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Tom Vanderbilt. *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002. 224 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56898-305-9.

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Atomic Tour 2002: An Excavation of America's Cold War Architecture

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In *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America* journalist Tom Vanderbilt leads the reader on an engaging tour of Cold War sites across the nation. Searching out the remains of the "most expensive war that was never fought" (p. 14), Vanderbilt explores the meaning of Cold War architecture through an inquiry into "how war defines space and space defines war" (p. 39). With the aid of the Interstate Highway and Defense System, which Vanderbilt points out is itself a Cold War creation, he takes the reader along on his journey examining atomic architecture from the hidden bunkers for Congress in West Virginia to defunct missile silos looming in the South Dakota desert. Through his study of Cold-War-built spaces he reveals the contradictions of atomic architecture: it was both "pervasive and invisible" with some designs made to protect, others to destroy (p. 124).

Drawing from government documents, novels, historical monographs, magazines, architectural journals, and his experience visiting sites, Vanderbilt provides an important addition to Cold War scholarship and architectural history by addressing atomic architecture and its cultural significance. When the potential death of cities became a stark reality on August 6, 1945, America, embroiled in an emerging, escalating Cold War, set out to defend itself and to dominate its enemies. A mixture of fear, post-World War II confidence, and prosperity coalesced in the creation of Cold War architecture. Highly visible and hidden structures appeared across the country offering the possibility of safety that Vanderbilt suggests was more an illusion than a reality.

Touring primarily in the West, where the federal government transformed the landscape during the Cold War, the reader encounters the ruins of Survival City, a distillation of atomic anxieties, where two colonial-style houses were placed near Ground Zero to test the effects of a 15-kiloton blast. "An architectural stunt-double for the American way of life," the Survival City experiment concluded with one house destroyed, the other standing, its mannequin inhabitants thrown to the floor (p. 92). This test, along with others that demonstrated the destructive capacity of the atomic bomb, sent architects to the drawing board as they became the new leaders in civil defense. From fallout shelters, which Vanderbilt notes were not common due in part to the federal government's ambivalence in producing a cohesive civil defense plan, to the "Abo School and Fallout Shelter" in New Mexico, the demand to "gimme shelter" resulted in "protective construction" (p. 102). While the majority of Americans did not have a bomb shelter, an underground school in the neighborhood, or a nuclear plan in case of attack, their government officials were "covered." Unfortunately Vanderbilt misses an opportunity to examine this contradiction in the federal government's civil defense policy. Exploring "Project Greek Island," the emergency relocation center for Congress in the event of nuclear attack at the four-star Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia, the JFK Presidential Fallout Shelter near Palm Beach Florida, constructed a year before the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the North American Aerospace Defense Command inside Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, Vanderbilt illuminates the ways in which the underground evolved into safe space, a place to protect the country's leaders and weapon functions, affording protection the city could no longer offer.

While the Communist threat and the fear of nuclear attack by a known enemy have faded into history, the architectural ruins of the Cold War remain. In his last two chapters Vanderbilt explores their current evolution, raising critical questions about the legacy of atomic architecture. As the nation's last active Minuteman II silo in South Dakota awaits transformation into a museum, a real estate entrepreneur has turned a deactivated silo into a 4,000-square-foot home marketed to the wealthy. The

dismantling continues in Carlsbad, New Mexico where Vanderbilt ends his tour at the "tomb of the Cold War" in the potash mines there (p. 186). At the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) the artifacts of the Cold War, including paperwork, hooded suits, beakers, and other transuranic waste used in the research and production of nuclear weapons, await the natural process of the 250-million-year-old salt bed to bury the barrels stacked 2,150 feet underground. Here the safe space of the underground no longer serves to protect government leaders but rather to destroy the artifacts of atomic development. Noting the "irony that the agent that will protect us from the highest scientific achievements of the Cold War will be nature itself" (p. 186), Vanderbilt instructs us that the enduring lesson from the Cold War is "there is no safety in walls" (p. 203).

Through a fascinating tour of Cold War sites rendered in an engaging style Vanderbilt provides a first-rate analysis of atomic architecture that was connected not by "a single, recognized style" but rather by the tensions of the period (p. 125). While Vanderbilt clearly succeeds in his aim of excavating the ruins of the Cold War, his work could benefit from an examination of the structures constructed during the Cold War period that still play an important role in American life. Juxtaposing missile silos and underground quarters with the explosion of shopping malls, suburban homes (which he notes might have been on the rise due to the fear of cities becoming targets), and hotels, would fully expose the complexities and contradictions of American culture and its reflection in architecture during a period dominated by prosperity and hope, insecurity and fear. Could these spaces also be considered atomic architecture in some way? In what ways, if any, did these buildings reflect and respond to atomic anxiety? Like the architects Vanderbilt briefly mentions who continued building in the International Style during the Cold War period, the American people, whether out of optimism, resistance, or both, continued confidently to consume, buying homes, patronizing shopping malls, and hitting the open road for vacation. The visibility and growth of these buildings and industries promoted domestic security. An analysis of these spaces and their relationship with protective architecture would provide a richer understanding of the cultural ramifications of the war and how it shaped architecture and culture as Americans at different times from the 1940s to the 1980s sought safety in a variety of ways.

In exploring the meanings of atomic architecture, Vanderbilt's work provides a strong foundation for future research. Historians could build on his analysis through the lens of social history. Folding in interviews with "locals" along with profiles on the architects who designed the protective spaces would continue the critical dialogue Vanderbilt has begun. Interviews with the townspeople in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nevada who have watched their towns expand and contract with the federal government's Cold War security program would add another dimension in considering the importance of built space during war and its aftermath. They would also shed light on how the federal government served as the main architect of the Cold War period through its military build-up across the West. Similarly, the narratives of workers at the Greenbrier Hotel, the architects who constructed the JFK Presidential Shelter, and officers who waited for action inside the Minuteman Launch Control Center in South Dakota, among others, would add another layer of meaning to the structures and articulate the human feelings and responses to life in atomic America.

Survival City offers an insightful exploration of the ruins of atomic America that demands attention in our current moment. In the poignant aftermath of September 11 the futility of Cold War architecture suggested throughout the book takes on new resonance. As the United States looks back at the Cold War in light of the nebulous twenty-first century enemy, terrorism, the importance of understanding our past architectural initiatives to survive and conquer through building and military build-up emerges. A tour through the remains of Cold War architecture with Tom Vanderbilt provides a provocative way to begin a critical assessment of the nation's built responses in wartime. The seemingly futile quest for security through building will most likely continue as the nation seeks protection from the unknown, now and in the future.

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