

## Notes on invisibility (Leading to darkness)

Underneath the city of Matera there are hidden spaces, dark damp spaces, extending deep down under the city. This investigation aims to explore the access of these spaces, both physically, and in their imaginary. The original proposed excavation and transformation of the cisterns below the Palazzo Viceconte into gallery spaces provides the trigger.

In parallel to the conceptual development of notional visibilities and invisibilities is the very pragmatic process of preservation, heritage. The city of Matera and the medieval Sassi are UNESCO protected world heritage sites, as a result any works to take place within the city are very controlled and have to fall within certain statues of limitation. Where does this leave us when trying to create a transformation and to work within this environment, how can the rules be pushed, worked around and within to at once create a dialogue between spaces, between eras and indeed visibilities?

The situation of the Palazzo Viceconte within Matera provides a keystone to the imaginary of the city. The Palazzo clearly visible within the projected image of the city (a postcard perfect vista that is also UNESCO protected) yet beneath the palace lies the gateway to the other world. Deep hypogean spaces, some perhaps opened up and revealed others hinting at their presence. A bridging point between worlds.

What creates (in)visibility? In the case of the cisterns there is an exchange, what was once hidden would be revealed, resulting in the loss of what was there before - the invisible or imagined becomes visible, one form of visibility is substituted for another. Whilst the physical shift here has resulted in a practical loss a conceptual preservation made through ideological displacement may still be possible.

There is an element of hiding or covering up in this environment. The nature of the city, cut into the rock face, the troglodyte architecture embracing the Gravina and digging in, an introverted approach hiding its face from the world, making itself invisible. An invisibility brought on through the shame and stigma of the situation. Coming back to the excavations and the cisterns, this opening up seems somewhat in opposition to the mentality of the place, the revealing of what was once unknown, or at least unknown in its physicality now exposing itself to the world.

Exploitation of the invisible, we know it is there but we don't really know what that actually means. Here lies the power. Here we can speculate and depending upon the individual there is an opportunity to bridge different worlds, create realities through the haziness of the not fully known. A blurred vision, tempered by the lack of full visibility, that which is hidden or not fully clear, that made or purposely left outside of full sight.

Suspended within this subterranean space we are lost, in between, neither here nor there. through this lack of visibility we are situated in a state of endlessness, searching for edges, points of orientation. Anthropologist Stefan Helmreich in his 2007 article 'An Anthropologist Underwater: Immersive Soundscapes, Submarine Cyborgs, and Transductive Ethnography' explores a descent into this immersive darkness joining the crew on the deep sea research submersible Alvin, travelling down to the ocean floor Helmreich describes the 'reassuring soundscape' produced by submersible's sonar, 'securing a sense that the sub is somewhere rather than nowhere', invisible technology 'supporting the sub in a web of sound', suspended between the surface and ocean floor, 'rather than being lost in a featureless void.' Here we have an instance where through technology we are supported, our fears, (maybe temporarily) put to rest through invisible means and we are given an edge (at least in the Z axis) from which we can start to orientate ourselves.

The installation 'Vessel for Darkness' aims to invite the question as to what's down there. To highlight and focus in on the borders, the edges of what we know and what might be. The vessel is a container for the dark (that which through renovation and re-purposing of the cisterns would at once be lost). Positioned on the floor of the Palazzo Viceconte is a heavy cover, in its centre an aperture, a portal, opening through to the world beneath our feet. The work is reliant on the architecture, the unknown depths and accumulated darkness, weighted beneath the heavy steel and bronze covers. The vessel serves two opposite purposes; to cover up, to hide and conceal, but also to provide focus, a point of orientation for something possibly much larger. Hidden yet highlighted, preserved in place the visitor is invited to craft their own intimate reading of place, from the imagined to the real, an invisible pavilion suspended in perpetuity deep beneath the city.

