

Chamberlin

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Permanent Wall Members

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When you pass through the door of the maintenance house, which sits exactly in the middle of the platform at U-Bahnhof Innsbrucker Platz, you arrive, after a fork in the path, in the Cecilien tunnels beneath the social housing block. Here you'll find a small black market, but the real business takes place further south. At one end, a narrow serpentine path begins, its corners already worn to a shine from the constant turning. And only after walking the Lassen passage to the point where it exceeds five meters in diameter, wide enough for two carriages side by side, does the *Rubenspassage* begin: a cheerful, underway full of little shops, almost a miniature of the Friedrichstraße-Arcade on Oranienburger Straße.

Behind it, the corridor branches into a crossroads beneath the corner of Dickhardtstraße and Wilhelm-Hauff-Straße. One route leads to the next subway station, though you must pass through the notorious coal spot, where a fine drizzle of briquette dust perpetually sifts down through the rotted floor of the coal cellars above. The second continues straight toward Feuerbachstraße; the small third shoots steeply up to the left, and after a while, you emerge in the souterrain of a Mietskaserne. Coming out in the fourth courtyard, the path stretches all the way to the main street and has grown into its own thoroughfare, the *Kleine Dickhardt*, with the building janitor running a small stand right at the tunnel exit, selling buckets, since containers are always in demand.

But by the Goerz Works at the latest, you go back down. At the entrance to this part of the system, you have to make your way through the struts of the iron *Rotes Kreuz*, though neither a sick bay nor a doctor is to be found here or anywhere nearby. Instead, several scrap workshops have established themselves, feeding off the industrial waste discarded by the factory above. The inventory runs from rivets, nails, coil springs, and clamps to patches, eyeglasses, and flashlights.

Close by, you reach the *Splitterkönigin*: two support pillars held together by a twisted beam bracket, producing a warped, twisting mirror that is so popular with the children that someone got the idea to charge a few pennies for a look. The business didn't last long, though, 'nach Feierabend,' the cover cloth was simply lifted back up.

Across the way, you can also gawk at the lift attendant's trough, which resembles an oubliette more than anything else. It supposedly measures eight meters in diameter, but since the pit is crammed full of scrap, no ladder is needed. Caves that are too large without supporting girders are generally inadvisable, given the risk of collapse. Permanent bracing sunk deep into the muddy ground, along with walls clad in wood or iron panels, has proven to be the most stable construction.

Due to the swampland on which the entire city was built, a continuous process of decay affects all architecture that reaches into the ground. This is most visible where the foundations, themselves resting on wooden piles driven into the bog in the marshiest areas, merge with the clay into a kind of shifting bedrock. And it is precisely where the most varied layers of material meet, interweave over time, and where interlocking corridors that support one another from above, below, or alongside, that a particular resilience tends to emerge.

To avoid accidentally digging into a neighbor's living room, some neighborhoods organize their own mapmakers, but the tunnel and cross-section plans go out of date so quickly, since the network is continuously being rebuilt, that the effort rarely pays off. When it gets too damp or groundwater seeps through the floor, passages are often simply filled back in if they can't be dried out. When a ceiling threatens to collapse, support pillars or entire walls are added, creating new rooms in the process. When alleyways fall out of use, they are converted

into private dwellings. Every week, walls are torn down again, shortcuts broken through in new directions, doors fitted, staircases carved. Still, the Baupolizei try in vain to properly document the unlawful excavations. The surveyors tasked with this work establish a baseline inside the tunnel by transferring coordinates and elevations down through the shafts using plumb lines and leveling instruments. Since there is no clear line of sight over long distances in the tunnels, a traverse is laid out and driven forward point by point along the tunnel walls, in order to gradually determine the precise position and course of each passage.

Among the underground residents, there is no consensus on the necessity and usefulness of these after-the-fact blueprints. For many, they represent the hope for more liberal legislation – laws that would lift their lives out of illegality. For others, they represent the beginning of the end, since the police can now form a clearer picture of the unauthorized construction and will find it easier to conduct raids, force closures, and generally suppress the makeshift expansions of the city.

The Association of the Underground has been invited to the Rotes Rathaus dozens of times to negotiate, so far with little success. The warming hall created in a disused subway tunnel at Spittelmarkt, for instance, was saved from eviction, at least. The biggest debate is over who pays for the electricity that is increasingly being siphoned off for underground use. But one might ask whether all those lights don't blind people more than they illuminate them.

Below, it is always night and day at once. On the one hand, dim for lack of daylight. On the other, quite bright, now that most of the deeper levels have been fitted with electricity, which in turn makes those remaining unwired places with their thick darkness seem especially haunted. But from the constant whistling, dripping, and clicking alone, from all the voices of neighbors heard through walls, there has been a surge in ghost stories of every kind, hawked at kiosks throughout. The light bulbs have also given bill-posters and flyerers good reason to work their way down into the secondary levels, advertising funfairs and cinema screenings. Support beams are often left freestanding, or earthen columns form through the traffic of the tunnels, serving as improvised Litfaß columns.

Through all of it runs a persistent draft, strong enough, at times, to set a pulley or lift moving entirely on its own. And when the sewage pipes burst from overload, and the stench spreads hundreds of meters, mixing with the ever-present smell of molder, the windy tunnels carry the odors far, but also dilute them. The smell from the kitchens of the little restaurants acts, in turn, as a kind of commercial beacon and causes real bottlenecks at lunchtime. And the countless distilleries would account for more than one crooked corridor or tilted detour. But they say all paths are, at bottom, detours.

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