



IMAGE 4 Exposed layout of a bomb shelter, USA, 1963.

Resistance

I've been exploring the underground as a concrete space as well as a geographic coordinate that comes to generate particular fantasies and social exchanges; tuning in to the acoustics of the underground reveals a larger set of ambiguities, myths of marginality, and the force of an echoic listening. In addition, fear and instability gain momentum through the reverberant, cavernous acoustics of the down under, fuelling notions of a lurking threat previewed or announced by noises in the dark.

This unsteady space of the underground, with its troubling echoes, can be situated alongside Michel Foucault's well-known theory of heterotopia. By acting as a space distinct from others, the underground comes to reflect back to those spaces their own condition, performing as an inversion to the terrestrial. Thus heterotopia is the very spatial coordinate of otherness, a differentiating geography that has "the curious property of being connected

to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected, or represented by them."⁴⁰

Heterotopia of the underground is brought forward by performing a certain *mirroring* of what is above: whether in the echoes of the cave or in the busking musician that reflects back the city above, the underground opens up to reveal what is already hidden within terrestrial light. Yet, following Foucault, heterotopia also provides an understanding on how such spatial experiences or sites are perpetually negotiated, unfixed, or shifted. The process of marginality and subsequent co-optation by established culture, bemoaned by earlier proponents of the avant-garde as the struggle between center and periphery, is unsettled and rethought through the notion of heterotopia. For what Foucault suggests is that spaces, in being processes of relations, are perpetually charged by the ideological and cultural forces that play out across their topography. As I've tried to show, the spatial acoustics of the underground shifts through a register of meaning. From the busker whose music relies upon the underground as an architecture to draw out his or her project to the gathering of the population in the London Underground during the Wars, marking the tunnel with hope and protection, the secrets or echoes that haunt the subterranean world can radically shift. Yet by following the movements that lie below, I might also suggest that going underground remains the passage through which to imagine transgressing the constraints of the visible, the established, the norm. To seek the underground, even in the rather ordinary subway ride, might be to take pleasure in exposing oneself to a dizzying uncertainty or to releasing the desire for otherness and the differentiating vagueness of the echo. Underground heterotopia imparts forceful matter into the economy of the social. Like the zombies in *Dawn of Dead*, that rise up from the grave to haunt the American suburb, the subterranean offers the aboveground the challenge of always having to negotiate its own hidden dreams or desires in moments of uprising, fantasy, or struggle, which shift the relation between form and

formlessness, temporarily unmarking any strict notion of above from below, inside from outside.

These oscillations are further glimpsed in understanding the underground as a significant location for forms of resistance—itsself the very mark of existing outside or below the established system. Literally, “going underground” is paramount to forging tactics of resistance, terrorism, and other forms of political agitation or escape. The space or image of the underground functions as site for clandestine movements, and in particular operates as a network-ing systemization for radical organization and expression. Whether in the establishment of the Underground Railroad throughout the nineteenth century, aiding slaves in their plight for freedom to the Northern states of America, or the Weather Underground, a small community arising from the student movement in the late 1960s aimed at bringing the terror of the Vietnam War home to American streets, underground movements haunt or reflect often embedded realities of a nation. They bring into pressing relief moral and political injustices while remaining out of bounds, or outside the law. In doing so, they provide an image of the very possibility of reshaping the present by always tipping the established equilibrium.

The fact of going underground provides a deeper image of what lies above, and in terms of an acoustical movement finds embodiment in the underground club—that space whereby musical cultures form into shifting communities and often interlock with specific political struggle. In mirroring terrestrial, aboveground culture, the underground club and its related bands or music can be heard as a *counter-sonic*, finding resonance in subterranean spaces, basements or abandoned barns on the outskirts of town. For example, the history of the Czech band The Plastic People of the Universe (PPU) brings forward this counter-sonic through a blending of avant-garde rock and counter-cultural politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their story is interwoven with the particulars of Communist Czechoslovakia and reveals the degree to which State policy and underground cultures interlock.

The Plastic People of the Universe

Formed in Prague in 1968 immediately following the crackdown by the Soviet Union in August, the PPU developed into an active circle of musicians, poets, art historians, and cultural critics. Taking their name from a Frank Zappa song, and playing cover songs of the Velvet Underground and the Fugs, along with their own compositions, the band found guidance and inspiration from the music of the West, enlisting Paul Wilson, a Canadian living in Prague, as their singer and translator in 1970. At this time, through an intensification of their musical presence and their avant-garde, Western aesthetic, the government revoked their music license, essentially banning them from playing live or making records, forcing the band underground.

During this initial period of censorship the band only furthered their musical project, incorporating lyrics from the work of the banned poet Egon Bondy. In addition, their manager, the art historian Ivan Jirous brought a self-consciously Warholian flair to the group, infusing it with a larger sense of cultural activity and relevance. Jirous' influential ideas, summed up in his theory of “Second Culture,” were to become a general ideological platform for counter-cultural agitation and expression within the community that gravitated around the band, leading to the organization of the First Music Festival of the Second Culture in 1974. The idea of Second Culture was quite literally premised on carving out an autonomous space within the First Culture of Soviet totalitarianism, defining a zone completely outside dominating policy. As Jirous states in his “Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival” written in 1975:

The goal of the underground in the West is the outright destruction of the establishment. In contrast, the goal of our underground is to create a second culture, a culture completely independent from all official communication media and the conventional hierarchy of value judgements put out by the establishment. It is to be a culture that does