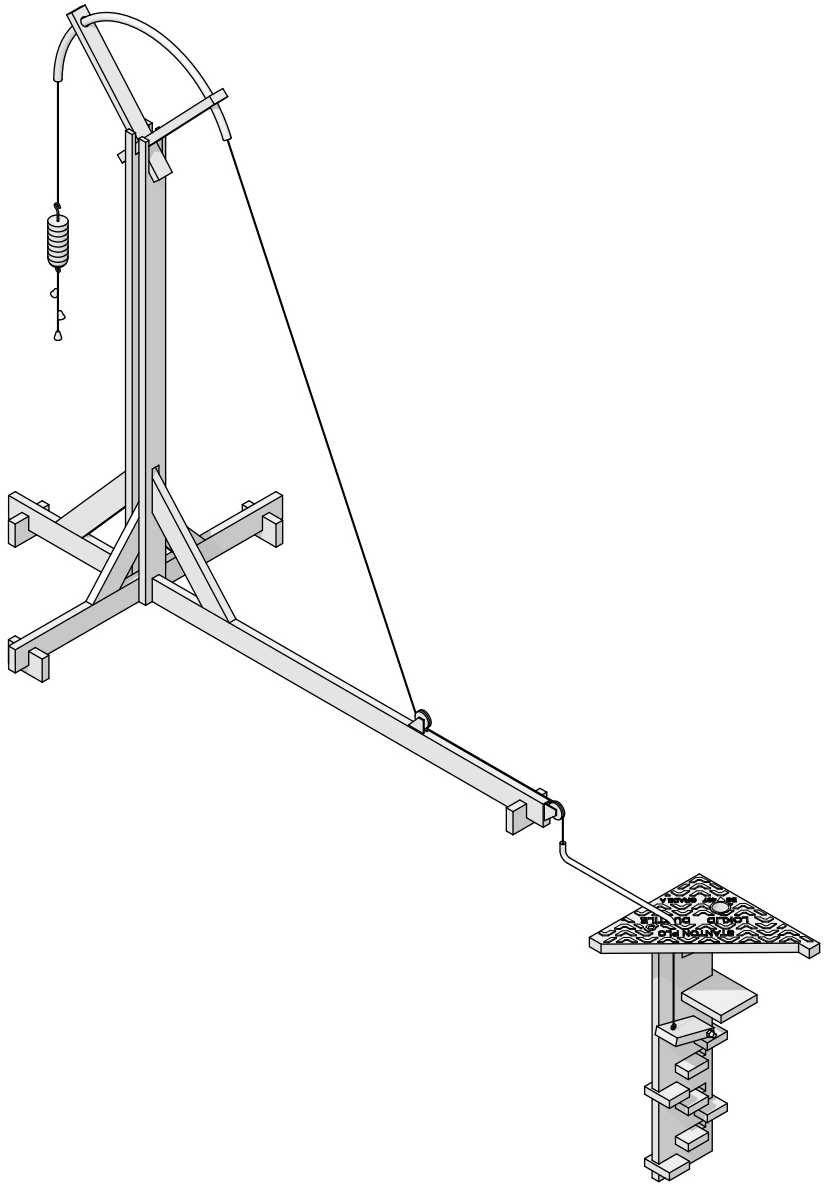


The Playground in the Sewer
Daniel Hambly



The film 'underground' tells the story of a community that hides away from the second world war but remains oblivious to its ending. The director, Kusturica, explores this underground world that operates independently to the one above and yet remains reliant on it. In the same way this contraption reveals the life under our feet (or maybe generates its own fictions). The volume and diversity of non-human life living in mostly-human waste is surprising and disturbing, from Ferrets and Eels to what we prefer to ignore¹. But perhaps rodents are a perfectly valid form of non-human inhabitation, after all vermin have evolved and changed their behaviours to suit city life.² Perhaps they're success is more a reflection on our inability to deal with our own waste. The installation hacks into the manhole on the corner of Bedford square to install an instrument that detects activity below. It would be a CNC timber frame that slots together to hold a pulley system; at one end a counterweight and bell - the movements of which indicates the presence of a creature stepping on the peddle concealed with a baiting system under the manhole. The device only suggests life, it is not explicit and leaves us guessing, perhaps making the bell that little more disconcerting. Our associations to the life below with the unsavoury and disease is what the contraption forces us to confront. It would also tell us a little about the intensity of this life as well as its habits and rhythms. The installation would be a success if it made us aware, uncomfortable, and divided our opinions.



1 <https://ukdnwaterflow.co.uk/animals-found-drains-sewers-around-world/>
2 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2019/04/rats-are-an-inescapable-part-of-city-life/>

