

# RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SUBURB

## Abstract

The suburb is a global phenomenon. Its seeds were sown in early industrial Britain and it has since spread throughout much of the former British Empire and the world. The Arabian Gulf littoral was one site in which suburban development took hold, and it is the oscillation of one of its cities' center of gravity from the pre-oil historic urban core to the new periphery and back again that is the focus of this essay. In the wake of the oil boom, Kuwait City at once expanded and lost its traditional urban core and thus its character. The suburbanity of Kuwait has become a source of much lament. Yet instead of a return to the city, the Kuwaiti quest for urban salvage has taken a different route, that of attempting to perfect the suburb. Germinating within one of suburbia's spatial types, though, are the kernels of such a return. In Kuwait, a simmering urban longing has been incubated by a fundamentally suburban artifact: the shopping mall. The Avenues is Kuwait's largest and most consequential mall, within which is an artificial re-creation of a cosmopolitan promenade and an alleyway-style market inspired by the old city fabric. By striving to bring the outside in, the mall effectively affords a pedestrian urbanism away from the city's car-dominated built environment. Though brandable as aesthetically kitsch, environmentally unsustainable, and politically facile—as a crude response to modern Kuwait's lacking urban character—The Avenues is an example of the fruitfulness of the alignment of architecture and mock urbanism. The presumptively low-brow here acts as a catalyst for a collective reappreciation of the urban. By becoming a crucible around which Kuwaitis have come to face the legacies of their urban past, this case of spatial historical fiction in the periphery prods them, even if ever so slightly, toward questioning the center's status quo.

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## Introduction

Underlying the seeming arbitrariness of a city's morphology tends to be a logic particular to the set of forces which have driven its growth.<sup>1</sup> To look at the city as a project means to acknowledge the many forces—visible and invisible—and the choices—conscious and unconscious—that give this complex entity a life of its own.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the project that is the city may be an endangered one; the main culprit behind the demise of the city as we have known it is the suburb, which is itself not sustainable.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise that the return to the city was heralded as early as the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> New urbanism subsequently arose to advocate the reprisal of traditional (Western) urban design and planning principles in the face of urban depopulation and suburban sprawl.<sup>5</sup> At the turn of the century, hopes were still high for a metropolitan restoration. In 1999, Britain's Urban Task Force led by Richard Rogers produced a lengthy report, titled "Towards an Urban Renaissance," to serve as a roadmap by which the Kingdom's cities and towns were to successfully compete with its suburbs. Its purpose was to make clear, in both descriptive and prescriptive terms, that the qualities of central urban areas "outweigh the attractions of suburban living . . . [in order to] persuade more families to stay."<sup>6</sup> Across the Atlantic, Robert Fishman went so far as to envisage a "fifth migration," a mass movement countering decentralization and serving to "reurbanize precisely those inner-city districts that were previously depopulated."<sup>7</sup> Urban planning wisdom holds that the health and long-term viability of cities depends on this sort of reurbanization. Whether a mass return from the suburbs pans out remains to be seen.<sup>8</sup>

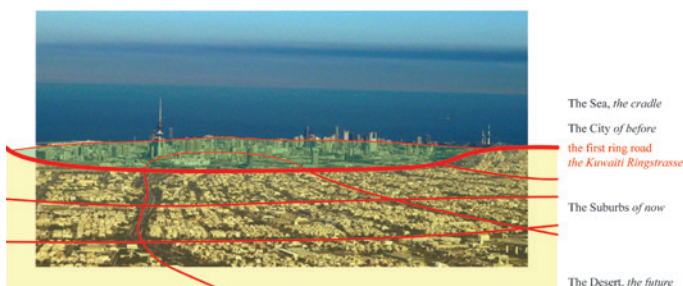


Figure 1: Taking the place of the city wall, the First Ring Road separates the coastal footprint of the original city of Kuwait from the radial grid of its suburbs which expand inland. (Base image source: [megaconstruccionen.net/en/kuwait-city/](http://megaconstruccionen.net/en/kuwait-city/).)

The suburb is a global phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> Its seeds are as old as industrialization. The centrifugal force of suburbanization arose as a reaction to the state of the leading cities of industrial modernity in the British Isles.<sup>10</sup> The rise of the Garden City was a form of proto-suburbanization which spread throughout much of the British Empire and also to some theretofore backwaters of the Global South.<sup>11</sup> The Arabian Gulf littoral was one site in which some of these developments played out, and it is the oscillation of one of its cities' center of gravity from the pre-oil historic urban core to the new periphery and back again that is the focus of this essay.

To bring together the house and the desert, the British in Arabia adapted the marriage that took place between the house and the park in the English countryside. This was a logic of city-making with which Kuwait has had to contend for the greater part of the past century.<sup>12</sup> The oil-fueled recomposition of this city-state yielded an urban morphology which experts have not ceased to lambaste.<sup>13</sup> The Kuwaiti quest for urban salvage takes a route that contrasts with that which is advocated by contemporary urban experts in the Western world.<sup>14</sup> That is, the approach in Kuwait has been to attempt to perfect the suburb rather than find a viable urban alternative signified by a return to the city.<sup>15</sup> However, germinating within some of suburbia's spatial types are the kernels of such a return.

## Hindsight: Blinded While Oil Rich

For three centuries, a fishing and pearl-diving community developed around the remains of a Portuguese fort on the Arabian Gulf.<sup>16</sup> By the early twentieth century, the mercantile town had become a fledgling city, described by a British orientalist as the "Marseilles of the Persian Gulf."<sup>17</sup> Kuwait maintained its autonomy from the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, becoming a British protectorate in 1899.<sup>18</sup> British cartography and subsequent aerial surveys testify to the growth of Kuwait which had become an expansive city of mud-brick architecture along winding streets and narrow alleyways.

The discovery of oil in the late 1930s radically affected the course of Kuwait, the city and the state. While original Kuwait was a seafaring community whose growth was closely linked to the coast, modernization turned the city's focus over to desert to which it formerly had its back. The newly discovered sea of oil below the ground displaced the sea beyond the ground as the economic patron of the city. And beyond the city wall was untapped space that the city-makers envisioned to be the future of the city. The oil boom sparked a period of rapid urban renewal which radically altered the character of the nascent metropolis. Slated to take the place of the old city was a central business district for a modern city. Because most of the old city's architecture was made of mud, it was literally leveled to the ground to make way for modern architecture and infrastructure. One of the more interesting effects of the erasure of the old fabric was that its demolition raised the city's grade level; of the few building types to be preserved were mosques, many of which are entered nowadays by descending a set of steps, thus serving as markers of a bygone stratum.<sup>19</sup> In essence, the mud-brick jungle became a modernist concrete karst.

Having consigned the extant city to demolition, the planning authorities set out to establish alternative residential areas to house its inhabitants. For Kuwaitis, moving to new residential areas exclusively zoned and designed as such and allowing the old city to be all but erased was to augur Kuwait's entry into modernity. Based on British development plans which were influenced by principles as diverse as those of the Garden City movement and Team 10, the old city was progressively encircled by concentric layers of residential zones.<sup>20</sup> The First Ring Road replaced the old city wall,

indicating that modernity meant that Kuwaitis had to relinquish their traditional boundary and conquer the hinterland (figure 1). Further ring roads separated the new residential bands and defined the structure of the semicircular grid of the modern city of Kuwait, solidifying the vehicle's position as the only viable mode of transport.<sup>21</sup> As the original area of Kuwait City crumbled, the suburbs emerged as the Kuwaiti milieu par excellence.

The suburban experiment that began half a century ago has become the Kuwait to which Kuwaitis have come to relate. The residential areas surrounding the center are devoted almost exclusively to single-family homes. Just about all Kuwaitis live in these suburbs and no longer have a propinquity connection to the original city.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it is the ostensibly transient expatriates who live in Kuwait City, generally occupying multi-dwelling units.<sup>23</sup> This signifies that the modern Kuwaiti sense of place is rooted in the suburb rather than the city.<sup>24</sup> To continue developing Kuwait's built environment, the natural Kuwaiti pursuit has become to perfect suburbia. The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has not been able to keep up with the demand for housing and has ceased not to propose increasingly large suburbs of detached single-family houses, developing "plans to create satellite cities and towns [i.e., bedroom communities] in the outlying regions."<sup>25</sup> However, the turn of this century has also seen a sense of urban resurgence overtake Kuwait in parallel to the nation's quest for suburban perfection. This unforeseen resurgence—a reanimation of a particular urban condition—has been sparked by a fundamentally suburban artifact: the shopping mall.

### **Delight: Reminded by Consumer Kitsch**

The widespread success of malls in Kuwait follows their proliferation after the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and subsequent liberation.<sup>26</sup> Reconstruction meant that the government and the people were thirsty for large-scale developments, many of which manifested themselves as commercial shopping centers.<sup>27</sup> They became popular public spaces in a city with a dearth of traditional urban open spaces. The largest and most consequential mall in Kuwait is The Avenues, the first phase of which opened to the public in 2007 (figure 2).<sup>28</sup> Designed by Gensler, the third, penultimate phase of the mall unveiled an artificial re-creation of an outdoor environment;<sup>29</sup> a cosmopolitan promenade dubbed the "Grand Avenue" was introduced alongside "The Souk," an alleyway-style market inspired by the old city fabric.<sup>30</sup>

By striving to bring the outside in, the mall effectively affords a pedestrian urbanism away from the outdoor autopia on the turf of which the former cannot compete (figure 3). The expansive Avenues embraces the fact that the modern Kuwaiti lifestyle is dependent on the energy-intensive air conditioner. The simulated boulevard does not simply shield people from the extreme heat of Kuwait's climate but also ensures a constant, cool ambient temperature, and has thus become a year-round attraction—a national amenity.<sup>31</sup> Underwriting all this is cheap oil.<sup>32</sup> Rather than spending their time locomoting in cool cars—or even

roaming in them, for "let's take a walk," in Kuwait, has also meant "let's go for a ride"—the many patrons of the Grand Avenue and its adjacent spaces spend their time strolling in the zephyr of modern, mechanical air conditioning.<sup>33</sup> Gas is guzzled whether the vessel of one's escapade from heat is a vehicle or a building. The Avenues is the architectural crystallization of modern Kuwait's utter reliance on fossil fuel-based comfort. The price of a walk in one of the world's largest malls may be free, but its true cost is credited to a planetary toll.

Be that as it may, no enterprise can be expected to freely call attention to its externalities, let alone dwell on them. This is especially true when that which is offered to the public is an experience. Indeed, the mall's raison d'être is to provide a space free from the unpleasantness of the city. For the mall-going public, ignorance is bliss, no matter how provisional.<sup>34</sup> The Avenues is far from a completely novel space. Its expansion took to heart what Margaret Crawford has described as "the basic mall trope":

"an inverted space whose forbidding exteriors hid paradisiacal interiors. . . . next was to reproduce the single missing element in suburbia—the city. The enclosed mall compressed and intensified space. . . . Architects manipulated space and light to achieve the density and bustle of the city downtown—to create essentially a fantasy urbanism devoid of the city's negative aspects: weather, traffic, and poor people. . . . an escapist cocoon."<sup>35</sup>

As a "simulated downtown-in-the-suburbs," The Avenues is such a cocoon.<sup>36</sup> Its design took seriously the suspension of disbelief that a viable urban phantasmagoria necessitates.<sup>37</sup> And in Kuwait, it found a captivated audience. This interior mercantile space is an ostensible development of the English arcade toward a denial of interiority through a masquerade of open-air leisure. As a building type, the suburban shopping mall is a postwar American development.<sup>38</sup> But its roots are much older; the age-old covered urban markets of the Islamic World and the nineteenth-century shopping arcades in the European metropolises are major nodes in the historical phylogenesis of the mall.<sup>39</sup> In its design, The Avenues' expansion harkens back to Europe's glazed, vaulted commercial passages. Spanning over the mall's corridors and shop windows which mimic storefront-lined streetscapes are vaulted semi-transparent polymer panels, together producing an airy setting that straddles the line between interior and exterior.<sup>40</sup> As outside-in spaces, these shopping galleries sustain the experience of being at once indoors and out—or more precisely—imagining that one is outdoors by being made to forget that one is enclosed by a building.

Yet, The Avenues is not content with simply offering "the scale and feel of London's Oxford Street, recast in a Kuwaiti context."<sup>41</sup> It also introduces the latter into the former's world of in-betweens. That is to say, in The Avenues, the old Kuwaiti souk is remade into an arcade (figure 4). Just as its promenades proffer a Europe-in-Arabia, the mall's Arabianized arcades proffer the neo-souk experience of an old Arabia



repackaged. The mall becomes host to a convergence of ersatz urban environments that are typologically related but historically and geographically distant. One way to read this deliberate juxtaposition is to recognize a flattening of difference perpetuated by global consumer capitalism.<sup>42</sup> Another would be to recognize something akin to genetic atavism, that is, a contiguous re-emergence of long lost types embedded in the genealogical makeup of the mall. Globalization's product in this reading is not so much a flattening as it is a rediscovery and reanimation of the intercultural exchange and cross-pollination that is international commerce.

Unlike arcades and bazaars, though, the Grand Avenue and the Souk are not de jure public spaces; they are not covered passages within a network of city streets and passages.<sup>43</sup> Little in the making of these spaces is emergent or communal. Much is calculated and preconceived. They are privately owned, designed, and managed spaces where the commercial logic of foot traffic substitutes for the vagaries of public life. The Avenues is a volitional privately owned public space.<sup>44</sup> In this paradigm of city-making, the benevolent developer becomes the grand purveyor of urban experience. In the absence of a living city, the inhabitants of Kuwait experience urban life vicariously through polished brandscapes.<sup>45</sup> To the lost genuine cityscape, The Avenues offers opportune alternatives: well-made knock offs.

While one can imagine a sanctimonious reaction from within architecture circles casting this approach as kitsch, as a crude response to modern Kuwait's lacking urban character, the public response was overwhelmingly positive. These interior spaces became immensely popular, cementing The Avenues' position as Kuwait's premier mall and a major attraction for visitors from surrounding countries.<sup>46</sup> What it has also proven is that a people so entangled with their vehicles still yearn for a traditional streetscape, where the tactile proximity to architecture and a slower (pedestrian) experience of space can compete with an automotive culture that ensures fast air-conditioned movement between air-conditioned spaces. Although Crawford spoke of an American downtown restimulation that was a result of the introduction of malls into the city, the major response to the mall in Kuwait has not been an analogous reproduction of the suburban simulation within its center.<sup>47</sup> Rather, a more productive effect of The Avenues' architectural experiment was that the creation of an artificial souk actually revitalized the decaying original which it had mimicked. The Avenues' Souk design recapitulated the experience of Al-Mubarakiya market, a famous traditional souk which had long been in decline since its heyday in pre-oil Kuwait (figure 5).<sup>48</sup> The success of the imitation led many people to reconnect with the souk-type and thus rediscover Al-Mubarakiya, which has reemerged as a preeminent public space in the city center.<sup>49</sup> This dynamic illustrates the power that an architectural undertaking can possess in engendering an urbanistic reaction from a public long estranged from the local urban experience.<sup>50</sup>

## Plebiscite: Winded by an Urban Itch

In The Avenues, patrons become figures in an assemblage of life-sized dioramas. Anachronisms and anachronisms are enacted as these denizens of twenty-first-century Kuwait stroll around the mall. To do so willingly and eagerly is to uphold the synergy on which the spatial type is built. The mall's multivalent role is that of a social, economic, and cultural aggregator. One no longer has to choose between running an errand or indulging in an immersive alternate reality. All is served at the mall and all are welcome. As Crawford puts it, the "principle of adjacent attraction is now operating at a societal level, imposing an exchange of attributes between the museum and the shopping mall, between commerce and culture."<sup>51</sup> Images of past Kuwaiti urban culture and forward-looking international commerce straddle one another in The Avenues. Aside from its commercial function, the Souk is a cultural repository on permanent public display. In a spatio-temporal endosymbiosis, The Avenues preserves this historical sample of a city for which it has come to symbolize the future.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the mall is not simply a symbol of the intransigent gulf between city and suburb. The mall has become the site of the interplay of Kuwait the urban and Kuwait the suburban. When the Virtual Kuwait City Team, an urban research group at Kuwait University's College of Architecture whose purpose is to salvage the pre-oil morphology from oblivion, put up the first exhibition of their work, they did so at The Avenues. This was the place to get images of the team's three-dimensional digital model of the old city of Kuwait in front of the broadest swath of people possible.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, occupying part of the suburban mall was the surest way to ensure that the public beheld the urban fabric which the mall has come to stand in for.

If the street has joined the market within the mall, then the square was not too far behind. The specter of politics combines with commerce and culture to complete the social trifecta which have found haven in the mall. After a contentious parliamentary election in 2013, the speaker of the National Assembly organized a statewide survey of citizen priorities to help guide the legislative body.<sup>54</sup> The site of choice for this survey was The Avenues. The decision to host in-person data collection at the mall was a stark admission that The Avenues constituted a manifest public space in the nation, if not *the* public space. The following year, the speaker planned another public survey at The Avenues which the prime minister was also set to attend, but public calls to protest and the mall administration's concerns about politicizing the space scuttled the plans.<sup>55</sup> While the first survey established that The Avenues was a physical site for public assembly and deliberation, the second demonstrated that it was a space of potential protest which was itself contested. As a constituent of the Kuwaiti public sphere, The Avenues became at once a site and object of contestation. This ostensible sphere of shopping in street's clothing attracted more than packs of hungry shoppers; for a moment in time, it became a space for citizens qua citizens: a Main Street Kuwait.



Figure 2: Phase 3 of The Avenues (polychrome, on the left) is comprised of several themed zones. Extending Phase 3, Phase 4 (not shown here) is similarly comprised of themed zones, adding to the types of urban environments that the mall attempts to mimic. (Source: The Avenues For Advertising, Distribution & Technical Production Co. [https://www.the-avenues.com/FfP\\_lsEFuToM9pcHfGRZ\\_Lp9h6VCenM3MB1L0lpIT62bKws2PsvIPI\\_MaKN0mEoQinGS1IptJL2BNPw3Nft4LBUAOp0Xe7r0n5BTj1QXxALBdTg6E12fg==](https://www.the-avenues.com/FfP_lsEFuToM9pcHfGRZ_Lp9h6VCenM3MB1L0lpIT62bKws2PsvIPI_MaKN0mEoQinGS1IptJL2BNPw3Nft4LBUAOp0Xe7r0n5BTj1QXxALBdTg6E12fg==).)

The Avenues' owners obviously balked at the idea of their mall becoming a public space as messily public as the streets and plazas of the city center.<sup>56</sup> Politics would only get in the way of a total escapist experience. The mall's brush with political discord reinforced that it is only public to a limit. The Avenues has since embraced a purely dual identity as Kuwait's prime convergence of commerce and culture, continuing to serve as host to endless apolitical events and initiatives that have reached wide audiences. If any qualms are raised about the introverted exercise of its "corporate social responsibility," one could point to the unintended consequence of catalyzing the resurgence of the traditional market in the heart of the city. And if The Avenues were to be pushed to give back more substantively to the city whose energy it has absorbed, it is not inconceivable that it would venture to find some other forgotten parts of past Kuwait to add to its collection of faux streets and blocks.

While it is easy to dismiss much of the architectural output of the corporate powers that run our world, The Avenues is but an example of the fruitfulness of the alignment of architecture and (mock) urbanism. Less an acquiescence to kitschy vernacular à la *Learning from Las Vegas* than an instance of cultural-commercial mimesis à la Lascaux II, here the presumptively low-brow acts as a catalyst for a collective return to urban authenticity, as problematic as the latter concept is.<sup>57</sup> The physical enterprise constitutes a medium of both public history and spatial history.<sup>58</sup> By becoming a crucible around which Kuwaitis have come to face the legacies of their urban past, this case of spatial historical fiction in the periphery prods them, even if ever so slightly, toward questioning the center's status quo. It may be too generous to say that it has challenged them to grapple with their collective loss and begin to right past wrongs, but at least it has made palpable the possibility of such a question.

As a suburban development par excellence, the mall has been a productive foil against which the urban center is reflected. Indeed, the suburb has long been the city's constitutive outside. But this dichotomy is far from stable.<sup>59</sup> Be it in the Kuwaiti desert today or the English countryside of yesteryear, investment in the periphery produces perches from which to sustain a reconsideration of the urban center from a distance. This distance is sometimes itself questioned, as evinced by the incursion of suburban types into city centers. Even so, The Avenues may go so far as to suggest a suburban self-questioning. With a planetary ecological crisis on the horizon, the incongruence of the Kuwait of today and a post-oil urban future is not so much the elephant in the room as it is a dead horse.<sup>60</sup> Summoning a public in a way that no other Kuwaiti space can, the not-so-subtle Avenues has the potential to be a subtle springboard for critical questions that interrogate the model of (sub)urban development thus far as it bears on the sustainability of the city-state: What happens to the megamall when oil is too expensive or too scarce for suburban excess? How will artificial ambience be judged when the wells run dry and the air conditioning on which it relies is no longer a given? When the mall is an uninhabitable shell, where goes a public which has not invested in producing urban public space because it has been making do with private simulations of the city? Precarious is the future presaged by so comfortable a status quo. Perhaps Kuwait the suburban, deep down, in the guise of The Avenues, knows this. Perhaps in its reincarnation of the old city, The Avenues, like the prodigal son who carries within himself the genes of the very father against whom he rebels, prefigures an eventual retreat from its own excesses. Perhaps, as the suburban artifact perfected, The Avenues, rather than being a mere simulacrum, opens up a wormhole back into the city.





Figure 3: The Grand Avenue simulates the famed boulevards of the West.  
 (Credit: Nick Merrick/Hedrich Blessing. Source: [pace-kuwait.com/portfolio/the-avenues-phase-iii.](http://pace-kuwait.com/portfolio/the-avenues-phase-iii/))



Figure 4: The Souk simulates a traditional Arabian market.  
 (Credit: Tariq Shaikh [Gensler-London] Nick Merrick/Hedrich Blessing. Source: [gensler.com/research-insight/in-focus/talk-of-the-town.](http://gensler.com/research-insight/in-focus/talk-of-the-town/))



Figure 5: Souk Al-Mubarakia is a traditional market in Kuwait's city center.  
 (Source: Travel Notes. [http://ttnotes.com/souq-marbarakia.html#gal\\_post\\_43572\\_souq-marbarakia-kuwait-city-1.jpg.](http://ttnotes.com/souq-marbarakia.html#gal_post_43572_souq-marbarakia-kuwait-city-1.jpg))

## Notes

1. Whether understood as an entity with a life of its own or as a reflection of the social, political, and economic dynamics, the city as a discrete, explainable, physical phenomenon is at the center of the discipline of urban morphology. See Pierre Gauthier and Jason Gilliland, "Mapping Urban Morphology: A Classification Scheme for Interpreting Contributions to the Study of Urban Form," *Urban Morphology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 41–50.
2. Pier Vittorio Aureli has asserted that the city is an ideationally informed political formation whether conceived as such or not, advancing this argument. See Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The City As a Project* (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2013).
3. Lewis Mumford's is a prime example of a sharp-witted critique of the post-World War II American suburban exodus: "Under the present dispensation we have sold our urban birthright for a sorry mess of motor cars. . . . But our descendants will perhaps understand our curious willingness to expend billions of dollars to shoot a sacrificial victim into planetary orbit, if they realize that our cities are being destroyed for the same superstitious religious ritual: the worship of speed and empty space." Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961): 486. See also Lewis Mumford, *The Urban Prospect* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968). Moreover, Jane Jacobs' classic was as much a critique of suburbanization as it was of urban renewal. See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). See also Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). And see James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).
4. For example, see Dennis E. Gale, "The back-to-the-city movement . . . or is it?" Occasional Paper, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, George Washington University, 1976, and Dennis E. Gale, "The back-to-the-city movement revisited," Occasional Paper, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, George Washington University, 1977. For a more recent global, Hispanic take on the subject, see Lawrence A. Herzog, *Return to the Center: Culture, Public Space, and City-Building in a Global Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
5. See Douglas Kelbaugh, *Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).
6. Urban Task Force and Richard Rogers. *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (London: Spon, 1999): 2–11.
7. Robert Fishman, "The Fifth Migration," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 4 (2005): 357.
8. Scholars have disputed the assertion of a substantive movement of people from suburbs to cities: See Edward Glaeser and Jesse Shapiro, "Urban Growth in the 1990s: Is City Living Back?" *Journal of Regional Science* 43 (2003): 139–165. Moreover, Joel Kotkin's oeuvre emphasizes that suburbia is humankind's future.
9. See Ann Forsyth, "Global Suburbia and the Transition Century: Physical Suburbs in the Long Term," *Urban Design International* 19, no. 4 (2013): 259–273.
10. Lewis Mumford argued that the suburb is as ancient as the city, with suburbanization in the modern industrial era taking on a mass scale. See Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 1961.
11. See Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).
12. One of the British's lasting impacts on the country is their reshaping of the city. Kuwait became a site in which British urban design and planning thought enacted itself. For an overview of post-World War II British town planning, see Peter J. Larkham, "Remaking Cities: Images, Control, and Postwar Replanning in the United Kingdom," *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science* 24, no. 5 (1997): 741–759. The re-urbanization of Kuwait City was one of many global experiments in modern urbanism. See Deborah Domingo Calabuig, Raul Castellanos Gomez, and Ana Abalos Ramos, "The Strategies of Mat-building," *Architectural Review* 1398 (August 2013): 83–91. For another prominent example in the Global South, see Adnan Morshed, "Dhaka—The Perils and Promises of an Asian Megacity," in *The Rise of Megacities: Challenges, Opportunities and Unique Characteristics* (London: World Scientific, 2018).
13. For a critique of the British-instigated modernist urban planning that reshaped Kuwait, see Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2016). Also see Asseel Al-Ragam, "Towards a Critique of a Kuwaiti Nahdha: Al-'Imara al-Haditha and the Competing Narratives on Architecture and Urban Modernity" in *Essays, Arguments & Interviews on Modern Architecture Kuwait*, ed. Ricardo Camacho, Sara Saragoça, and Roberto Fabbri (Salenstein, Switzerland: Niggli, 2017). Both cite a then planner's critique: See Saba Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanization* (Kuwait: Government Printing Press, 1964).
14. Two documentaries best exemplify the alarm with which Western urban planners have approached the suburbanization
15. Despite the urbanist focus on revitalizing cities, there have been many attempts in the West to salvage the suburban model. For example, Ann Forsyth's *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
16. The existence of this fort and its Portuguese provenance are in dispute. See H. V. F. Winstone and Zahra Freeth, *Kuwait: Prospect and Reality* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972): 38; and B. J. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait* (Leiden: Brill, 1991): 89–103. Kuwait is the diminutive form of the word "kout" which means fort.
17. Harold C. Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia, Ibn Saud: An Intimate Study of a King*. [1924]. (Beirut: Khayat's College Book Cooperative, 1954): 18.
18. For more on this, see Briton Cooper Busch, "Britain and the Status of Kuwait 1896–1899," *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 187–198.
19. Having been perplexed for years by the fact that many old mosques in Kuwait City lie slightly below grade, I am indebted to Deema AlGhunaim for sharing her father's, geographer Abdullah Al-Ghunaim's, explanation that this is due to the leveling of Kuwait's traditional mud-brick city fabric which had surrounded the mosques. Deema AlGhunaim, "Presentation of multidisciplinary initiative and online platform Madeenah," Startup Weekend Kuwait, February 6, 2014, College of Engineering, Kuwait University. For more on Madeenah and its attempt to revive an urban consciousness, see Sarah Jurkiewicz, "Cultural Activism Through Spatial Practices: Walking Tours and Urban Gardening in Kuwait City" (Working Papers 14, Zentrum Moderner Orient, 2016). <https://d-nb.info/1099933366/34>.
20. See Asseel Al-Ragam, "Towards a Critique of a Kuwaiti Nahdha," 2017.
21. At roughly the same time that Reyner Banham was extolling Los Angeles' "autopia," Ralph Hewins lamented Kuwait's becoming as much. See Ralph Hewins, *A Golden Dream: The Miracle of Kuwait* (London: W. A. Allen, 1963).
22. The erosion of Kuwait's city center may be understood as a precipitous variant of Duany et al's "Pensacola Syndrome" wherein the prioritization of car traffic cannibalizes the urban center which it supposedly serves. See Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000): 162.
23. For more on the differences between citizens and expatriates, see Philipp Rode, Alexandra Gomes, Muhammad Adeel, Fizzah Sajjad, Jenny McArthur, Sharifa Alshalfan, Peter Schwinger, Devisari Tunas Christiane Lange, Clemence Montagne, Steffen Hertog, Andreas Koch, Syed Monjur Murshed, Jochen Wendel, and Alice Duval, *Resource Urbanisms: Asia's divergent city models of Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Hong Kong* (London: LSE Cities, 2017), <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86457/>.
24. In 2005, the expatriate population in the city center was about 15 times that of the citizens' therein. See "General Population Census (Final Result) 2005" (Kuwait: Central Statistical Bureau, 2005).
25. "Kuwait Mega Projects 2010–2014," Kuwait Embassy in Japan, uploaded August 20, 2010, [kuwait-embassy.or.jp/pdf/kuwait-five-year-plan.pdf](http://kuwait-embassy.or.jp/pdf/kuwait-five-year-plan.pdf). By the end of the first decade of this century, PAHW's housing waitlist had more than 100,000 applicants, which is roughly equal to the number of applicants to whom PAHW had dispersed housing units during the six prior decades. See Sharifah AlShalfan, "The Right to Housing in Kuwait: An Urban Injustice in a Socially Just System," Research Paper 28, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, May 2013), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18581869.pdf>.
26. For a short report on the scale of destruction and reconstruction, see Huda Al-Bahar, "Kuwait's Post-War Reconstruction," *Mimar* 40 (1991): 14–17.
27. Establishing upscale shopping centers can be read as the private sector's mercantile contribution to the struggling, government-led effort to restart the Kuwaiti economy in the postwar period. It can also be read as a scramble to capitalize on a socio-economic gap in the retail market. For more on what some have deemed a missed opportunity beyond the economic, see Sultan Barakat and John Skelton, "The Reconstruction of Postwar Kuwait: A Missed Opportunity?" Research Paper 37, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance, and Globalisation in the Gulf States (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, November 2014), [eprints.lse.ac.uk/55337/1/Barakat\\_Skelton\\_2014.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/55337/1/Barakat_Skelton_2014.pdf).



28. See Richard Storer-Adam, "The Avenues, Kuwait—A Lifestyle Destination," *Double Stone Steel Ltd.* (blog), October 31, 2017. <https://www.doublestonesteel.com/blog/design/avenues-kuwait-lifestyle-destination>. So successful has The Avenues been, its developer has established another Avenues in Manama, Bahrain, and has plans to build outposts in Riyadh and Khobar, Saudi Arabia, and Sharjah, UAE. See Mohammed Abdulaziz AlShaya, "The Chairman of the Board's Message," Mabanee Real Estate Co., *Annual Report 2018*, [www.mabanee.com](http://www.mabanee.com). For more on "the only high-quality megamall in Kuwait," see "Mabanee Co.: Equity Research June 2011," (KAMCO Research, KIPCO Asset Management Company, 2011): 8–13, [content.argaam.com.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ec5f97e4-8142-485c-a350-421f39168b90.pdf](http://content.argaam.com.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ec5f97e4-8142-485c-a350-421f39168b90.pdf).
29. For a fly-through animation of the penultimate and ultimate phases of The Avenues, see "Avenues 2009," *Our Studio*, <https://vimeo.com/116945866>.
30. The indoor promenade was modeled on Paris' Champs Elysees and Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive. The architects describe the mall as "an urbane, walkable place that invites shoppers to explore it in comfort year-round." See Vernon Mays, "Talk of the Town," *Dialogue* 23 (2013): 14–21, and Vernon Mays, "The Middle East + Europe," *Dialogue* 26 (2014): 24–29.
31. A comical response to Kuwait's breaking of the heat record in 2018 was Burger King's "sun flame grilled whopper" promotional campaign. See "Burger King Serves Sandwiches Flame-Grilled by Sun," *Arab News*, July 24, 2018, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1344836/corporate-news>.
32. The co-evolution of homo modernus and air conditioning is far from sustainable. The modern ubiquity of air conditioning is the result of a socio-economic outlook that takes carbon-based largesse for granted. Simply put, air conditioning is a bad habit. See Harold Wilhite, "Towards a Better Accounting of the Roles of Body, Things and Habits in Consumption," *COLLEGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 12 (2012): 87–99. For more on this subject, see the 2008 special issue of *Building Research & Information*, "Comfort in a Lower Carbon Society."
33. In Kuwaiti colloquial speech, there are two words for "we walk:" "nemshi" which means "we (briskly) walk," and "nitmesha" which means "we (leisurely) walk." It is the latter that encompasses vehicular flaneur-ing.
34. For more on what the mall as a type displays and conceals, see the dizzying *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (2002). If that tome is understandably overwhelming, Frederic Jameson's review and theorization of the publication may provide some clarification; see Frederic Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review* 21 (2003).
35. Margaret Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall" in *The City Cultures Reader*, 2nd ed., eds. Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall, and Iain Borden (London: Routledge, 2004): 134.
36. Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 135.
37. Other totalizing, world-reproducing interiors have been identified by critics; Frederic Jameson has scrutinized the megahotel and Robert Somol the casino. See Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984); and Robert Somol, "Cartoon Plan," *Flat Out* 1 (2016).
38. See Lizbeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996): 1050–1081.
39. Beyond published material, several master's theses have engaged some aspect of the transhistorical connection between bazaar and mall. See Asli Tokman, "Negotiating Tradition, Modernity and Identity in Consumer Space: A Study of a Shopping Mall and Revived Coffeehouse," (master's thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, 2001); Buket Ergun Kocaili, "Evolution of Shopping Malls: Recent Trends and The Question of Regeneration," (master's thesis, Cankaya University, Ankara, Turkey, 2010); Zoha Niazi, "The 'pedestrian realm' as a genesis of commerce: Bazaars of the East and mixed-use centers of the West," (master's thesis, The University of Texas at Arlington, 2012); Hazim Alhazmi, "Shopping Malls and Spatial Interactions of People in Saudi Arabia," (master's thesis, University of Cincinnati, Ohio, 2013); Niloufar Taghizadehvehed, "A Comparative Study of Covered Shopping Spaces: Covered Bazaars, Arcades, Shopping Malls," (master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, 2015); and Sumaia Abdullah Mekhlafi, "The Shift From Souqs to Malls: A Socio-Spatial Analysis in Doha and Jeddah," (master's thesis, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar, 2017).
40. The roof panels were designed to "effect a subtle reduction in solar transmission through the mall—allowing sunlight to be reflected and harmful UV radiation to be shielded; whilst bathing the [faux] streets in natural daylight." See "The Avenues," Vector Foiltec, <https://www.vector-foiltec.com/projects/the-avenues-3/>. But "the material's advantages aren't just functional. It also delivered huge revenue potential to Mabanee,
- because the covering permitted the circulation ways to be counted as open space instead of as enclosed, built space. That meant that it was not included in calculating the site's allowable square footage, giving the client a substantial reserve of site area they can put to future use." See Mays, "Talk of the Town," *Dialogue* 23 (2013): 21.
41. Penny Craswell and Amanda Kolson Hurley, "Destinations," *Dialogue* 29 (2016): 9.
42. In her review of the 2014 Venice Biennale, Sarah Goldhagen critiques curator Rem Koolhaas' attempt to shoehorn the world's modern architecture into a similar narrative of global neutralization and monotony. See Sarah Williams Goldhagen, "The Great Architect Rebellion of 2014," *New Republic* 29 (August 2014), <https://newrepublic.com/article/119202/architectures-rebellion-2014-venice-biennale>.
43. Their urban precedents aside, Crawford asserts that malls are characteristically anti-city: "While Islamic bazaars and Parisian arcades reinforced existing street patterns, malls—pedestrian islands in an asphalt sea—further ruptured an already fragmented urban landscape. As suburbs sprawled, so did their only public spaces; the low-rise, horizontal forms of suburban centers reversed the tightly vertical order of traditional urban space" ("The World in a Shopping Mall," 134). The Avenues, however, is not a flat island surrounded by formless parking lots separating it from the surrounding built environment. Rather—since it slips into a delimited space at the edge of an industrial-commercial area straddling a major highway, the Fifth Ring Road—the long but compact building is composed of a series of layers: under the public retail level are several others dedicated to underground parking, building services, and administrative offices. The layered mall recalls the "culture of congestion" and the consolidation of independent worlds in the Manhattan skyscraper as described in Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York* (Oxford University Press, 1978).
44. For more on the origin, development, and global spread of this model, see the 25th volume of *Sustainable Urban Regeneration*, titled "Privately Owned Public Spaces: The International Experience" (January 2013). Ironically, at the same time that experiments with POPS are taking place in Kuwait as a substitute to its long-lost urban space, its sovereign wealth fund invests in POPS that threaten the vitality of long-established European urban centers. See Jack Shenker, "Revealed: The Insidious Creep of Pseudo-Public Space in London," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/24/revealed-pseudo-public-space-pops-london-investigation-map>.
45. Farah Al-Nakib begins her historical account of oil-driven urban development in Kuwait and the loss of its public space with a recount of a series of deadly fights between patrons at The Avenues. The mall here serves as an embodiment of the collective loss of a sense of a civil, public sphere and its attendant communal urbanity. In other words, the civic baby was thrown out with the urban bathwater. See Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, 2016.
46. This well-crafted but costly investment has resulted in a bonanza for its developer. The year before The Avenues first opened, Mabanee's net profit was shy of \$35 million. A decade later, its net profit had quintupled. See "Annual Reports" under "Investor Relations," Mabanee Real Estate Co., <https://www.mabanee.com/>.
47. Artifice has been an urban revitalization strategy, though, albeit unsuccessful; in the city center stands the concrete skeleton of a long-stalled project, the "Heritage Village," whose purpose is to produce a historic district by recreating in concrete the lost urban fabric of the old city. For more on this, see Yasser Mahgoub, "Evolution and Development of Architecture and Urbanism in Kuwait," (lecture at Qatar University, February 24, 2010, 161–168); Abdunnasser Al-Aslami, "Heritage Village Project Reflects the Execution Failure 14 Years After Launch," *Arab Times*, August 8, 2018; and "Phase 2: Heritage Village Project," Al-Abdulhadi Engineering Consultancy, n.d., <http://www.freejswaileh.com/aec/project2.html>.
48. While the architects did not specifically cite Souk Al-Mubarakiya as their referent, their early (unexecuted) rendering of the space closely resembled some of the souk's spaces. See Adrian Welch, "The Avenues Kuwait," *e-architect*, December 8, 2009, <https://www.e-architect.co.uk/kuwait/the-avenues-kuwait-city>.
49. Al-Mubarakiya's newfound status as Kuwait's premier tourist destination was referenced during the first season of Kuwait's version of *Shark Tank*. In response to a contestant's answer he deemed lacking, one of the judges, former minister of information Mohammed Al-Sanousi, said, "you've forgotten the most important thing now: Souq Al-Mubarakiya—this is tourism in Kuwait" (author's translation). See *Taam* (Arabic for Done), Episode 1, AlMajlis TV, aired on October 29, 2015: 16:31–16:37.
50. Ironically, this positive public rediscovery and embrace of a vestige of the old city carried in its folds a reactionary, atavistic urge. In celebration of and investment in the development of Souq Al-Mubarakiya as a symbol of the original city, municipal authorities razed some mid-century modern buildings around the souk that were built on the ruins of the old city and were widely seen as the perpetrators of that loss. To no avail, architects and urban activists responded to the



municipal plans by putting up Kuwait's "first ever anti-demolition demonstration," seeing the modernist buildings as part and parcel of Kuwait's architectural heritage and their demolition as a repetition of the cardinal sin of urban erasure. See Ben Garcia, "Architects Seek Preservation of Building in Mubarakiya," *Kuwait Times*, April 7, 2014.

51. Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," 138.

52. Within a post-socialist (Russian) context, Gregory Andrusz has analyzed the role of the mall as an identity-bearer for cities and nations that have lost their metaphorical wall (Iron Curtain) which had up to then preserved their identity by force. "Now, in the new order, the security that life behind the Wall provided has been exchanged (or surrendered) for the choices offered by the Mall. . . . The demolition of the Wall can thus, perhaps, be seen as an act of Faustian proportions." Gregory Andrusz, "Wall and mall: A metaphor for metamorphosis" in *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe: Space, Institutions and Policy*, eds. Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedovic-Budic (Heidelberg: Physica-Verlag, 2006), 71, 84.

53. Virtual Kuwait City Team, "Map of Kuwait City, 1951, within the Border of the 2nd Wall," Exhibition at the Grand Plaza, The Avenues (Phase 4), May 12–18, 2019. For more on the research and mapping project, see Abdulmuttalib Al-Ballam, "Reconstructing Old Kuwait City Project," Lecture at Yarmouk Cultural Centre, December 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syXPZx0TB1k>.

54. Literally "the nation's council" in Arabic, the National Assembly is Kuwait's unicameral parliament. In 2013, Marzouq Al-Ghanem became Speaker for the first time, the youngest in the body's 50-year history. His decision, at the beginning of his tenure, to organize this public survey was unprecedented. See "Kuwait Parliament to Organize Survey on Citizens' Priorities—Al-Ghanem," *Kuwait News Agency*, August 18, 2013, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2328701&language=en#>. For the survey results, see "Kuwaiti Citizen Priorities Survey Results." National Assembly (2013). [www.kna.kw/research/ra2013/01.pdf](http://www.kna.kw/research/ra2013/01.pdf).

55. The decision to hold a public survey as a means of generating a legislative roadmap in the first place, let alone in a mall, was widely mocked. The parliament's resort to The Avenues was construed as an admission of the government's failure in the portfolio of urban development and its inability to foster a viable public space of which all could be proud. See Khalaf Al-Duwai, "Salalim al-sultat min al-Avenues. ila slayyil al-Jahra wal-Kout." *Al-Watan Newspaper*, May 7, 2014, [alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=356364&yearquarter=20142](http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=356364&yearquarter=20142).

56. I imagine that on their minds

was the political strife of the prior couple of years which reached a boiling point in 2012, a relatively turbulent year which saw two general elections. In that long year, Kuwait City was the site of several unpermitted political marches and rallies protesting the Emir's and government's role in parliamentary politics. See Sylvia Westall, "Thousands of Kuwaitis Protest Electoral Law Move," *Reuters*, August 27, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kuwait-politics-rally/thousands-of-kuwaitis-protest-electoral-law-move-idUSBRE87Q13Q20120827>. Also see Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Kuwait's Doomed Parliament," *Majalla*, December 14, 2012, <https://eng.majalla.com/2012/12/article55236588/kuwait-s-doomed-parliament>.

57. For a discussion of the challenges of historic preservation and the lingering question of authenticity, see John Pendlebury, Michael Short, and Aidan While, "Urban World Heritage Sites and the Problem of Authenticity," *Cities* 26, no. 6 (2009): 349–358. As for Lascaux II, it is a replica of the famed prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux. This mimetic project has been hailed as a touristic, artistic, and archaeological conservation success story. See Tom Lubbock, "The Hall of the Bulls (1983): Lascaux II, Montignac, Dordogne," *The Independent*, July 31, 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/great-works-the-hall-of-the-bulls-1983-1764859.html?amp>. For a more technical account of how the French produced a facsimile of the subterranean space, see Brigitte and Gilles Delluc, "Lascaux II: A Faithful Copy," *Antiquity* 58, no. 224 (1984): 194–96.

58. Just like a good spatial history project, and a public one to boot, The Avenues' mimesis collapses space and time which helps generate new conceptual connections. Richard White aptly describes the fecund, open-ended potential of spatial history: "Visualization and spatial history are not about producing illustrations or maps to communicate things that you have discovered by other means. It is a means of doing research; it generates questions that might otherwise go unasked, it reveals historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and it undermines, or substantiates, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past." See Richard White, "What is Spatial History?" Stanford University Spatial History Project, February 1, 2010, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29>.

59. Though he explains that this understanding has thus far been pervasive, Neil Brenner asserts that the inside-outside binary is no longer tenable. See Neil Brenner, "The Hinterland, Urbanised?" *Architectural Design* 242 (2016): 122. For more on this epistemological reevaluation of urban schemas, see the following journal issue: "We have never been urban," *City* 22, no. 1, ed. Sukriti Issar (2018).

60. The Kuwaiti government has an itch for planning but not necessarily executing, accruing a glut of largely unimplemented strategic plans and reports. For an example of the Kuwait government's efforts to plan for a diversified, post-oil economic future, see Antonio Carvalho, Jeff Youssef, Joel Ghosn, and Lara Talih, *Kuwait in Transition: Towards a Post-Oil Economy*, (Kuwait: Tri International Consulting Group, 2017), [www.ticg.com.kw/content/dam/oliver-wyman/ME/ticg/publications/TICG\\_PoV\\_Kuwait\\_In\\_Transition.pdf](http://www.ticg.com.kw/content/dam/oliver-wyman/ME/ticg/publications/TICG_PoV_Kuwait_In_Transition.pdf).

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