Alien Vernacular Manifesto

A call to the
Wandering Stars;
Nomads Menders & Makers:
Being A Musing
upon the making of
Utopia
and such magic portals
as may be discovered thereby

Ye Orderers!

This Book records an artist's journey in search of Place and what to do with it.

It was created during a residency at Braziers Park, located on the border of Oxfordshire and the Otherworld, during a research project funded by Arts Council England.

It was made by Nor. eleanorg.org

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0. Introduction

1. Vernacular

2. Anti Vernacular

3. Alien Vernacular

0. Introduction

From the Latin root "verna" stemming from the word for "home" (and related to the word native), "vernacular" is a design term meaning that which emerges from the home-place or locality, typically using local materials and techniques because they are both readily available and appropriate to the local climate.

This somewhat obscure design concept has taken on an unlikely new relevance in the contemporary design world, linked to the popularity of "placemaking" as an ethical aim in progressive discourse. Countering the "nonspaces" of late modernity, a quest to enhance the distinctiveness of specific places has become a prized goal in design disciplines from public art to architecture. Making reference to local heritage, landscape and community has become synonymous with good design ethics. It has come to stand for sustainability, community involvement, and belonging. This is Lippard's (1997) "lure of the local" which "offers a ground for resistance" against capitalism's well-documented erasure of places and communities.

Or as architects Material Cultures (2024) put it: "To avoid a new age of imperialism, or repackaged extractivism, we must... reimagine the fundamentals of relationships to land, materials and each other".



Placemaking agency Civic Square typify this trend in their advocacy for "an ecoregional approach", creating a "situated" architectural practice, "reaffirming ties between the material, the building, and the ecoregion" (ibid). In practice this often means using locally sourced materials, not only for their green credentials but as an ethical gesture of engagement with place.

Postmodern theorists of place have long cautioned against a simplistic definition of the "local", pointing out that Place is always a complex layering of here and elsewhere, of longtime inhabitants and more recent arrivals (Cresswell, 2004). And the roots of our obsession with site specific art lie partly in the radical land art of the 60's, which certainly did not romanticise the local. As Smithson (1968) wrote about the geological processes which inspired his practice: "The strata of the Earth is a jumbled museum... When one scans the ruined sites of pre-history one sees a heap of wrecked maps." Only on the shakiest of conceptual grounds therefore can local materials, or formerly vernacular styles, be lauded as the correct design choice today simply because they are "site specific". But too often in a public art context, "place based" is taken to mean simplistic historical or landscape references, and the simple fact of something being "from round here" is considered to be a sufficient design rationale.

Art which is rooted in place is a laudable aim, but any contemporary vernacular will look radically different to what it would have done in the past, with globalised supply chains and waste streams a more likely source of readily available materials than the (often fragile) landscapes nearby. Design ideas, too, will have travelled long distances and intermixed, along with the migration of people.

So how can we embrace the complexity of Place as it impacts design, without throwing the vernacular baby out with the bathwater?

This zine investigates alternative approaches to site-specific design which offer groundedness and belonging, but which also acknowledge places as provisional and always interleaved with their "elsewheres". I use insights from research on the psychology of migration, and the placemaking practices of utopian communities, alongside examples from the history of architectural ornament. I conclude with a manifesto for a contemporary type of vernacular design, and artistic examples which explore what this could look like in practice.

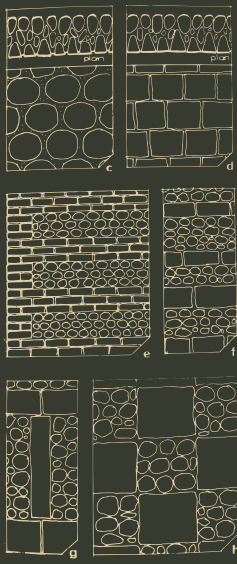


My experiments with papermaking from local river plants such as sedge and willow

1. Vernacular

While vernacular buildings are very unusual today, in the past they would have been the norm. There were always exceptions of course: high status buildings often followed fashion, not vernacular tradition – of which more later. The coming of the railways and mass production, however, spelled the death of vernacular traditions even for low-status architecture. For example, trainloads of multicoloured bricks from faraway brickfields made new and variegated designs possible. This death of vernacular style spawned two reactions.

The first was a romantic revolt against modernity, epitomised by the Arts & Crafts movement - which famously celebrated the authenticity of local traditions, elevating their use by designers to a quasi-religious duty.





The second reaction to the death of regional vernacular styles - Modernism - embraced new design possibilities and sought out fresh visual styles appropriate to an age of upheaval. New materials such as concrete for example were not to be shunned but on the contrary celebrated for their interesting material properties.

However it's fair to say that the high Modernism of the mid 20th century, while giving us many invigorating new material experiments, did devalue and even destroy the unique qualities of many pre-existing places. Modernism is something of a dirty word for the average person today thanks to a 'slash and burn' pursuit of the New which came to characterize (some) mid-20th century architecture and town planning in particular.

A disillusionment with the placelessness of Modernism helped to feed the folk revivals of the 1970s and into today. And an interest in vernacular traditions has now entered the mainstream, given added impetus by a growing awareness of the environmental cost of shipping in materials from afar. In the field of design, a growing fashion for bio-based materials and premodern craft skills are some examples of this revival of interest in the local and authentic.

The values of both the Arts & Crafts and the Modernist movements continue to be felt here: their shared revulsion at visual dishonesty, and engagement with the essential nature of raw materials, feel familiar when we consider the contemporary love affair with vernacular materials.

This zeitgeist has influenced my own place-based art practice. I've always been fascinated by Place and tried to figure out how to make art which is rooted in specific places. I'll share an example, and explain how I reached the limits of this vernacular approach, and became dissatisfied with it.

During the Covid lockdown times I worked on a site-specific project with curator Sam Skinner, who set up an artists allotment plot in East Oxford to make space for projects exploring horticulture, community and place (Fig. 2026). I was at a point in my own practice wondering what materials I should use, what forms – a typical postmodern dilemma of too much choice. So I embraced the design constraint of sourcing all materials and design ideas from within a mile radius of the plot.



Postmodern revival: medieval music & leopard print flag at May Morning, Oxford

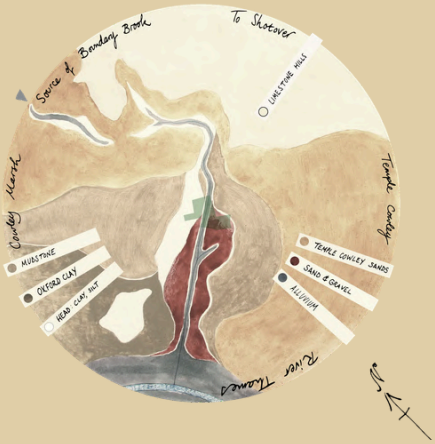


WE HAVE INHERITED SOME OFFSHOOTS WHICH SHOW THEMSELVES
SLYLY BUT SURE



OUR NETTLE PATCH

FRIENDLY
BIG HEARTED
NETTLES
WELCOME ME



Determined to investigate this single place really deeply and ask, if I let this place dictate the materials, what will my art look like?, I mapped the terrain, creating a geological map with clays and vegetable inks sourced from the locale. I roped archaeologist pal Olaf Bayer into investigating the soil layers (discovering good Oxford clay which I used to make some glazed tiles). And I ran workshops with an allotment based recovery group, making paper and vegetable inks from their plants.

I became obsessed with Oxford Ochre, a popular yellow pigment once quarried in the area and now exhausted. It sums up the contradictions of trying to create a vernacular palette now: the former quarries are now mostly nature reserves. So I started making imitation ochre – sourced from building site waste, and plant dyes.

I hoped these exercises would reveal the kind of appropriate palette about which the proponents of bioregionalist design enthuse so vocally. But the process didn't answer any aesthetic questions for me: there was just as much choice and uncertainty as before. Ultimately, even when taking a serious engagement with Place and Site to its logical and rather extreme conclusion, I didn't find what I was looking for.

And in due course I begun to realise that my own relationship to Place was always going to be more complex than that, and started to confront my own history, asking why I was obsessed with finding groundedness via Place in the first place.



Above: My test swatches of Oxford Ochre & plant-based substitutes
Top: My geological map of Oxford painted in local clays and inks
Previous page: My allotment plot sketches & Olaf's excavation

2. Anti Vernacular

Before I was old enough to fully acculturate to Englishness, my family moved to the tropics – only to return just a few years later, to the "homeland" which was no longer home. I expected to fit back in amongst the rolling hills and flint buildings, only to find that I was an alien amongst my former peers.

This experience has a name: I'm what's called a Third Culture Kid, also called "global nomads" because people with this background tend to maintain a wandering habit into adulthood. They were first described by researchers Ruth & John Useem in the 1950s, defined as people who live abroad from their passport culture during a significant part of their developmental years, without settling permanently in the host culture. They are the military brats, and children of missionaries or academics.

Third Culture Kids move between cultures before they've had the opportunity to fully develop a primary cultural identity, and this has interesting effects upon relationship to Place – indeed, I believe it instils a lifelong compulsion towards placemaking. The "first" culture is the passport culture; the "second" culture refers to the host culture abroad. And the "third" culture? Here it gets interesting.

2.1 Third Culture Placemaking

Decades of psychological research on Third Culture Kids has shown they are prone to a lifelong syndrome of "cultural homelessness" (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999): a paradoxical state in which "all groups are out-groups", accompanied by an "intense longing to 'go home'; however, they cannot, because they have never had a cultural home". A lifelong project of home-creation takes place which is never finished:

"'Home' is never stable, never complete; there is always something or someone lacking, and the pieces that are present are often incompatible... a sense of having built pieces of home in different places, with different shapes, and being unable to put these pieces together as a whole."
(Greenholtz & Kim, 2009)

This then is the coherent, so-called "third" culture which all global nomads share: characterised by a sense of dislocation, of alienation from the very notion of home. Schaetti & Ramsey (1999) call this "living in liminality". De Wall (2011) says we live in "a Neither-Nor world, or interstitial space". And this gives a powerful impetus to construct a sense of place, indeed a utopian place. How could it be other than a fantasied "non place", given that we have no reference for what belonging feels like?

Although global nomads are always busy with projects of place-construction, this is rarely a simple case of "cultural fusion". Rather, what emerges is a fragmented or contradictory collage of differing elements, which remains a collection of disparate parts between which the individual may flicker or cycle.

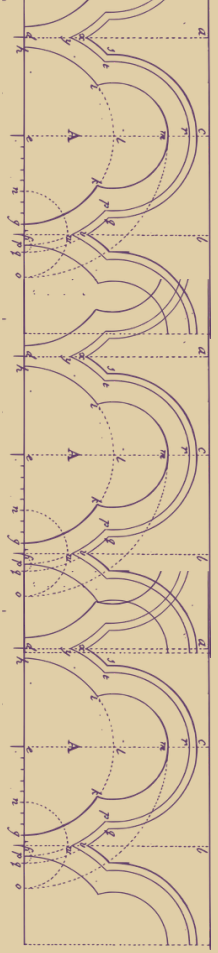
After discovering the literature on Third Culture Kids, the sense of dislocation and searching for an elusive "home" that pervade my creative practice begun to make sense. I had an inkling that the findings of Third Culture psychology may have something to contribute to solving the dilemma of how we might relate constructively to vernacular design.



A nomadic lifestyle: volunteers guestbook, Braziers Park

Traditional
territorial ties are
broken down but,
instead of a void,
new territories are
constructed
in their place.

(Cason, 2015)



2.2 Papier Mache Utopia



To explore the notion of third culture place-construction and how it might relate to visual and spatial design, I undertook an artist residency at Braziers Park community. This is one of the oldest intentional communities in the UK, housed in an 18th century mock "Gothick" mansion. It has played host to a long history of creative activity from the utopian experiments of the commune's founders in the 1950s, to the International Artists Workshop and its successor Supernormal Festival today.

Staying at Braziers helped me discover the artistic movement of 18th century romantic architecture: the pre-Victorian flirtation with follies, sham ruins and fake stage-set castles which foreshadowed the more serious Gothic Revival to come. In this school of design, known as Strawberry Hill Gothic after its most famous exemplar, there is no "truth to materials".

Braziers Park is a typical Gothick confection: invented, anachronistic, fake. And certainly not locally appropriate to the Chilterns landscape of chalk and flint, which are nowhere to be seen in the building itself. This school of design is deeply out of step with our contemporary love affair with authenticity and bioregionalism – and yet. I sensed it calling to me on a deeper level, and that it might just have something to offer in answering the question of how we wandering nomads might make Home.



We can get a flavour of this free and easy school of design by browsing the architects pattern books which proliferated in the period: full of inspirational ideas for sham castles and mansions built to look like cathedrals. As Clark (1929) wryly points out in his history of the Gothic revival, this typically involved "just enough of the scenic elements of Gothic – pointed arches, battlements and towers – to convince the owner that he lived in an ancestral home. There were no mediaeval mansions; the Gothic mansion was an eighteenth-century form, which grew out of the romantic demands of its eighteenth-century owner".

This gave rise to some incredible designs. One of my favourite pattern books of this era is William Wright's (1790) Grotesque Architecture or Rural Amusement, containing ridiculous follies from "hermit's caves" built of twigs, to imitation ancestral piles. Another classic, Middleton's (1810) Decorations for Parks and Gardens, samples freely from various local styles and time periods, and throws in some bizarre delights including a house made entirely of moss.

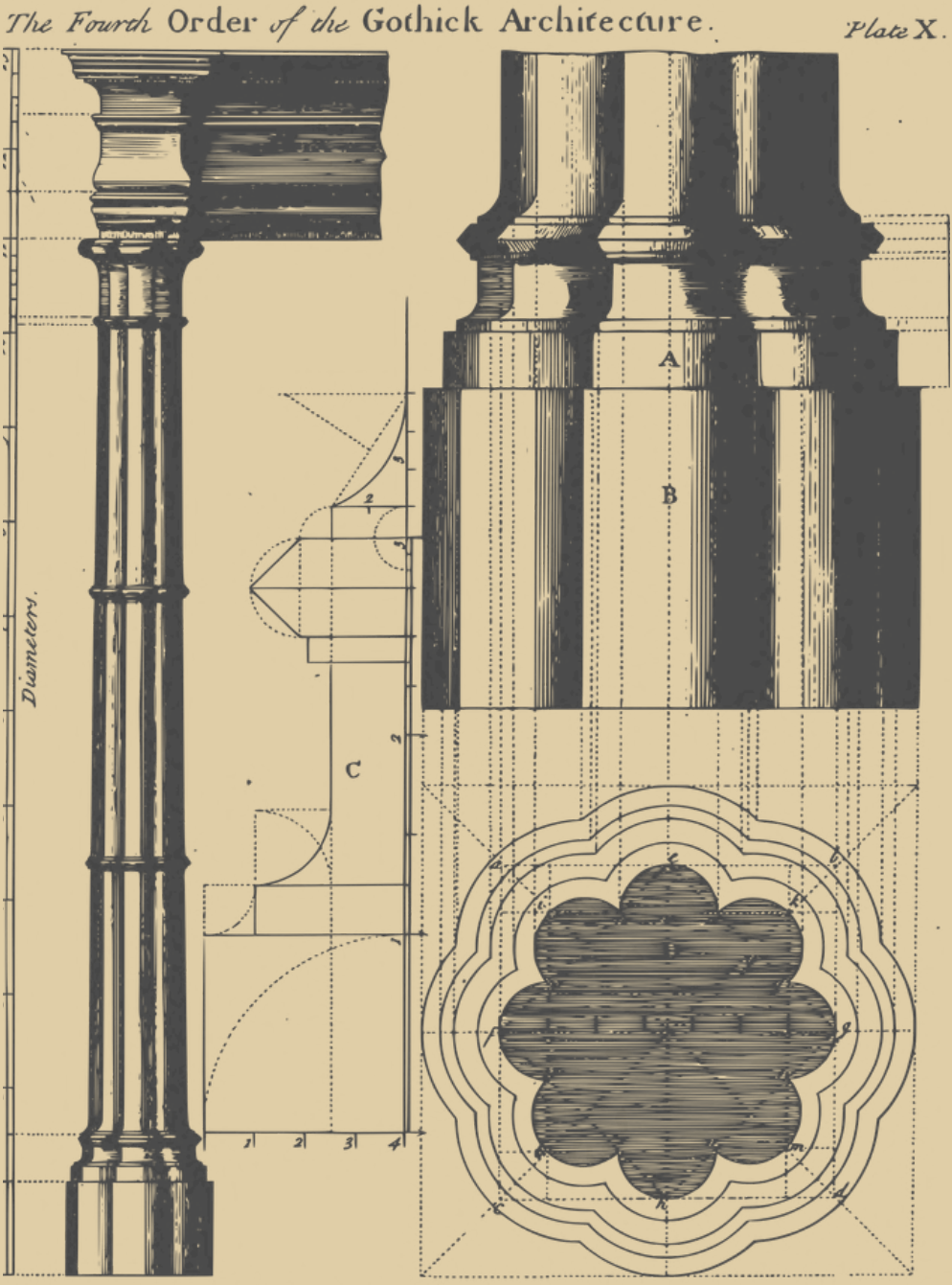

Gothic Grotto, with Cascades & Wings

This embrace of the fake, the sham, carries through to materials. Forget real stone, carved in medieval style as the later Revivalists would demand. Here it's all twigs and papier maché. In fact we have a whole treatise on papier maché architecture from a prominent manufacturer of architectural detailing at the time. Bielefeld's (1842) On the Use of the Improved Papier-Maché shows the stunning range of ornaments he created to imitate stucco work.

This whole genre of design is ridiculous, naff, fails utterly by the Modernist/Arts & Crafts criterion of truth to materials... but this is maybe their charm. This kind of devil-may-care design gives permission – "anything goes" – while constructing a theatre-set vision of the Real and Authentic. As a Third Culture Kid, it makes perfect sense.

I begun to realise that this school of design was showing me an alternative way to engage with local traditions and historic materials. A way altogether more playful, and more useful as a nomad seeking to construct a place to call home. My studio begun to fill up with plaster casts and papier maché imitations of Gothic mouldings, fake battlements, and paper angels.





Made-up vernacular: Batty Langley's (1747) book of gothic designs, "improved" by the application of classical proportion



2.3 A Gathering of Wanderers

During my residency I was fortunate to find myself in the middle of the annual UK Communities Conference, a gathering of intentional communities from across the country and some from further afield too.

Everyone from anarchist squatters to religious monks was there, all united by a quest to create places of beauty and belonging in their various little corners of the world. As I immersed myself in the improvised utopias of the intentional communities movement, I began to notice a pattern. Everywhere I turned, I heard familiar stories of longing for belonging and rootedness, combined with a strangely contradictory lifestyle of restless movement. I realised that I had found myself at home among fellow nomads, who like me had experienced childhoods of upheaval and migration. Whether moving internationally or simply experiencing family breakups or boarding school, a life history characterized by dislocation seemed to unite all these seekers after a utopian vision of belonging.

I now believe that the third culture shared by traditional Third Culture Kids is also shared by people who have experienced alienation from home in these other ways too, not only via international travel. We perhaps need a wider term than "Third Culture Kid" to include these other types of unbelonging and utopian striving.

I call us Aliens.



A gathering of nomads: Supernormal Festival at Braziers Park.

Over drinks at the Communities Conference, a few of us mused over the strangely magical quality of the communes in this network. It was as if they were "out of place", but connected to each other by some kind of mycelium. You can be in Scotland, Wales or indeed rual Oxfordshire and yet when you step over the threshold of these places you step into a common world.

Were these communes, I wondered, all instances or outcroppings of this place called Utopia, which transcends geography?

I realised that the fantasy architecture of Braziers which has fuelled the engine of this project for 75 years now, has a generative power. It isn't "real" or "authentic", it isn't grounded in any actual vernacular tradition... but what is lacks in sensitivity to Place, it makes up for in sheer power of Place-creation.

Writing of the UK communities movement, Chris Coates (2001) quotes Oscar Wilde: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing".



In this rusted
spaceship



we'll blast to
heaven!



The Vortex performance space at Braziers Park

3. Alien Vernacular

So if Aliens like me will never feel at home with purely local traditions, and have to make belonging in a different way, what might this type of Alien place-making look like? Inspiration can be found at Braziers, again, in the contemporary uses to which this weird estate is put by artists and musicians.

It's no coincidence that those who feel out of place, yet yearn for a spiritual home, are drawn here. The back-to-the-land camping and woodcraft movements in which Braziers' founders were initially immersed, have a similar flavour of naff mock-revivalism to that of the house itself. Staying here gave me the chance to discover the long-forgotten 1920s movement the Kibbo Kift – a splinter movement from the Boy Scouts – with its reinvention of folk motifs in an attempt to grapple with modern times. A kind of Boy Scouts meets the Bauhaus. Related schools of sylvic weirdness continue in a chain down to the wooden constructions and folk-inflected raves which happen at Braziers today.

Music journalist John Doran (2017) uses the term "New English Weird" to describe the kind of underground music constellating at places such as Supernormal festival at Braziers and characterised by an aesthetic of "continuity-rupturing psychedelia".

3.1 New English Weird

Writing of one such event at Supernormal, in a hand made wooden building called the Vortex, he muses: "It is evening when we arrive at a barn situated in the wooded recesses of the Oxfordshire countryside, by way of a curious invitation. ...Tonight, inside the barn, [the performers are] all naked and dripping in white paint smudged with streaks of vermilion...

"A self-styled priestess is chanting into a microphone in a language I don't recognise. Another woman with a vertical daub of crimson bifurcating her face is radiant, crowned in a headdress of corn dollies and antlers. She looks like a sadhu, the ascetic Hindu mendicants who decorate their faces with paint, sandalwood ash and even mortuary remains and gather for cleansing rituals on the muddy shores of the Ganges. Behind them is a large screen. It cuts between various giant faces, mouthless with eyes like pools of oil. Momentarily it flickers to static, as if a rogue transmission from some other place entirely is being received, revealing a glimpse of a huge room containing a semicircle of black onyx standing stones, in front of which three glowing white figures writhe."

The strange hybrids which this place facilitates – whether the surreal combination of fantasy castle and monastery of the original house, or the hay bales and rave costumes up on the festival field – point the way to an Alien approach to aesthetics.

Not exactly "folk horror", but certainly in that vein: in which the supposedly homely and familiar England of yore is shown in fact to be foreign, bizarre, interpenetrated by all manner of wyrd, in the original sense of a web or network which links apparently disparate entities.

So if not horror, then what aesthetic track to follow? Perhaps the "uncanny" is a useful concept. In Enst Jentsch's landmark 1906 essay in German, the term (unheimlich) literally means un-homely, or foreign, and describes a psychological state of confusion or disorientation – a state of not being able to get one's bearings. Elaborated by Freud, the uncanny came to mean that which disturbs us precisely in places where we expect to find the homely and familiar, and instead find the strange and frightening. This concept goes a long way to describing the experience of Home for us Aliens, where the only place that feels homely is a railway carriage or aeroplane, and the safe familiar hearth by contrast generates a queasy feeling of alienation.

Another useful concept is Mark Fisher's (2016) "weird", defined as the intrusion of other places in to the here, and vice versa. In the field of Third Culture Kid psychology, this effect has been called "glitches in the Matrix" (Cason, 2015), those moments where memories of a foreign place intrude suddenly into the present and we lose our geographical bearings.

With these ideas I had begun to discover a different approach to placemaking. Utopian; playful. Fascinated with the vernacular and specific, yet unwilling to be bound by the limits of the local. Weird, uncanny, somehow not of this world and yet firmly rooted in and longing for a sense of place. For want of a better term I am calling this an Alien Vernacular.



This and following page:
Installation view of my papier maché relief work in the woods at Braziers Park



Alien Vernacular Manifesto



Aliens don't belong fully to any one culture, and embrace faux pas especially in their "home" country.

Aliens love folk and vernacular traditions, hoping to synthesise a sense of belonging, but sitting on unfirm foundations the overall effect will tend toward the uncanny.

Alien art is permeated by a melancholy longing for remembered places, in the midst of the here and now.

In Alien art, "here" and "elsewhere" are not opposites but flickering images overlapping as by lamplight. Aliens are given to falling thru portals between worlds.

Aliens are prone to make-believe. They use scraps of remembered visual styles to construct their aesthetic home.

Aliens drop anchor at many ports, but rarely grow permanent roots. Their real home is with the movement of wandering stars.

Aliens engage intimately with materials near to hand, yet confuse them with traces from elsewhere. They use vernacular materials, but probably use them wrong.

3.3 Aesthetic Precedents

The project of developing an Alien Vernacular approach to site-specific visual art and architectural design will be a lifelong project for me, in the same way that projects of place construction are always in progress for the nomadic wanderers drawn to Braziers and other utopian communities. What pointers or precedents are there to guide us as to how an Alien Vernacular might look and feel in practice?

"Paynted cloths of beyond-sea work"

Landscape murals and later panoramic paintings are among the earliest forms of virtual reality, which transport the viewer from the present into a faraway, or even imaginary place (Grau, 2003). With their superimposition of the Elsewhere into the homely Here, they are an Alien artform par excellence.

We can take inspiration from the fantastical landscape wallpapers which reached their peak in the 18th and 19th centuries, recreating fantasied visions of faraway lands in the living rooms of Western Europe and reflecting the surreal collapse of geographic boundaries ushered in by the dawn of the colonial age. This slippage of the domestic interior into an (imagined) elsewhere is familiar for the Alien psychologically, and a fitting medium for creating spaces which are paradoxical, uncanny, not quite real.

Similar effects are achieved by set backdrops of all kinds, with their trompe l'oeil effects and disorienting merging of physical into painted space. Current fashion for the "authentic" may cast such effects as naff, but Aliens can reclaim them as a valid way of grappling with confusion over place-specificity and indeed of making our own worlds from scratch.



Early C19th scenic wallpaper in Massachusetts turns the domestic interior into a simulation of Paris

In my own work, I have begun to create architectural rooms which are fully covered with mural decoration, both painted and in papier maché bas relief. Using local materials as well as foraged and purchased pigments, this mural decoration aims to transport the viewer to an imaginary realm and is rooted in the local mud while depicting fantastic landscapes. I installed one such piece at Supernormal Festival where it unexpectedly became an informal stage used as a backdrop for unplanned performances – a woodland portal to some other realm.



Scenic painting from the set of Forbidden Planet



Early trompe trompe-l'oeil scenery at Teatro Olimpico (1585)





Installation view of my immersive mural at Supernormal Festival



'La Cathedrale Engloutie' by Ithell Colquhoun

Surrealist painting

In dreamlike states the here and elsewhere bleed into one another, and uncanny contrasts abound. In visual art we have a ready store of inspiration in the legacy of Surrealist landscape painting, in which highly place-specific elements – for example British megaliths in the work of Ithell Colquhoun, herself a Third Culture Kid – are superimposed upon fantastic other worlds of dream and myth.

A more recent example of surrealist landscape design can be found in sci-fi cinema. The constructed worlds of say Forbidden Planet, every bit as "real" as a remembered landscape of a faraway home, give a model for Alien placemaking in which reality is not given but made.

In my own work I have begun to use landscape painting as a vehicle to construct imaginary places and make them real.

While studying landscape architecture I picked up the habit of creating tiny landscape dioramas and using these as a reference for mural painting. I enjoy the uncanny effect of "painting from life" using these models, somehow magically transforming these make believe landscapes into real places by doing so.

In one such series, mounted as an immersive mural of several panels, residents of the Braziers community appear in medieval costumes fashioned from cardboard and tin foil (again painted from life), populating a semi-real version of the surrounding Chiltern beech woods.



One of my papier mache dioramas, used as the basis for fantastical landscape painting

Otherworlds in literature

All of these aesthetic precedents demonstrate ways to conjure other worlds and so to make a new reality in the present. For ideas about what these other worlds might look like and how they relate to "here", we can turn also to literature.

The Otherworld of Celtic myth provides concrete images to illuminate an Alien relationship with place. This Otherworld is a place which can be visited and returned from – though with an ambiguous, paradoxical relationship to the familiar world of home.

Descriptions of this place in the Mabinogion and Arthurian legends perfectly capture the surreal, perplexing experience of a child who is transported all of a sudden to a far-off land in which the flow of time and experience is suddenly disrupted.

Aspects of the traditional Celtic Otherworld which could provide placemaking pointers are:

• Unreliable access – for example, the Welsh fairy islands which are accessible only once every few years when the waters recede or the mists rise. This ruptured experience of travel is more relatable for the Alien than linear movement in geographic space.

• Geographically ambiguous – Celtic stories differ in opinion as to the location of the Otherworld. Some describe it as over the sea, on an island, or underground. In others it is not located in one physical place, but is a world parallel to our own and in some sense all around us; accessed via mysterious portals out of which beings from the other side may suddenly appear.

• Out of place = out of time – Protagonists who travel to the Otherworld are often depicted as having been frozen in time. For example, the Scottish tale of a bridegroom "abducted when newly married, who returned home two generations later, looking as young and fresh as when he disappeared" (Rees, 2012). A confusion over linear time makes sense to the Alien whose identity formation and developing relationships have been disrupted. Slippages of past and present enable parallel worlds to coexist.





Panels of my immersive mural painted "from life" via miniature dioramas and Braziers Park dress up box.

Hawaiian Gothic

Finally, Alien aesthetics will be specific to the places between which each of us have travelled. As my own background involved time in the tropics, I will give an example of how Alien aesthetics have long been at work here in response to European contact.

An indigenous monarchy survived in Hawaii for many decades after Europeans arrived, and the 1800s saw an astonishing period of cultural improvisation in the islands during which the royal court consciously borrowed from English culture to create something which had never existed before: a modern, Hawaiian monarchy freely sampling from the visual culture of Victorian England. The distance between these two places will always prevent a simple "hybrid" model of cultural integration, instead producing uncanny intrusions and contrasts which give an apt model for Alien placemaking.

Imagine my surprise to find, on the sleepy volcanic slopes, the very Gothick windows of Braziers Park – looking out on palm trees and rolling surf, in the royal palace at Kona.



Above: Royal palace at Kona, Hawaii
Following page: "Poppies", 1890, by Princess Ka'iulani



Queen Lili'uokalani, last monarch of Hawaii. Overthrown 1893.

Or, created following a sojourn at boarding school in the UK, the surreal landscape painting by Princess Ka'iulani which depicts a dreamlike scene of European poppies growing on the shores of a strange beach, with what could be Diamond Head volcano on the horizon.

It's this strange image I'll finish with, encapsulating as it does the Alien dreamworld in which papier maché castles appear from nowhere, and strange foreign plants might just take root in local soil. It's in that uncanny place I hope our paths may one day cross.



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Aliens don't belong fully to any one culture, and embrace faux pas especially in their "home" country.

Aliens love folk and vernacular traditions, hoping to synthesise a sense of belonging, but sitting on unfirm foundations the overall effect will tend toward the uncanny.

Alien art is permeated by a melancholy longing for remembered places, in the midst of the here and now.

In Alien art, "here" and "elsewhere" are not opposites but flickering images overlapping as by lamplight. Aliens are given to falling thru portals between worlds.

Aliens are prone to make-believe. They use scraps of remembered visual styles to construct their aesthetic home.

Aliens drop anchor at many ports, but rarely grow permanent roots. Their real home is with the movement of wandering stars.

Aliens engage intimately with materials near to hand, yet confuse them with traces from elsewhere. They use vernacular materials, but probably use them wrong.