

'ON PEDIMENTS',
AN EXCERPT FROM
LECTURE IV OF
SIR JOHN SOANE:
THE ROYAL ACADEMY
LECTURES

It would be tedious and not absolutely necessary to point out more examples of these improprieties,¹² so glaring that they could not be endured even in scenic representations. Of this fact Vitruvius gives the following instance:
*Apaturius of Alabanda having painted a scene for a theatre in which he had placed statues and centaurs to support the roof and the projecting extremities of the pediments, and also ornamented the cornice with lions' heads, these parts having reference to the roofing and eaves of edifices, nothing could be added without the most evident violation of propriety. Apaturius, however, being a better painter than an architect, repeated upon this work in the episcenium all the various parts of another building. And as the whole was executed in a masterly manner, general approbation would have been given to it by the multitude, had not Licinius, the mathematician, condemned the work as a public disgrace upon the city. For, said he, how can columns and pediments be placed with propriety upon the tiles and the roofs of houses? And although, men being accustomed to view absurdities, the judgement may be depraved, yet we must not approve in painting what cannot be in fact. And to the honour of Apaturius, it is added that instead of defending his work he removed the scheme and by proper alterations made it consistent with truth.*¹³

The public condemnation of this impropriety, although committed in a scene only, could not fail of making a strong impression on the minds of the architects of those days, and was perhaps one of the great causes of the superior excellence of so many of the ancient edifices.

If Licinius was justly offended with this extravagance in a mere scenic representation, what would he have said of the distorted architecture in some of the great compositions of Rubens, or of the twisted columns in one of the cartoons of the divine Raphael, or of the Roman architecture in another of the cartoons, where the different styles of various ages are blended together although the scene represented [is] the Areopagus at Athens?

If we had a Licinius among us he would be fully employed. I know not whose works would escape just censure.

Note. It would be endless and, after what has been already said, in some degree useless, to point out all the different places and different modes in which pediments have been improperly introduced even by artists of most distinguished and superior talents. Many of the great artists of Italy who united painting and sculpture with architecture were less attached to the pediment than those of succeeding times, not because they were not sensible of its beauties, but because they, like the Egyptians, delighted in large simple parts and long unbroken lines, and because those great artists felt the difficulty of placing the pediment with propriety without sacrificing magnificence. The Farnese Palace, the Pitti Palace, the Farnesina, the Stoppani, the Palazzo Massimi, are proofs of what is here advanced.

13

De architectura, vii, vi, 5–7.

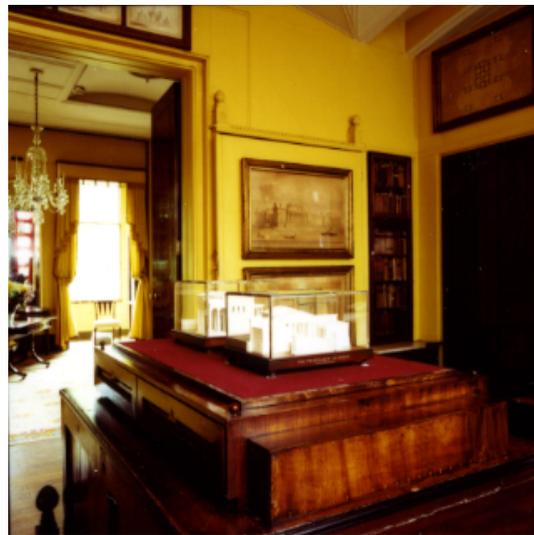
SOANE MUSEUM

Oliver Godow

171	Dome area, facing east
172	Upper drawing office, looking south
172	Passageway south of Colonnade, facing east
173	Upper drawing office, looking north
174	Model Room
175	North Drawing room
176—178	Model room











TWO EXCERPTS FROM
THE ARCADES PROJECT

Walter Benjamin

“Apart from a certain haut-goût charm,” says Giedion, “the artistic draperies and wall-hangings of the previous century have come to seem musty.” [Siegfried] Giedion, Bauen in Frankreich (Leipzig and Berlin [1928]), p. 3. We, however, believe that the charm they exercise on us is proof that these things, too, contain material of vital importance for us – not indeed for our building practice, as is the case with the constructive possibilities inherent in iron frameworks, but rather for our understanding, for the radioscopy, if you will, of the situation of the bourgeois class at the moment it evinces the first signs of decline. In any case, material of vital importance politically; this is demonstrated by the attachment of the Surrealists to these things, as much as by their exploitation in contemporary fashion. In other words: just as Giedion teaches us to read off the basic features of today’s architecture in the buildings erected around 1850, we, in turn, would recognize today’s life, today’s forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of that epoch.

N1, 11, p.458

It’s not that what is past cast its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. Awakening.

N2a, 3, p.462