

## **Submission for Built Environment Special Issue: Suburban Spaces, Suburban Cultures**

### **Building the sacred in suburbia: improvisation, reinvention and innovation**

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#### **Abstract:**

This paper explores diverse practices of religious place-making in suburban space drawing from a research project on the making of suburban faith in West London. We argue that the creative cultures and spaces of suburban faith communities are often marginalized in enduring narratives of secular suburban materialism. In contrast through an analysis of creative responses to suburban space by different faith communities, at different time periods, we suggest both the persistence of suburban faiths and the creativity of suburban faith communities. We argue that creativity is evident through processes of improvisation in the creation of make-shift places of worship in early 'frontier suburbs' and in the creative re-adaptation and re-invention of former buildings to new places of worship, often by diasporic faith communities. Finally we emphasise architectural innovation in making new places of worship which engage directly and imaginatively with suburban space. Our analysis suggests the importance of suburban faith communities in the making of suburban spaces and cultures, and the relevance of religion, and sacred place-making, in wider re-evaluations of suburban creativity.

#### **Introduction**

*Buddha in Suburbia* was the predictable title of a programme first broadcast in 2011 by the BBC, tracing the story of Lelung Rinpoche, one of Tibetan Buddhism's three principal reincarnations. Rinpoche had spent the previous nine years in political exile in the west London suburb of Ruislip, leading a dharma centre and the programme opened with Rinpoche in his home, a converted shed, located in the garden of one of his followers. This trope is not unfamiliar, playing on the supposed incongruity of exotic 'eastern' religion in the landscape of English semi-detached suburbia. (This trope is, of course, central to Hanif Kueishi's original 1990 novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, about growing up in Bromley, but bathos here is heightened not just by Ruislip's associations with the nostalgic suburban romanticism of John Betjeman's 'Metroland' poems, but also its appearance in the title of Leslie Thomas's 1974 sex comedy, *Tropic of Ruislip*). The construction is evident too in media responses to the spectacular Swaminaryan Hindu temple in nearby Neasden or the large Mohammedi Park mosque complex in neighbouring Northolt, both seen as somehow out-of-place in this suburban landscape (Dwyer et al. 2013). There are two dimensions to this representational strategy. First, and most obviously, there is a racialization of place and an assumption of suburban

‘whiteness’ that ignores what are by now long-established imperial and post-colonial connections shaping the populations and built environments of London’s suburbs (Driver & Gilbert 1999; Naylor & Ryan 2002; King 2005). As Mark Clapson (2003), Wei Li (2009), Rupa Huq (2013) and others have emphasised suburbs in the UK and elsewhere were never as homogeneous in ethnicity or class as often caricatured, and are increasingly shaped by both the suburbanisation of earlier migrant generations and new patterns of direct suburban settlement and urban churn. Secondly, the *Buddha in Suburbia* trope points to a wider assumed dissonance between suburbia and the sacred. Suburbs have often been regarded as mundane and materialistic; at various stages in their development, suburbanisation has been regarded as a key factor in wider processes of secularisation (Dwyer et al. 2013). Our argument here is that this underplays religion and faith as significant influences on the cultures and built environments of suburbs, both historically and in their ongoing development.

Our focus in this paper is on religious buildings in west London, and draws particularly on current research in Ealing that explores the role of religious faith as an active element of creativity in suburban settings. London was the city where identifiably modern suburban developments appeared first in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the city experienced urban growth unprecedented in human history. The late nineteenth century and pre-first world war period saw massive growth in suburbs such as Wembley, Harrow, Merton and Ilford; the area now corresponding to the modern London Borough of Ealing was typical, increasing its population by around 75% to 160 000 in the ten years between 1901 and 1911. Between 1919 and 1939 London grew by 10% (to around 9 million people) but also doubled in built area, stimulated by new suburban transport systems. Ealing’s sobriquet ‘Queen of the Suburbs’ evokes the wealth of parkland in the borough, but can also suggest a middle-class homogeneity at odds with Ealing’s contemporary demography, which reflects diverse migrant histories, associated with Irish, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Polish settlement.

While to some extent London’s growth anticipated developments elsewhere, the suburbs were also distinctive places made in the particular contexts of London’s social, economic and imperial/post-imperial histories. Recent work on ‘global suburbanization’ prompts an analysis beyond common patterns in urban morphology and simplistic ideas of spread, sprawl and cultural homogenization, to regard suburban worlds with similar respect for difference and the particularities of place-making accorded to studies of urban modernity (Keil 2013). The classic case of the North American suburb still often dominates understandings and expectations of suburban culture, including suburban

culture and religion. While tensions between materialism and religious belief were central to mid-twentieth century sociological studies of suburban faith (notably Herberg 1955 and Whyte 1956), more recent studies in North America have focused on the development of large suburban churches and their relationship with suburban life and governance (see Wilford 2010, Warf and Winsberg 2010). The west London examples discussed here present a rather different trajectory, and our emphasis is on the plurality of ways that successive faith communities have responded to and actively remade the suburban built environment. There is not a singular model of the role of religious faith in the relationship between suburban space and suburban culture that emerges from this analysis; rather what is indicated are different kinds of creative responses to suburban conditions that have wider resonances.

This paper presents an analysis of the *making* of religious spaces in west London, suggesting that faith communities have engaged with the suburban built environment with creativity, flexibility and innovation. We identify three broad types of response manifest in these suburban faith spaces. First, we emphasise that the making of suburban faith has been characterised by improvisation – particularly through the use of temporary buildings or worship spaces. Reflecting on the histories of nascent faith communities in the expanding suburbs from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, we trace the importance of improvised worship spaces in the transitional spaces of the suburban frontier, such as tent churches and ‘tin tabernacles’, corrugated iron churches supplied in pieces for easy on-site construction. . Second, we discuss the ways in which successive faith communities have reinvented the existing built environment, adapting existing buildings, including older religious buildings, for new forms of worship. Such reinventions are undertaken by faith communities themselves, often through volunteer labour, and are an indication of everyday vernacular creativity in the making of suburban religious space. Thirdly, we identify examples of architectural innovation in the suburbs, through an analysis of two purpose built religious buildings which, we argue, engage powerfully and creatively with their suburban settings.

### **Improvisation: tents, boats and tin tabernacles**

An early stimulus to the growth of the London suburbs was the coming of the railways. To the west of Ealing, Brunel’s Great Western Railway crosses the valley of the River Brent on the magnificent Wharncliffe viaduct. The labourers that built the line and the viaduct in the late 1830s came mainly

from Ireland, and many settled in the rapidly expanding suburb. Initially, the spiritual welfare of this population was not supported by any Catholic institutions, but instead they were evangelised by the Moravian church, who operated a 'tent church' in the fields adjoining the newly constructed railway. This is an early example of improvised tent churches that characterised the religious revivals in developing suburbs. A century later the founder of the Elim Pentecostal movement, George Jeffries, visited West Ealing in the summer of 1930, to preach the mission of his newly established evangelical church. A large marquee was erected in Dean Gardens, a new park on the site of a former common, and by 1934 the church was established in a local hall, before moving into the premises of a former cinema. Another early evangelical church, the Greenford Gospel church, used a canal boat as its mobile place of worship, moving around the new suburbs of west London, putting up its temporary tented church on open spaces and parks adjacent to the canal.

The canal boat and tent churches were easily improvised places of worships in suburban landscapes which were essentially frontier settlements, expanding rapidly through relatively unplanned speculative house building. The rapidity of growth often took the established churches by surprise and created gaps in the conventional parish structures that were exploited by evangelical movements, moving into places that had very little in the way of formal social organisation. In Victorian Ealing, the resources of the established Anglican church were initially concentrated in the more affluent heart of the new suburb, where large new churches were constructed, or older churches that had previously served rural parishes were extended and rebuilt. More makeshift provision was characteristic of the rapidly grown margins of the suburb. One solution was the 'tin tabernacles', pre-fabricated corrugated iron churches that were supplied as kits for immediate construction .

Pre-fabricated corrugated galvanised iron buildings originated in Britain in the early nineteenth century, and were particularly targeted towards the expanding British Empire and the gold rush frontier towns in Australia and South Africa (Smith 2004). Manufacture of pre-fabricated churches and chapels began in the 1850s and by 1860 the Liverpool based manufacturer, Francis Morton and Co., had established a dedicated department for the design and manufacture of churches, chapels, and schoolhouses. While their use in the frontier spaces of the empire is relatively well documented, and they were also associated with rapid growth in industrial areas such as the South Wales coalfield, their importance as a form of sacred building in the rather different frontiers of London suburbia is more hidden. Iron churches were constructed around a wooden frame, portable and quick and easy to assemble. While functional and affordable, many saw them as inappropriate for

places of worship, and a betrayal of strongly held notions that connected craft, beauty and the proper form of religious space. The influences of Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement were significant. Ruskin in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) declared the use of mass production and materials such as cast-iron a 'sin' because it pretended 'to a worth which it has not', while William Morris in 1890 decried the way that pre-fabricated architecture was 'spreading like pestilence over the country' (quoted in Dobraszczuk 2104 p. 13; Mornement and Holloway 2007, p.30.)

Nonetheless, both the established churches and other religious groups did make use of iron pre-fabricated buildings, in responding to the rapidity of change in the suburbs. Those 'tin tabernacles' we can trace in Ealing offer a mapping of the emerging geographies of religion in the suburbs and the role of missions from the established churches, as well as non-conformist groups, in evangelising new migrant and suburban populations. An insight into the dynamics of the early Catholic presence in Ealing is evident in the records of an 'iron church' in the grounds of a house on Mattock Lane in central Ealing. The church was built in 1897 by an Irish-born priest, Father Richard O'Halloran, who took over the leadership of a Catholic mission in Ealing in 1894, primarily directed at the Irish migrant population. The foundation of the mission church was controversial and Father O'Halloran enjoyed an uneasy relationship with the Catholic hierarchy. In 1896 Benedictine monks were invited by the Archdiocese to establish a new Catholic mission in Ealing, operating first in several large Victorian houses before construction began on a large priory church in 1902, which was subsequently to become Ealing Abbey. Yet the improvised tin chapel remained and Father O'Halloran continued to operate his maverick parish until 1914, when he was formally excommunicated by the Vatican. The tin chapel was re-used as a scout hall and then in 1929 by Questors' an amateur theatre group, before demolition in the early 1960s. Ealing's Catholic mission tin tabernacle, and its controversial priest, is one local suburban example of wider trends through which the established Catholic hierarchy sought to manage a new urban, and suburban Irish migrant population whose perceived unruly and disruptive presence required discipline and control (Hickman 1995).

Elsewhere in the borough the Anglican church was also responding to the challenge of providing spiritual provision for rapidly growing suburban populations and 'tin tabernacles' provided makeshift solutions to providing worship spaces. In 1901, St Luke's was consecrated as a satellite mission church of the nearby St Stephen's church to minister to the newly expanding suburbs of Drayton Green. This corrugated iron church held twice-daily services on Sundays for up to one hundred

people, although by the postwar period the congregation had dwindled and the mission church was no longer viable, closing in 1952. Half a mile further west the mission church of St Thomas was established for the new suburban districts of Boston Manor. The church was initially formed in the front room of a semi-detached house and served by a vicar who travelled from neighbouring Southall, before a tin tabernacle was constructed in 1909. This church was to be replaced by a new purpose built church in 1933, by celebrated architect Edward Maufe (see below).

Traces of tin tabernacles provide a picture of how space for religious practice was improvised in the emergent suburban landscape as temporary and make-shift buildings. Yet some also remain in suburbia and are part of a wider account of creative reinvention. The tin tabernacle which was built as St Luke's church reopened in May 1953 as the newly consecrated Ealing Liberal Synagogue. The Jewish Liberal congregation had formed a decade earlier in Ealing gathering for worship in private homes and hired halls and the old chapel provided a permanent home for their Torah and a space of festivals, worship and education. The reinvention of the church space to a synagogue was undertaken by members of the community over time. The building remains almost unchanged on the outside, with its original white painted corrugated iron walls and roof (See Figure 1). Inside the original church is divided, with a wood clad sanctuary at the east end, divided from a large hall which is rented as a nursery school. The synagogue makes straightforward and functional use of the former church, retaining the original pews as seating, with the Torah scrolls housed in cupboards directly behind a central lectern. The most significant creative intervention comes in the form of new stained glass windows, replacing those of the original church, which depict a Torah scroll, star of David, Menorah candle and Passover meal. While this adaption has remained little changed since the 1950s, as the current congregation of the synagogue ages, the community is contemplating new creative transformations to the synagogue space, removing the pews to create a lighter, flexible and more open space within the interior, reinventing again the former Anglican worship space.

### **Reinvention: Chapels to Temples, Cinemas to Churches**

The creative adaption of St Luke's corrugated iron chapel into the home of the Ealing Liberal Synagogue in the post-war suburbs is mirrored elsewhere in Ealing. The appropriation and transformation of existing buildings into new sites of worship is not an unusual or unfamiliar story. Vacant warehouses or industrial buildings in the transitional spaces of cities may offer affordable spaces to rent for evangelical churches, mosques or temples and attract less restriction for use as worship space than other buildings (Krause 2008). The conversion of former churches and chapels to non-Christian places of worship reflects planning preferences to safeguard and preserve listed

buildings and may allow new worshippers greater ease in navigating legal restrictions related to worship and building use. However the literature on the religious reuse of existing buildings focuses rather narrowly on planning restrictions, offering surprisingly little discussion of the creative processes by which buildings are adapted and transformed. Here we want to draw on three different buildings in suburban west London to illustrate how their transformation has been possible through the vernacular creative practices of their incumbent faith communities.

The Sri Kanaga Thurkkai Amman (SKTA) Hindu Temple in West Ealing occupies a former Baptist Chapel which was built in 1865. The building was sold in 1991 as congregations declined and worshippers consolidated in other central Baptist churches. The SKTA trust was established by Sri Lankan Tamils from Ealing and wider North-West London in 1991 (the foundation date of 10<sup>th</sup> August is now celebrated in their annual Chariot Festival) in a bid to gain a local worship place, rather than commute to temples in North London. The inaugural ceremony, with worship centred on photographs of three gods from their home temple in Sri Lanka, was held in a rented hall and was followed by successive relocations in temporary worship spaces. The purchase of the former church was ideal because it presented the community, like the Ealing Liberal Synagogue, with a building already designated for religious practice in local planning regulations.

While authorised as a religious building, the material transformation of the former chapel to a Hindu temple is constrained by the building's status, as a locally listed building, which prevents exterior modifications, unlike more extravagant conversions of churches to temples which have occurred in other areas. However the interior of the church has been transformed into a South Indian Hindu worship place through a range of transnational creative practices to install shrines to Hindu gods which were carved in Sri Lanka before being shipped to London (See Figure 2). A creative reworking of the chapel's original architecture has also been achieved through the construction of eight carved sculptures on the side walls of the church, with deities over each of the window arches. At the rear of the building sets of teak doors, surrounded by elaborate painted mouldings are in the process of construction. The painted concrete mouldings are made in situ by visiting Sri Lankan temple artists under commission by members of the SKTA temple trust. Traditions of South Indian Hindu worship are preserved, enabled by underfloor heating to combat the London climate, and the temple is filled with the sounds of chanting, the smell of burning ghee and jasmine flowers. There are strong transnational creative elements in this transformation as the home temple in Sri Lanka remains the spiritual touchstone for the relocated faith community, a recording of its temple bell is played during worship.

The SKTA temple committee is seeking planning permission for extensions to the building, on adjacent properties which they own, to accommodate the large numbers of worshippers that this vibrant temple now attracts. In 2004 they were granted planning permission for a small glazed extension adjacent to the temple building which houses the elaborate cart, built to transport the goddess Durga during the annual Mahotsavam Festival in August. In granting planning permission Ealing's planning inspector dismissed objections from the temple's neighbours and Ealing Green Conservation Advisory Panel regarding the disruption to the integrity of the 'neo-classical proportions' of the original building stating *'The building frontage in my assessment is not of such importance or sensitivity that it should remain unaltered.'* Instead it was argued *'Placing the cart on display could make a vibrant point and positive contribution to the street scene, would help express in a dramatic and attractive fashion both the new religious function of the building and the mixed cultural heritage of the Borough.'* (Quoted in Planning Application Report, July 2004). While the SKTA temple may seek eventually to erect a new purpose built temple, their current temple is a hybrid space, a recreated Hindu space of worship within the existing architecture of the original Baptist chapel.

The West London Islamic Centre is housed in a former catering warehouse off a busy high street in West Ealing and surrounded by recently upgraded social housing. The three storey, L-shaped building with two attached small temporary buildings, has little, beyond a notice board, to denote its role externally. The building was bought in 1996 by a community trust of Muslims, most of whom were migrants from Pakistan to Ealing in the 1960s. The new building replaced the two semi-detached houses, owned since the mid-1980s, which they had previously used as a mosque. The mundane exterior of the building belies the creative adaptation within which provides space for a large prayer hall, women's prayer room, washing spaces, offices, community room and shop and even a gym. If the purposeful Islamification of the space is limited to a mosque patterned carpet in the prayer room, and Moorish blue tiling over the entrances and preacher's seating, this is a building that bears witness to successive interventions in creatively engineering authentic Islamic space. While the eclectic array of furnishings and material culture may lack coherence, and are usually the result of gifts from community members and donors, it is evidence of a creative attempt to shape the functional space of the warehouse into meaningful worship space. This is also a dynamic and constantly improvised space, as room dividers are drawn back to enlarge prayer spaces for Friday prayers, keep-fit classes or Quran classes. The mosque has planning permission to construct an ambitious four-storey replacement for the existing improvised mosque which will have space for workshop alongside a café, crèche and gym, and a major fundraising initiative is now underway. Plans for the new building reflect a mixture of Islamic influences in designs to produce a new modern and functional space which will provide both religious and community space for a dynamic



Muslim community which has been boosted by more recent migrants from Somalia, Yemen and Algeria.

A rather different suburban secular space which has been converted into religious use is provided by the Ealing Christian Centre (ECC) the church founded in 1934 after the tent church mission visit to Ealing of George Jeffries, founder of the Elim Pentecostal Church. The Elim Church moved through a series of buildings in West Ealing and Northfields, including a church hall, and a disused silent cinema. In 1996 the ECC bought the disused Avenue Cinema, an extravagant 'atmospheric' cinema built in the 1930s and designed by architect Cecil Masey as a fantasy landscape of 'Spanish style' with a tented ceiling, fake balconies and courtyard around the main auditorium, and Moorish-style panels and lighting on the exterior. The derelict cinema had previously been used as a nightclub but is Grade II listed and the church community have worked with English Heritage in renovating the interior, repainting and restoring many decorative features (see Figure 3). While this work has been undertaken by members of the church community as an act of service, and safeguards the heritage legacy of the building, the protestant theology of the Elim Pentecostal Church means that there is a clear distancing from the notion that this is a distinctively sacred space. Instead the building's large auditorium offers an ideal functional space for the participatory worship of the church focused on the stage with its lectern and single, simple cross. However one intriguing adaptation has been the reuse of the cavity on the stage that previously housed the large illuminated Compton organ console, which would be raised above the stage on its hydraulic lift and then lowered as the film began, which now opens to reveal ECC's large baptismal bath.

The Ealing Christian Centre's creative reuse of the former cinema offers a more complex approach to understanding the creative presence of faith communities in suburbia. Their own restoration of the former cinema enables a celebration of the cinema architectures of the 1930s even if their own worship practices are not shaped, as is the case at the SKTA temple, by this vibrant material culture. Instead, like the West London Islamic Centre, this is a functional reinvention of suburban space enabling forms of affective mass worship which draw upon the theatricality of the space of the suburban old cinema.

### **Innovation and built form: faith, modernity and suburbia**

In the final section of the paper we explore the possibilities for faith communities to shape architecturally innovative responses to the suburban landscape. Through its history, suburbia has been an under-recognised site of modernity and of distinctively innovative forms of building. Accounts of distinctively suburban forms, such as Venuturi et al's. *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972),

focus on commercial architecture. In Britain far more has been written about the suburban cinemas of the inter-war period than the churches that were built at the same time (and, as the example of the Ealing Christian Centre in the old Avenue cinema suggests, places of worship may be the more lasting presence in the suburban landscape). Yet the suburbs have seen distinctive forms of innovation in built form that have directly and deliberately attempted to create sacred space; sometimes seeking to create spiritual separateness from their surroundings, and sometimes seeking to find the sacred in their contexts. Around London, there were major church building programmes by both the Anglican and Catholic Churches, associated particularly with suburban expansion between the wars, and the development of New Towns and council house estates in the post-war period. These responded to innovations in theology and liturgy, and the potential of new building materials and styles (Yelton and Salmon 2007, Proctor 2014). More recently there have also been innovative newly designed non-Christian places of worship, that have sought to combine traditional religious forms and transnational references with influences both to wider developments in contemporary architecture and to suburban contexts. Here, we counterpoise two different buildings, a church designed by Edward Maufe in the 1930s and a new Islamic centre currently under construction in Harrow, just north of Ealing, designed by architects Mangeria Yvars.

The Church of St Thomas the Apostle was built in Hanwell (now part of the London Borough of Ealing) in 1933, replacing a makeshift 'tin tabernacle'. Its construction was made possible by the sale of another church dedicated to St Thomas in Portman Square in central London. This process of selling assets in the central city as it depopulated in the inter-war period was a key part of the strategy of the Anglican Church in this period. The Middlesex Forty-Five Churches Fund aimed to address concerns about the secularising effects of suburbia through the construction of new places of worship (Walford 2007, Dwyer et al. 2013). St Thomas' was designed by the architect Edward Maufe and its design has been described as an 'exquisitely miniaturised' (Harwood 1995) version of Guildford Cathedral, which Maufe began in 1936, although it was not completed until 1961. Maufe's churches are celebrated for retaining a conventional gothic form but with modernist influences that pared this down to the bare essentials (Glancey 2007). He was strongly influenced by contemporary Swedish modern architecture and sought in his own buildings similar use of space and simplicity to create spiritual meaning and effect. This is particularly evident in St Thomas' with a soaring white interior with a nave and chancel of equal height. Writing in the booklet for the church's consecration Maufe (1934) explained: 'the endeavour has been to provide for the spiritual and practical needs of the Church of England in the parish of St Thomas's in a direct and straightforward way, working along traditional lines but not fearing to use new materials and new methods.' He cited his use of

reinforced concrete, an iconic modern material (Forty 2012), for the foundations and the vault, only their second use on a church in the England, and an innovation noted in contemporary architectural journals (*Architecture and Building News* 1934).

The architectural and artistic innovation at St Thomas's Church was reflected in the work by leading figures in early twentieth century modern art, such as Eric Gill who was commissioned to produce 'Calvary', an arresting sculpture of the crucifixion whose cross forms the tracery of the Church's East Window. Gill is now recognised as an outstanding, if controversial, artistic figure of early twentieth century modernism (MacCarthy 1989) whose works include the famous carving of Prospero and Ariel produced for the new BBC Broadcasting house (1932) and eight relief sculptures on the theme of winds for the headquarters of the London Electric Railway (now Transport for London) in St James' in 1929. Inside the church the artist Vernon Hill contributed a font with distinctive fish motifs which are echoed in carvings of the piscine in the Lady Chapel and main chancery, and a carving over the west door, bronze reliefs depicting waves on the main doors and a Madonna statue in the Lady Chapel. Stained glass windows by the artist Moira Forsyth were included at the West end above the font and in a side children's chapel.

The interior decoration of St Thomas' provided further evidence of the intertwining between narratives of modernity, creativity, suburbia and faith, with the commissioning of artists associated with the department store Heals, where Maufe's wife Prudence was artistic director and pioneer of interior design. In the Lady Chapel Kathleen Roberts created the ceiling painting 'Christ as Morning Star' which is echoed in stars carved in the windows of the chapel and vestry, and Heals' artists provided meticulous decorative work featuring the symbols of St Thomas, a builder's square and the three spears depicting his martyrdom, on light fittings, the carved lecterns, decorative flooring and even on the external drainpipes. Heals were also the providers of many of the interior furnishings including side altars, vestment cupboards, carpets, altar frontals, curtains and candle sticks providing a link between the aspirational domestic interiors of Britain's suburban new homeowners and their new church's decoration.

St Thomas is evidence of artistic and architectural innovation in the suburbs which challenges both straightforward narratives of secular modernity and accounts which identify suburbia as narrowly conformist lacking in innovation or creative invention. Maufe's execution of St Thomas' church also engages explicitly with its suburban location, both in its built form with its red-built exterior echoing the neighbouring semi-detached houses, and in the meticulously decorative detail of the interior. A

particularly effective artistic innovation is a mural by Heals' artist Elisabeth Starling in the Children's Chapel of the annunciation and nativity relocated to Hanwell, completed with the church itself, semi-detached houses and allotment gardens.

There is a rather different artistic engagement with the suburban setting of a new religious building at the Salaam Centre, designed by architects practice Magera Yvars and currently under construction in Harrow, in north-west London, a few miles north of St Thomas. The Salaam Centre has been commissioned by an Ithan'ashari community of Shia Muslims of East African ancestry, who came as migrants to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. Worship previously took place in another improvised pre-fabricated building, a derelict NAAFI hut which the community purchased from the local council in 1990. The construction of a permanent building is the culmination of a long period of transnational fundraising and a concerted process to gain planning permission which was obtained in 2011, with the building under construction in Spring 2015. The aspiration behind the new building is for a centre which will both meet the needs of the Shia Muslim community and also offer facilities for the wider community, hence the carefully chosen name, Salaam Centre, as a deliberate message of invitation. However the building is also intended to be an architecturally innovative and distinctive addition to the north-west London suburban landscape.

The London and Barcelona based architects Magera Yvars, designers of the building, have been active in the promotion of new Islamic architecture in the UK and were the designers of an innovative, but never realised, new mosque in East London (Magera 2011) in addition to buildings in Qatar and Kuwait. The design for the Salaam Centre interprets the message of invitation and inclusion through a series of open linked courtyards. The building design incorporates 'fractal geometric patterning' into the buildings façades allowing daylight to produce 'distinctive geometric shadows' (see Figure 4). The design is intended, explains the architect, Ali Magera, to 'open up the building, inviting visitors inside.' The building's design also engages explicitly with the religious and migration history of the community. Motifs for the geometric patterning of the building's façade were drawn from Persia, India and Tanzania making a direct link to the ancestral origins of the community. However the design's fourth patterns references Harrow's suburban vernacular with motifs inspired by English arts and crafts designer William Morris. The intention is to produce a design which references the community's diasporic journey ending in suburban London. These journeys are echoed in the planned gardens linking the different buildings which include both an 'Islamic' garden and a 'Metroland' suburban British garden. Such direct engagements with the built environment of the contemporary suburbs provide an intriguing parallel with the artistic designs of

Maufe's Anglican church some eighty years earlier with both buildings providing a potent example of the possibilities of religious architectural innovation in suburbia.

### **Conclusion: Suburban religion, creativity and enchantment**

We make three suggestions by way of conclusion. The first is to indicate the significance of religion in the making of suburban spaces and cultures. Very often there is an assumed narrative that represents suburbia as a place of secularising materialism. As noted above, certain kinds of religion have been a strong presence in communal organisation and identity in the 'classic case' of North American suburbia. However the examples cited in this paper emphasise the diversity and longstanding significance of religion for other kinds of suburb cultures and built environments. Even in the UK, which experienced significant decline in church attendance and other measures of organised religion through the twentieth century, religion continues to play a significant role in suburban place-making, and it would be an error to see this as a residual feature of suburban culture. Of particular importance are those faiths associated with diasporic groups, where religious identity can be a powerful focus for identity and associational culture. Like many other suburban formations, the London suburbs are no longer secondary destinations in patterns of migration, but are directly plugged into transnational geographies that by-pass the central city.

Second, our paper emphasises the unexpected significance of suburbs as spaces for creative intervention in the built environment, where people have the capacity and capabilities for active place-making. A strong strand of work in cultural studies and social history, sometimes known as the 'new suburban studies,' argues that suburbs cannot be written off as sites of passive consumption or dull conformity (Silverstone 1997; Gilbert 2011; Gilbert 2015). Oliver et al.'s (1981) reinterpretation of the semi-detached suburban house recognised the creative practices of suburban residents in the transformations of their houses through home improvements, interior decoration and gardening. Suburban gardens can be sites of experimentation, design and innovation (Preston 1999), while the creative adaptation of suburban domestic space, including the diverse uses made of the 'ordinary' garden shed (Barker 2009), provide evidence of lay expertise and 'vernacular creativity' (Edensor et al. 2009). Parallel work on the geographies of making and crafting recover the role of domestic space in the revival of creative economies (Gauntlett 2011). Our paper traces a distinctive, if often ignored relationship, between this rediscovery of everyday or vernacular creativity in suburbia and religious faith. We suggest that the special importance of religious space, and the desire to make it different or separate from ordinary space is a strong impetus for active creative practice.

Our final comment relates to that 'specialness' of religious space. Recent approaches to the idea of sacred space move beyond both the structuralist position of Mircea Eliade (1959)[ref?] and the social constructivist critique of that approach (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Chidester & Linenthal, 1995), towards an emphasis that includes due attention to the power of affect in space (della Dora 2011; 2015). Although this work has seen a shift towards thinking about the significance of the sacred in the spaces of everyday life (moving away from Eliade's central concern for the demarcation of sacred and secular spaces), what has been missing is analysis of the active role of people in making spaces of enchantment. There are of course profound differences in the relationships between theology, liturgy, practice and architecture even in the limited range of examples presented here; there are also significant contrasts in terms of power and the coherence of creative vision between architects like Maufe or Mangera, and the kind of ad-hoc bricolage approach to the enchantment of space at the West London Islamic Centre, the SKTA temple or the tin tabernacles. Yet what they share, we suggest, is a common response to ideas of the suburban world as mundane, prosaic and profane, and a desire to make special places through creative practice.

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Figure One: Ealing Liberal Synagogue (Credit: Authors)



Figure Two: Sri Kanaga Thurkkai Amman Temple, West Ealing (Credit: Authors)



Figure Three: Ealing Christian Centre (Photo Credit: Laura Cuch)



Figure Four: Architect's Image for the Salaam Centre (Photo Credit: MYAA, used with permission)

