

Representing Colonial Estrangement: Depictions of Unreal Architecture in the Painting A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove, 1794

Luke Tipene

University of Technology Sydney

This essay examines depictions of unreal architecture in the painting A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove 1794 (1793-5) (or Sydney Cove 1794), contestably authored by the convict artist Thomas Watling. By comparing this painting to three of Watling's topographic drawings of the same period, this essay demonstrates the repeated use of familiar architectural objects in the work. It suggests that, as an assemblage of discontinuous architectural objects in the landscape, this painting fulfils picturesque aesthetic principles by fragmenting accurate representations of place. By considering various claims of the accuracy of topographic drawings—widely accepted as the authentic other to the picturesque—this essay challenges their assumed compositional neutrality. Instead, it argues that the same mechanism of addition/omission of visual information is apparent in both picturesque and topographic depictions of architecture at Sydney Cove. Both methods of image production depart from how buildings appear in order to satisfy familiar, although unreal, illusions of the civility of architectural space. Underlining this argument is the suggestion that space itself was not a neutral concept during the early colonial occupation of Sydney Cove, and that this painting demonstrates the manipulation of the image in order to culturally assimilate a completely unknown reality. By linking these practices of image production to the emergent eighteenth-century culture of imitation, this painting is described as the consequence of an attempt to meaningfully represent unfamiliar land, using ideas of space and methods of depiction at a distance from their context. The result is a collapse of distance between metropole and antipode depictions of place, accompanied by an equivalent collapse between the mediums of image production and concepts of space. Sydney Cove 1794 portrays the experience of colonial estrangement by representing a space neither familiar nor foreign but dispelled from its centre through the endeavour of colonisation.

Keywords: architectural image production; topographic drawing; picturesque; Sydney Cove; Thomas Watling

Viewing Sydney Cove 1794

The question of how to draw something we don't know how to see is a complicated one, particularly when it comes to depictions of the first buildings constructed by British settlers in an unknown land after 1788. The complication arises, not from conflicts in the depiction of form, but from conflicts in the arrangement of these forms in space. A useful example to demonstrate this conflict is the oil painting, *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove 1794* (1793-5) (or *Sydney Cove 1794*), attributed to the convict artist Thomas Watling.¹ In this depiction, the buildings of the settlement sit uncomfortably in a landscape scene of Sydney Cove. Groups of built objects are drawn independently from others, with inconsistencies in scale and perspectival diminishment. The result is architectural objects drawn with no universal visual field to order their depiction in space (fig. 1).

The dissonance in this depiction extends to how this painting has been categorised in the history of Australian art. In the revised edition of his first major book on visual depictions of Australian identity in art, the prolific art historian Bernard Smith describes this painting as a “transitional form between the topographic style and the romantic approach” to painting.² Topographic art is introduced by Smith as a type of drafting based on precise depictions of urban objects using measured, detailed line drawings.³ He juxtaposes this with the emerging “romantic” fascination in visual media with “[t]he curious, the strange, the odd, the mysterious.”⁴ Positioning this depiction of architecture in the landscape between these two extremes, we establish what Smith describes as an oddness of place, which he defines as the picturesque.⁵

Early picturesque depictions of Sydney Cove use techniques of composition developed from eighteenth-century landscape architecture and painting; they blend the irregular features of nature with classical arrangements of formal elements.⁶ In Jeffrey Auerbach's essay on picturesque image composition in the visual depictions of British colonies, he outlines the genre's typical characteristics as:

divid[ing] the landscape into three distances: a darkened and detailed foreground, a strongly lit and deep-toned middle-ground, and a hazy background. Features such as trees and ruins were to be positioned so as to create a balanced composition that provided a sense of both harmony and variety, and to push the

1 Based on Bernard Smith's attribution of authorship, see Bernard Smith, “The Oil Painting ‘Sydney in 1794,’” *Australian Journal of Art* 14, no. 1 (1998): 58. Dates of all paintings and drawings have been taken from: Tim McCormick, *First Views of Australia 1788-1825* (Chippendale, NSW: David Ell Press/Longueville Publications, 1987).

2 Bernard Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art since 1788* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), 56.

3 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 40-46.

4 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 37.

5 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 37.

6 Jeffrey Auerbach, “The Picturesque and the Homogenisation of Empire,” *The British Art Journal* 5, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2004): 48; Ian McLean, “Sense of Place: Edward Dayes's and Thomas Watling's Pictures of Sydney Cove,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 2, no. 1 (2001): 12-13; Lynette McLoughlin, “Vegetation in the Early Landscape Art of the Sydney Region, Australia: Accurate Record or Artistic Licence?,” *Landscape Research* 24, no.1 (1999): 27.

Figure 1. Overleaf. *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove 1794* (1793-5), Thomas Watling.; a comparison of key examples of inconsistent perspectival diminishment. (Courtesy of Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales.) Overlay added by Luke Tipene.



viewer's eye to the middle distance, as in a stage set. In a typical picturesque scene there would be a winding river; two coulisses, or side screens, which are the opposite banks of the river and which, in conjunction with some hills, mark the perspective; a front screen which points out the winding of the river; and a hazy, rugged, mountainous background. There was also an identifiable picturesque tint, the soft golden light of the Roman Campagna, which, as a number of scholars have suggested, artists transposed first onto the English landscape, and then carried to the furthest reaches of the British Empire.⁷

7 Auerbach, "The Picturesque," 48.

Other than the omission of the "mountainous background"—which the painting's attributed artist, Watling, describes as a conspicuously absent feature from Sydney Cove—this painting fits this description.⁸ Smith agrees that *Sydney Cove 1794* belongs to this genre by comparing it to William Gilpin's founding principles of picturesque composition.⁹

8 Thomas Watling, *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay to his Aunt at Dumfries* (ca. 1794), *Australian Historical Monographs* 34 (Sydney: D.S. Ford, 1945; reprinted Dubbo: View Publications, Dubbo, 1979), 25, 32.

9 Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 184-85.

Ian McLean suggests that in spite of the range within the picturesque aesthetic between the "clear neo-classical spatial arrangements" in the landscape architecture of Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton and the "freer more romantic scenery" of Payne Knight and Uvedale Price, the central narrative of these scenes, in the colony, was a description of civilisation—in the form of ordered built objects—framed by "wilder nature."¹⁰ The ambition of these competing principles was to seamlessly blend wildness and order, and create an agitated visual dialectic to emotionally move the viewer.¹¹ Although in *Sydney Cove 1794*, the perspectival irregularities of the architectural objects interrupt the seamless blending of built form and wild nature, creating oddness in the depiction of civic order.

10 McLean, "Sense of Place," 12-13.

11 McLean, "Sense of Place," 13.

This oddness may lie in the painting's inaccurate reflection of the experience of the Australian environment. In a letter to his aunt in December 1791, Watling describes his experience of the colony as entirely unfamiliar to the romantic scenes of British landscape painting—the genre in which he was trained prior to his transportation to Australia in 1792 after being convicted of forgery in 1788.¹² Watling suggests that were he to "select and combine" views of Sydney Cove, he might "avoid that sameness, and find engaging employment" as a picturesque artist.¹³ As Smith suggests, "[t]he 'sameness' that dismayed him was what he felt to be the unpicturesque nature of Australian landscape."¹⁴ Smith goes on to affirm that Watling did indeed combine compositional elements of his two topographic drawings: *Taken from the West side of Sydney Cove behind the Hospital* (1793-5)

12 Watling, *Letters*, 24-25; for reference to art training, see Auerbach, "The Picturesque," 50; McCormick, *First Views*, 271; for conviction date, see Jeffrey Auerbach, "The Impossibility of Artistic Escape: Thomas Watling, John Glover, and the Australian Picturesque," *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 7 (2005): 162; for transportation date, see Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 56.

13 Watling, *Letters*, 25.

14 Smith, "The Oil Painting," 57.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

and *A Direct North View of Sydney Cove and Port Jackson, the Chief British Settlement in New South Wales, Taken from the North Shore, about one Mile distant, for John White Esq.* (1793-5), in order to fulfil the major aesthetic requirements for a picturesque depiction of the colony, in spite of its false reflection of the actual site (fig. 2).¹⁵

The telling feature that demonstrates the fabrication of the scene is the depiction of British signifiers; architecture and ships have been mimicked from the topographic drawings. Other features that have been mimicked include vegetation in the foreground to establish the picturesque framing of the architecture. In addition to the two drawings discussed by Smith, an architectural feature of two sets of row houses has been included from *North View of Sydney Cove; Taken from the Flag-staff, Opposite the Observatory* (1793-4).¹⁶ This composite process of image production suggests that the inconsistent perspectival diminishment and scale of the painting are the result of juxtaposing features from separate drawings.

In his essay on the evocation of a sense of place through image production in the early colony, McLean suggests that

Figure 2. (a) *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove 1794* (1793-5), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales); (b) *Taken from the West side of Sydney Cove behind the Hospital* (1793-5), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy); (c) *A Direct North View of Sydney Cove and Port Jackson, the Chief British Settlement in New South Wales, Taken from the North Shore, about one Mile distant, for John White Esq.* (1793-5), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy); (d) *North View of Sydney Cove; Taken from the Flag-staff, Opposite the Observatory* (1793-4), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy.) Overlays added by Luke Tipene.

¹⁵ Smith, "The Oil Painting," 57. Smith's reference to "wash drawings" is understood to be a reference to topographical drawings, based on the acceptance that Watling's drawings are topographic drawings; see Gordon Bull, "The Artistic Background: The Development Of Topographic Painting," in *First Views of Australia 1788-1825*, ed. McCormick, 26-28.

¹⁶ Partially attributed to Watling. Shared attribution does not affect this essay's argument, see McCormick, *First Views*, 271, 274.

inaccuracy is a key attribute of the picturesque genre. He too situates this genre between romantic and classical aesthetic ideas, though he describes the picturesque, not as a dichotomy, but as the “cultivation or colonisation” of sublime depictions of “pristine wilderness” suffused with classical ideals of beauty.¹⁷ The compositional arrangements of the picturesque construct a “synthetic space” in the image by depicting unknown environments via “ideal arrangements” of elements.¹⁸ This control of compositional freedom by aesthetic ideals parallels the architectural subject matter; ordering wildness into a new synthetic space of the built environment. The result is an idea of an “ideological place,” both in the architecture of the colony and its depiction, which replaces direct experience of the unknown with safe imitations of how the unknown is imagined to appear.¹⁹

17 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 13.

18 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 13.

19 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 14.

Returning to *Sydney Cove 1794*, the inaccuracy of this picturesque depiction extends beyond the painting itself to the provenance of the work. Smith’s attribution of Watling’s authorship is highly contested, and discourse on its authorship remains a great debate in the history of Australian image production.²⁰ In addition to Smith, experts including Hugh Gladstone, Paula Dredge and Steward Laidler, Elizabeth Ellis, Jane Lennon, and Ian McLean, and many others, have attempted to answer the questions of who painted *Sydney Cove 1794*, and where it was painted. The unknown origin of this work, prior to its emergence in the Oldham Fine Arts and Industrial Exhibition of 1883, has created what Smith described as a “gap in its provenance” which significant research has continuously tried to fill.²¹

20 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 21-23.

21 Smith, “The Oil Painting,” 58.

Recognising the synthetic nature of this inaccurate aesthetic genre, it is important to consider why this climate of misrepresentation would have existed at the historical moment of discovery of the unknown antipodes. In order to address this, rather than continue in the footsteps of giants in search of the provenance of *Sydney Cove 1794*, it is more useful to consider the reasons for the uncertainty of authorship in the first place. In addition, rather than continue the dangerous game of talking about architecture inside paintings, it is more apposite to consider the wider field of image production and its relationship to addressing the unknown. The aim of the rest of this essay, then, is to demonstrate how the inaccurate depiction of architecture in images was indicative of a wider culture of misrepresentation at the time, and to consider its consequences.

The Picturesque

In a thoughtful reflection on the experience of producing images in the difficult early days of the colony, Smith considers the human motivations for making drawings of the settlement. He suggests the primary “scientific” methods of topographic drawing were based on “a desire to find out all they could about the new land.”²² Importantly, he recognises that this sense of curiosity must have been accompanied by a palpable sense of homesickness in response to the difficulties endured in this “harsh and uncongenial environment.”²³ Smith describes how “the homesick artist, who painted for homesick patrons, probably neither desired, nor was asked to provide, a landscape depicting the brutal realities of the new environment.”²⁴ The result was that Australia’s unknown environment would be seen with “English eyes” through the reconstruction of unfamiliar observations into familiar aesthetic qualifiers from England, reflecting a nostalgia for a distant homeland.²⁵

22 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 27-28.

23 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 27.

24 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 28.

25 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 28.

Smith’s insight humanises the misrepresentation of the picturesque, suggesting it is the result of distance from a familiar sense of place. He infers that the sameness in the depiction of architectural objects in unknown sites is based on an emotional desire for familiar signifiers from home. Auerbach recognises a similar condition of homogenisation at the macro-scale. In his survey of picturesque images across the British colonial empire, he demonstrates the development of compositional “sameness” of “strangeness and difference.”²⁶ Auerbach suggests the picturesque strips away the inhospitable “otherness” of unknown places via the application of familiar compositional techniques.²⁷ The result is a collapse of difference between “metropole-periphery, home-abroad” depictions of vastly different places.²⁸

26 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 48.

27 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 52.

28 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 51, 53.

Importantly, Auerbach suggests that this colonial homogenisation of depictions was in opposition to the ambitions of the domestic production of images in the same genre. Picturesque works produced inside the United Kingdom aimed to display “variety, novelty, ruggedness, and wild, unkempt beauty.”²⁹ In spite of this opposition of purpose, the domestic and foreign incantations of this genre were compositionally indistinguishable from each other, leading Auerbach to conclude that the motivation for picturesque image production, as a whole, was the domestication of the exotic—be it through the addition of mild wilderness to the passive English landscapes, or the omission of otherness from unknown colonial environments.³⁰ The purpose was to create a new type of visual

29 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 52.

30 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 52-53.

media to support the eighteenth-century appetite for the new social phenomenon of tourism, followed by immigration and investment.³¹

Smith describes how this domestication of the exotic arose from the movement of topographic drawings from antipode to metropole. The result of which “played havoc with the enclosed classical system of eighteenth-century aesthetics,” and shifted the purpose of image production from accurate depictions of unknown places, to the fabrication of odd scenes for domestic novelty.³² Evidence of this process leads Smith to conclude that the later emergence of Romanticism was in part “fed at its source by commercial imperialism,” based on the production and consumption of colonial images of misrepresented unknown places.³³

This cultivation of image production developed in parallel to the exploration of the antipodes. Lynette McLoughlin describes how “improved engraving processes and printmaking” during the mid-eighteenth century resulted in a massive increase in the magnitude of image manufacturing.³⁴ This accompanied an increase in the availability of content from discoveries and settlements, which matched the increase in domestic demand for images. In his first voyage James Cook was the first in the British Admiralty to include a professional artist to document findings, and by his third voyage, approximately 3000 drawings had been produced.³⁵ Topographic drawings had become a valuable resource to translate into engravings, and were widely distributed in journals, official records and private publications.³⁶ Further, this demand for depictions of distant places was accompanied by increased consumption of landscape painting produced in the picturesque aesthetic, in part due to their availability as reproductions via engraving.³⁷

Returning to Watling’s inaccurate picturesque depiction of the colony’s architecture, we can now situate the contestation of the painting’s authorship within the emerging eighteenth-century context of image production, reproduction and consumption. McLean describes the circumstances of Watling’s employment as an artist at the beginning of this supply chain of image manufacturing. He describes how Watling’s topographic depictions were sent to England to become the basis for the “most widely disseminated images of Sydney Cove” via engravings in several major publications.³⁸ Importantly, Watling’s drawings were used without him being credited or receiving payment for his services.³⁹ The relationship of image production between Watling and the English picturesque artist, Edward Dayes—who prepared Watling’s work for engraving

31 Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 52; McLean, “Sense of Place,” 13-14; Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 27.

32 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 36.

33 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 37.

34 McLoughlin, “Vegetation,” 28.

35 McLoughlin, “Vegetation,” 28; Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 25.

36 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 41; Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 24, 27; McCormick, *First Views*, 269.

37 McLoughlin, “Vegetation,” 27; Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 25-26.

38 McLean, “Sense of place,” 11; McCormick, *First Views*, 273, 275.

39 Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 27-28.

though never travelled to Australia—was a hierarchical one.⁴⁰ Topographic drawings, drawn directly from observing the unknown environment, were seen as a lesser art of draftsmen. The origin of authorship and the accuracy of their depictions were of secondary concern to the strength of the engraver’s translation of these depictions into reproducible picturesque images.⁴¹ Referring to *Sydney Cove 1794*, Smith describes how Watling’s employer—the naval surgeon John White—was “unhappy about mere convicts signing pictures” and discouraged Watling from signing his own work—a point that Smith used to defend his position on Watling’s authorship.⁴² Further, the combination of topographic drawings to invent composite picturesque scenes had become a common practice in English oil painting.⁴³ If we consider the contestation of the painting’s authorship within this context, the great debate to determine if Watling painted *Sydney Cove 1794* attests to a time when the emergence of imitative practices through the mass reproduction of images made originality inadmissible. This death of authorship accompanied the collapse of distance between depictions, from metropole and antipode, through the mimicry of the familiar in foreign places.

Smith situates the beginning of the British engagement with Australia within a paradigm shift in European art. He insightfully recognises that Cook’s initial recordings of Australia occurred only ten years after the Rococo movement—which he cites as the “last manifestation in Europe of an original art style”—had given way to Neo-Classicism.⁴⁴ This shift from originality to imitation in art was seismic, and signalled the beginning of the first of the revivalist moments, with Classicism followed by Gothicism and Primitivism. An equivalent shift is recognised in architecture, from Neo-Classicism to the Victorian revivals and the Arts and Crafts movement. In this sense, the colonisation of Australia is unique, as it coincided with this emergence of a culture of imitation and reproduction, which would “dominate the art of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁴⁵ Understanding the oddness of *Sydney Cove 1794* as indicative of this era of imitation and reproduction, the colonisation of Australia can be described as denying a direct experience of the unknown by reflecting synthetic images of reality back and forth around the globe.

The denial of the unknown via the fabrication of images is not a new reading of the picturesque. According to McLean, due to the fact that this genre was “based on art and not place,” it has been criticised and discredited since the 1820s.⁴⁶ Smith himself describes visual prejudices in the portrayals of unknown scenes

40 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 22.

41 Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 27; McCormick, *First Views*, 269, 274; McLean, “Sense of Place,” 18.

42 Smith, “The Oil Painting,” 55-26; McCormick, *First Views*, 271.

43 Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 27.

44 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 25.

45 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 25.

46 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 14.

as “a normal process in the development of scientific thought.”⁴⁷ Due to a reliance on known, familiar representation techniques to qualify our visual experience, the falsification of depictions is a part of seeing things for the first time. Smith suggests that this condition subsided during the early nineteenth century through the calibration of image production with new experiences of the colony.⁴⁸

47 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 29.

48 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 29.

Although picturesque falsification did subside, this line of enquiry demonstrates that for a period in the early British occupation of Australia, the unquestioned relationship between spatial experience and spatial representation was deeply disputed. The inconsistent depictions of architecture in *Sydney Cove 1794* are indicative of a much larger gap between the visual and experiential knowledge of the colony. Like the gap in provenance of the painting, this gap between these two types of spatial knowledge appears to have been difficult for later generations of art theorists to tolerate, perhaps due to Smith’s suggestion that knowing how to depict a place is instrumental to recognising that place’s unique identity. As to what makes Australian image production *Australian*, Smith suggests that only through directly addressing the unknown, and enduring its presence long enough to define a unique method of depiction can a people make a place meaningful and render its identity in images.⁴⁹

49 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 30-31.

This inability to address the unknown in picturesque images raises questions as to how a national identity can be constructed, at the outset of the colony or in successive generations, in an era that institutionalises images via imitation, mass reproduction and consumption. Recent criticisms of colonial Australian picturesque images speak to latent concerns for an identifiable understanding of place to situate a unique depiction of Australian identity. It is perhaps not surprising that topographic drawing has been framed antithetically, as the authentic other to the picturesque. As the site-specific method of image production associated with the beginning of the supply chain of engraving, topographic drawing has been given a particular status in the hope of grounding identity in the waves of imitative depictions of place. Thus the question arises: is it deserving of such status?

Topographic Drawing

Turning our attention to the three topographic drawings on which *Sydney Cove 1794* was based, the question of their accurate representation of architectural objects in the landscape is extremely significant. These works infer an embryonic

understanding of how the colonial Australian identity appears via the visual mitigation of the unknown in images. Perhaps the expectation of equivalence between these drawings and the actual site—in order to fulfil claims to knowledge about this period—explains why significant questions about accuracy have not been addressed. Recently, assumptions about the accuracy of topographic drawings have included: describing the provenance of this genre in cartography, drafting and “naval intelligence”;⁵⁰ stepping over the issue with such terms as, “fairly faithful,”⁵¹ or “sufficient detail”;⁵² infantilising topographic drawings as unclear proto-picturesque images;⁵³ or suggesting the imposition of picturesque principles on topographic accuracy.⁵⁴ Only Tim McCormick, in a short note near the end of his book, acknowledges the existence of an “information gap” that would interrupt any determination of accuracy.⁵⁵ He gives several reasons for this gap, though beneath them is the unacknowledged and unanswerable question: how can the properties of space ever be translated into drawings?

To address this question, we must consider how the three topographic depictions—that Watling combined in his picturesque depiction—represent Sydney Cove. Rather than compete with the comprehensive study undertaken by McCormick, this comparison will focus on the single architectural object of Government House.⁵⁶ In each of the three depictions, the house is drawn orthographically to the plane of the page, in spite of the orientation of each view. Further, the side walls used to imply depth in each depiction appear to have been drawn obliquely rather than perspectively (fig. 3). These orthographic and oblique characteristics bear a significant resemblance to an earlier, highly detailed depiction of Government House, *A View of Governor Philip’s House Sydney Cove Port Jackson taken from the NNW* (ca. 1792) (fig. 4). The impossible vantage of this image suggests that its orthographic and oblique characteristics resulted from the

50 Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 25; McLean, “Sense of Place,” 15; McLoughlin, “Vegetation,” 27; Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 54 (endnote 55).

51 McLoughlin, “Vegetation,” 26; Smith, *European Vision*, 184.

52 John Pickard, “The First Fences: Fencing the Colony of New South Wales, 1788-1823,” *Agricultural History* 73, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 49.

53 Auerbach, “The Impossibility,” 167; Auerbach, “The Picturesque,” 50.

54 McLean, “Sense of Place,” 15; Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 25.

55 McCormick, *First Views*, 287.

56 McCormick, *First Views*, 269-307.

Figure 3. (a) Detail of Government House from: *Taken from the West side of Sydney Cove behind the Hospital* (1793-5), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy); (b) Detail of Government House from: *A Direct North View of Sydney Cove and Port Jackson, the Chief British Settlement in New South Wales, Taken from the North Shore, about one Mile distant, for John White Esq.* (1793-5), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy); (c) Detail of Government House from: *North View of Sydney Cove; Taken from the Flag-staff, Opposite the Observatory* (1793-4), Thomas Watling (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy.)



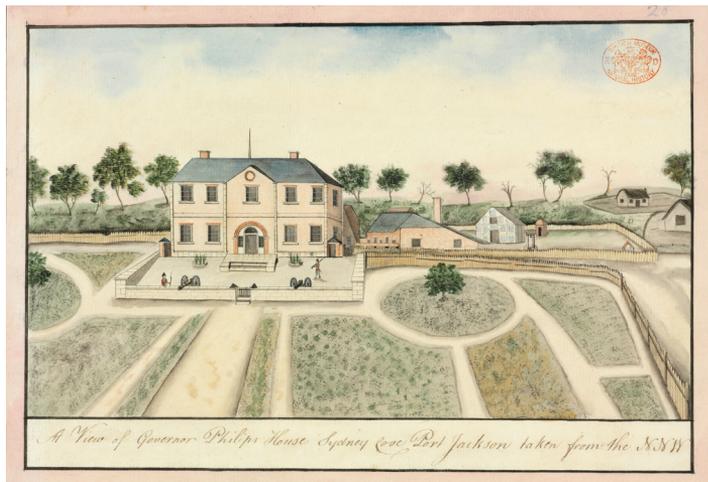


Figure 4. *A View of Governor Philip's House Sydney Cove Port Jackson taken from the N/W* (ca. 1792) [unsigned]. (Courtesy of the trustees of the Natural History Museum London / Alamy.)

fabrication of this depiction, and was not drawn from direct observation. These characteristics appear to have carried through to the later topographic drawings, repeating the representation of Government House as a symbolic trope of British civility by maintaining its frontality in each depiction. “Copying and swapping” elements of drawings was a common practice amongst the topographic artists to maintain “clarity” through uniform depictions, though ultimately this practice obscured an engagement with the unknown.⁵⁷ The process of emulation across these drawings mimics the composite process of picturesque painting and seriously questions the accuracy of architectural objects depicted in topographic drawings.

57 McCormick, *First Views*, 269.

The picturesque was a known ideological device; topographic drawing was thought to be directly drawn from site. The inaccuracy of the picturesque is characteristic of the genre and as such, is not a fault, though it may be considered a limitation. Topographic drawing, on the other hand, has an implied purpose of depicting the properties of real spaces, whatever the level of accuracy achieved. Importantly, like the findings above, Bull and McCormick suggest that topographic drawings of Sydney Cove were not simply documentations of the colony’s architectural progress. Structures were added that were “not yet built,” and others were “omitted” in order to validate “favourable or even celebratory reports” of the colony’s progress.⁵⁸ Unlike the inclusion and omission of objects within picturesque depictions in pursuit of aesthetic purposes, the same process was used in topographic drawings, in part, to visualise an imaginary idealisation of the colony’s future. In this respect, these topographic drawings must be considered to some extent as documents of spatial design, as they fulfil Robin Evans’s

58 Bull, “The Artistic Background,” 27; McCormick, *First Views*, 287.

assertion that in architectural drawings, “[t]he logic of classical realism is stood on its head.”⁵⁹ By altering, and in some cases preceding, the architectural objects they depict the speculative characteristics of these topographic drawings contradict their dependence on empiricism. Thus these drawings struggle to depict buildings accurately because—to continue Evans’s assertion—they open up unknown architectural opportunities that do not necessarily exist without the aid of the drawing.⁶⁰

59 Robin Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 165.

60 Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building,” 180.

Addressing the inaccuracy of topographic drawings is not to suggest an equivalence to picturesque aesthetics. Rather, it is to address issues with the use of accuracy as a means to qualify depictions of architecture. With the onset of image reproduction, in addition to an appetite for the imaginary in the picturesque, we see the emergence of an equivalent imaginary in empiricism. As the instrument of observation, topographic drawing established a type of mimicry by embodying the idea that the best way to address an unknown space was to draw it. The result was an unquestioned coupling of image and space, and a necessary subjugation of images to the illusion of accuracy in order to carry meaning across the world; a process “which would have art be a form of haulage”; “pushing ideas from place to place.”⁶¹ The picturesque was a medium of imitation that denied a direct experience of the unknown by reflecting an imaginary reality in images. The result was a collapse of distance between metropole and antipode depictions of place. Faith in the accuracy of topographic drawing, a device seconded to record and observe the unknown, resulted in an equivalent collapse in distance between the mediums of image production and concepts of space. Seen in this light, the oddness of the architecture in *Sydney Cove 1794* is the oddness of an emergent culture that insisted an image could speak on behalf of the complex experience of reality.

61 Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building,” 181, 186.

Postscript

Smith’s proposal that knowing how to depict a place is instrumental to recognising its unique identity in images is interesting when considered in the discourse of accuracy. A premise to this discourse is the existence of an unfalsifiable Australian identity, against which all imitation and reproductions may be measured. If such a difficult hypothesis were to be true, it does not address the key issue concerning the fate of meaning as it is translated between the mediums of image and space. Smith, probably aware of the limits of accuracy as a qualifier in a discourse on meaning, argues that the depiction of

site-specific signifiers in images does not qualify such images as indicative of that place. Regardless of the level of resolution and detail of drawings, he states, “[a] national art requires more than the photographic rendering of certain national *symbols*.”⁶² How something appears and what it means are very different things, and Smith explains that drawing something accurately is not necessary to determine its value. Topographic drawing and the picturesque are both inaccurate mediums for depicting identity, though in different ways; the picturesque inaccurately depicts place to satisfy a cultural aesthetic, whereas topographic drawing inaccurately reflects a cultural aesthetic to depict a cultural bias. For Smith, what saves colonial images from this endless internal reflection of falsification is their empathetic description of a people, which in turn defines a place and time. He measures the accuracy of art in its ability to qualify human endurance, without which he suggests the history of image production is nothing more than a “history of surface effects.”⁶³

62 His emphasis. Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 30.

63 Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 31; McLean shares this point to establish meaning in picturesque images, see McLean, “Sense of Place,” 14.