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Open to Interpretation

A Study of the Urban Implications of Nineteenth-Century Topographic Drawings of the Swan River Colony

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Nineteenth century topographic drawing has generally been overlooked when it comes to scholarly discussion about matters of representation in the art and especially architectural history disciplines. It has been seen to belong to the category labelled, by Henry Fuseli (early Nineteenth Century professor of painting at England's Royal Academy), as "map work" and/or to be the province of either amateurs (particularly women) or naval officers and colonial surveyors educated in the techniques of eye-sketching. Twentieth Century art and architectural historians have often used the term topographic to denote the largely descriptive function of images. In Australia, such images are seen to belong to the "art-as-information" type, in accord with Bernard Smith's influential thesis regarding the non-aesthetic empiricism of early colonial topographic art.

However, close analysis of topographic imagery reveals an embodiment of aesthetic values particular to the nineteenth century that demonstrate concerns beyond the descriptive precision that characterises the topographic ideal. Moreover, these values seem aligned with ideas relating to the development of urban form. This is particularly evident in a series of topographic sketches produced during the first decade of European settlement at the Swan River Colony.

This paper offers broader interpretation of the topographic as a "between" or cross-disciplinary mode central to artistic and surveying practices, as well as town planning in the very loose sense of that term. A foregrounding of sketch and prospect paradigms underpins my explorations of the roles played by topographic imagery in the formation and representation of the design aspirations influencing the foundation and subsequent shaping of Perth as well as the larger settlement at Swan River.



This paper extends the conference theme of “open” in two ways. Firstly, I open to new interpretation nineteenth century topographic drawing such as produced in colonial Western Australia. In particular, my study explores the value and meaning of topographic art in relation to the history of built form. As an outcome of this I show, secondly, how selected images from the topographic genre support my claim that the open spatial quality so definitive of Perth’s urban development was strongly desired and intentionally constructed from the time of the Swan River Colony’s British origins in 1827. At this time, English aesthetic interests and artistic practices (especially those of the sketch and watercolour painting) found powerful resonance with the landscape character of Swan River. This makes for a compelling argument that settlement of this region was considerably motivated by early nineteenth century aesthetic tastes. Elsewhere I have discussed this at length, but suffice to say here that of particular importance to what might be called my architectural reading of topographic art are the paradigms of the sketch and the prospect.¹ The various characteristics of each are key to how I interpret the evolution of built form at Swan River.

1. Kate Hislop, “Sketches in the Sand: Speculative thought and the aesthetic foundations of the Swan River Colony 1826-1839,” PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2012.

Here let me underline the speculative nature of this paper. My discussion focuses on a selection of art works produced at the Swan River Colony during the 1830s; yet while I attend in some detail to the artistic qualities of the images this is primarily to provide evidence for approaches to the design of colonial urban form. A set of lithographs by Charles Dirk Wittenoom forms the major part of the study, alongside watercolours by Frederick Garling among others. My reading of these images is framed by reference to a curious set of small drawings found on the cover notes of a few correspondence files in Western Australia’s Colonial Secretary’s Office Records.² These simple outline drawings—especially those of buildings—first prompted me to consider the sketch (as process and image) as a way of explaining the emergence, formation, appearance and morphology of the Swan River Colony. Early visual representations of the settlement as well as written descriptions found in letters, journals and newspapers reveal a fascinating confluence of many strands of thought and activity around the notion of the sketch, in itself a speculative tool. As well, I will show that equally prominent and revelatory of planning aspirations is the notion of prospect. Indeed the document considered by many historians to be chiefly responsible for British colonisation of Western Australia—the report prepared by founding Governor James Stirling following

2. Colonial Secretary’s Office correspondence held in the Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia.

3. Captain Stirling, letter to Governor Darling, 18 April 1827, with Enclosure No. 1 “Narrative of Operations” by J. Stirling; and Enclosure No. 2 “Observations on the Soil, etc., etc., of the Banks of Swan River” by C. Fraser in *Historical Records of Australia, Series 3, Despatches and papers relating to the settlement of the states* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1921-23), vol 6, 551-78 and 578-84.

the 1827 exploratory expedition—speaks directly to the British taste for romantic pastoral landscapes, gaining most of its persuasive power through numerous verbal sketches of what are literally and metaphorically the prospects of settlement at Swan River.³

There are surprising similarities between the incidental cover note drawings and early sketches and watercolours of the Colony. The treatment of line, pictorial composition and choice of subject matter provide forceful evidence of a widely shared approach to the representation of settlement. But more than this, the common approach tells much about the imperatives driving the establishment of settlement and underpinning its built formation. It is revealing of the ideas guiding the settlement’s layout, the siting of the principal towns, the enclosing of space, the capturing of openness and the construction of modestly-scaled buildings. Finally, the pictorial commonalities highlight what I believe can be described—in today’s terms—as the suburban aspirations of the colonists. I will return to this point later.

Classification of Images: Topographic and Picturesque

First, however, it is important to understand the selection of images in relation to the context of early nineteenth century visual culture, particularly the categories of the topographic and the Picturesque. While it is not my intention to provide pithy definitions of these terms, nor to neatly classify under these headings any of the images discussed here, it is impossible to discuss colonial imagery without reference to these dominant pictorial modes. Not least, as identified by Bernard Smith and recently highlighted by David Hansen’s work on John Glover, early nineteenth century sketch and watercolour practices were often grounded in both the Picturesque ideal and the traditions of topography.⁴

Conventional explanations of Western Australian colonial art situate images by Wittenoom, Garling and others including Richard Morrell at Swan River within the topographic genre by virtue mainly of their subject matter and amateur status. Garling’s 1827 watercolours for example are typical in many ways of official images produced to record and illustrate colonial expeditions and land surveys and as such they feature explorers and their tools in a variety of poses and activities. They also document and describe the distinctive characteristics of the region’s flora, fauna

4. See Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (London; New York: Oxford U.P, 1969), 177; and David Hansen in *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* (Hobart, Tas.: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery/Art Exhibitions Australia Limited, ©2003), 54.



and geology. In a similar way, Morrell's 1832 *View of Fremantle, Western Australia, from Church Hill, East of the town* is, at one level, a naming of places and mapping of progress. As such these satisfy "visual catalogue" or "art-as-information" functions.⁵

Wittenoom too has been described as a "topographical draughtsman," even though his images seem less concerned with describing the natural environment or cataloguing buildings than evoking an impression of the settlement's position ten years on. Not much is known of his background or training and it should be noted that he produced these images at age fifteen, so the descriptor may be associated more with technique than subject matter or training. Furthermore, he is the son of one of the founding members of the Colony's civil establishment, the Reverend J. B. Wittenoom, himself described as an "amateur artist."⁶ Indeed, with the possible exception of those by Garling (who evidently served an apprenticeship with Augustus Earle), most images of Swan River in the early decades were produced by so-called amateurs: members of the civil establishment, those trained in engineering, surveying or other cognate fields, and women.

If these images belong to a topographic classification because of their amateur authorship or descriptive purpose—describing landscape features, colonial life and urban development for the edification of friends, family and prospective emigrants—they often do so within a Picturesque framework. Here, however, Bernard Smith's observation about the shifting focus of the Picturesque in Australia after about 1820 is important: from this time "far more attention was ... given to local peculiarities of terrain, vegetation, and atmosphere."⁷ In accord with the principles discussed by John Macarthur, Smith, Hansen and others, the images are mostly organized according to convention: they position landscape elements (trees, rocks) as framing devices and construct a layered picture plane that foregrounds a colonial narrative of some kind against receding middle grounds and backgrounds.⁸ However, discussion of these images in conventional art-historical terms conceals their important evidence of broader social, cultural and aesthetic trends and values. So, although I continue to use the terms topographic and Picturesque, I do so alongside an emphasis on the more multi-dimensional expressions of the sketch and prospect.

My foregrounding of the early nineteenth century cross-disciplinary modes of sketch and prospect allows me to show that the topographic at Swan River is not simply descriptive and

5. See Hansen, *John Glover*, 25-26; Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801-1890* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985) Chapter 5 "Art as information," 87-106; also Bernard Smith's influential thesis regarding the non-aesthetic empiricism of early colonial topographic art in *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art Since 1788* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979, 2nd ed), esp. Chapter 1, "The Beginnings of Colonial Art," 33-65.

6. Barbara Chapman, *The Colonial Eye: A Topographical and Artistic Record of the Life and Landscape of Western Australia, 1798-1914* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1979), 53, 80.

7. Smith, *European Vision*, 178.

8. See John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007).

9. The prospect and sketch aesthetics are respectively defined by Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender, and Romanticism* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) and Richard C. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch in British Romanticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

10. Stirling, letter to Darling, 576.

11. Wittenoom's sketches were published in Nathaniel Ogle, *The Colony of Western Australia: A Manual for Emigrants, 1839* (Sydney: John Ferguson in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1977), though it is not known whether they were produced specifically for that purpose.

12. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch*, 5.

motivated by scientific or empirical purpose, but is (equally or instead) projective and driven by aesthetic intent.⁹ In this regard it is possible to identify in my selection of images a consistent set of ideas about settlement and built form design. In various ways each captures a sense of the speculative underpinnings of the Colony and its built morphology, characterised by qualities of indefiniteness, expansiveness and openness. A comparison of Garling and Wittenoom is instructive in this regard. Garling's 1827 *View from Mount Eliza* and *View across the Coastal Plain* show a tangible sense of prospect augmented by the atmospheric effects of watercolour technique and the sketch-like quality of the delineation. These are expansive impressions of a "Country in a state of nature" suitable for a projected settlement.¹⁰ Wittenoom's 1839 lithograph *Sketch of the Town of Perth from Perth Water* similarly attests to the power of the prospect-sketch conjunction but a decade on he affirms the materialising of Garling's promise, and he extends instead the prospect of the cultivated landscape awaiting would-be migrants. That Wittenoom's lithographs were published in an 1839 manual for emigrants is persuasive testament to their promotional function and, furthermore, to the broad appeal of the speculative and provisional forms and metaphors of sketch and prospect.¹¹

That these images are concerned with prospect is self-evident in their elevated viewing stations, but especially interesting are their impressions of a prospective atmosphere, captured through treatment of light, colour and translucency. That all adopt the sketch aesthetic is clear from their technical delineation. Displaying looseness and roughness—often incompleteness—of line, emphasis on outline of form and approximation of detail, as well as conventional framing devices and asymmetrical composition, they belong to a tradition associated with William Gilpin among others. In aspiring to the speculative, the provisional and qualities of openness and incompleteness they share what Richard Sha describes as the "less-is-more" rhetoric associated with the romantic sketch's aesthetic of simplicity, a tradition gaining currency in early nineteenth century Britain and its colonies.¹² The degree to which the views are reliable depictions of landscape and urban topography is apparent when comparing Wittenoom's Perth sketch with a recent photographic panorama. At the time, however, their claim to authenticity rested especially on technical application: the delineation of outline forms appearing to have been produced on the spot and eschewing the "excessively elaborate, ornamental, structured, and deceptive



rhetoric of neoclassical artists and Royal Academicians.”¹³

Wittenoom’s linework is intentionally rough, discontinuous and irregular, heightening the sketch-like qualities and rhetoric of his images.

A Prospective Approach to Design

When more broadly interpreted, the topographic base seems to be common across a variety of forms of colonial representation at Swan River. Wittenoom’s sketches share with the written survey descriptions by Surveyor General John Septimus Roe, for instance, a descriptive mode through which land and ultimately landscape was surveyed, interpreted, named and defined. This is consistent with John Barrell’s claims that the origins and predominance of the topographic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries exists in written rather than visual mode, and with Paul Carter’s observations about the instrumental role of naming in conjuring up the country.¹⁴ While there is not space in this paper to explore this avenue, elsewhere I have demonstrated the significant embedding of written survey descriptions within the aesthetic domain of the topographic.¹⁵ The topography—what Henry Fuseli dismissively called “map-work”—of Roe’s survey narratives and Wittenoom’s sketches highlights the kind of disciplinary cross-over that has been the focus of recent scholarship in the fields of philosophy as well as human and cultural geography.¹⁶ In a local context, Diane Brand has studied the instructive relationships between the survey and the sketch, revealing the “in-between identity” of the surveyor in early-nineteenth-century Australia and New Zealand.¹⁷

Philosopher Edward Casey’s study of the intersections between maps and landscape painting, focused on late eighteenth and early nineteenth century United States and Britain as well as seventeenth century Netherlands, usefully identifies topography and description (*descriptio*) as the “middle terms” connecting the essentially pictorial paradigms of cartography and landscape painting.¹⁸ Describing, in particular, is a practice involving “inscribing or writing as well as drawing” and it is basically “by description that mapping and painting commingle.” Casey further suggests that the “descriptive undertaking present in maps and paintings alike would not be possible without a common conception of pictorial space” which is “the space of the survey,” and a “sense of space as surveyable”¹⁹ (which is also

13. Sha, *The Visual and Verbal Sketch*, 14.

14. John Barrell, “Landscape and Topography in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British Art,” unpublished paper, for presentation at the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts, The University of Western Australia, 14 June 2010. See especially Chapters 1 and 2 in Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987).

15. Hislop, “Sketches in the Sand.”

16. Fuseli on “map-work” of topography quoted in Barrell, “Landscape and Topography,” 4. On relationships between maps and landscape paintings see Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris; New York, 2008); Edward Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Jeremy Foster, *Washed with Sun: landscape and the Making of White South Africa* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

17. Diane Brand, “Surveys and Sketches: 19th-century Approaches to Colonial Urban Design,” *Journal of Urban Design* 9, no. 2 (June 2004), 156.

18. Svetlana Alpers’ work on seventeenth century Dutch painting is relevant here also. See *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

19. Casey, *Representing Place*, 159-160.

20. In this context I use the term “ar” to encompass painting, drawing and sketching.

to say “open”). The notion of surveyable space seems especially pertinent to my revision of the topographic and the conjoining of cartography and landscape art presents interpretative possibilities that cast light on the planning of Perth.²⁰

It is my contention that, within the broad context of the topographic, the notion of surveyable space and the art of surveying (such space) links Wittenoom’s practice to Roe’s, Stirling’s and Garling’s. For example, the descriptive tendency of Roe’s surveying method (and the verbal sketching in Stirling’s expedition report) inclines to art, while at the same time Garling and Wittenoom show a propensity to survey which approaches the cartographic. More broadly, this connects the disciplines of mapping, sketching and planning: evident in all is a sense of survey as overview and as description. Wittenoom’s *Sketch of the Town of Perth* can be usefully discussed in this regard. Without sure knowledge of his intentions, my hypothesis is that his sketch of Perth not only represents a location, but testifies to the purposeful choice and design of that same location. He corroborates Governor James Stirling’s founding visions, expressed in Garling’s watercolour views. Together they support my claim that not only had the settlement been conceived on the basis of its prospects (what Stirling described as its “capabilities”) or subsequently depicted from high view points, but its towns planned from a prospective point of view.²¹ Perth and Fremantle appear to have been located and designed in terms of the relationships between prospect and aspect, how they would appear from and relate to adjacent eminences and other topographic features. In other words, they seem planned through a process as much pictorial and spatial as driven by the delineating of a plan diagram. Hence I claim that the prospect-sketch tradition (combining overview and description) informs a colonial planning sensibility at Swan River: planning considered pictorially.

21. The site’s “capabilities” were described by Stirling in Stirling, letter to Darling, 575-578.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the sense of space as surveyable was a significant factor motivating settlement at Swan River. Pragmatically, an open landscape was more readily navigated, cleared, surveyed and settled than one densely forested, and we know from the inscriptions on Stirling’s 1827 chart of the Swan River region that the “thinly wooded” terrain was an attraction for settlement.²² In aesthetic terms, the openness of the landscape, which seems inherently related to the “space of the survey” (equating to space for seeing), appealed to the speculative

22. On an 1827 Chart of Swan River and a later Map ordered by the House of Commons, 13 May 1829, is an inscription, “Undulating Grazing Country Thinly Wooded.”



impulse and romantic values of Stirling and many first settlers.²³ The openness of surveyable space was an important liberating force for prospective and visionary thinking. In his sketch of Perth Wittenoom has captured the qualities and promise of the surveyable space that influenced the foundation of settlement and the location of the capital. Wittenoom's choice of position and orientation is clearly deliberate. Alongside Garling's watercolours framing the Perth site, he highlights the prominence of Mount Eliza as a platform affording the overview, a major aesthetic determinant of location for the general vicinity and specific site for the capital. As can be seen in comparison with a present-day photographic panorama, Garling's *View from Mount Eliza* places the expedition party on this prime spot in 1827.

23. As observed by David Hansen the openness of the landscape was perceived by John Glover and others as "a 'natural' or providential manifestation of the Picturesque". See Hansen, *John Glover*, 98.

Let us underline the evidence drawn from these images. Alongside Garling's views, Wittenoom's sketch highlights the pictorial opportunities afforded by this particular position and topographic configuration: his representation of surveyable space confirms, firstly, an aesthetic motive for the selection of location for Perth. The prospect/aspect relationship created by mount, river, flats and scarp exists at no other location in the region, certainly at none considered as possible capital sites. This corresponds with Paul Carter's observations about the importance of hills, rivers and other distinctive features in implying "the possibility of viewpoints" and signifying "differences that made a difference."²⁴ The impact of this setting rests not only on the original choice of location but also its design, beginning with the significantly elongated layout of Perth's plan. In this regard Wittenoom's sketch points, secondly, to a deliberate approach to town planning—in the broader sense of that term—driven by pictorial thinking generally and by a prospective mind-set in particular.²⁵ To underline this point further: the layout of Perth, for example, seems driven by an approach to and the processes of planning a setting and siting a town more than it revolves around a plan per se.

24. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 48.

25. I use the term "town planning" in its broader sense to encompass the ideas and activities involved in planning a town, rather than in relation to its more specific twentieth century professional meaning.

Picturing a Sub-urban Morphology

In spatial terms, Wittenoom's Perth sketch is especially interesting. The mount delivers a sense of infinite extension across the foreground (landscape) and mid-ground (river and flats) to the background (scarp, horizon and sky). The town at the foot

26. See Pamela Statham-Drew, *James Stirling: Admiral and Founding Governor of Western Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 256. See also Extract from “Colonel Hanson’s Pamphlet,” in *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, no. 2 (12 Jan 1833): 7. For reservation as a place for the people see Dorothy Erickson, *A Joy forever: the story of Kings Park and Botanic Garden* (Western Australia: Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, 2009), 31.

of the mount is a key component in what is at once a spatial, pictorial and narrative construct of the settlement expanding through space and time. In short, the prospect afforded by Mount Eliza, as projected by Wittenoom, represents the Colony’s position, progress and promise. No wonder Stirling had initially considered Mount Eliza as a possible site for his Government House, or that Roe reserved and protected it as a “place for the people” from 1831.²⁶ It could be claimed on this basis that the site for the capital was chosen by Stirling for more than its beauty or utility or strategic positioning: the enduring significance and popularity of the view from the mount shows this setting as the very symbol of the speculative settlement of Swan River.

A central aspect of the speculative symbolism of the Perth setting is its distinctively sub-urban character (and here I note my adoption of the hyphenated form of the word to underline its historical and morphological etymology and separate it from our present-day associations). This quality is strongly captured by the conjunction of prospect and sketch aesthetics in Wittenoom’s sketch of Perth from Mount Eliza. Most immediately, the ground-figure relationship apparent in the predominantly low scale and significant separation of the buildings creates a distinctly dispersed non-urban setting. But if the town depicted by Wittenoom is not urban, neither is it a village in the traditional English sense. A grid plan and the regulations prescribing house position and form contribute to uniformity of building form and scale as well as regular fence lines, creating an orderliness typically not found in English villages. Not a village and not an urban core radiating out to suburban hinterlands (as was the case in Sydney and Hobart by 1845 for instance): the town of Perth was planted as a capital incorporating suburban allotments from the outset.²⁷ Accordingly, Wittenoom accurately depicts the town’s particular and deliberate spatial organisation. His is a picture of the physical expression of sub-urban principles.

27. Suburban allotments are labelled in the 1832 plan of Perth and there are multiple references to suburban allotments in survey descriptions from c. 1830 onwards.

Wittenoom’s image additionally captures the sensibilities underlying the sub-urban form. First, it is a clear expression of romanticism’s creative ambivalence. This is partly an outcome of the hybridity or superimposition of the prospect stance and the sketch form.²⁸ From the crest of the Mount his view of Perth is entrenched in the masculine prospect tradition of Caspar David Friedrich for example, which claims high ground as a vantage point for surveying (indeed, constructing) the landscape

28. Caroline Jordan, *Picturesque Pursuits: Colonial Women Artists & the Amateur Tradition* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2005), discusses the hybrid nature of amateur art and romantic sketches.



below and beyond, as territory but equally as a picture. At the same time, however, the amateur connotations of the image's topographic sketch technique compromise the authority of the prospect tradition.

The ambivalence is a product of numerous other dualities as well. One exists in the monumental spread of this modest settlement. While the settlement does not actually extend to the limits of the picture, the blurring of edges between built environment and landscape infinitely extends its potential claim. Another lies in the coexistence of openness and enclosure as qualities as well as definitions of space that were fundamental to the sub-urban experience. This can be related to the location duties that settlers had to perform in order to secure ownership of their land. The approved activities, including building, clearing, gardening, fencing and so on, contribute to the creation and control not only of enclosure but also of openness, critical for cultivating the continuity of settlement in physical and aesthetic terms.

With respect to sub-urban sensibilities, Wittenoom secondly captures qualities of modesty, openness and continuity. Partly because of the diminished scale of the distant town viewed as a prospect, partly because just ten years had elapsed since foundation (and some would claim because of the Colony's lagging development), the settlement described in Wittenoom's 1839 view is modest. But this modesty is substantially, I suggest, by design: this was the blueprint for the pastoral capital and for the Colony's future as a dispersed, sub-urban community. It had been envisaged as such by Stirling and Garling in 1827 and it is the same quality afforded by the prospect from Mount Eliza that has been the city's postcard image ever since.

Wittenoom underlines the effects of modesty and dispersal via a number of pictorial techniques. Enhancing the effects of the angled position (introduced by Wittenoom and adopted in numerous Swan River views thereafter) are the principles of breadth and connection. My understanding of these terms derives from John Macarthur's explanation of ideas emanating from Sir Uvedale Price's *Essay on the Picturesque* of 1794. Breadth, Macarthur explains, "means that a scene forms into general areas rather than the 'broken and disjointed' form of a hill planted with poorly scattered clumps and single trees" and allows the eye to enjoy "one broad, connected whole." Breadth refers to the graduation of light and shadow to "avoid sharp contrasts and form wholes": "it connects what was before scattered; it fills up

29. Macarthur, *The Picturesque*, 47-48.

30. Graeme Davison and Lewis Mumford cited by Robert Freestone in *Urban Nation: Australia's Planning Heritage* (Collingwood, Vic.: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 48.

staring, meagre vacancies; it destroys edginess.” Significantly, “the ‘connection’ that this breadth effects is not only visual but also an emblem of social harmony,” “as much to do with socio-political matters as painting.”²⁹ In a similar way, Wittenoom controls the receding of lines and detail, the fading of tone and thinning of texture to achieve a graded effect within his sketch. These pictorial techniques create an effect of harmony as well as indeterminacy and indeed, an organic, harmonious landscape seems the intended object of Wittenoom’s sketch. The spatial and architectural qualities of Wittenoom’s built setting correlate strongly with the kind of social space Stirling had contrived to create and which, for Lewis Mumford and Graeme Davison, also underpin the democratic and speculative logic of the grid plan.³⁰ The social ambitions for harmony and uniformity and the aesthetic desires for openness and continuity appear closely related.

It can thus be seen that Wittenoom’s sketching of the prospective view of the capital was prophetic of what was to become a lasting impression of the city. His artistic approach, while in many ways aligning with topographic convention, was also (and most particularly in the conjunction of sketch and prospect aesthetics) distinctively and intimately connected to the materialising of this settlement as a speculative sub-urban landscape, particular to this colonial circumstance.

