v. 1, 198; English translation cited in *The Ecstatic Journey: Athanasius Kircher in Baroque Rome*, ed. Ingrid D. Rowland (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 58–9. Portions of *Mundus Subterraneus* were translated into English and published in London in 1669, entitled *The Vulcano's…out of Kircher's Subterraneous World*.

[28] William C. Parcell, "Signs and Symbols in Kircher's *Mundus Subterraneus*," in *The Revolution in Geology from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Gary D. Rosenberg (Coulder, Colo.: Geological Society of America, 2009), 65.

[29] Toshihiro Yamada, "Kircher and Steno on the 'Geocosm,' with a Reassessment of the Role of Gassendi's works," in *The Origins of Geology in Italy*, ed. G.B. Vai and W.G.E. Caldwell, *Geological Society of America Special Paper* 411 (2006), 65–80.

[30] Toshihiro Yamada, "Hooke-Steno Relations Reconsidered: Reassessing the Roles of Ole Borch and Robert Boyle," in *The Revolution in Geology from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Gary D. Rosenberg (Coulder, Colo.: Geological Society of America, 2009), 120–1.

[31] See, for example, Luigi Mayer's influential work, *Views in Egypt from the Original drawings in the Possession of Sir Robert Ainslie* (London, 1801), 17. Soane owns a copy of Luigi Mayer's *Views in Egypt, Palestine, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1804), a combination of three closely related works by Mayer, in which *Views in Egypt* was one. See also Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 10.

[32] Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 27.

[33] Jacques Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Hegelian Semiology," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 76.

[34] In the European metaphysical convention there is a linguistic chain of "sign – body – tomb." Socrates, for example, discusses the "sign" (*sēma*) as "body" (*sōma*) or "tomb" (*sēma*), a prison of the soul. See Plato, *Collected Works in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 63, cited in Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid," 82.

[35] See *ETL,* Lecture VIII, 605 and Lecture XI, 641.

[36] Robin Middleton, "Soane's Spaces and the Matter of Fragmentation," in *John Soane: Architect, Master of Space and Light*, ed. Margaret Richardson and Mary Anne Stevens (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1999), 34.

[37] Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 39.

[38] *CH*, 63.

[39] Pliny the Younger, *Letters, with an English translation by William Melmoth*, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson (London: Heinemann, 1915), book 7, letter 27, "To Sura."

[40] Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, *Prospectus of L'Architecture Considérée sous le Rapport de l'Art, des Mœurs et de la Législation'* (Paris, 1802). The translations are by Soane, who purchased a copy in 1803 and began to translate some extracts. SM AL Soane Case 163, *MS Extracts Relating Directly to Architecture. J. Soane 1815*, fols 83–86. Cited in *ETL*, 220.

[41] "It is said that the *Iliad* is best relished on the banks of Scamander," *CH*, 64. J. M. W. Turner, Soane's friend, applied this theme symbolic of subterranean fire and water in his paintings, e.g. "Fire at Sea" (1835). See Philipp Fehl, "Turner's Classicism and the Problem of Periodization in the History of Art," *Critical Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (1976): 128.

[42] Dorey, "Notes to *Crude Hints*," in *Visions of Ruin*, 75.

[43] See *ETL,* Lecture V, 552. The summary of architecture's rise, progress and decline from Noah's Ark, via the age of Constantine and the Middle Ages, to its revival under Brunelleschi and Colonna, is a familiar tale going back at least to Giorgio Vasari. Soane owned two editions of Vasari's *Lives*, see *ETL,* 249.

[44] Ammonite capitals were used on the façade of Dance's Shakespeare Gallery, Pall Mall, London (1788 –9).

[45] *ETL*, 305.

[46] J. J. Winckelmann, "Observations sur l'Architecture des Anciens," in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1803), vol. 2, 629, cited in Vidler, *The Writing of the Walls,* 133.

[47] Nikolaus Pevsner and S. Lang, "The Egyptian Revival," in *Architectural Review* (1956): 242–54.

[48] David Watkin, "Freemasonry and Sir John Soane," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 54*, no. 4 (1995): 402–17.

[49] *ETL*, 638.

[50] See David Watkin, "Sir John Soane's Grand Tour: Its Impact on his Architecture and his Collections," in *The Impact of Italy: The Grand Tour and Beyond*, ed. Clare Hornsby (London: British School at Rome, 2000), 107.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Gillian Darley, *John Soane: An Accidental Romantic* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999), 35.

[53] Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 38.

[54] Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 88–9.

[55] *Visions of Ruin*, 31.

[56] Samuel Lysons' *Remains of Two Temples and other Roman Antiquities Discovered at Bath* (1802) contains perspective drawings by Robert Smirke of a fully 'restored' building based on a few single stones discovered in Bath in 1790. Cited in *Visions of Ruin*, 30–1.

[57] *ETL*, 432–3.

[58] Denis Diderot et al., *Salon de 1767; Salon de 1769*, éd. critique et annotée présentée par Else Marie Bukdahl, Michel Delon, Annette Lorenceau (Paris: Hermann, 1990); *Oeuvres de Denis Derot*, Tome 14, 421, cited in Sophie Thomas, "Assembling History: Fragments and Ruins," *European Romantic Review* 14, no. 2 (2003): 183.

[59] G. B. Piranesi, "Dedicatory letter to Sign. Nicola Giobbe," in *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (Rome, 1743), cited in Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 28.

[60] Soane's attitude certainly changed later, which is also shown in *Crude Hints*. This is not discussed here because of lack of relevance.

[61] Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 39. Watkin also suggests that the museum is reminiscent of eighteenth-century landscape gardens, or a garden of association. *ETL*, 414.

[62] Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect," 39.