

THE ARCHITECTURE OF FREE MARKET RELIGION:
GOD'S AT THE PANEL BEATER

PART II – ARCT5011

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

FELIX JOENSSON – 20503495

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Introduction to research

This dissertation is constituted by three parts, each representing an attempt to understand elements of an observed phenomena concerning the appearance of churches in Perth that are accommodated within vernacular commercial forms of architecture. It is the aim that each section contribute to the structuring of a research methodology that will seek to explain the emergence of these churches. Initial observations of the occurrence of these religious structures were first made during 2014 whilst driving through Perth's metropolitan area. These observations were most repeated, however not confined to, locations of light industry and commercial retail bounded by suburban housing - a regularity (discovered through mapping exercises, as will be discussed in the methodology section of Part Two) which defined the geographical scope and potential for further investigation. I wanted to understand why a larger density of churches were occurring in these localities, and although I had the preconceived idea that it was simply due to economic accessibility, there existed grounds for further research into the geographies in which the churches were able to proliferate, along with more specific questions concerning the architecture of these churches sitting within or outside of a historical lineage of Christian religious architecture. The first two parts of this dissertation are literature reviews concerned firstly with this historical genealogy, and secondly with geographical questions surrounding the appearance of these churches in Perth.

To undertake a study of any physical manifestation of religiosity requires an exploration of how the theology and practices of that religion influence the architectural outcome of the church. Part One of the research outlines a brief genealogy of Protestant church architecture focussing on the aesthetic practices which impact the architectural manifestations of the church. The literature review in this part will focus on those aesthetic practices which, developing out of the Reformation and subsequent iconoclasm, gave rise to informal and increasingly privatised religious practices which have subsequently altered the architectural forms of sacred space. I will establish that it is within this informal strain that Perth's postsuburban churches sit, in direct relation to the aesthetic practices of their parallel contemporary denominations, in particular those of evangelical Pentecostalism influenced by North American charismatic church movements.

Part Two seeks to explain the repeated observation concerning the proliferation of these churches in suburban contexts. Whilst the initial interest concerning the broad ontological questions of whether the suburban conditions produced a desire for religiosity in the seemingly profane environments may remain beyond the scope of this discussion, we can begin to investigate how the proliferation of evangelist Protestantism functions successfully within these contexts. The literature review in this part of the dissertation focusses on questions surrounding the appearance of such churches in relation to their geographical contexts. This section explores how Protestant sanctification of everyday suburban built environments allows the boundaries of sacred/secular to become more ambiguous, and how this

can be linked to the dissolution of Modernist planning principals of centre/periphery as discussed in postsuburban theories.

The third part of this dissertation seeks to examine the use of photography as part of this research methodology. Through a literature review this section will discuss how the ‘documentary’ photograph has been used historically as a tool to understand and inform readings of vernacular architecture. The aim of investigation is to inform the establishment of a critical framework in which I can place my own photographic methodology and practice, including the processes of creating a photobook. The literature review raises complex questions surrounding the photographic document as ‘objective’ evidence, and whilst these complexities reach beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will seek to elucidate the relationship between the documentary photograph and vernacular architecture in an attempt to determine what is the correct kind of ‘documentary’ photograph to record and represent these churches.

Research questions

1. What role does architecture play in the aesthetic practices of contemporary Protestant practice? How do the contemporary churches, such as those found in this study, fit with historical precedent?
2. Are Perth’s suburban landscapes contributing to a proliferation of evangelical Protestant churches? If so, do they signal a changing suburban experience?
3. How does the photobook as the manifestation of this photographic investigation including the specific processes of making it: taking, editing and sequencing images, constitute a form of representation?
4. Can a methodology combining a critical literature review, establishment of architectural context and a photographic investigation allow us to further understand a ‘vernacular’ building type?

PART I - ICONOCLASM: SANCTIFYING THE EVERYDAY

The architecture of Protestant worship space from church to warehouse

Although the churches discussed in this dissertation may appear to be, from an architectural point of view, superficially mundane buildings, it is their historical context that provides the interesting point of departure for the investigation. The religious function of these buildings, limited to specific denominations of Protestant Christianity, namely evangelical strains, means that we must clarify how this kind of religious practice utilises, rejects or is apathetic to the architecture of the church itself. In order to do so, it is helpful to trace a brief genealogy of Protestant architecture, and begin to interrogate these recent manifestations as either a continuation or a break with historical precedent. Taking the Reformation as a starting point, this genealogy intends to investigate how evolving iconoclastic processes can explain the observed contemporary condition; where the architectural form of the church appears to be effectively subordinate to a material worship practice that is immersed in the aesthetics of secular systems of exchange and economic viability. Establishing this connection to commercial forms of church architecture seen today in Perth, first requires identifying the historical foundations that enabled sacred space to enter the privatised realms of commodity.

Early acts of intercession, that is, prayer performed on behalf of others, were an early catalyst for the formation of privatised religious activity. Howard Colvin traces how the spiritual ‘welfare state’ of medieval England was economically bolstered by the desires of wealthy individuals who, seeking spiritual salvation for themselves, would fund the construction of specific spaces of worship to accommodate intercessory prayer.¹³ These occurrence of these spaces, known as ‘chantries,’ was a result of the formalisation and official recognition of Purgatory by the church in the 13th century, which placed the worshipper under increasing pressure to cleanse themselves of sins, or be faced with suspension between heaven and hell, to be eternally burnt, but never consumed by the fires.¹⁴ The possibility of such was a frightening thought for most, and for those with enough money they could effectively bypass an overburdened monastic system and, usually together with others, establish a kind of club, wherein a priest would essentially be hired and given a space to pray for the salvation of their souls and those of their passed loved ones.¹⁵ Varying in their architectural manifestations, many examples were established in existing churches and cathedrals, requiring only an alter to perform mass. Others were founded in entirely new buildings, on the private property of the benefactor. Consequently many of these spaces were erected spontaneously, and because their existence was tied to the private

¹³ Howard Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 26, no.2 (2000): 164, doi: 10.1016/S0304-4181(99)00012-2

¹⁴ Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” 169.

¹⁵ Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” 166.

capital used for their establishment, many were abandoned when the funding ceased transforming into burial places and family chapels without the custody of a priest.¹⁸

Importantly this suggests an early shift of focus; the individual now held an increased influence on the structuring and occurrence of sacred space. This placed the church under new pressure, which was now experiencing significant scrutiny from a middle class who were bolstered both economically by increasing trade overseas and more widely distributed wealth after the 14th century plague.¹⁹ Furthermore, education was increasingly available through the development of the printing press and the congregations were becoming rapidly exposed to the rationality and technological advancement of a more scientifically aware humanist society.²⁰ The church responded by surrendering some control to this transformed public so to remain identifiable, relevant to a merchant class who were, as Colvin puts it, more likely to “identify with a parish church in a way that they perhaps could not with an old-established monastery of royal or boronial foundation.”²¹ Identification with the parish church brought about territorial shifts, marking a drift away from centralised structures of worship toward the more dispersed middle class urban and rural topographies.²²

Further scrutiny of the church underlined the Reformation of the 16th century, whereby radical changes to the liturgy itself, shaped by Lutheran and Calvinist theology, ushered in major departures from traditional Roman Catholic worship practice. Although a complex examination of these events is far beyond the scope of this discussion, the outcomes for architecture offer a suitable starting point to investigate shifting aesthetic perceptions of the sacred. This is most notably evident in the iconoclastic acts of the time, where the material forms of Catholic culture came under violent scrutiny. For the radical Dutch and English Calvinist and Puritan Protestants of the late 16th and 17th century, the perceived idolatrous nature of Roman Catholic structures were unacceptable as places of worship. The radical Separatists iconoclasts believed it necessary to transfer their Puritan aesthetic from the other world to this one, rejecting the mediation of images, idols and architecture as pathways to transcendental experience. To this end many congregations would meet in simple houses or found spaces, including warehouses, in which their theology was justified by the rejection of aesthetic decadence as manifest in the traditional cathedrals of Roman Catholicism.²³

¹⁸ Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” 166.

¹⁹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93.

²⁰ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 94.

²¹ Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” 172.

²² Colvin, “The Origin of Chantries,” 164.

²³ Keith L. Sprunger, “Puritan Church Architecture and Worship in a Dutch Context,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 66, no.1 (1997): 49, doi: 10.2307/3169631

Sprunger outlines how the adoption of such mundane spaces also had a defensive reason, as a house church seamlessly blended in, essential when Catholicism still exercised large amounts of power.

Although these Separatist examples demonstrate the strictest Puritan ideals, there existed a more tolerant strand of reformed Protestants of whom accepted this dismissal of image worship, however adopted a more lenient approach toward the existing architecture of worship spaces. If a cathedral had previously contained idolatrous material it could be cleaned, refurbished and reinstated as a Protestant place of worship avoiding the outright condemnation voiced by the Separatists.²⁴ These whitewashed, purged churches were depicted by Dutch artists Pieter Saenredam (1635) and Emanuel de Witte (1638), whose paintings perform the aesthetic gesture of emptying these once decadently modelled interior spaces. (figs.1, 2, 3) Telling of the complexities of contested sacred space, these paintings demonstrate a new material culture, which as Angela Vanhaelen points out, negate the image and leave the viewer to meditate on “the complex interplay between different types of spaces.”²⁵ Here the worshiper is confronted with a pure space, venerating its material qualities through the delicate and masterful manipulation of light shaped by the architecture, whilst at the same time highlighting a newly formed cultural void. Such aesthetic practice was identified by philosopher Roland Barthes as an antecedent to “a ‘modern’ aesthetic of silence.”²⁶ For Barthes, these empty, silent spaces provide what he argues the ideal metaphoric scene for the takeover by the enlightenment system of productive capitalist economy.²⁷ The dismissal of religious iconography places man at the very centre of this spatial meditation, who, in Barthes’ vision, would ignore the expressiveness of its negation, the potential numinosity of its space and seize it as something secular, unencumbered by liturgical historicism.

The paintings are evidence of this Puritan erasure, but at the same time reveal transformed perceptions of the image and the role it played in soliciting some secularisation of sacred space. It is possible to identify various motifs within de Witte’s compositions that attest to this claim. Vanhaelen cites the occurrence of epitaphs and monuments to Dutch war heroes as early examples of such secular image veneration.²⁸ Furthermore, the appearance of textual elements within the paintings suggest a radical shift in the importance of the spoken word with resultant signage manifest in both painters’ work.²⁹ The stripped space provides an ideal backdrop for new acts of persuasive imaging and text, transformations which serve to transgress the aesthetic boundaries of the sacred and the secular, the figures are within depicted not as worshipers but as secular agents; a liberated public accommodated by and occupying the newly unfettered space. These churches are ephemeral spaces, displaying the perceived sensory attributes of their materiality, the deftness of the light and the purity of the architectural form. Whilst paradoxically, especially in de Witte’s paintings, a dialogue is provoked by the inclusion of historic imagery existing pre-Reformation, disrupting through juxtaposition, the spatiality and the temporal

²⁴ Sprunger, “Puritan Church Architecture,” 43.

²⁵ Angela Vanhaelen, “Iconoclasm and the Creation of Images in Emanuel de Witte’s *Old Church in Amsterdam*,” *The Art Bulletin*, 87, no.2 (2005): 255.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, “The World as Object,” in *Critical Essays* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 3.

²⁷ Howard Caygill, “Barthes and the Lessons of Saenredam,” *Diacritics*, 32, no.1 (2002): 49.

²⁸ Vanhaelen, “Iconoclasm and the Creation of Images,” 256.

²⁹ Caygill, “Barthes and the Lessons of Saenredam,” 47.

nature of these interiors.³⁰ These paintings ask whether or not the space of architectural form is enough to make the divine tangible, or is it rather just an emptiness which will inevitably be recovered by “man and his empire of things”,³¹ consequently overlooking the ineffable nature of its asceticism. As addressed at a later point, it is this ascetic space which many canonical examples of Modernist architecture of the 20th century utilised in the production of the sacred.

Firstly though, it is important to establish a brief outline of the aesthetic and material practices of contemporary Protestant evangelicalism to provide some background to understand the evangelical forms of architecture occurring in Perth. The schism between those Protestants who began to consolidate more formal aesthetic practice, including the use of ‘refitted’ churches, and those who supported a more radical *anti-formal* approach continued to widen in the 17th and 18th centuries. Such a distinction developed from the latter utilising the Enlightenment period’s humanist philosophies to place the individual in a position of power, no longer subordinate to a clergy but responsible for their own salvation.³² This worship extended the founding attempts of the hard-line Calvinists to enable a boundlessness between the sacred and profane, therefore being less restricted to the *static* objects of worship. It is in this anti-formal stream where, according to Jeanne Kilde, evangelical Pentecostalism develops as its own denomination.³³ The advent of Pentecostal evangelism holds significant consequences for the architectural manifestations of the church, contributing to a move away from purpose built structures.

Evangelical revivalism began to adopt more transient forms that allowed preaching to cover broader geographies. Revival camps and outdoor preaching were common in late 18th North America³⁴. The idols and images once evident in pre-Reformation architecture had essentially been converted to sermon, spoken word. The material qualities of architecture negated to be subordinate to the functions of sermon; intended architectural expression plays little role in mediating divine interaction between the congregation and the divine. It seems even spatiality becomes idolatrous in this context, as space contained is also space ossified. And such a state of permanence goes against a theology concerned with an emboldening of individual spirit, always in a state of continuous becoming.³⁵ A theology concerned with the temporal aspects of being cannot accept permanent form as meaningful, and so the church as a physical entity is not essential, “existing only in the minds of the true believers.”³⁶ It is in

³⁰ Vanhaelen, “Iconoclasm and the Creation of Images,” 251. Vanhaelen also notes how many details were excluded, as well as imaginary elements included, making the archaeological accuracy of some works questionable, perhaps to appeal to the art market of the time.

³¹ Barthes, *Critical Essays*, 3.

³² Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 145.

³³ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 133.

³⁴ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 147.

³⁵ Simon Coleman, “Words as things,” *Journal of Material Culture*, 1, no.1 (1996): 107. doi: 10.1177/135918359600100106

³⁶ Thomas Peebly, “When the Sacred Journey Ends,” in *The Religious Imagination in Modern and Contemporary Architecture: A Reader*, ed, Renata Hedjuk and Jim Williamson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15.

this respect that a departure from earlier Puritan theology is evident, where even the materiality of the everyday is rejected in search of something transportable, more ephemeral, ultimately seizing language and the body as such vehicles. Where in Saenrendam's churches, architectural space was still the essential scaffold for the development of new forms of transcendental idolatry, the role here is inverted, with the church a by-product of sermon.

Religious practice began to take on a more public role in an effort to enable effective evangelisation. As Kilde explains, the main spatial transformation was the adoption of large centralised plans, in which a large corporate body of participants could be gathered.³⁷ Because evangelicalism is essentially an affective religion, that is, one that appeals to the emotions of the laity, it relied on these large gatherings to foster sensational experiences in the individual. Socially produced evocations of the divine frame the experience for the individual, who is persuaded by spectacle.³⁸ Such shared experience was manifest in the architecture of the auditorium style church in which congregants exhibited new social power as a coherent middle class, who expected an entertaining sermon and an increasing number of previously secular functions, including kitchens, gymnasiums and public meeting rooms to be incorporated into the building.³⁹ Evangelism began to utilise secular economic subsystems to engage in the developing consumer behaviour of the public.

American evangelism in Australia

The popularity of evangelical Pentecostalism in Australia has much to do with the adoption of North American Charismatic revivalism. An early notable example within the Australian context was Pastor Billy Graham's 'crusade' to Australia in 1959. Graham's adoption and use of stadiums and other outdoor settings can be placed in the anti-formal lineage of the revivalist camp meetings occurring in late 18th and 19th century North America. Adopting an anti-Communist rhetoric born out of the Cold War threat, the Charismatic preacher Graham drew over 150,000 worshippers to a Sydney arena in May 1959. Warning of the impending social and moral decay of the West, Graham's overtly planned 'Crusade' utilised the medium of mass entertainment to call for a spiritual revival.⁴³ Arousing frenzy in the crowd, these huge congregations filled showgrounds and arenas, which, as Judith Smart points out were closed and "well demarcated from the outside world," where the audience had "turned their backs to the city."⁴⁴ The atmosphere was controlled by Graham's charismatic oration that would build to dramatic conclusions inciting a contained hysterical discharge of religious emotion.

³⁷ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 154.

³⁸ Brigit Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no.4 (2010): 754. doi 10.1215/00382876-2010-01

³⁹ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 158.

⁴³ Judith Smart, "The Evangelist as Star: The Billy Graham Crusade in Australia, 1959," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 33, no.1 (1999): 167.

⁴⁴ Smart, "The Evangelist as Star," 172.

The popularity and emotional high of conservative Pentecostalism in Australia waned during the rapidly liberalising cultural milieu of the 1960s, among the anti-war sentiment, civil, women's and students' rights movements, Charismatic church growth declined. Revivals began to increase again from the early '80s, after renewed attempts by Pentecostal church movements to infiltrate the rapidly pluralising consumer markets in which a new generation of potential congregants or 'unchurched' could be accessed.⁴⁵ Religion had effectively entered the free-market driven by successful marketing that espoused an individualism broadening their appeal to a more diverse base of participants. The architectural outcome of religious deinstitutionalisation is evident in the rise of megachurches in North America and globally. Defined as any congregation that exceeds 2000 on days of worship, the architecture of megachurches is characterised by their emulation of a shopping centre aesthetic, mimicking the everyday experience of consumer focussed personal choice.⁴⁶ Polar opposite to traditional ecclesiastic forms, they reject architectural historicism, and in this way continue the line of anti-formalism centred around a personal experience received via the form of spectacular sermon rather than explicit architectural cues.⁴⁷

Purism and pastiche in the postsuburban church

Whilst examples of this size are rare in Australia (in Sydney Hillsong is an exception, whilst in Perth, Riverview is recorded to attract 4500 weekly attendees),⁴⁸ smaller examples share the rejection of traditional ecclesiastic architecture, instead favouring the informal spaces of revivalist evangelism. A meeting hall or any large floor space will suffice for the immediate erection of a stage and set up of video projection screen which provide the audience with an intimate, introverted and confined theatre for self-transformation. These ideal architectural vessels are most commonly found distributed along the peripheries of what seem predictable light industrial precincts in Perth's outer suburbs. In a way these appropriated spaces remain further in the anti-formal strain than the megachurch, because although they may utilise similar worship practice, they do not use an architectural form which is purposefully designed, rather implementing an interior retrofit with very little external transformation.

The appropriation of found spaces may be solely be a reason of economy; however, it substantiates the evangelical search for ephemeral forms of mediation, highlighting the essential relationship that contemporary evangelism has to market based consumer cycles. The retrofitting of once secular spaces: shops, warehouses, offices and even domestic settings, ensures that evangelism maintains appeal to an audience intimidated by more traditional religious structures which may be perceived as stagnant institutions. Adoption of these spaces is deployed to attract a broad congregation base, usually derived

⁴⁵ Sam Hey, "God in the Suburbs and Beyond: The Emergence of an Australian Megachurch and Denomination" (Ph.D., Griffith University, 2010), 68.

⁴⁶ John Connell, "Hillsong: A Megachurch in the Sydney Suburbs," *Australian Geographer* 36, no.3, (2006): 316. doi: 10.180/00049180500325710

⁴⁷ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 194.

⁴⁸ Hey, "God in the Suburbs," 25.

of young middle class families, who are susceptible to the marketing these churches employ, emphasising “consumerism, informality, self-exploration, self-transformation and immediate experiences.”⁴⁹ It is the spectacle of this immediate experience which is attractive to the congregations. Created through the use of video, music and artificial lighting, media provides the vehicle which demonstrates that the “divine narrative is never static but in continual flux.”⁵⁰ The industrial warehouse provides the ideal scaffold for the implementation of these spectacles, natural light is eliminated and replaced by controlled manipulations which, in the same way as a Gothic cathedral dissolves the earthly realm by directing our gaze upward, serves to dematerialise the architecture itself.

This reintroduction of imagery also holds important associations with language. Immediately recognisable through external signage combining the two, sermon adopts the physical form of advertising. Although not explicitly displaying religious iconography, connotations are made through the choice of names: ‘Great Life’, ‘Dream Life’ or ‘Church on Higher Ground’, usually combined with images and graphics that share the aesthetic language of consumer focussed products and services. One could almost mistake ‘health lifestyle’ clubs with names such as ‘Good Life’, with churches which share such similar forms. In some cases a clear franchise language is developed, testament to the subversive nature of these particular denominations; by participating in consumer culture they also tactically act upon it, engaging elements to their own ends.⁵¹ Whilst such an argument demonstrates the overarching pervasiveness of western consumer culture, it does little to authenticate a Christian practice which can be seen as contradictory in its means, insofar as the church is complicit in encouraging the consumer behaviour it may claim to neutralise.

What becomes evident in contemporary evangelical examples is the rejection of space as the object of contemplation, replacing it with a material practice which is inextricably linked to a consumer culture, merely reinforcing idolatrous worship which sanctifies the aesthetic of the secular world. It seems that by attempting to leave historical modes of practice, Protestantism continually develops new material practices which position it as a religion constantly “blind to its own aesthetics.”⁵² Much like in Saenrendam’s interiors, the fleeting reoccurrence of religious iconography takes place inside Perth’s largest evangelical church, Riverview, suggesting that the resonance of some historical imagery still holds sway in contemporary practice.⁵³ (figs.4, 5) The images shown are ironically of an interior similar

⁴⁹ Hey, “God in the Suburbs,” 72.

⁵⁰ Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 195.

⁵¹ Aaron B. James, “Rehabilitating Willow Creek: Megachurches, De Certeau, and the Tactics of Navigating Consumer Culture,” *Christian Scholars Review* 43, no.1 (2013): 22.

⁵² Brigit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion,” 748.

⁵³ I have identified one of the projections as the 4th century Roman Basilica Trier in Germany. The basilica was once adorned with traditional Roman Catholic decoration, however its destruction during an air raid in WWII meant it was subsequently rebuilt without, left as an unadorned brick structure. Since 1856 it has been used as an Evangelical church.

“Konstantin-Basilika,” Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Trier: Allgemein, accessed June 1 2015, <http://ekkt.ekir.de/trier/884.0.html>

to Saenrendam's; one that illustrates a church's stripped interior space, here projected as a substitute within the closed form of the mundane warehouse. More than merely reintroducing symbolism, these projections bring the negation of architecture to the fore, its reduction to the two dimensions of representation. The effect is twofold, the architecture projected is also venerated - it is now the *image* of space that is the idol.

Modernist space as religious image, a historical divergence

Before concluding this chapter to pursue evangelism's spread in Perth's suburban contexts, I would like to briefly touch on how changing worship practices were reflected in some canonical examples of architectural Modernism that run historically parallel but aesthetically counter to the anti-formal strain the preceding discussion outlined. By doing so we can identify how Modernist examples of the 20th century objectified the space of the church itself.

In his book *Disfiguring*, Mark Taylor outlines how in terms of architecture, Protestantism is inextricably linked to Modernism, which distilled the ascetic ideals of purism into the rationally functional forms of the early Modern architectural zeitgeist.⁵⁴ Taylor cites sociologist Max Weber's argument of 1904 that outlined the seamless transition of Protestant ethical values into a capitalist economy which relied on control of excess, functionality and utility as a crucial connection to Protestantism's distrust of those historically more traditional image-centric Christian worship practices.⁵⁵

We see this same distrust of the past tradition of building and total embrace of industrial capitalism emerging during the early 20th century's architectural avant-garde. It is the economy of construction that reveals the connection most apparent, the aesthetic consequences of which manifest in early modern works concerned with new technologically driven architecture. The intersection of this economy and ideas concerning spatiality are of importance to a discussion on Protestant and indeed cross-denominational church space, insofar as it is possible to highlight the development of a religious architectural language that was overtly concerned with the spatiality and materiality of the church, unlike the anti-formal practices we have discussed so far. We see here how rationality, economy and historical severance led to the sanctification of space, in lieu of images, as the embodiment of the ineffable.

Evident in many mid-century examples is the emphasis on a truthful use of materials and their evocation through the manipulation of light and structure serving to intensify the experience of this world. Countless examples could be cited: Jensen-Klint's gothic inspired brick vaults at Grundtvig's Kirke (fig.6), the supplely illuminated surfaces of the Saarinen's Christ Church Lutheran (1949) (fig.7), the vernacular timber forms of Belluschi's First Presbyterian Church (1951) (fig.8), or the remarkable use

⁵⁴ Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, architecture and religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 129.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Disfiguring*, 129.

of brick evident in St Peter's at Klippan by Sigurd Lewerentz (1966) (fig.9) evoking a feeling of deep contemplation, cave like, recalling ancient Christian catacombs.⁵⁶ The expressiveness of structure was further augmented by the growing influence of Catholic and reformed denominational liturgical shifts. Such changes gave rise to the requirement of a centralised plan to reunite the congregation with the altar, in turn allowing architects to experiment with vast sculptural and structural forms.⁵⁷ Such expression is demonstrated by the massive rough-hewn concrete beams in Breuer's St John's Abbey (1960) (fig.10) or the sharp triangulations of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's Air Force Chapel (1962) (fig.11). Inside these spaces worshipers become intensely aware of their position in space and how it is manipulated by the form of the architecture.

It is in this sense that modernist architecture directed vision toward its own surfaces rather than the imagery upon them, and we recognise, as Venturi states, that "space is what displaced symbolism".⁵⁸ Whilst the church is stripped of objects it is in fact the space itself which has become objectified, inadvertently reinstating a formal role of idolatry. There were, however, exceptions to this in the modernist canon. Mies' St Saviour Chapel on the campus of IIT (1952) (fig.12) is one of these concessions. Reduced to the rationalisation of economically driven construction, so to be "concerned with the epoch"⁵⁹ as Mies himself described it, the chapel is a steel framed, brick and glass box. It is not the materiality that consecrates this chapel, instead it identifies itself as sacred precisely through its own negation. A perfectly proportioned void intended to evoke an other worldly presence, this is Barthes' modern aesthetic of silence. It does not present space, rather it presents absence.⁶⁰

Mies' chapel provides an interesting deviation to the spatial acrobatics of many mid-century Modernist examples. It begins to reflect a religiosity unbounded by its architectural manifestation, one that, like evangelism, takes sacredness away from the finished physical manifestation and moves it into an abstract realm of commodity. St Saviour was designed to be cross-denominational; its accessibility to a broad religious audience is enabled by this language of universal economy. In this way the chapel could be considered as an ideal model for a contemporary religious practice that functions within the net of a pluralist consumer culture.

⁵⁶ Peter Blundell Jones, "Sigurd Lewerentz: Church of St Peter, Klippan, 1963-66," *Arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 6, no.2 (2002): 164. doi: 10.1017/S1359135502001628

⁵⁷ Meredith L. Clausen, *Spiritual Space: The Religious Architecture of Pietro Belluschi* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1992), 21.

⁵⁸ Robert Venturi, Denis Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Los Vegas* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1977), 148.

⁵⁹ Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, "St. Saviour Chapel, IIT Campus, Chicago," in *The Religious Imagination in Modern and Contemporary Architecture: A Reader*, ed, Renata Hedjuk and Jim Williamson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 214.

⁶⁰ Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), 111.

PART II - THE DESECULARISATION OF POSTSUBURBAN GEOGRAPHIES

“Modern architecture is surely most cogently to be interpreted as a gospel – as quite literally, a message of good news.”⁶¹

- Colin Rowe

Interpreted this way, Modernism can be understood to share with evangelism a similar trait of proselytism. The gospel, the spreading of God’s word, is the vehicle of Evangelist revival. Indeed the term evangel has its etymological roots in the classical Greek term *euaggélion* meaning ‘the bringing of good news’.⁶² Moreover, dispersion and suburbia are mutually inclusive results of modernity. This notion of dispersion provides a thread to unpack the perceived proliferation of religious architecture in Perth in 2015. In what follows I examine the contemporary conditions in which the proliferation of churches occurs, starting broadly with the geographic scale of suburban landscapes, a form of which can be linked to Modernist planning principals. It is not my intention to undertake the extensive deconstruction of the foundations of these suburban contexts, of which there are many established discussions.⁶³ Rather I adopt their forms and aim to investigate how these differing geographies can enable a proliferation of religious activity as evident in the context of Perth.

Postsecular and postsuburban

This section aims to clarify some points on the broad topics surrounding the geography of religion with specific focus on the architectural and planning manifestations. In recent geographical writings, connections have been forged between religion and space, exploring how the spatiality of a particular landscape can give rise to particular religious identity.⁶⁴ Among the advanced debates emerge two related but distinct paradigms which require brief explanation in any discussion surrounding contemporary religion and its material, including architectural, manifestations. The first theory which requires introduction is that of secularisation. Secularisation theory posits the idea that as modern society advances, the importance and influence of religion in both the individual and collective spheres diminishes. Steve Bruce as one of secularisation theory’s firmest exponents, introduces this idea as “the

⁶¹Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1978), 11.

⁶²T.F Hoad, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. “evangel.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

⁶³For a comprehensive discussion on Perth’s garden city heritage and suburban development see Lee Stickells’ thesis: “Form and Reform”. A European and North American analysis can be gained from the Ghent Urban Studies Team publication, *The Urban Condition*.

⁶⁴This article provides a useful summary of the varying developments of religious geography - see, Elizabeth Olsen, Peter Hopkins, Rachel Pain and Giselle Vincett, “Rethorizing the Postsecular Present: Embodiment, Spatial Transcendence, and Challenges to Authenticity Among Young Christians in Glasgow, Scotland,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6 (2013): 1422.

displacement of religion from the centre of human life”.⁶⁵ Such a reading is easily transferred into the realm of urbanism when taking into account the common discourse surrounding modernity’s effect on built environments in the western world. Modernist planning ideologies introduced displacements as essential in the structuring of an ideal city. By seeking to remedy the increasing levels of density, congestion and pollution urban designers introduced rational planning strategies reliant on the separation of urban functions.⁶⁶ Secularisation theory then, could be understood as linked to the physical implications of Modernist planning principals. Insofar as the dispersion of zones of work, living and leisure away from a central point also displace the rituals associated with religious practice.⁶⁷

An evident implementation of Modernist planning strategies in Perth was the importation of the British garden suburb, which by the early 20th century had started to shape the residential landscapes of the emergent city.⁶⁸ This ideal city was seen as an instrument, as a tool “capable of structuring health and morality”.⁶⁹ The garden suburb thus develops as a remedy to the purportedly immoral modern city. This desired structuring of morality is of enduring importance when discussing secularisation, as it was an individual’s built environment which was to provide the predominant moralising force for life in the modern city, a shift which signals a reduction of emphasis on public religious structures. This shift, however, does not necessarily entail a reduction of religious activity. Rather, it catalysed a dispersion carried out by a middle class of whom embraced the social distinctions associated with the physical segregation from the working class inner city.⁷⁰ Similarly in Britain, where suburban landscapes developed earlier, the splintering of religious activity away from the public into a more private, domesticated realm was seen as good news by a burgeoning Evangelist movement who perceived the suburban landscape as an alternative to the geography of vice a citizen can expect to encounter in the immoral city.⁷¹ The suburban lifestyle meshed coherently with a religious attitude that espoused a stable family-centric existence. Evangelism in Australia was able to capitalise on this dispersion of the middle class, utilising the housing and parallel ‘baby boom’ of the ‘60s to disseminate Protestantism across a broad geographical scale.⁷²

With this relationship of modernity and the suburb as a manifestation of its idealised moral force established, it is possible to recognise that the Protestant ethics of space, with its emphasis on the routine materiality of life and rational functionality, as established in the first chapter, could be easily

⁶⁵ Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 11.

⁶⁶ Ghent Urban Studies Team, *The Urban Condition: Space, Community and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999), 19.

⁶⁷ Phillip Sheldrake, “Placing the Sacred: Transcendence and the City,” *Literature and Theology*, 21, no.3, (2007), 245. doi: 10.1093/litthe/frm023

⁶⁸ Lee Stickells, “Form and Reform: affective form and the garden suburb” (Ph.D., University of Western Australia, 2004), 48.

⁶⁹ Stickells, “Form and Reform,” 74.

⁷⁰ Stickells, “Form and Reform,” 119.

⁷¹ Ghent Urban Studies Team, *The Urban Condition*, 19.

⁷² David Hilliard, “God in the Suburbs and Beyond: The religious culture of Australian cities in the 1950’s,” *Australian Historical Studies*, 97, no.24, (1991): 404. doi: 10.1080/10314619108595856

transferred to the broader scale of the new suburban landscapes. And so, to take the theory of secularism as the overarching theoretical framework would be antithetical in this discussion which is formulated around the observance of the increasing manifestations space allotted to religious function. This stance falls in line with the second paradigm that somewhat opposes theories of secularisation, that of postsecular theory. Avoiding the complexities of the debate between the two theories, of which there is an abundance of literature, postsecular frameworks provide useful utility when assessing the physical appearance of these sacred spaces around Perth.

By no means does postsecular theory advance the idea that society on a whole is becoming increasingly desecularised, rather it is concerned with the resurgence of religious based activity within an urban realm since the start of the 21st century.⁷³ The reappearance of religious activity serves to dissolve “the dividing lines (and hence) roles of religion and science, faith and reason, tradition and innovation are no longer rigidly enforced (or indeed enforceable), and new relations of possibility are emerging.”⁷⁴ In spatial and architectural terms these new possibilities were advanced by readings of suburban sites which leave behind narrow concerns surrounding their perceived stasis; texts such as Robin Boyd’s *Australian Ugliness* (1960) polemically espoused the materialistic and compartmentalised nature of a rigid suburban landscapes. Venturi and Scott Brown’s analysis of Levittown (1970) for instance, started to probe the suburbs as in fact sites of complex social, cultural and indeed architectural relations. Such a stance underlines a post-modern shift ‘from treating suburbs *as* modernisation to the analysis of suburban modernity’.⁷⁵

More recent studies have begun to further analyse the complexities of these suburban landscapes, probing the disintegration of the classical model of the suburb as an isolated and closed form. This fragmentation, both socially and spatially, has given rise to a built environment, which according to the Ghent Urban Studies Team, is increasingly hard to define, identify and classify.⁷⁶ This is a distinctly *postsuburban* condition, one that involves a diversity of functions, economically and culturally which serve to dissolve the established homogeneity of the suburbs.⁷⁷ Similar to postsecular theory, postsuburban frameworks are concerned with the shifting fragmentation of boundaries, and the dissolution of distinctions between centre and periphery. A further connection can then be forged between Protestant evangelism, which can be read as postsuburban in its own right - as it too functions most successfully in this landscape of dispersal, utilising it to remove boundaries of sacred and profane, a distinction which would limit its spread. Achieving this dissolution through the sanctification of

⁷³ Justin Beaumont and Christopher Baker, *Postsecular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice* (London: Continuum Publishers, 2011), 5.

⁷⁴ Beaumont, *Postsecular Cities*, 2.

⁷⁵ Dwyer, “Faith and suburbia,” 407.

⁷⁶ Ghent Urban Studies Team, *The Urban Condition: Space, Community and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999), 69.

⁷⁷ Ghent Urban Studies Team, *The Urban Condition*, 69.

outwardly mundane contexts, evangelism adopts the existing architectural aesthetics of its postsuburban environment.

It should be noted that these studies focus on highly developed examples of postsuburban landscapes in North America and Europe. Perth presents an underdeveloped case, with many elements still contained within typical suburban distinctions. This dissertation asks whether the occurrence of the churches may be symptomatic of an early shift toward a more postsuburban topography. We can take the model of the classic suburban church, of which many exist in Perth, to highlight this possibility. These traditional models act as catchments for a homogenous suburban experience, commonly integrating, sporting clubs, guilds and other non-religious social functions, linking less regular church attendees with church life.⁸⁰ The local church served as an institution which validated a mutually shared, common experience of a community's suburban life.⁸¹ The proliferation of the evangelical churches as recorded here, may indicate a shifting religious and cultural experience of the suburbs. This is made visible through the maps, which not only demonstrate the occurrence, but also the spread and density of the churches.

Mapping Perth's evangelical landscape

From the outset of this research in 2014 maps were utilised to locate churches to be photographed. Google maps were used, and the scope was defined by limiting the search criteria to Protestant denominations - Pentecostal and Baptist (Uniting and Anglican churches were deliberately excluded due to the nature of both evangelical and non-evangelical elements existing within both, whilst Baptist is included based on the frequency in which Baptist churches in Australia have adopted charismatic and evangelical worship methods).⁸² Upon typologically organising the first photographic survey, which I will come to in Part Three, I began to develop a series of maps to illustrate the contextual observances regarding church localities. The first maps identified three urban zones in which the churches were found: light industrial, domestic suburban and retail, of which a corresponding architectural language was reflected in the photographs. The next maps widened the scope to illustrate the whole of Perth and establish the spread of evangelical churches across the metropolitan area visually highlighting densities per suburb (fig.13). This then validated a concentration on the denser occurrences of churches in the suburbs of Malaga (fig.14, 15) and Joondalup (fig.16), both light industrial zones. It is in these areas

⁸⁰ Hilliard, "God in the Suburbs and Beyond," 407.

⁸¹ Wilford, Justin, *Sacred Subdivisions: the postsuburban transformation of American evangelism*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 47.

⁸² See Sam Hey's thesis where he outlines the spread of Pentecostal type phenomena in more traditional Protestant practice within Australia, including Baptist traditions. Hey, "God in the Suburbs," 26.

I have not confirmed the individual practices of each church mapped or photographed. Besides their names and association with self-proclaimed evangelical Pentecostal church bodies, such as Australian Christian Churches (ACC) which subsumed the Assemblies of God group of churches in 2007, there is no easy way, within the scope of this research, to determine individual associations with Pentecostalism or other evangelical practice, as many evangelical churches still operate independently of the ACC. Where possible I have endeavoured to determine, through individual descriptions supplied on church websites or signage their evangelical nature. The architectural form and geographical location of the church has also played a determining role in this identification.

where the repeated occurrence begins to suggest a shift away from the classic suburban model as previously discussed.

Inconsistences - a new religious experience of the suburbs

It is helpful here to take an example to demonstrate this shifting paradigm. All accommodated within tilt-up structures, Joondalup exhibits one of the highest evangelical church densities in Perth (fig.16). A satellite city on Perth's northern periphery, Joondalup exhibits the most advanced characteristics of postsuburban space in Western Australia. The development of Joondalup in the 1990s advanced the appearance of a variety of mixed functions intentionally synthesising nodes of work, leisure and residence.⁸³ In this way it is distinguished from the more traditional closed garden suburbs, as it is a purposefully accelerated form of postsuburbia. Today the light industrial precinct, which sits west of Joondalup's main work and leisure node, contains six churches, all of which practice evangelical Pentecostalism, a number which seems disproportionate to census data that reveals a much smaller identification with these specific denominations. For instance out of a total 5284 people identifying as Christian in Joondalup, only a combined 445 identified with Pentecostalism and Baptist in the 2011 ABS census. On the other hand, 1982 people identified with Catholicism with only one church in the suburb representing this denomination, suggesting that here the Catholic church still operates as a suburban catchment in the traditional sense.⁸⁴

The data corresponding to Pentecostal identification is suggestive of a highly transient mobile congregation base that does not rely on the catchment areas of traditional suburban churches, relying rather on a high turnover of participants from a broad geographic scale. Similarly, Malaga shows a high number of churches, with a total of eight evangelical Protestant churches within the light industrial commercial zone (fig.14). ABS data is not as useful in this circumstance, as Malaga has a very limited residential population, being solely commercial, however it does show the relationship between suburb and church is one not based on catchment but rather on mobile congregations. We can take the garden suburb to the north of Malaga - Ballajura - to show how evangelical church proximity has little to do with a fixed congregation base. Out of 11,249 Christians, 514 identified with evangelical forms of Protestantism whilst 5246 identified as Catholic, for which there is one church in Ballajura.⁸⁵ ABS data figures like these are consistent in the other suburbs surrounding Malaga.

The practices and worship methods utilised by these evangelicals are based on attempts to reconcile what they identify as an increasingly plural and fragmented cultural existence. No longer functioning

⁸³ Stickells, "Form and Reform," 387.

⁸⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'B14 Religious Affiliation By Sex,' *Census of Population and Housing 2011, Joondalup (SSC50363)*, Canberra, 2011, <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>

⁸⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'B14 Religious Affiliation By Sex,' *Census of Population and Housing 2011, Ballajura (SSC50033)*, Canberra, 2011, <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>

under the Modernist spatial systems of centre and periphery, their aim, as one Joondalup church website states, is toward a practice which is “relevant to today’s fast-paced world.”⁸⁶ A pace which has dissolved these established modernist binaries, which are “scrambled in the fragmented patchwork spaces of postsuburbia.”⁸⁷ They offer a spiritually structured moral guidance for navigating the conflicting forms of existence in the contradictory postmodern world. They do not, however, attempt to reconcile these forms of existence, rather relying on them to carry the evangelising message across broad urban scales. This is made clear by churches of equivalent denominations which occur on a domestic suburban scale – evangelical churches that splinter off from their related larger churches in the industrial contexts, evident to the south east of Malaga. On many occasions these churches are no more than a typical suburban house which provides, as Wilford explains, “the ideal setting for evangelical performances because it is a foundational environment for postsuburban identity”.⁸⁸ The commercial setting of the light industrial church provides the physical context for setting up a ‘production’ of a religiosity, which is then taken by the individual, applied to what Wilford calls fragmented ‘narratives’⁸⁹ of postsuburban life - evangelism is able to oscillate sinuously between spatial scales, both geographically and architecturally.

⁸⁶ “About us,” C3 Church Joondalup, accessed June 1, 2015. <http://www.c3j.net.au/home/about-us/>

⁸⁷ Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions*, 46.

⁸⁸ Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions*, 166.

⁸⁹ Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions*, 163.

CONCLUSIONS - PARTS I AND II

1. What role does architecture play in the aesthetic practices of contemporary Protestant practice? How do the contemporary churches, such as those found in this study, fit with historical precedent?

2. Are Perth's suburban landscapes contributing to a proliferation of evangelical Protestant churches? If so, do they signal a changing suburban experience?

"If men had never built houses for gods, architecture would still be in its infancy. Tasks self-imposed on the strength of false assumptions have given rise to the highest forms of culture. "Truths" lack the power to motivate in this way".⁹⁴

- Friedrich Nietzsche

"Without the desire for God, our planet would be a sorry wasteland of ugliness." ⁹⁵

- Louis Barrágan

Protestantism utilises the 'truths' immanently manifest in the everyday materiality of life as spiritual motivation. These truths include the architecture of the worship space, which, reflecting these aesthetic considerations, take the banal contemporary forms of the surrounding topography in which they exist. Historically these 'truths' were not always used to motivate. Religion and its architectural manifestations: the cathedrals, temples and churches to which Nietzsche refers, exhibited 'false assumptions'; the icons and images attacked by the iconoclasts who asserted their very falsities. This process of negation paradoxically gave Protestantism new material practices driven by a growing capitalist economy and educated middle class, who embraced the transient and anti-formal nature of a growing evangelist movement which continues to expand in a contemporary context both locally and globally.

In Perth's case, the architectural form of evangelism is inextricably linked to the commercial, domestic and retail topographies that constitute these suburban contexts, reflecting the desire for architectural forms that do not explicitly reflect traditional notions of religiosity. I first suspected the arrival of the mundane churches as symptomatic of a certain autonomy of existence, a result of living in the segregated suburban sites of modernity. However, it is more likely that the churches themselves are a

⁹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Posthumous fragments," In *Nietzsche and 'An Architecture of Our Minds,'* ed. Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 336.

⁹⁵ Louis Barrágan, "Religion and Myth," in *The Religious Imagination in Modern and Contemporary Architecture: A Reader,* ed, Renata Hedjuk and Jim Williamson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.

socially produced outcome of a need to reconcile an increasingly fragmented and plural form of existence brought on by a metamorphosis of socio-cultural forms. This includes the beginnings of a dissolution of traditional religious suburban models, which contributes to the weakening of planning forms that implement distinct functional boundaries between centre/periphery and sacred/secular. Whilst the churches do not attempt to solve the puzzles of pluralisation, they aim to soften the tensions that produce this metaphysical angst, this can be seen in their attempt to fuse and combine the sometimes contradictory patchwork of contemporary life through the adoption of its aesthetics and rituals. By sanctifying the 'truths' - the banal everyday elements of a fragmented postsuburban existence, of which the suburban landscapes are a container for, evangelism is able to proliferate.

The findings made in part one and two of this essay pose broader questions about the nature of existence in a postsuburban landscape, many of which confront the role of architecture as a device used to understand how we exist. Further clarification is required to begin to elucidate if the occurrence of churches, in particular those in light industrial suburbs, signal a shift toward a new suburban experience, establishing whether they are an exception or if there is a general movement toward a more diverse postsuburban experience. It would be necessary to analyse the mixture of functions, longevity and land use titles of the churches themselves, as well, as the functions which surround them to begin to establish the degree in which these suburbs are transforming.

As our postsuburban environments become more complex, will the forms of Protestant churches continue to become increasingly ambiguous? What will the consequences be for an architectural typology if the prevailing form of religiosity in these environments is evangelical Protestantism - will Perth begin to see the construction of new 'megachurches' comparable to further advanced geographies of evangelism in North America and Australia? Are the northern suburbs, where densities of churches are highest the beginnings of Perth's own 'Bible Belt'? These are broadly hypothetical speculations that would rely on an understanding of social, political, economic and cultural factors beyond the vision of an architectural or urban planning field of view to be comprehended properly. What the built environment can tell, as a material artefact shaped by these forces, is that there are certain forms of architecture and geographies that are more susceptible to evangelical appropriation than others.



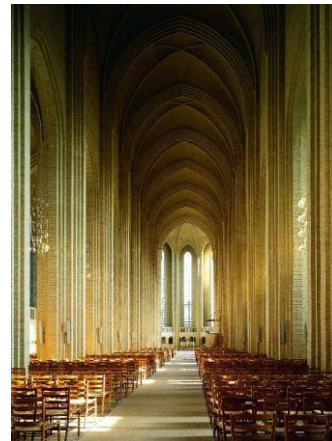
1. Emmanuel de Witte, *Interior of a Church*, 1668.



2. Pieter Saenredam, *View of the ambulatory of the Grote or St. Bavokerk at Haarlem*, 1635.



3. Pieter Saenredam, *View Through the Transept of the Cunerakerk, Rheden*, 1655.



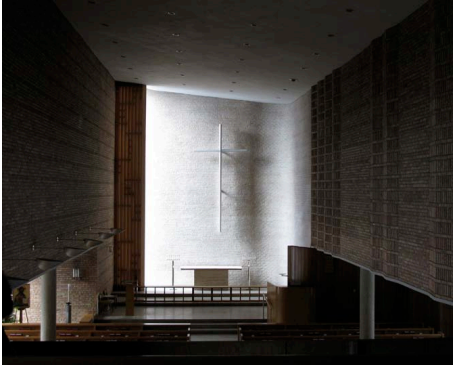
6. Jensen Klint, *Gruntvig's Kirke, Copenhagen*, 1940.



4. Interior of Riverview Church with projected imagery, Perth, 2014.



5. See footnote number 46 in text.



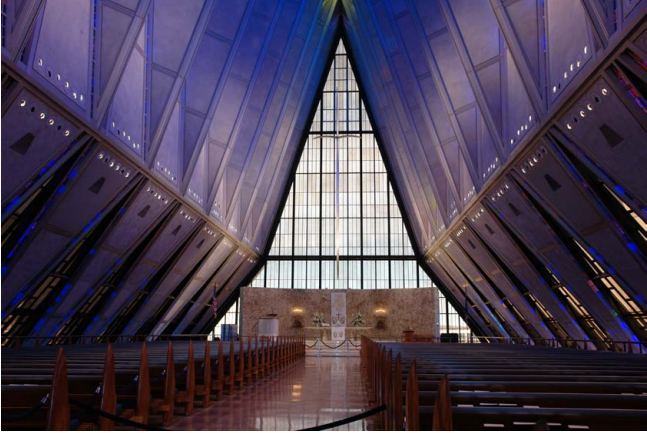
7. Eiel and Eero Saarinen, Christ Church Lutheran, Minneapolis, 1949.



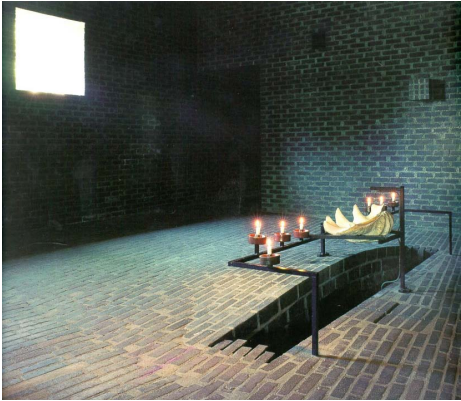
10. Marcel Breuer, St John's Abbey, Minnesota, 1960



8. Pietro Belluschi, First Presbyterian Church, Oregon, 1951.



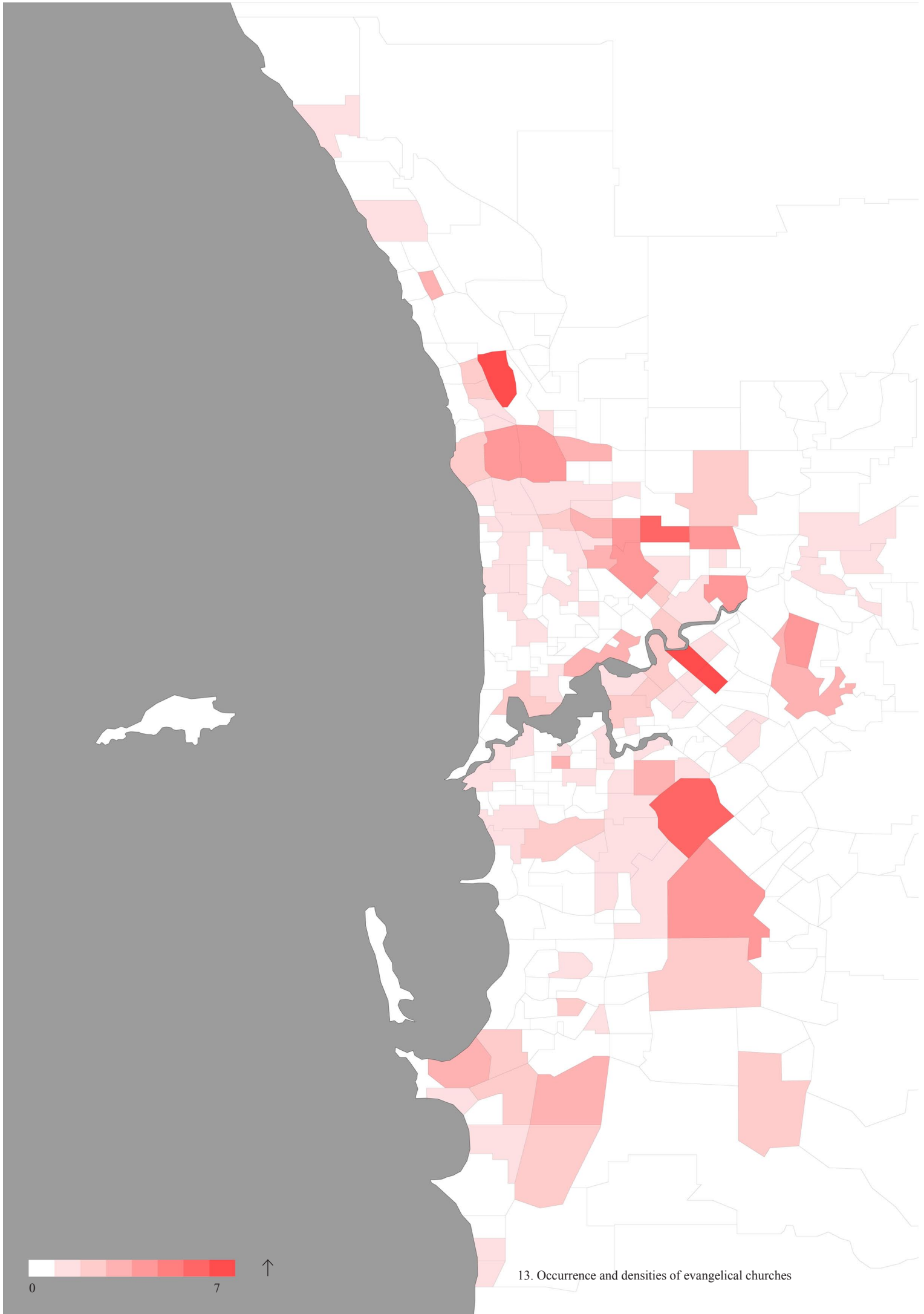
11. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Air Force Academy Chapel, Colorado, 1962



9. Sigurd Lewerentz, Sankt Petri Kirke, Klippan, 1966



12. Mies Van der Rohe, St Saviour's Chapel, IIT Campus Chicago, 1952.



13. Occurrence and densities of evangelical churches

14. Malaga and surrounds



- Evangelical Protestant church
- non-Protestant church

15. Malaga - northern boundary



4



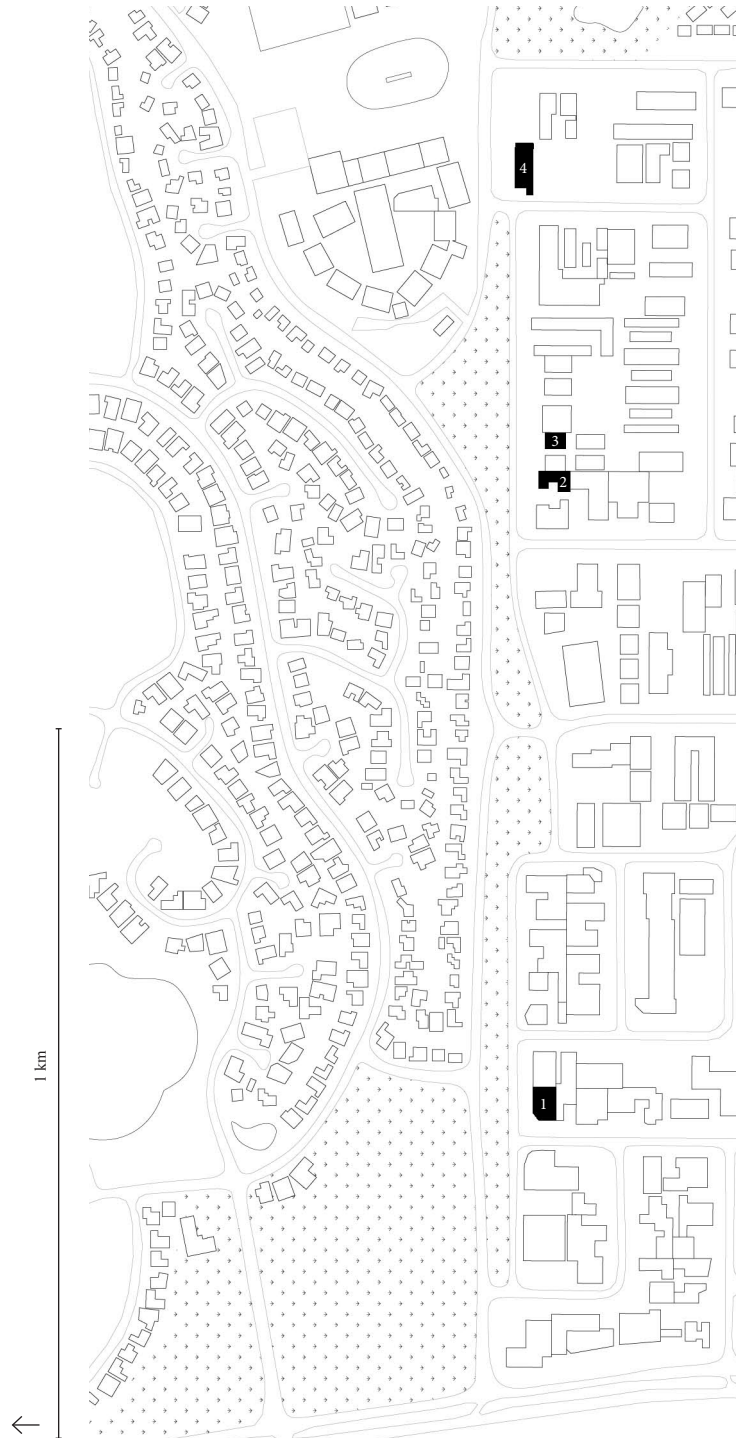
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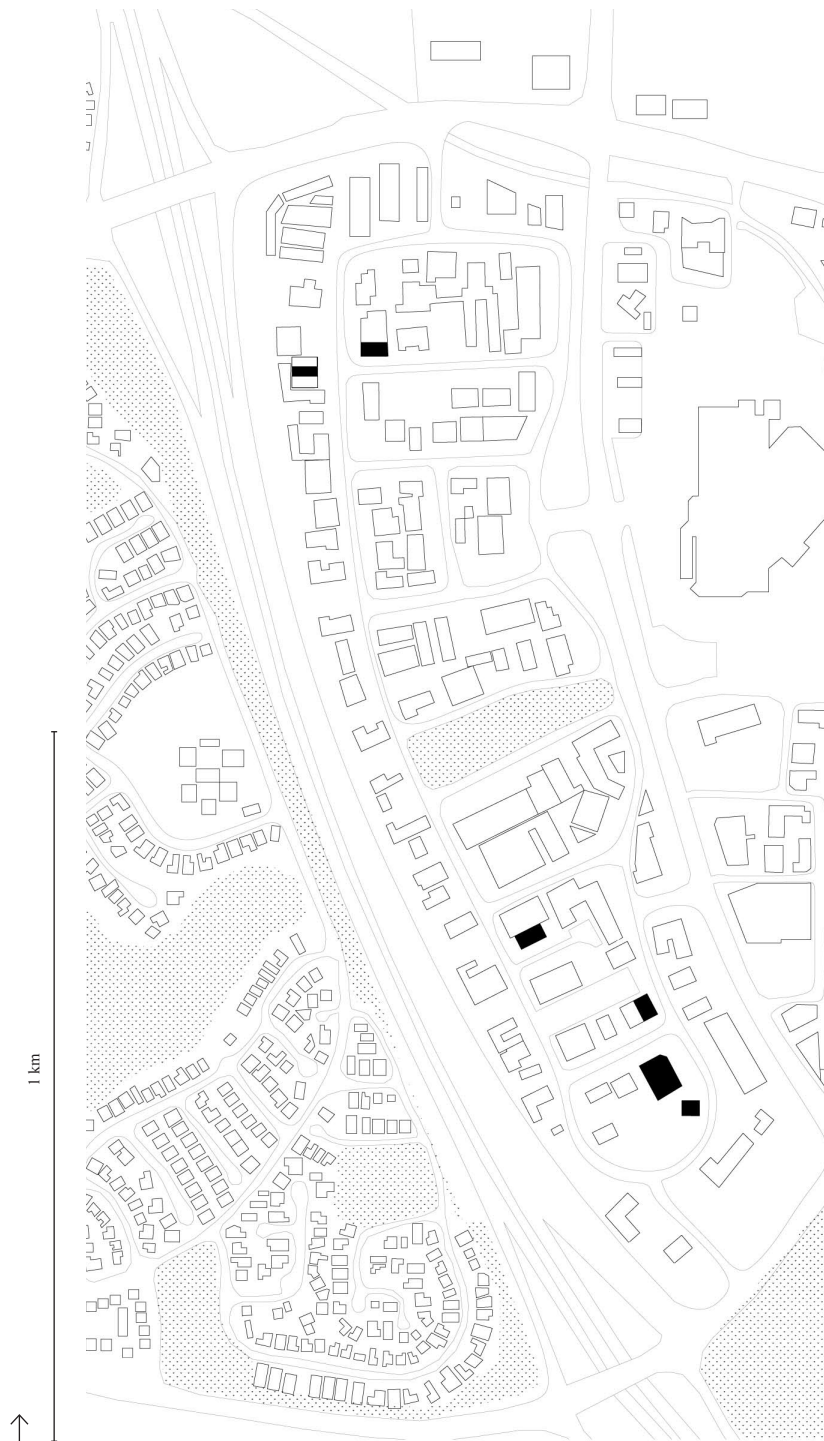
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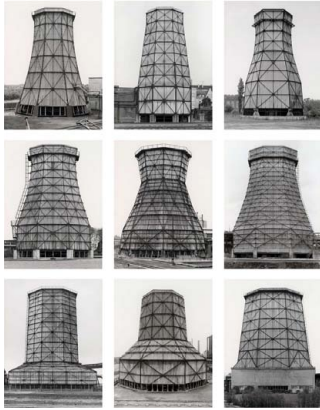


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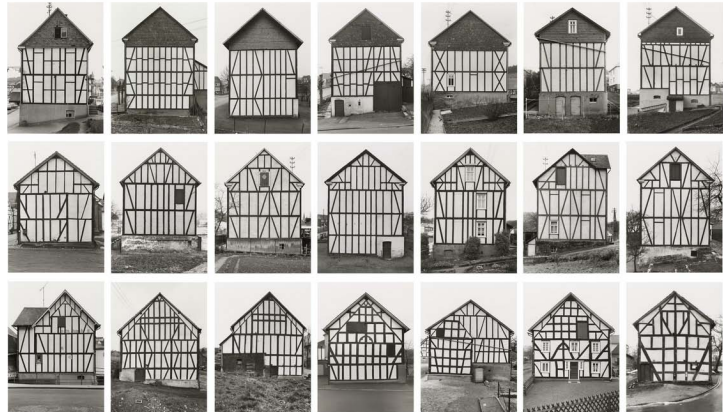


16. Joondalup





17. Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Cooling Towers, Ruhr District, 1655.*



18. Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Framework Houses, 1959-73.*



19. Walker Evans, *Roadside Store between Tuscaloosa and Greensboro, Alabama, 1935*



20. Ed Ruscha, *Beeline, Holbrook, Arizona, 1962*

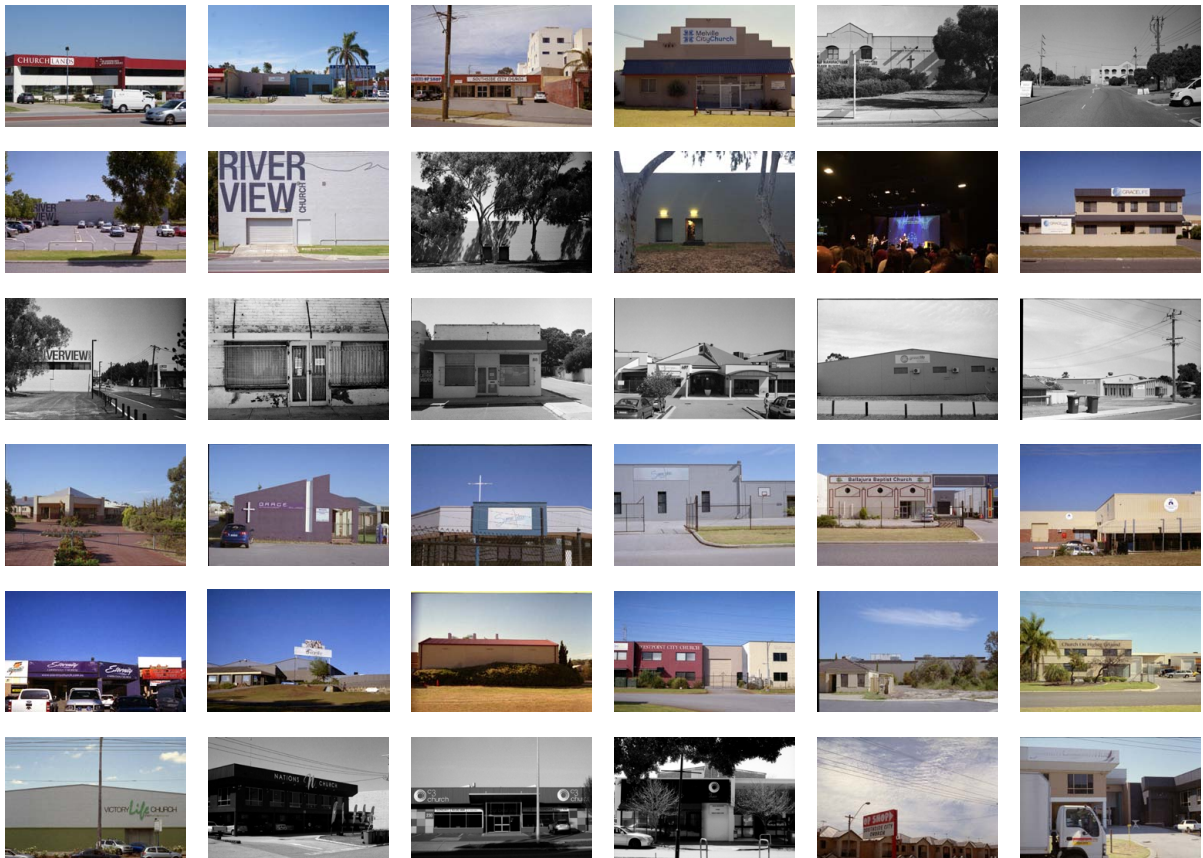


21. Lewis Baltz, *New Industrial Parks #45*, 1974

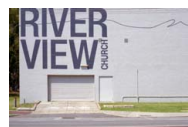


22. Stephen Shore, *West Fifteenth Street and Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 15, 1974*. 1974

23. Initial survey - a 'weight of numbers'



LIGHT INDUSTRIAL



DOMESTIC SUBURBAN



OPPORTUNIST RETAIL



PLAN



STREET



SIDE



CARPARK



SIGN



ENTRANCE



INTERIOR



ONLINE



25. Re-photographing



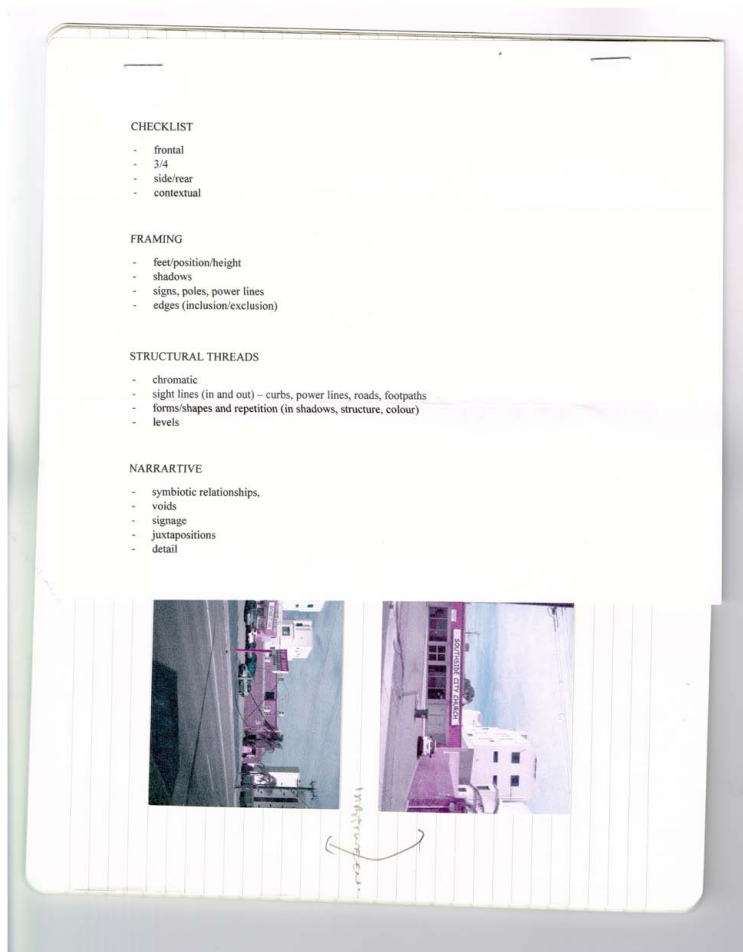
Google



Photograph - 2014

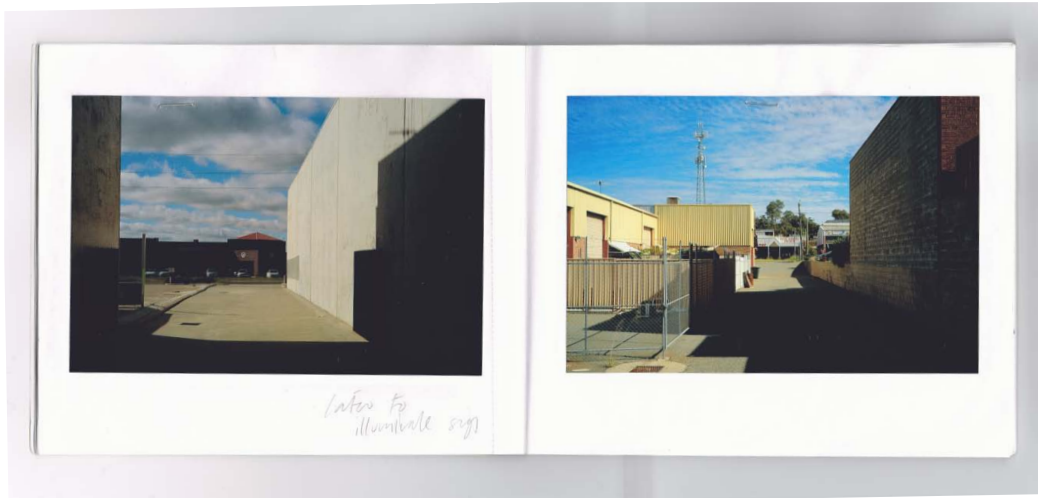


Photograph - 2015



Checklist

26. Photobook sequencing



PART III – DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY AND METHOD

This section will establish a critical framework surrounding the historical usages of the documentary photograph in relation to vernacular forms of architecture. This framework will enable me to place my own processes of making the photographs of Perth's postsuburban churches into a broader tradition of making and writing about documentary photography, examining how the implementation of documentary photography, and the way in which photographs are represented, can serve to create a descriptive system for the understanding of the subject matter. Central to implementing these photographs is the concern that a description of the contexts in which these churches exist would be more successfully engaging through documentary photography than through writing. Creating this contextual description raises pertinent questions about the nature of reading the documentary photograph to deduce information and meaning. Taking information from reality via a photograph harbours innate problems; its construction as the vehicle of inquiry is used to elaborate on what it could represent. The following literature review aims to elucidate some of these complex concerns before assessing how my own photographic processes engage with these ideas.

The ambiguity of the documentary photograph

In the *Burden of Representation*, John Tagg discusses the problematic roles of documentary photography as evidence. Beginning with the earliest utilisation of photography for legal means, Tagg identifies how the 'evidential force' of a photograph can only be understood through historical relations connected to specific institutional powers and societal structures, including the museum, governmental systems of discipline, the media and education.⁹⁶ Tagg traces the shifting position of the documentary photograph as a tool of institutional and administrative control and posits that this utilisation negates the "status of photographic evidence as neutral and given."⁹⁷ As an example, Tagg illustrates this shifting boundary played out in the Modernist appropriation of the heroic humanist documentary aesthetic, institutionalised as a high art in exhibitions such as *The Family of Man*, curated by Edward Steichen in 1955. Describing it as an "ethnographic theatre"⁹⁸ for the viewing by those privileged in the upper echelons of a hierarchical culture. Susan Sontag continues a similar polemic toward the contemporary works of Sebastiao Salgado, criticising the 'focus on the powerless, reduced to their powerlessness.'⁹⁹

The transfer of a documentary purpose into the space of the museum demonstrates the capacity of the context in which a photograph is viewed by a certain audience to completely remove the photograph's status as an evidential document. Salgado's work and Steichen's curatorship and subsequent criticisms are focussed on the representations of human subject matter and are not centrally concerned with the

⁹⁶ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 3.

⁹⁷ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 8.

⁹⁸ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 12.

⁹⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 78.

built landscape as I am, where the boundaries between evidence and ‘high art’ appropriation can become less yielding. Where a portrait of a starving child, or a romantic natural landscape is more immediately affective to certain audiences, viewing a photograph of a 19th century Parisian street scene would unfold a slower narrative, one firstly of historical record and then of potential nostalgia. Whilst it is not the aim of this essay to undertake an analysis of the power relations the photographic medium can enable, it is important to recognise that any subject can be made susceptible to exploitation via the medium. We must then keep in mind that the research operations I have undertaken are done within the institutional system of higher education and is thus pre-exposed to ideological concerns surrounding architecture and the built environment and how it should be represented.

We can take the photographic discourses Allan Sekula separates as ‘fetish’ and ‘informative’ as a way to demonstrate the ideological poles of photographic representation. The first is grounded in an explicitly aesthetic rhetoric, and the other by an empirical objective.^{100 101} It has been my aim to make photographs in this empirical mode. The problems arise when attempting to determine the best way to demonstrate this information photographically. The empirical objective to be discussed, is historically founded in the lucid description of architecture as an object, rather than as a product of a broader social and cultural context. Because the other half of this research is concerned precisely with the surrounding context that enables the proliferation of the postsuburban church, the descriptive aims of the photograph becomes more complex. What this essay does is set out historical precedents of how the vernacular built environment has been visually represented and in doing so demonstrates how an understanding of it, via photography, is difficult to pin down in an objective and evidential manner.

There exists varying levels in between Sekula’s categories and the documentary photograph can inhabit any number of them dependent on the context of representation. It is within this constant field of movement that the difficulties arise when trying to find this appropriate form of ‘documentary’ to record an object within the world. The photographer finds themselves in a position whereby they are confronted with what Sekula describes as the ‘double system’ of photographic representation, on one end it is repressive and on the other it is honorific.¹⁰² These poles are more explicitly discernable (and affective) in photographs containing human portraits. Documentary photographic representations of the built environment on the other hand, occupy a less obvious position precisely because they aim to remain neutral, and to aim for neutrality is to aim for a constructed position. In what follows I attempt

¹⁰⁰ Allan Sekula, *Photography against the grain* (Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 10.

¹⁰¹ To demonstrate the movement between information and fetish with an architectural subject matter we can take an Alfred Stieglitz photograph from 1911, *Old and new New York*, which although made explicitly for ‘fine art’ aims oscillates between the poles but veers toward and remains in the realm of aesthetised art object. At once it is a document recording a construction, evidence of development taking place in a New York street. At the same time the transparency of which the new buildings scaffold is rendered is in sharp contrast to the existing street where the viewer looks from shadow. Although not explicitly, the photograph denies the role of objective report through the transmission of metaphors surrounding modernity. It is the context of the reading that informs this meaning, but it is also enabled by the objective of Stieglitz and other modernists to elevate photography to the realm of high art and to inflate the role of photographer as poetic author.

¹⁰² Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October*, 39 (1986): 5.

to follow this tussle across representations of the vernacular built environment in order to establish where my own attempts to record a vernacular building type sit in the contested space of the documentary photograph.

Vernacular, preservation and photography

The photograph can be seen as an extension and supplement to the antiquarian practices of making measured drawings of a building. The practices of Edouard Baldus and the other four French Mission Heliographique photographers during the 19th century are the earliest examples of the collection of photographs into a framework; an archive, suitable for subsequent architectural and preservation based analysis.¹⁰³ The creation of highly detailed, and neutrally framed photographs (usually frontal as to emulate an orthographic projection) was the aim of photographers working in this archival mode so to provide architects and preservationists with clear historical images for reference.¹⁰⁴ Although these early examples were concerned primarily with monuments or iconic structures deemed by governmental or architectural institutions as historically important, there too existed preservation groups which sought to utilise the camera to record the more anonymous vernacular architecture that was threatened by burgeoning modernisation.¹⁰⁵

Hence the earliest photographic records of the vernacular were born out of preservation rhetoric, and thus adopted a kind of romantic nostalgia for ethno-specific, pre-industrial or marginal forms of architecture. The advent of American vernacular architectural studies coincides with this development, and as prominent vernacular architecture academic Dell Upton mentions, the earliest examples of these studies “were often illustrated with good photographs of the buildings.”¹⁰⁶ Not only is this testament to the accessibility of photography to amateur historians and academics as an evidential tool, it also established photography as an important resource for developing structures for object oriented study beyond the typical archival preservationist scope.

By the 1960s studies of vernacular architecture had begun to shift away from the romantic forms and the definition of what was considered vernacular became increasingly ambiguous due to cross-disciplinary interest in the fields of vernacular material culture (in which I include photography). Upton explains that vernacular is not a category, rather an approach, or methodology applied to the study of the built environment. The broadening of scope directed concentration onto of the vernacular of the ‘everyday’ and the banal, “anything not obviously the product of an upper-class, avant-garde, aesthetic movement.”¹⁰⁷ This ambiguity means that vernacular is not a category for specific architectures but

¹⁰³ Hippolyte Bayard, Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq, and Auguste Mestral.

¹⁰⁴ Jesus Vassallo, “Documentary Photography and Preservation, or The Problem of Truth and Beauty,” *Future Anterior*, 11, no. 1 (2014): 28.

¹⁰⁵ Vassallo, “Documentary Photography and Preservation”, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Dell Upton, “Ordinary Buildings: A Bibliographical Essay on American Vernacular Architecture,” *American Studies International*, 19, no. 2 (1981): 58.

¹⁰⁷ Dell Upton, “The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture,” *American Quarterly*, 35, no.3 (1983): 263.

rather a way to “distinguish between practices of structuring information about architecture.”¹⁰⁸ Out of this there emerged newly founded focus on the emergent symbolism of the commercial architectural landscape, of which the photographic medium played a crucial role in establishing. I come to this at a later point, firstly however, it is useful to examine the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose photographs of vernacular buildings formulate a very clear object focussed approach to vernacular architecture.

The vernacular as object

The work of the Bechers (figs 17, 18) constitutes an archive of mainly industrial vernacular typologies. Despite being formulated in the milieu of cross disciplinary interest in vernacular architecture during the ‘60s their corpus of photographs operates from firmly within an antiquarian preservation mode. These typology focussed photographs constitute a more typical object oriented study of architecture than say the work of Walker Evans, which utilises a different vision; one that is more invested in the emergent vernacular rather than that of the vanishing, of which I will discuss shortly. Despite being restricted by the technical requirements of developing such a rigorous typological examination, it is the form of the Bechers’ archives that provide insight into how the structuring of a comparative form can influence a reading of not only the subject but also, through a secondary process the broader social context. By understanding these processes I was able to assess my early attempts at establishing a survey of postsuburban churches, and why my initial effort to generate a typological archive proved insufficient, not merely from a technical point but rather from the insufficiencies of this methodology when applied to the divergent forms of the postsuburban church.

Utilisation of serial imagery is a common occurrence in the study of architectural forms. The comparative nature of serial imagery allows similarities and nuances to be read across a spectrum of difference and is thus ideal for architectural object based analysis. The work of the Bechers, whose vernacular architectural subjects are isolated by a uniform frontal or perspectival frame, allowing only slivers of context, embody this objective mode of representation. Their photographs were represented in various contexts, mainly book and exhibition form. Within the former the sequential predominates over the serial and with the text accompaniment, Chris Balaschak argues that it is within this mode that their images provide “valuable, historical insight in the realm of architecture.”¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, the exhibition arrangement that is in a serial grid form displays the photographic multiplication at once. In turn this raises complex questions about the documentary photograph as an evidential object. The serial format, when viewed in totality rather than sequentially, begins to negate individual photographs in favour of the whole, which tests the authenticity of the constituent parts. As

¹⁰⁸ Mike Christenson, “Viewpoint: “From the Unknown to the Known,” *Transitions in the Architectural Vernacular*, 18, no.1 (2011): 2.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Balaschak, “Between Sequence and Seriality: Landscape Photography and its Historiography in Anonyme Skulpturen,” *Photographies*, 3, no.1 (2010): 36. doi: 10.1080/1750760903561090

Walter Benjamin argued, reproduction calls into question the “historical testimony of the object” and thus “the authority of the object.”¹¹⁰ With the Bechers it is the totality of the subtly nuanced photographs that call Benjamin’s critique into question. Separate from mere multiplication, the historical authenticity is preserved and heightened. Jacques Ranciere states that these images confront photography’s impoverished position as unique pieces of art put forward by Benjamin, by displaying the ‘multiple unity’ of the images. Seriality is what the objectivist photographers utilise to displace reproducibility.¹¹¹

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A second reading of the Bechers’ work however, can take the serial nature of their photography not as a purely typological tool, but rather as a visual initiator for a critique of the surrounding social context. Unlike Roland Barthes’ *punctum*: that element of a photograph which incites a personal affective response, seriality relies on the *studium*; the concentrated gaze of the viewer to unpack the elements of the image, to engage with the content within. In the case of the Bechers, the photographic documentation becomes such a vast data set that it actually speaks of the broad social conditions via a preservation narrative surrounding deindustrialisation. The aspect of loss, which is so prevalent in *Camera Lucida*, provides the Bechers’ images with a *punctum* not linked to a subjectively affective point, rather it is a *punctum* born out of a sustained *studium*. It is the relentless seriality which, with its “lacerating emphasis”¹¹³ on time, reveals these buildings as something historical. It is in their explicit multiplication of a typology that the cultural decline of industry is emphasised.

As previously mentioned the cross disciplinary influence on vernacular studies during the latter period of the 1970s moved away from preservation toward the establishment of the emergent vernacular, which focussed on the new formal languages and systems of signs appearing in the commercial landscape. The early work of American photographer Walker Evans in the 1930s was instrumental at directing photographic vision away from the ‘traditional’ vernacular toward commercial ‘everyday’ and commonplace buildings. It was Evans’ work which had the most profound influence on the

¹¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 221.

¹¹¹ Jacques Ranciere, “Notes on the photographic image,” *Radical Philosophy*, 156, no. 6 (2009): 11.

¹¹² The objectivity of the Becher’s photographs works in two divergent ways. Their photographs have come under scrutiny for the negation of context, criticised for denying the social condition of labour that surrounded the industrial structures represented in their 1970 publication *Anonyme Skulpturen*. Part of this though, is due to the decontextualisation which occurs when these photographs are transferred to the vastly different site of the museum, where they are presented as artworks (see Chris Balaschak, “Between Sequence and Seriality,” 35).

Minimal and conceptual artists of the ‘70s were particularly interested in the systematic seriality of the works and thus contributed to appropriating the work into the context of art history, a problem which serves only to negate the photographs social prerogative in favour of the conceptual methodology employed. Rather than understanding these images as points of reference and representation capable of informing a reading of the social conditions in which these buildings exist, Minimalism is concerned with these photographs as self-contained objects, thus negating the actual meaningful content of the image.

For a lengthened discussion on the point see the chapter on ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ objecthood in Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 303-335.

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 96.

photographers of the '70s of whom many influenced architectural discourse and helped establish a new vision for the post-modern landscape.

Walker Evans and an emergent vernacular

Walker Evans' photographs of vernacular architecture are not concerned with romantic or pre-industrial forms. What they depict is the rapidly transforming American vernacular landscape, photographs of monuments or iconic buildings are a scarcity in his oeuvre. Although Evans rarely worked explicitly with an architectural preservation objective, (his Victorian Houses of Boston series is an exception) his work bore the traces of these archival and objectivist techniques throughout his entire career. To Evans, according to John Tagg, "an older archival mode of documentation remained available as a rhetorical resource."¹¹⁴ We can see this older mode was grounded in preservation via the traditional survey and archive mode established by the work of French photographers from Baldus through to Charles Marville and later Eugene Atget, whose work Evans was introduced to in 1930. In curator John Szarkowski's words, their influence shaped Evans' own "central sense of purpose and aesthetic: the precise and lucid description of significant fact."¹¹⁵

This documentary pedigree, provided Evans with many of the technical frameworks from which to approach the vernacular architecture that makes up a large portion of his early oeuvre. He would employ the technical aspects of this tradition to document the vernacular landscape of America during his time with the Farm Security Administration (1935-1938), of which the aim was to build a state archive of images that could be utilised to implement reformist political rhetoric. The point is that Evans worked in a highly constructed manner when he photographed vernacular architecture within its social context. It was not, as MoMA curator Szarkowski would state in a moment of contradiction, "without regard for the conventional structures of picture-building."¹¹⁶

Whilst Evans' work depicts aspects of a declining built environment, it simultaneously depicted the advent of an increasingly commercially shaped landscape. Nowhere is this dualism more evident than in his photograph of an old roadhouse, *Roadside Store between Tuscaloosa and Greensboro* from 1935 (fig.19). The predominately frontal framing of the building shifts slightly to the right so to include the shed in the background, which works to bring the relationship between the pervasiveness of commercial culture and that of the regional into assessment. This only subtle shift of perspective works to retain lucid a rendition of the building's façade, meaning we can understand the arrangement of signs in an orthographic fashion. It is these signs that have replaced the building's fenestrations.¹¹⁷ Here is a critique of the decorated shed 35 years before *Learning from Las Vegas*. Evans' is not explicit in this

¹¹⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 12.

¹¹⁵ John Szarkowski, *Walker Evans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 17.

¹¹⁶ Szarkowski, *Walker Evans*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Jessica May, "The Work of an Artist: Walker Evans's American Photographs," in *American Modern: documentary photography by Abbott, Evans, and Bourke-White*, ed, Sharon Corwin and Ron Tyler (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 77.

critique, it is disguised in a documentary objectivism - he utilises the notions of objectivity exemplified by the photographic technique to develop this cultural appraisal. Whilst the Bechers' object based approach requires the insistent repetition of subject matter to develop a critique outside of a specific analysis of those objects, Evans' work, which is still shaped by objective technique, utilises contextual elements to develop social and cultural critique via a system of signs and symbolism.

The vernacular as symbol

We can see this semiotic concern for symbolism within American photographic discourse develop from the establishment made by Evans. Particularly as the automobile shaped city began to come under aesthetic scrutiny from a range of sources during the 1960s.¹¹⁸ Scrutiny notwithstanding, this emergent landscape was also examined for its potentialities for architectural theories concerned with a new symbolic vernacular, most notably by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in the 1972 publication *Learning from Las Vegas*. The explicit use of the photographic medium in *Learning from Las Vegas* became the central tool in which a critique of the commercial vernacular could take place.

The photographic technique employed by Venturi and Scott Brown to represent the form of the Las Vegas strip was heavily influenced by artist Ed Ruscha, (fig.20) who developed a particularly detached photographic method described as 'deadpan'- an apparently objective technique whereby the representing of facts and reduction of artistic subjectivity is made the principal aim.¹¹⁹ This desire is evident in Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), where he attached a camera to his car and documented the Hollywood strip mechanically, moving the human from the subjective position behind the camera to the apparently objective position behind the wheel of the car. Evidently any attempt to relate this to documentary photography becomes perilous, because as we have seen, documentary photography, when tasked with recording architecture is a highly constructed photographic proposition. Ruscha's position too is highly artificial, however his objectivity is not directed toward the subject rather toward the medium of photography itself.

For Ruscha it is the banal or 'amateurish' outcome of this systematic technique which directly corresponds with the subject matter he chooses to photograph. Ruscha was not concerned with an object based analysis of this subject, whether it be gasoline stations or the homogenous apartments along Sunset Boulevard. He works in a conceptual mode, dealing with issues internally relating to the systematic and anonymous deployment of photography within art practices.¹²⁰ It is therefore questionable to use this method to assess a vernacular building type. Precisely because the inclusion of written research or investigation in the manner of *Learning from Las Vegas* (or any other study

¹¹⁸ Most notably Peter Blake's, *God's own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1964).

¹¹⁹ Aron Vinegar, "Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography," *Art History*, 32, no.5 (2009): 859.

¹²⁰ Benjamin Buchloch, "Conceptual Art 1962-69: from the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, 55 (1990): 122.

concerned with architecture on a level broader than pure object based analysis) initiates a transition whereby the banal architectural subject is lifted from anonymity, from an essentially unknown state to one of intense comprehension.

What Venturi and Scott Brown seem more interested in is deadpan as a 'style', suggesting that perhaps their adoption of this technique lies more in its striking visual form, one which can be made en masse quickly and effectively. It becomes a way to structure a view of the built environment rather than as a way to analyse it. This was evident within my own photographic processes where I used Google Street View as a way to immediately identify and initially represent the churches I would later visit to photograph. Mike Christendom argues that Google Street View works to collapse the distinctions between vernacular and non-vernacular because it disseminates data on a universal level, essentially eroding any understanding of the Street View photograph as place-specific.¹²¹ It is because the Google images are not selective, in a manner similar to Ruscha, (although Ruscha still selected the street to drive down) that they can only provide a base in which to construct a more nuanced visual understanding of the building and its geographical context through a more focussed, inevitably meaning a more subjective, photographic practice.

Subjectivity and objectivity

The opposition between the subjective and the objective remains the central issue of documentary photography's practice. The descriptive role of a photograph, constituted by the edges of the photographic frame, is a decision the photographer must inevitably make unless the process is undertaken within a conceptual framework. We have established that the 'complete' objectiveness of Ruscha and Venturi's 'deadpan' (and Street View) is not capable of describing the subject accurately because it can potentially lose grasp of the physical evidence due to the nature of the description as universally applicable. Therefore in the case of the postsuburban churches, even though the architectural language may be universally banal, everyday or commonplace, each church requires an individual description based upon the conditions in which it exists. This means that the information within a photograph represents a selective process, which should convince the viewer of its own neutrality thus validating the photograph as evidence.

A mode of representation more suitable to a context based analysis of vernacular architecture can be found in the works of some of the artists associated with 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Images of a Man-altered Landscape*. The aim of the exhibition in curator William Jenkins' words, was to question "what it means to make a documentary photograph."¹²² Although the underlying aim of the exhibition, this question was distilled from the photographs included, which aimed toward the detailed

¹²¹ Christendom "Viewpoint, 8.

¹²² William Jenkins, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, (New York: International Museum of Photography, 1975): 7.

description of the emergent built landscapes or *topographies*, of America. These photographers confronted that essential opposition within documentary photography, the establishment of an objective view from a subjective position. What I mean by this is that by attempting to avoid moral subjectivities about these topographies, subjective decisions about description/composition had to be considered. This relationship inherently becomes a very fine, if not impossible, line to tread because it is exactly the subjectivity of the description that will create or deny any moral judgment.

With this tension between subjectivity and objectivity established, I would like to discuss two photographers from within the *New Topographics* whose work displays very different approaches to the description of these topographies. Whilst both Stephen Shore and Lewis Baltz approached the anonymous vernacular architecture of the new commercial landscape, each outcome developed different modes of dialogue with it. Baltz's images are characterised by tight compositional frames, high contrast black and white and depopulated scenes (fig.21). Correlating Baltz's work with a 'late-modernist' abstract aesthetic position, Allan Sekula's criticism argued that this minimalism served to make anonymous the labour forces and social structures which operate within this environment.¹²³ Sekula's is a valid criticism, however such abstraction can be placed beyond mere aesthetic concern. What I mean by this is that the subjective and selective removal of context consciously demonstrates how the emergent vernacular architecture is a result of the standardisation inherent in capitalist systems of production, shown in the photographs via this abstract mode of representation.

Baltz's approach then, is in fact a highly subjective one, meaning that the status of some of the resultant photographs as socially minded documents may come under scrutiny. Stephen Shore's large format colour photographs, especially those made for his book *Uncommon Places*, many of which were included in the exhibition, are equally rigorously constructed compositions. A major point of difference, not only in the use of colour, is that whilst Baltz tends to focus on a singular element, Shore's photographs tend to bring visual coherence to a usually visually incoherent scene: intersections, main streets or car parks; places appearing to have no real central point of interest (fig.22). Focal points become dispersed in Shore's photographs where the banal details of the everyday vernacular built environment begin to exercise the eye of the keen observer.

It would seem inappropriate then to suggest Shore's technique could be relevant to the study of a particular building type. However, his work offers a way in which the surrounding topography becomes equally as relevant as the architecture, showing that the two exist together as part of much broader systems. It is precisely this attention to context that make the photographs relevant for a study of a vernacular architectural type which emerges as a result of social and geographical pressures. Whilst the inclusion of vast amounts of detail is a subjectively guided choice, it in turn leads to a very objective image. The density of information selected forces an extended observation or, *studium*, in a Barthesian

¹²³ Sekula, *Photography against the grain*, 233.

sense, making the photograph ‘impossible to conceive at once.’¹²⁴ Thus the photograph halts viewer interpretation, it becomes neutral in its objective, making the empirical nature of the photograph certain, and its status as an evidential document solidified. Shore offers us a documentary method not dissimilar to Baldus, only it is applied on a macro, rather than micro scale.

Photographic processes explained

My use of photography, unlike Baldus and the Mission Heliographique, is mostly contrary to aims of preservation, it is not a record of what is disappearing, rather of what is appearing. The nature of the photographs as a historical record is however emphasised by the transient nature of many of the churches sought out, which according to participant turnover may move location or shut down frequently. The initial photographic survey I made of Perth’s postsuburban churches aimed to, in a typological mode, identify nuances in the formal language of these buildings. Initially utilised to present a visual ‘weight of numbers,’ the first photographs, made in 2014, were implemented to provide illustrative evidence for the existence of these churches. (fig.23)

Upon recommencement of the research which was extended in 2015, the initial survey was reconsidered and organised into various taxonomical groups - firstly categories were identified based on the observable differences in building type, of which there were three dominant forms: light industrial, opportunist retail or shopfront and domestic suburban. Images were organised into these groups (fig.24). This taxonomical organisation coincided with the development of the maps discussed in Part Two of this dissertation that were used to locate the geographical contexts of the churches already photographed. The divisions aimed to describe the qualities of each structure in a comparative format - I was concerned with how such a process could reveal nuances in these religious architectural forms. Following this, an attempt was made to further classify the buildings into components, isolating elements such as signage, entrance, car park and interior (fig. 24).

Ultimately the photographs made in 2014 proved too limited especially when considered alongside the literature reviews that began to query the social, cultural and historical significance of the occurrence of these buildings, because they were more concerned with a documentation of types. The development of a taxonomical system of description proved too limited since the forms were less similar than was first assumed. In other words there was not enough subtle difference to generate a kind of ‘Becherian’ chart that would speak of any important functional or typological similarities. It became clear that a ‘multiple unity,’ as discussed previously, could not be achieved in my case, precisely because the churches were not formally regular enough to speak convincingly in a serial format. In this case seriality would inherently lead to an elimination of context, antithetical to the research which is concerned with the social and historical conditions of their existence. The photographic methodology had to be

¹²⁴ Fried et al., *Stephen Shore*, 97.

redefined to move away from the object oriented analysis of typology toward an approach that could contribute to an understanding of the conditions of church occurrence without being reliant on formal comparison. The new photographic aim was to attempt to develop a ‘view’ that explained the form of the building whilst situating it more broadly within the landscape.

My photographs are still concerned with a specific building type in an object oriented manner. The problem is that instead of finding, like the Bechers, a consistent pre-industrial object, I found an inconsistent commercial vernacular, formed not out of functional requirements, but rather appropriated for use where available and economically accessible. The consistencies that were revealed however, concerned the contextual geographies in which the churches existed: light industrial, commercial strip and domestic suburban. These were further understood with a series of maps that aimed to understand any patterns on a geographical scale. Whilst the mapping exercises reinforced these contextual differences, the descriptive power of a map rarely surpasses its role as data, and if it does the data is transformed into an abstract representation. Thus the broader inclusion of context in the individual photographs became a descriptive necessity. It was concluded that the photographs could become crucial documents to describe not only the churches but also the surrounding landscape, precisely because it is the ability of a photograph to ‘talk’ about the mundane in a way that words, and maps, cannot.

Part of the surrounding landscape that the churches exist includes commercial forms of signage and advertising. Although my concern is not with the automobile shaped city, in the manner of *Learning from Las Vegas*, many of the churches do place an emphasis on large signage legible from a moving vehicle. The idea that this signage could be photographically isolated was tested, however soon abandoned. Of more relevance to this to this study was to show how many of the churches appropriate vernacular forms of advertising essentially disseminating religious gospel rhetoric. Thus the church signs had to be represented within the broader context to illustrate how the appropriation of advertising similar to those of the surrounding functions had essentially converted spoken word sermon into sign, which in many cases was what constituted the architecture of the church in a Venturian ‘decorated shed’ sense. Furthermore, their signs go beyond the physical realm of the built environment and usually make up part of a brand language easily recognisable online and in print media (usually flyers and pamphlets).

This broadening of geographical scope during 2015 introduced new churches to be photographed, whilst also initiating a process of re-photographing those covered in the initial survey. The process of re-photographing is evident in three phases throughout the process. Firstly churches were located on Google maps, where the Streetview image was used to develop a general idea of location and context, churches were then photographed in 2014, and then revisited in 2015 (fig. 25). The latest photographs were taken with the aim of structuring more information within the image, more carefully taking into account conditions such as lighting, and framing. Attention was paid to the contextual elements that

could be included to develop a clearer understanding of the building's context and surrounding conditions. I kept a checklist of elements to consider when making each image (fig.25). Following the completion of making the photographs, decisions regarding their collation and subsequent final presentation were made in regard to the making of the photobook.

Photobook as 'articulated corpus' – in between art and analysis

Before considering the processes of creating my photobook *Postsuburban Churches of Perth*, I will discuss some of the issues and complexities concerning representation that are raised when tasked with the job of constituting a collection of documentary photographs into the archival form of a book. Susan Sontag argued that the book is not the ideal form to present photographs because “nothing holds the readers to the recommended order or indicates the amount of time to be spent on each photograph.”¹²⁵ A book can be opened or closed at any page which may disrupt attempts at forging a coherent narrative structure for its reading. Whilst the order of reading may be of less importance to an object oriented study which exhibits a more typological rigour, an example being the work of the Bechers, a narrative structure may serve to forge more complex contextual links where typological or formal connections are weak. Within this sequential mode a climatic logic may exist that aims to establish an over-arching narrative or ‘literary’ structure, which according to photobook historian Gerry Badger attempts “to convey encoded messages.”¹²⁶

The sequences established in *Postsuburban Churches* serve to paradoxically juxtapose the evangelical narrative of life improvement with the banality of the everyday conditions in which it is promoted. Consequently sequencing in a way that draws out these paradoxical relationships introduces irony as a tool for the construction of this narrative. Photographic irony can be understood as the result of the objective distancing that the documentary photograph takes in an attempt to avoid a sentimental or moralising judgment of the subject. Utilised by Walker Evans, irony served as a counter to the sentimentalism of photography embodied by Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibition, which, as previously discussed promoted an ‘intuitive’ mode of photography.¹²⁷ Although not explicitly, ironic implications subsequently played a role in the development of the new documentary mode after Evans, including in the work of some of *The New Topographics*. It may be problematic to include Stephen Shore's work in an explicitly ironic vein. Certainly his detached technique alludes to the banality of the new ‘man-altered landscapes’, describing the formation of these topographies by a new consumer driven sentiment, however his photographs rarely draw attention to the “increasingly uncomfortable confrontations between the land and those who used it”.¹²⁸ Banal architectural subject matter became

¹²⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 5.

¹²⁶ Gerry Badger, “Sequencing the Photobook: Part 2,” *Aperture*, 209 (2012): 3.

¹²⁷ For a thorough account of photographic irony and documentary photography see: Emma Kate-Dowdell, “Picturing Irony: Making a visual case study from the work of Camus” (Ph.D., Edith Cowen University, 2015), 32.

¹²⁸ Michael Fried et al., *Stephen Shore*. (New York: Phaidon, 2007), 92.

the vehicle in which the photographers like Shore were able to shift the focus of the documentary photograph away from the drama of a decisive moment toward the conditions of everyday life. In this sense the photographs become pre-meditated and governed by an over-arching idea or collective scheme. Contemporary photographic practices which takes this kind of distanced photographic aesthetic, everyday subject matter and pre-determined idea has been called ‘Conceptual Documentary’.¹²⁹

Placing my own photographic attempts within a Conceptual Documentary mode because it seeks out a particular subject matter in a premeditated way could be problematic in a variety of ways. Precisely because a Conceptual Documentary book is a standalone object whilst *Postsuburban Churches* sits in a position between autonomy and association with the written research. This becomes a problematic relationship because Conceptual Documentary photography, as Melissa Miles explains, consciously isolates the subject to re-contextualise it within the book form in order to allow new meaning to develop in the absence of extensive literary explanation.¹³⁰ Whilst the re-contextualisation of a photograph occurs under any viewing circumstance, it is important to recognise the context in which this book will be comprehended, and ask whether or not a photographic approach like this is suitable when intended not as an art object but as a way to represent a vernacular architecture in an academic context.

Inevitably, this becomes a question regarding the form of the archive, and in particular the complexities of its interpretive function. Whilst this issue is highly complex it is unavoidable, and it is worth acknowledging, as David Bell does through his reading of Derrida, that the “constitution of the archive does not consist simply in storing disparate documents together in juxtaposition”, rather the archivist makes choices in relating documents within the archive to one another, with its final form becoming an “articulated corpus.”¹³¹ This implies that the archive can standalone as a generator of meaning and that they are not required to “foreground their own conditions of meaning making.”¹³² Rather like the Conceptual Documentary photobook, meaning will be created through the re-contextualisation implicit in the focussed gathering together and ordering of documents. The photographic archive is first formulated and then reflected upon in Conceptual Documentary.

Take for instance Stephen Gill’s series *Lost*; a collection of photographs showing people consulting street maps in London, and notice the unconscious body language of those trying to find their way, usually turning inward or seeking the cover of a wall or other manmade object. This is an interpretation

¹²⁹ Melissa Miles “The Drive to Archive: Conceptual documentary photobook design,” *Photographies*, 3, no.1 (2010): 50. doi: 10.1080/17540760903561108

As Miles mentions, it is important to distinguish here the separation between Conceptual Documentary and the previously discussed conceptual photographic practices associated with artists like Ed Ruscha in that Ruscha treats the camera as a neutral instrument and it is utilised for this in art practice. Alternatively a Conceptual Documentary approach acknowledges the limits of this objectivity and is aware of the impact on the subject matter photographed.

¹³⁰ Miles, “The Drive to Archive,” 55.

¹³¹ David Bell, “Infinite Archives,” *SubStance*, 33, no.3, (2004): 150. doi: 10.1353/sub.2004.0034

¹³² Karen Cross and Julia Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory,” *Photographies*, 3, no.2 (2010): 129. doi: 10.1080/17540763.2010.499631

only possible after the archive is made. Another of Gill's series, *Billboards*, which explicitly utilises irony as a narrative device, tests the relationship between word and image through the juxtaposition of advertising slogans with the decrepit spaces he finds behind billboards. Gill photographs the rear of a Mazda billboard from among a junkyard filled with wrecked cars and shopping trolleys. Taking the text advertised on the billboard that reads *Turn the key. Start a revolution*, and placing it below the photograph within the photobook places the billboard in a new conceptual context, where, as Miles states they become a vehicle revealing a "seemingly endless series of promises of fulfilment... a culture of excess, waste and decay."¹³³ The point is that the billboard's re-contextualisation into the archival form of the photobook allows meaning to emerge, it also reveals how the structure of this archive makes such a reading possible – without the accompanying text this retrospective interpretation would be missed.

Gill never states a conceptual aim for the series, the introductory text merely describes in a matter of fact manner some places where billboards can be found or their most common type being "a wooden hoarding structure fixed into the ground," the closest it comes to a conceptual outline is formulating the obvious observation that billboards "naturally become a curtain for whatever lies behind."¹³⁴ The construction of my own photographic archive ran counter to this, first formulating an analysis through the literature review and mapping, and then utilising the book form to structure the photographic information visually. Whilst photographs were made at the beginning of the research in 2014, they were yet to be placed into an 'articulated corpus', in other words they were yet to develop as critical documents, and remained solely as an attempt to establish a fact. The conceptual structure for the final archive of postsuburban churches was thus established by research before it was photographically filled out. It is the way in which the photographs are sequenced within this structure that presents new opportunities to reveal, elaborate or contest ideas and meanings explored within the writing.

The majority of the sequencing in my book *Postsuburban Churches of Perth* is structured around a contextual narrative, where links can be made not from an object oriented point of view but rather through symbolic connections. This is a reflection of the diversity of forms serving to highlight the failure of serial examination in this case. Occasionally photographs are sequenced in a comparative typological manner when enabled by the photographic framing. These processes of layout are considered through testing via mock-up examinations that explore potential relations between photographs (fig.26).

The symbolic relations are discovered through contextual examination where we may find the repetition of a motif, which will generate the logic of the next photograph. Elements such as signage, church names, surrounding functions are among some sequencing devices utilised. The sequencing aims to

¹³³ Miles, "The Drive to Archive," 49.

¹³⁴ Stephen Gill, *A Book of Field Studies* (London: Chris Boot, 2004), 176.

elucidate the relationship between these churches and the commercial architectural language they adopt reflecting the pervasiveness of this kind of religiosity within a postsuburban topography that provides the scaffold for its dispersion and consumption.

A sustained sequence that utilises repetition can thus be used to expand on or continue an analysis set up within the research. Where a literature review may reach a descriptive limit, a cohesive photographic sequence may serve to draw out detail that is not easily communicated in the written research. For instance, how do we talk about the recurrent material palette of salmon brick and beige roof sheeting, the discarded furniture lying in church car parks or the homogeneity of church and panel beater? The very banality of these scenes make them camouflage to literary description until they are made visible through a photograph, and thus able to be integrated into the broader scheme of analysis. The documentary photograph is able to not only furnish evidence but also provide critique through vehicles of repetition and juxtaposition.

Although I have not explicitly attempted, in a conceptual mode, to shift the attention of the viewer from the representation of the subject to a critique of the systems of representations, it is important to acknowledge the descriptive inadequacies of both writing and documentary photography. These flaws are identified in the endnotes of *Postsuburban Churches*, whereby the pairing of some descriptive text with the photograph serves to bluntly call attention to elements within the photograph that may lead to an understanding or reading not contained within the photographic frame. The same could also be said of the pairing of photograph and title, in which the label of ‘church,’ is at times the only device used to recognise the function of an otherwise non-descript building. This book can be comprehended in two ways. It can be approached independently as an ‘art object’, like a Conceptual Documentary photobook, able to generate its own meanings about the subject that can *then* be theorised upon. Or it can be understood in relation to the critical text which it can accompany; writing that will make apparent the cultural, social and historical dimensions enabling the occurrence of churches within these ordinary vernacular buildings.

CONCLUSIONS – PART III AND BEYOND

3. How does the photobook as the manifestation of this photographic investigation including the specific processes of making it: taking, editing and sequencing images, constitute a form of representation?

4. Can a methodology combining a critical literature review, establishment of architectural context and a photographic investigation allow us to further understand a ‘vernacular’ building type?

*“Documentary photography has amassed mountains of evidence. And yet, in this pictorial presentation of scientific and legalistic “fact,” the genre has simultaneously contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world.”*¹³⁵

- Allan Sekula

The initial observation that set this research in motion was that the language of ‘sacred’ architecture in Perth was becoming, to borrow words from Mircea Eliade, “*unrecognisable...camouflaged in forms, purposes and meanings which are apparently ‘profane.’...One does not recognise it immediately and easily, because it is no longer expressed in a conventional religious language.*”¹³⁶ The fact that photography was instinctively utilised to imbue the research with further descriptive power is testament to the photographic medium’s ability to describe the profanity of this everyday architecture. And whilst the photograph may be a representational system easily taken for granted, it is important to consider how, as a subjective document, its construction can allow us a certain reading of a vernacular building type. I have sought to find an appropriate manner in which to photograph and represent Perth’s postsuburban churches through understanding the traditions of ‘documentary photography’, and this process has inherently led to some mannerist outcomes. I have used these photographic devices, avoiding the term ‘style’ because it assumes a non-critical position or mere emulation, because they have provided utility for the task at hand - that is to selectively include or exclude content that will help establish a critique complementary to the research that establishes these churches as an outcome of an anti-formal worship practice that proliferates via the adoption of architecturally banal commercial vernacular forms.

It is the banality of a vernacular form that elicits the implementation of the photograph, as an aesthetic aid, a way to convince an audience that an observation of this subject matter is a worthwhile pursuit in the first place. Could the churches have been discussed without a visual description? Yes, although

¹³⁵ Allan Sekula, *Photography against the grain* (Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 57.

¹³⁶ Mircea Eliade, “The Sacred and the Modern Artist,” in *The Religious Imagination in Modern and Contemporary Architecture: A Reader*, ed, Renata Hedjuk and Jim Williamson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 123.

without a visual archive would further possibilities for understanding be missed? The processes undertaken to generate this visual description – the making, collating and representing of the photographs, highlights the tense relationship between two descriptive systems. This tension is nowhere more apparent than within the edifice of the photographic archive, which, when influenced by the information established in the research, occupies an ambiguous space – between aesthetic sensibilities and fact providing evidence, where these sensibilities; not just the taking of the photograph but their sequencing, compilation and subsequent omissions and exclusions, are utilised as tools to describe this fact. If the photobook can constitute a critical system of representation, it is because of its articulated archival form, which helps to position the images beyond their base evidential capacity, where narratives and relationships between images are set up through their ordering and arrangement. The photobook begins to test whether an archive of postsuburban churches can stand alone as not only a descriptive system, but as an analytical tool.

I began by asking if a methodology combining a critical literature review, establishment of architectural context and a photographic investigation could allow a more comprehensive understanding of a ‘vernacular’ building type, and have concluded that the photographs equip this methodology with an analytical scope beyond the vision of traditional literature review. What began to clarify however, is that to advance this study of how and why these churches are proliferating on a social and cultural level, a shift in approach is required – the methodology developed here provides a way into one less architecturally reliant. The photograph would still play a role in this, albeit divergent from how it has been utilised here - where we still remain ‘outside’ of these buildings. We would need to begin looking into the interior of these churches and focus this shift on the human practices and activities that take place within. Surveys, interviews, and examination of land use titles are among some of the processes that would benefit the research in ways that architecturally centred forms of representation: drawing and object oriented documentary photography, are of less utility.

The role of the documentary photograph in anthropologically centred study takes on new and even more complex importance because it can seek to explain not just the geographical and architectural conditions that enable the housing of religious activity, but the social and cultural conditions that furnish the possibilities for this kind of religiosity to exist.¹³⁷ Explaining how these churches are socially shaped through the photographic image, requires a closer look at the human ritual and corresponding material practice – and as I established at the beginning of Part Three the documentary photograph is more susceptible to falling into the traps of a system of repression when the subject matter begins to be more human centric. Whilst I am not suggesting a series of portraits, I am concerned that any photographic approach that seeks to elucidate worship or religious practice in this context could easily transform into

¹³⁷ Here I am reminded of a conversation I had with a Pastor at Heart City in Bibra Lake – a church that occupies the large structure of an old gardening warehouse store. He told me that the open span of the large auditorium space would not have been made possible without the removal of the pre-existing columns that were compensated for by a large truss manufactured, installed and donated by a congregation member who ran a steel fabricating business.

a negligent vision of an ‘other’. An extended investigation could perhaps begin to look at evangelical self-representation – certainly the presence of some of the major evangelical churches and associations online provides scope to invigorate a literature review with visual representation informed by ‘found’ images, retrieved from the avenues these churches use to interact with their current and potential congregation base. I have looked at how the vernacular architecture of the church is one of these platforms of appeal; social media outlets like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube present possibilities for the development of a different mode of ‘documentary’ photography - one that critiques the tension between external perception and self-representation.

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