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***Brain of the Earth's Body***

Art history is not at an end, but rather at its beginning. In fact, it is our field's perpetual attempt to begin; to justify a discourse of history which tries to erase the artifice of its historiographic methodology, which is what has made it as profoundly interesting and important today as it was two centuries ago. I want to talk today about some of the implications of the mythic ambitions of art history and museology.

1.

The title of my paper, "Brain of the Earth's Body," refers to the historical processes by which Europe constructed itself, both materially and virtually, in relationship to the rest of the world – to the new worlds and peoples it encountered and increasingly dominated beginning five centuries ago. Central to that self-construction was the institution of the museum. The title also refers to ways in which this project of self-transformation, commonly referred to as *modernity*, was articulated, supported, and produced both by the institution of the museum, and by a network of interpretative professions, at the center of which were the history, theory, and practice of art.

It is customary to believe that the museum institution as we know it today is an increasingly rational and scientifically systematic version of earlier forms of collecting and display, which are thought of by contrast as being unsystematic, idiosyncratic, or picturesque; or as Romantic prologues to more objectively ordered, historical authentic instruments of public education.

It has also been customary for some time to believe that artworks – whether defined strictly as a certain kind of artifact, or more generally, as artifacts as such - are historically and philosophical significant phenomena, and that art itself has a history, the careful analysis of which would produce authentic and significant knowledge about the (presumably parallel or complementary) histories of individuals and peoples. It has also been customary to believe that the insights gained by this form of historical analysis would provide significant lessons for our own times, since the shape of the present is also commonly seen as the product and effect of the past.

Our modern institutions of art history and museology are founded upon such assumptions. Changes in artistic form are believed to correspond to changes in mentalities, beliefs, or intentions; or to changes in social, political, or cultural conditions. The major portion of the debates in the fields of art history, theory, and criticism over the two centuries has concerned the ways in which relationships between form and signification should be articulated. A much lesser portion of these debates, however, have concerned the validity of this fundamental hypothesis in the first place, since it will be obvious that to question this assumption is to cast doubt upon the entire mission or *raison d'être* of art history and museology.

This paper is concerned with some of the implications of questioning these foundational assumptions of our field. It is concerned, then, not with the ‘end’ of art history or its seeming transformation into some ‘post-art historical’ condition, but rather with its beginnings since, by its very nature, our field always seems to be at a crossroads (*Querstrasse*) of contradictory theoretical perspectives, and what has often been portrayed in recent years as a ‘new’ art history has commonly consisted of a return to alternative theoretical possibilities of art historical practice which have been invisible or dormant in the literature of the discipline.

2.

One of the theses of this paper is that the primary function of what we call ‘art’ in modern times has been to make visible certain very specific ideas about the Self – that is, to make visible a certain kind of subjectivity which would have pragmatic social value in the evolving nation-states of Europe and America. In other words, in modernity, art is a *practice of the Self*: a practice superimposed upon, and to a great extent superseding and usurping, the practice of religion. Historically, the language of aesthetics is a language of ethics.

Related to this is a parallel historical thesis regarding the contingency or transitoriness of notions of art. The modern idea of art as a kind of thing represents an apparent transformation from earlier modes of making and using any materials (*ars, tekhnē*). This transformation was an ideological shift which aligned together artifacts and psychology, making possible a civic and secular version of the older religious practice of permanent self-examination, of a discipline of the soul. This entailed obscuring the functions of art as a mode of explaining and producing what it seemed to merely measure and analyze.

Essential to the rise of the modern nation-state is this close ideological alignment of ethics and aesthetics, and the institution of the museum as we know it today evolved to serve as laboratory, theatre, and factory for the production both of the state and of its citizen-subjects through the ‘medium’ of art. Art is thus is not simply a product of the state; rather, the nation is a product – in many ways the principal product and effect - of art. Similarly, the ideological mission of art was to produce and articulate the Self as citizen, a member of the people or the Folk.

Such historical developments depended upon a very specific kind of *repression*. For institutions such as art history and museology to establish themselves as systematic, authentically historical disciplines, what must be repressed is the essential ambivalence and undecidability of the connections between the individual or collective subject and its products or objects. This is the most fundamental art historical and museological problem, and it is simultaneously epistemological, semiological, ethical, political, historical, and religious. It relates to a long history of the practices of Christian piety and the individual’s responsibility for its actions and their effects. The new modern public or civic museum in Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was the theatre and battleground within which this problem was most dramatically addressed. While the fundamental problem of the relationships between subjects and objects was of course played out on every social front (and not least in religion), it was the new institution of the civic museum which focused these issues most powerfully and acutely, and with far-reaching implications for modern notions of individual and collective identity.

Such questions are by no means new: you will have heard echoes in what I've just been saying across a wide spectrum of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. But I believe it is important to reconsider such fundamentally unresolved problems today in any attempt to understand the current state and future potentials of art, art history and museology. One way in which the project of rethinking art history and museology may be furthered is by closer attention to the historical and social contexts and circumstances surrounding the institutional foundations of modern museology, art history, and aesthetics. At the same time it will be necessary to understand what the historical rise of art history and museology replaced or obscured in European thought and social practice, as well as to how these developments related to older modes of social and religious practice. It is important here to also consider the ways in which the modern nation state and the very idea of the Nation usurped the power and the ethical space of established religion, and replaced or superimposed upon religious loyalties a loyalty to the power and freedoms afforded by the new nation-state.

These are very fundamental problems facing our beliefs and practices as art historians, critics, and theorists, and it will be obvious that in the context of the present paper we can only look at the barest outlines of the questions that need to be asked. What I would like to present here as a small beginning is a case-study of two early 19<sup>th</sup> century institutions whose contrastive orchestrations of subject-object relationships may help illuminate what was most deeply at stake in the modern invention of art and the staging of its civic functions in the articulation of the roles expected of makers and users of art and of museums. My hope is that an appreciation of such contrasts will help clarify the larger issues at stake for us today, and help clarify the deep implications of 'universalia sunt in re.'

First, some general observations.

Modern ideas about museums, and about art history, theory, and criticism, reflect more fundamental ideas about the relationships between social subjects and the object-worlds (*umwelten*) they occupy and imagine. Even more fundamentally, ideas about these relationships are themselves effects of ideological, philosophical, religious, and cultural perspectives on the nature of the Self as a social subject.

For the past two and a half centuries, the ways in which such relationships were articulated has determined the development of institutions such as museums, and of professions such as art history and criticism. Changes in these institutions and professions have been thought to be closely connected to changing perspectives on the world of objects and the roles expected of social subjects. Although the histories of these institutions have been commonly plotted in isolation and in linear, evolutionary ways, none of these institutions or professions are understandable historically or theoretically without an understanding of modern ideas about the nature of the individual subject, or without an understanding of the historical evolution of these ideas.

The fundamental beliefs about the nature of time, history, memory, and identity that have underlain and made possible the art historical and museological practices we know today themselves depend upon very particular *dialectical relationships* imagined to exist between ourselves as social subjects and the object-worlds we build ourselves into. These include assumptions about how the world of art or artifice not only appears to represent, mirror, or echo, but sustains, embodies, and legitimizes our individual and

collective identities – our subject positions, however fixed, fluid, multiple or conflicted those are imagined to be.

Although there were a variety of approaches to the relationship between subjects and objects, two strikingly different and competing perspectives coexisted in the late 18th and early 19th century, and both have left their trace both in the forms and functions of modern museums, and in the analytical practices of art history. In art history and museology today, these two contrastive ideologies coexist uneasily. I would like to outline these perspectives by an examination of two 19<sup>th</sup> century institutions, which most clearly exemplify these differing conceptions. Both of my examples are 19<sup>th</sup> century London institutions, chosen both because of their geographical proximity and their stark contrast to each other. The first is Sir John Soane's Museum, begun in 1812 and remaining today in its final form of 1837. The museum is preserved largely intact at the time of Soane's death in 1837, when he donated it to the British nation with the legal agreement that nothing be changed.

3.

In 1812, the London architect John Soane wrote a 64-page manuscript entitled *Crude Hints towards an History of My House in L(incoln's) I(nn)Fields*. Assuming the role of an imaginary antiquarian of the future, and discovering his London house-museum in ruins, he offered various hypotheses as to the building's original function, since there were no traces remaining of "the Artist who inhabited the place." Until his death in 1837, Soane continually rebuilt and remodeled his house-museum, in the words of his imaginary antiquarian, to fabricate "a great assemblage of ancient fragments which must have been placed there for the advancement and knowledge of ancient Art." Soane's remarkable text was a "history" of his museum from the perspective of its future ruin. *Soane then spent the next 25 years reconstructing the building in the image of what its ruins in the future might suggest it had been in the past.*

This would seem to be an impossible task. The ruined state of a building would seem especially unpredictable: a product of pure chance. Destruction will have proceeded in ways that could neither be predicted nor controlled, nor yet easily described. Yet Soane would have had to "design" those (future) fragments in such a way that they would be *legible* enough to reconstruct their prior integrity, and, through that backward-projected, reconstituted fullness, the motivations and intentions of Soane himself, who was in fact himself the "Artist who inhabited the place." Think of just what kind of design problem this would be: how could a designer or builder predict the forms of a ruin? And what can be made of the Artist's intentions in such a project: in what sense can we say that they are really prior to their imagined material effects? And just what kind of "history" does all this extraordinary projection presuppose?

Of course the Romantic fascination with ruins and with the construction of fictional 'ruined monuments' in many places in Europe is very well known, and has been the subject of many excellent historical and critical analyses in recent times.<sup>1</sup> I would like to explore here one particular fascination with ruins which in my view differed greatly from those of its contemporaries in Britain, Germany, or France in not being oriented nostalgically toward a melancholy lost world, but toward the future. Soane's Museum was an instrument for constructing an enlightened future.

The ruined fragments of the museum's imaginary future condition had to be especially legible so as to lead any future archaeologist to correctly reconstruct both the building's original function as well as the originating Artist's intentions for it. In short, the building should appear not only to "decay" in some predictable way, but it would have to encode clues or instructions both as to how it should be reconstructed, and how its future fragments might encode the intentions or desires of the original Artist. And those clues, to be safe, must be encrypted in every conceivable fragment that might remain in and as the museum's ruins.

In Soane's enterprise there is an implicit similarity between the creativity of the Artist and that of a God, the Artist is not simply imitating the God's *effects* - Nature - he is imitating Nature's God's *modus operandi*: how God works. Soane's mimetic labor must simulate an activity which is *outside of time*, yet at the same time inescapably a *product of time*. Thus, as the existence, nature, and will of God might be taken as "legible" in and through God's presumptive effects - the divine Artificer's artifacts, which is the "Book" of Nature - so too must the existence and will of Soane the Artist become legible, in a two-step process of reconstructive reading, which itself might resemble the reconstructive reading of the collection's fragments themselves: their re-collection. Soane *gives himself to be seen* by giving his future public tangible symptoms of his creative activity – the traces and relics by which his intentions could be reconstructed clearly and unambiguously.

From the point of view of design, this was an extraordinary project. It was articulated in the very years when the modern disciplines of archaeology and art history were being professionally founded, and Soane himself very closely followed and commented upon developments of the major works of aesthetic philosophy then current in German, French, and English. He was a familiar with the writings of Quatremere de Quincy as he was with those of Winckelmann, Kant, Herder, and Hegel.

This Artist of what I might call a 'hindsight-historicism' was clearly a very complex and elusive character in a number of ways. For one thing, in contrast to the founders of virtually all other great collections open to the public, whose busts, statues, and dedicatory inscriptions grace thresholds and entryways, welcoming visitors, John Soane was figured in his museum ambiguously, in fragments, and *anonymously*, as an unlabelled bust among other objects in the collection. Also, in both his London museum and in his earlier residence in the London suburb of Ealing, he erected a basement "monk's apartment" or Monk's Parlour. In his writings, John Soane often alluded to a fictional monk ("Padre Giovanni" - Father John) who wandered like a ghost among the basement ruins. That he strongly identified with this monastic specter is clear in a number of his letters and notebooks referring to the creation of the "Monk's Cell" in the London house in 1815-16 - a section of the building he increasingly haunted, redecorated, and rebuilt. In the 1835 edition of his book *Description of the Residence of John Soane, Architect*, he described the tomb of the imaginary "Padre Giovanni" amidst mediaeval and classical fragments in an adjacent courtyard next to the (fake) tomb of his wife's pet dog Fanny.

The entire collection of Soane's Museum surrounds a large, three-storied, sky-lit space known as "the Dome," on whose eastern parapet is a bust of Soane himself, finished and put in place in 1829. The hair and clothing resemble prototypes common in

ancient Roman iconography, and are thus compatible in style to other busts and bas-reliefs, real, fake, and imitations, in the Dome area.

All these busts are overshadowed by a cast of the life size nude *Apollo Belvedere* in the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican, a gift presented to Soane in 1811. Soane's own anonymously classical bust stands directly opposite the Apollo, on a pedestal of his own design, incorporating on its back an 18th century imitation of an ancient mosaic image of Genius in a triumphal chariot.

Soane is thus figured in his museum ambiguously, and he is situated, in his writings about the building, both *anterior* to its present state (in the guise of his alter-ego, the mediaeval Father John who wanders about down in the basement) and *posterior* to its falling into ruin - where the protagonist is the imaginary antiquarian of the future. This artist-god exists only in his absence, only as a sculptural *object* in the present time of the visitor, and also twice-removed, in the masquerade both of an ancient monk, and of an antiquarian or archaeologist yet to be born. Soane's image does not confront the visitor at the entrance to the building, but rather stands in relative anonymity as one fragment amongst several in the Dome area, dramatically overshadowed by the fine figure of the Apollo Belvedere. At the time, this statue was widely considered to be not only the paragon of ancient male beauty, but a *canon* to teach the viewer how to recognize beauty in the ideal proportions of parts to whole: macrocosm and microcosm; universalia in re...

The central 'part' in that canon was that physical part of Apollo covered over by a fig leaf soon after Soane's death. There exists an extraordinary relationship between Apollo's phallic member and the head of Soane as canonical entities: just as Apollo's genital member is the modular key to his body, so Soane's head exhibits the *locus*, as from a belvedere, where what can be seen only from this spot is the system of the entire collection of seemingly random pieces: Soane as *genius loci*; the "spirit of (his) place". So, rather than standing at the entrance to his museum, like someone greeting visitors or guarding his property, he takes up his position at the one site which renders everything in this amazingly complex and seemingly cluttered museum perfectly legible. Soane's bust, in other words, is the exact place in the whole museum where everything appears ordered and clear; where the entire program of the museum is suddenly perfectly visible. Like the 'Aha!' point in a postmodern building, or the position of the eye of the viewer in a Renaissance painting of an ideal city.

But Soane's bust is significant not only spatially, but also temporally, like different times or tenses of a Verb: he is not simply the *past definite* of what he was"(John Soane, Architect, after 20 January, 1837 deceased), nor only the *present perfect* of what has been in what he is (Padre Giovanni; Father John, his mediaeval alter-ego, ruminating on ruins and mortality in the basement, where, by the way, in the Monk's Parlour there is a miniature [dark, lead] Apollo Belvedere on a table), but also as the *future anterior* of what he shall have been for what he is in the process of becoming: - that is, the future antiquarian of the museum's own ruins and fragments. This John Soane is at the same time the *alter-ego* not only of the Apollo Belvedere whom he confronts across the Dome, but also of the visitor to the museum - each of us - whom he puts in his place that we may learn to see. The modern citizen-subject, the Self, as *genius loci*.

All of this goes very far beyond a wish of a collector to be present to explain in detail how all the parts of his collection make sense together - a sense lost with the collector's death. Soane doesn't simply arrange the pieces of his collection to make the

collection tell the story of the collection itself. He positions *himself* as an “antique fragment” within the collection in a place where the *relationships between pieces* (caused by placing his bust where he did) serves as the “key” to unlock the museum’s overall significance. He is the framer of the museum and he (or his eye) is what the museum frames; he is both narrator and protagonist of the tale; both inside and outside the story; both theatrical stage-set and member of the play’s cast. As protagonist, he is a statuesque fiction, the delineation of (the spirit of) a place which is the future anterior of where we as visitors shall have been. His life history is constructed as a simulacrum of the principles of design and construction exemplified in the objects of the collection. On another level, Soane stages himself as the ideal citizen-subject, and / as the prototype of the professional art historian, orchestrating sense out of the apparent chaos and detritus of life.

One might be tempted to say that Soane was both a ‘subject’ and an ‘object’ in this museum, except that it is precisely this duality of subject and object that is problematized here. The museum was made up of a mass of objects which were displayed so as to be legible as examples of artistic and design principles to be understood and appreciated by visitors in the present, and emulated by students of art, design, and architecture in their task of creating a humane modern environment. Soane’s life work was explicitly dedicated to rescuing the possibility of a humane modern environment from the massive disruptions being caused in his time by the early Industrial Revolution, which so completely disoriented every facet of traditional space and time in Europe and America. The exemplary nature of the displayed items of the collection resonated with the exemplary and *ostensive* nature of Soane’s displays.

Each object-fragment is a ghost of its future completion. He termed these juxtaposed fragments his “studies,” and they were intended as thought-pieces or puzzles not only to intrigue the visitor or student, but to evoke, challenge, and elicit understanding: things to reckon with, in both senses of this term in English (to “think with” and to “struggle with”). Soane’s Museum resembles a memory-machine or a modern version of a mediaeval *florilegium* - a garden of aphorisms, fragments of wisdom, generating ethical knowledge through aesthetic example (to use two terms – “ethics” and “aesthetics” - which for Soane were mirror-images of each other). Its aim was to foster the development of a humane environment based on exemplary fragments providing ancient precedents for a modern “union of architecture, painting and sculpture,” in his own words, to “remember” a lost or dis-membered unity. In projecting the entire edifice as a mass of “future fragments,” rather than “relics” of the past, he aimed to have those future fragments *of* the building serve functions identical to those served by those now residing *in* the building. The objects in the museum are thus fundamentally different from those we are accustomed to “reading” and analyzing in later museums. *They are not there to illustrate a past, but to suggest a method and a means of creating the future.*

In seeing (the bust of) Soane seeing, the museum visitor could learn to envision a new world out of the ruins and fragments of an old world. So this institution was neither an “historical” museum of art objects, nor a private collection, in the more familiar meanings of these terms: it was, instead, an instrument of social change and transformation; a *critical* rather than an historical instrument. It was a “collection” in the original Latin meaning of that term - an assemblage of things meant to be “read together,” in which the actual process of “reading,” the visitor’s active use of the museum

spaces over time, was itself productive of meaning and sense. Soane's Museum, then, was neither simply a museum or a collection or a laboratory or a theatre, but an institution for manufacturing knowledge which combined all of these functions. An epistemological technology. In this sense, it bore a closer relation to older institutions devoted to knowledge-production such as the *Wunderkammern* or *studioli* of an earlier age than the "historical" museums we are more familiar with today, composed of collections of objects arranged episodically to be "read" as a narrative or story leading up to the present.

Soane's remarkable project thus bears a close resemblance to that of Albert Einstein in its focus on the relativity of our frames of understanding and on the processes of knowledge-production. This in fact is the subject-matter of his museum, and what is arranged in the museum's spaces are *not* "objects" in a passive sense to be directly "read" by viewers for their inherent and unique "meanings," or so as to discover the "intentions" of their original makers. What Soane's Museum exhibits are *things to think with*; instruments to be used by the visitor to create meaningful narratives about the nature of individual and social enlightenment. Thought-pieces to use in imagining the future.

Soane's Museum was not unique, and its mission was echoed in other early European museum institutions which however either no longer exist or are known today only in fragments or in radically modified forms. All of these, as I've discussed in detail elsewhere, were founded by Freemasons in Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, and America, and were practical applications of a Masonic philosophy dedicated to transforming character by transforming social space.<sup>ii</sup> This philosophy was shared by the founders and designers of the major new public museums of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, all of whom were prominent Freemasons.

It is largely because Soane's Museum has been so well preserved in its original state that we can appreciate what the world of museology and art history that we are familiar with today has obscured and almost entirely erased. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, this museum world had been radically superseded and usurped by a new world of institutions: museology and art history as they became professionalized and radically commodified in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After Soane's death in 1837, and after 25 years of continual change and alteration, his Museum was frozen in form, never to be modified or altered again, according to the terms of his will in donating the institution to the state. We thus have a unique instance of a Masonic institution in its original form. This is in contrast to the fate of comparable institutions founded by Freemasons, such as Alexandre Lenoir's Louvre in Paris, or Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, the British Museum in London, Bernard Ashmole's Museum in Oxford, Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, or the Royal Museum in Stockholm. Except for some minor alterations made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and repairs done to damage caused by bombing in World War II, Soane's Museum remains essentially as it was 168 years ago.

4.

If art is the practice of the modern Self, art history is the practice of the commodification of the Self; the Self as historical commodity. And museology (in its post-Masonic form) is the stagecraft of the commodification of the collective Self. Because time is short, I will finish my paper with a very brief look at what is perhaps the



most powerful image of this new world of capital and of the commodification of the individual and collective Self, symbolized by what became not only the world's most influential building of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but more profoundly the most enduring emblem of the new imaginary life of the nation-state and its populations.

This was the first international exposition of the artistic and industrial products of all nations, at a gigantic and technologically innovative prefabricated iron and glass pavilion which came to be known as the Crystal Palace. This "Great Exhibition" opened in London's Hyde Park on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1851 and closed on October 15<sup>th</sup> of that year. The Crystal Palace building was disassembled, after remaining empty for a year after its exhibition closed (in 1852) and was re-erected on a new site (in Sydenham across the river in south London) where it continued in use with many expansions and modifications until this massively popular public institution was destroyed by fire on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1936, the same day German troops landed in Spain. Although there was no connection between the two events, many observers at the time wrote of the destruction of the Crystal Palace as marking the true end of the Victorian age, and of the events in Spain as marking the beginning of a new era.

This most dramatically transparent of 19<sup>th</sup> century institutions, this glass temple of commodity fetishism, revealed in a flash that uncanny landscape of capitalism - what Walter Benjamin referred to in his *Passagenwerk* as that catastrophic nightmare which smothered Europe<sup>iii</sup>. The Crystal Palace brought together in one brilliantly lit space, one taxonomic system, all the world's products, arranged by national groupings, a "fairy world of labour," as one contemporary poet called it. In this universal framework all human products could be compared and contrasted, their differences instantly legible as differences in ability, mentality, character, style, and economic, social, and cultural development. The instant commodification of peoples and their object-worlds for the roving eye of the visitor.

The chief "roving eye" was that of Queen Victoria herself, whose husband, Prince Albert, was responsible for the whole project, and who visited the Crystal Palace 60 times during the 23 weeks the Great Exhibition was open. Her arrival each day was marked by huge crowds following her progress around the exhibition, intent upon noticing what she found of interest. It provided her with a way to visit the many different parts of her Empire without leaving England, and the exhibition, in her own words, "filled (her) with devotion, more so than any religious service (she) had ever heard;" a remark which calls up echoes of the theory of commodity fetishism developed by Karl Marx - who also spent many days visiting the Crystal Palace. We have no record of the two ever meeting as they walked among the exhibits. The Queen's stopping to look more closely at an object instantly caused it to be offered to her as a gift - a prerogative of royalty in Britain, and what might be called the ultimate ideal of all 'window-shopping' in which fascination itself resulted in immediate ownership.

Victoria exemplified that ideal of consumerism for the exhibition's visitors. More dramatically than any existing museum at the time, the Crystal Palace rendered visible and simultaneously comparable all peoples and their products, making legible the connections between style and character, or between quality of form and level of mentality or spirit. In this materialist masquerade of Christian piety, every object is legible as an *object-lesson*, where the form of a work is the figure of its truth, and a window into the spirit of a time, place, person, or people. An obverse of centuries of

Christian practices of the Self, where one's good works were an index and direct reflection of the worth of one's soul.

The Crystal Palace synthesized the technologies of history, art history, museology, and commerce. Yet it was neither a museum nor a department store, nor an abstract system of classification, nor a philosophy, nor a theory of optics, or a theory of society or social evolution; nor was it a model of the world and its peoples. It was *all of these and neither*; its founding and its enduring existence profoundly marked and altered all of these institutions and professions, so that it may be fair to say that it was the imaginary paradigm of modernity itself, the virtual brain of the earth's body<sup>iv</sup>. It did give birth to one museum institution, the South Kensington Museum, whose name was later changed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, which shared a similar archival mission to document all the world's arts and crafts.

The Crystal Palace also rendered permanently canonical a certain relationship between subjects and objects that contrasted with that established by earlier institutions such as Soane's Museum by being primarily passive rather than constructive. Objects as things to be "read" and analyzed for their value or "content," wherein could be discerned the social, cognitive, and ethical character of their makers. This ideology of consumption and commodification lying at the heart of modern art history and museology was powerfully enabled by this remarkable institution which served both to align together existing practices of history, art history, museology, religion, and commerce and to re-initialize or re-energize them in the service of the nation-state. In bringing together all artifacts in the same frame it positioned the visitor / consumer at the center of an imaginary world of artifice; as its point of resolution. Not in an active, constructive manner, but in a passive manner; as a simulacrum of the commodity "object" for which it is the (equally commodified) "subject-consumer."

The Crystal Palace, this great dazzling frozen iceberg of a theory of order, provided a medium for imagining nation, empire, ethnicity, and individual and collective identity in a manner that neutralized otherness while at the same time fetishizing differences as mere stylistic variations of an imaginary underlying sameness. It outlined the very methodology of orientalism and commodification.

I will end by leaving you with a final image: an 1851 engraving by the artist George Cruikshank entitled "All the World Going to See the Great Exhibition of 1851," which succinctly sums up my remarks, showing the Crystal Palace astride the earth (London of course at the top of the world), absorbing all peoples and their products, shown here arriving from every point on the planet by boat, train, cart, and foot. You can make out on the globe the world's races, nations, landscapes, and monuments. Everything, that is, *except* Europe itself – the brain of the earth's body, summed up solely by the Crystal Palace: the frame of the world; the imperial optical instrument for making the world and its peoples visible as commodities.

As long as we remain fascinated by wandering about this mythic place, and resist looking out of the glass walls of the Crystal Palace into the larger landscape it both reflects and distorts, art history and museology will be perpetually beginning, frozen at its crossroads.

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<sup>i</sup> Among many useful recent texts, see Wolfgang Ernst, 'Frames at Work: Museological Imagination and Historical Discourse in Neoclassical Britain,' *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. LXXV. No. 3, September 1993, 481-497. In connection with this, see also Stephen Bann, 'The Sense of the Past: Image, Text, and Object in the Formation of Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' in H. Veeger, ed., *The New Historicism*, 1989.

<sup>ii</sup> See D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity*, 2003, 63-91.

<sup>iii</sup> "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces." Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Konvolut K1a,8.

<sup>iv</sup> Walter Benjamin refers to industrial exhibitions as "secret blueprints for museums;" W. Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Konvolut G2a,7. He also observes (Konvolut G16,6): "The world exhibitions were training schools in which the masses, barred from consuming, learned empathy with exchange value. 'Look at everything; touch nothing'."