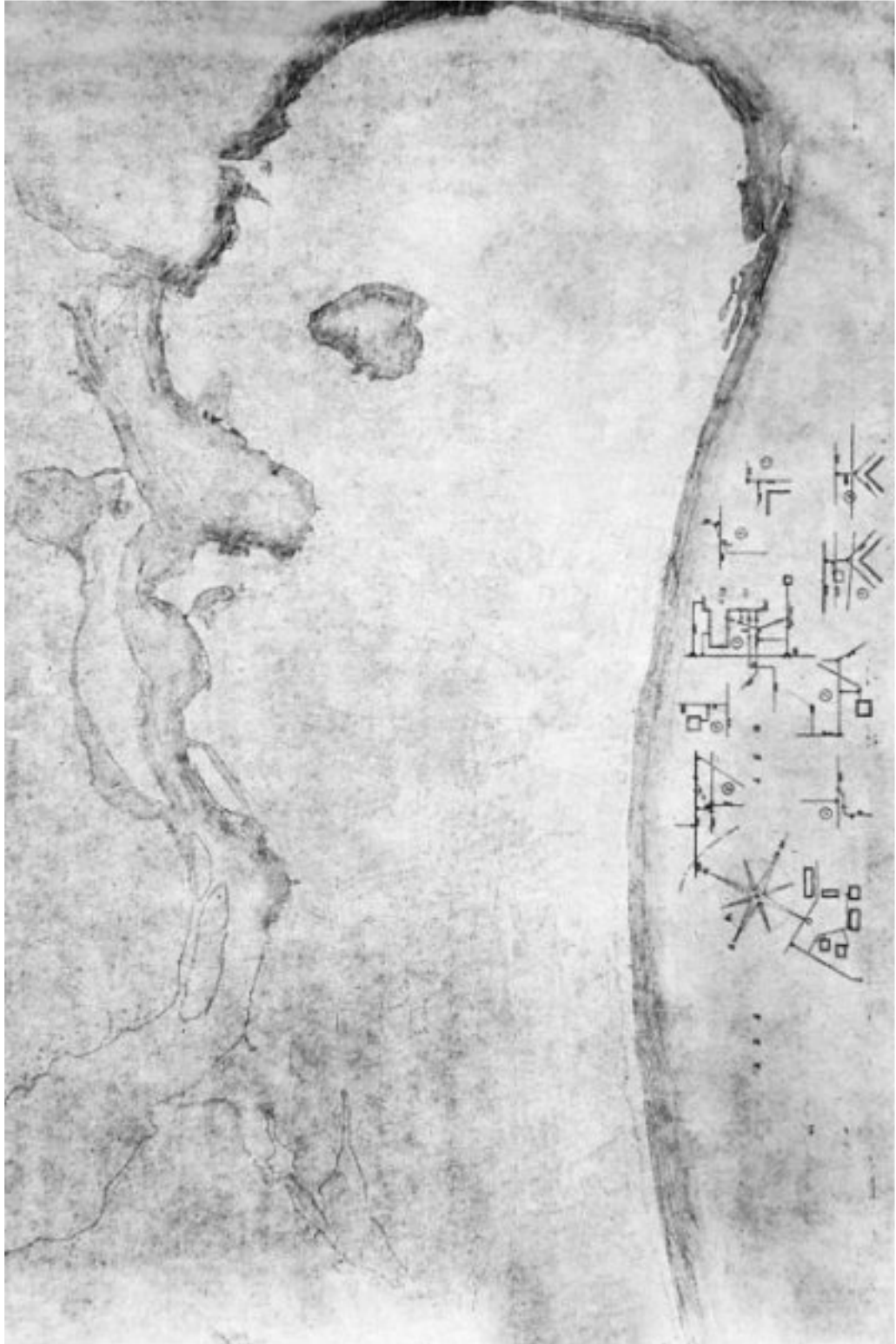# No signal: xxxxx and the Peenemünde project


...the screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent

[Gravity's Rainbow. Thomas Pynchon. p. 760]

Introduction

Peenemünde [xxxxx] presents an intense, highly speculative three day long working group/workshop within a key, historical location in Northern Germany. Diverse groups, populated by artists, theorists, and tacticians will actively examine that fiction which presents a dark heart of technology (as evidenced, for example, by electromagnetic practice), and a vivid relation to both entropy and ecology.

The Peenemünde location, hermetically sealed by military and scientific interests for over fifty years prior to the reunification of Germany in 1990, acts as a questionable, treacherous and highly concentrated site for an examination of information, signal meaning and technology, under the overarching parabola of Thomas Pynchon's epic novel Gravity's Rainbow. Described within a circular narrative, with the arc of the rocket bridging the last months of the war, and a contemporary, theatrical rocket fall, the work employs film technique (flash forward/analepsis), multiple (internal) voices, comedy routines, songs, slang, strategic, scientific, and military terms, embedded equations, and circuit diagrams. Technology is entwined with fiction.
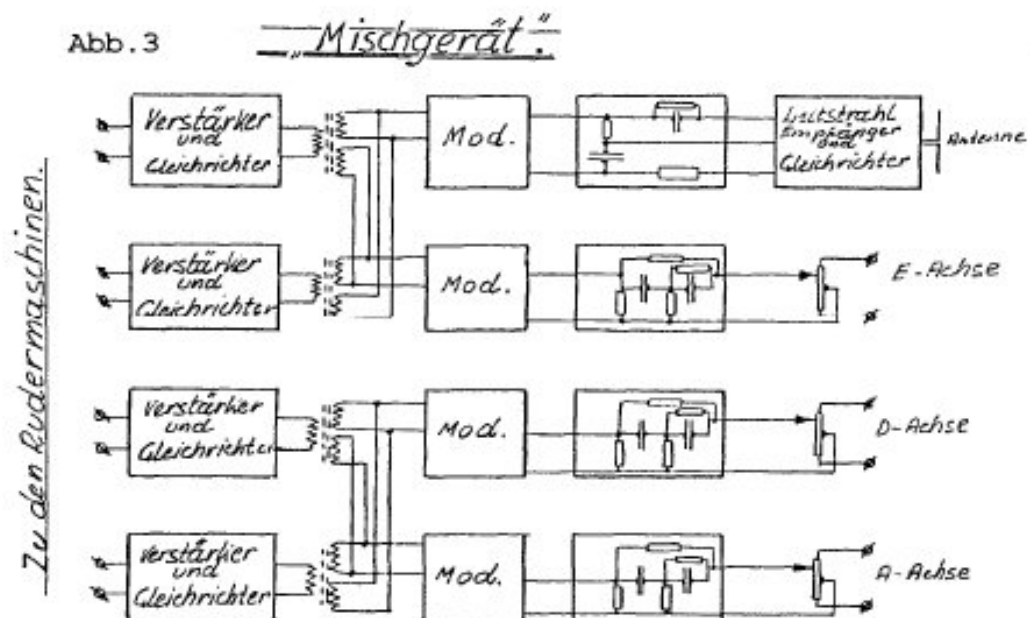
Within Gravity's Rainbow, and indeed the history of contemporary technological development, the Peenemünde site, as Heeresversuchsstelle Peenemünde (HVP), occupies a major position. Under the technical directorship of one Wernher von Braun, so-called father of the cold war US space program, major developments encompassing aerodynamics, analogue computing and surveillance technologies took place at this site within the context of the V-2 (A4) rocket development, and against the backdrop of the Third Reich military-industrial apparatus. We can enumerate a series of so-called firsts: the first entry of a man-made object into near space in October 1942, the invention of the analogue computer (characterised as an embedding of mathematics within the real (Helmut Hoelzer)], and early development of closed circuit television technologies. During the early 1940s Peenemünde can be characterised as an engineer's paradise, with skies little darkened by a twin location in the Harz mountains later devoted to the production of rockets using enforced labour; Mittelbau-Dora where 20,000 prisoners died within 18 months. The trajectory, technological development and war economies, can easily be sketched, helped by the mythic figure of Wernher von Braun, tracing a route from early rocket amateur work in the 1920s, inspired by Fritz Lang's Frau im Mond, towards Peenemünde, and through later popularisation of space travel during the cold war with Walt Disney as partner figure.

During the early 1920s, the Peenemünde site presented a vast living and working complex, at one point employing 12,000 scientists, engineers and forced labourers occupying the peninsula. The site was almost totally destroyed by Allied bombing in 1943 and 1944, and by international agreement after the Second World War. An erased location, bearing few traces of previous occupation, Peenemünde signals a too clear meaning, contrasting the utopic dream of spaceflight with an economy of propaganda, and destruction. The landscape is perhaps too easily decoded, inviting both speculative psycho-historical mapping, and advanced decryption technique.

Peenemünde is a place concerned precisely with hiding, and it is this hiding which allows for the however visible overlap of two diagrams, one over the other; an historical map, the now erased Heeresversuchsstelle (army research centre), and another set of diagrams which hint at concealment; diagrams attempting to both map and construct a contemporary digital (landscape). We can examine and question, as given, the onion-skinning of protocols, levels and layers of protection and privilege, circles and rings after Dante, and Pasolini. Finally to arrive at Oberst Endian's rocket mandala: KEZVH. Klar, Entluftung, Zundstufe, Vorstufe, Hauptstufe (main stage) encoded in the sky over Alexanderplatz (Gravity's Rainbow). And all of this, a circular design within diagram and structure of discovery or (signal) detection, arriving back at its own staging (for what divined, so-to-say conspiratorial purpose) is present within modern networking design and protocol; agreements precisely of (information) exchange. These layered diagrams are named as OSI Reference Model or TCP/IP model, before arriving again at issues of concealment and more obviously cryptography. The two diagrams overlaid point towards another, more traditional model, which equally occupies the networked imagination, steganography described as the concealment of the fact that there exactly IS a hidden message. Yet, neither is there this alterity of a well-intentioned signal, noise, the surface appreciation of an encrypted code. Rather a clear or cover message, however innocent which belies the presence of hidden information; originally hair grown to cover an image, map or message tattooed on the low-bandwidth carrier's head. A hidden writing, after the apparent magician Johannes Trithemius whose own Steganographia encrypted a treatise on the very subject of cryptography within an ostensibly magical text. A circle again drawn on the map, embracing our two diagrams, seven layers advancing steganographic possibilities under the most recent model, before we even examine encryption as technique.

A good rocket and a bad rocket. In Pynchon's terms, with the Rocket opened up for interpretation, it can be decoded as twin, as *"a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide"* [GR p. 727]; decoded by the Manichaeans, a route into Gnosticism. It's too easy to talk in this context of revelation;

It comes as the Revealer. [GR p. 728]

But the message is exactly too obvious, as "message". The inverse steganographic or paranoiac impulse is too strong. The legend is literally too present revealed as twin insignia, as two steganographised sides of a fateful forged/dealt card; the witch with broomstick idling on her shoulder is the flip-side of a bared Frau im Mond. Two destinations, a divided lady and voyage in this bachelored machine. What is revealed there where there is no signal? Where there is exactly island encapsulation (of a protocol) within a vacuum. The diagram is closed to the outside, an ENIGMA (the other side of the political coin, with Turing) ever to be decoded, with the resulting message layed out in this landscape for examination as a question concerning technology. Does such a signal imply intention?

An interval

What if there is no Vacuum? Or if there is—what if They're using it on you? What if They find it convenient to preach an island of life surrounded by a void? Not just the Earth in space, but your own individual life in time? What if it's in Their interest to have you believing that?

"He won't bother us for a while," They tell each other. "I just put him on the Dark Dream." They drink together, shoot very very synthetic drugs into skin or blood, run incredible electronic waveforms into Their skulls, directly into the brainstem, and backhand each other, playfully, with openmouth laugh—-you know, don't you is in those ageless eyes . . . They speak of taking So-and-So and "putting him on the Dream." They use the phrase for each other too, in sterile tenderness, when bad news is passed, at the annual Roasts, when the endless mind-gaming catches a colleague unprepared—"Boy, did we put him on the Dream." You know, don't you?

[Gravity's Rainbow. Thomas Pynchon [1973] p. 697]

Description of the Peenemünde project

Six working groups across three days described as:

Peenemünde [xxxxx] is a treacherous satellite event, taking place both within this key, techno-historical location in Northern Germany and equally exposed during a salon event in Berlin. Peenemünde [xxxxx] will present research findings from six working groups, concerned with both constructivism and construction (of plans, of apparatus, of interface, of software, of ideas and a view of the world) within a specific site of fiction and revelation (Peenemünde); a questioning of the detail of revelation and substance within a paranoiac frame (conspire and crash). A description of the working groups expresses the interests of xxxxx in terms of a constructivist play with the existent revealed by a mapping of various descriptive means over the "world/view".

a) Data forensics

*…this ex-refinery, Jamf Ölfabriken Werke AG, is not a ruin at all. It is in perfect working order. Only waiting for the right connections to be set up, to be switched on … modified, precisely, deliberately by bombing that was never hostile, but part of a plan both sides—"sides?"—had always agreed on … yes and now what if we—all right, say we are supposed to be the Kabbalists out here, say that's our real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone…*

[Gravity's Rainbow. Thomas Pynchon. New York. 1973. p. 520]

The data forensics group is occupied with divination and equally ideas for a future (data) archeology. Key concepts include physical data sedimentation, decoding and paranoia, cryptography, techniques for the examination of promiscuous data leakage, and making sense of/within a landscape. Steganography, as described, is paired with an interest in photo reconnaissance, with the Peenemünde site treated as an important test case within the history of this practice.The group is concerned with mapping this no-signal landscape onto contemporary data forensics/visualisation issues; the notion of both evidence (the evident) and software.

b) The filmed image, history and pornography

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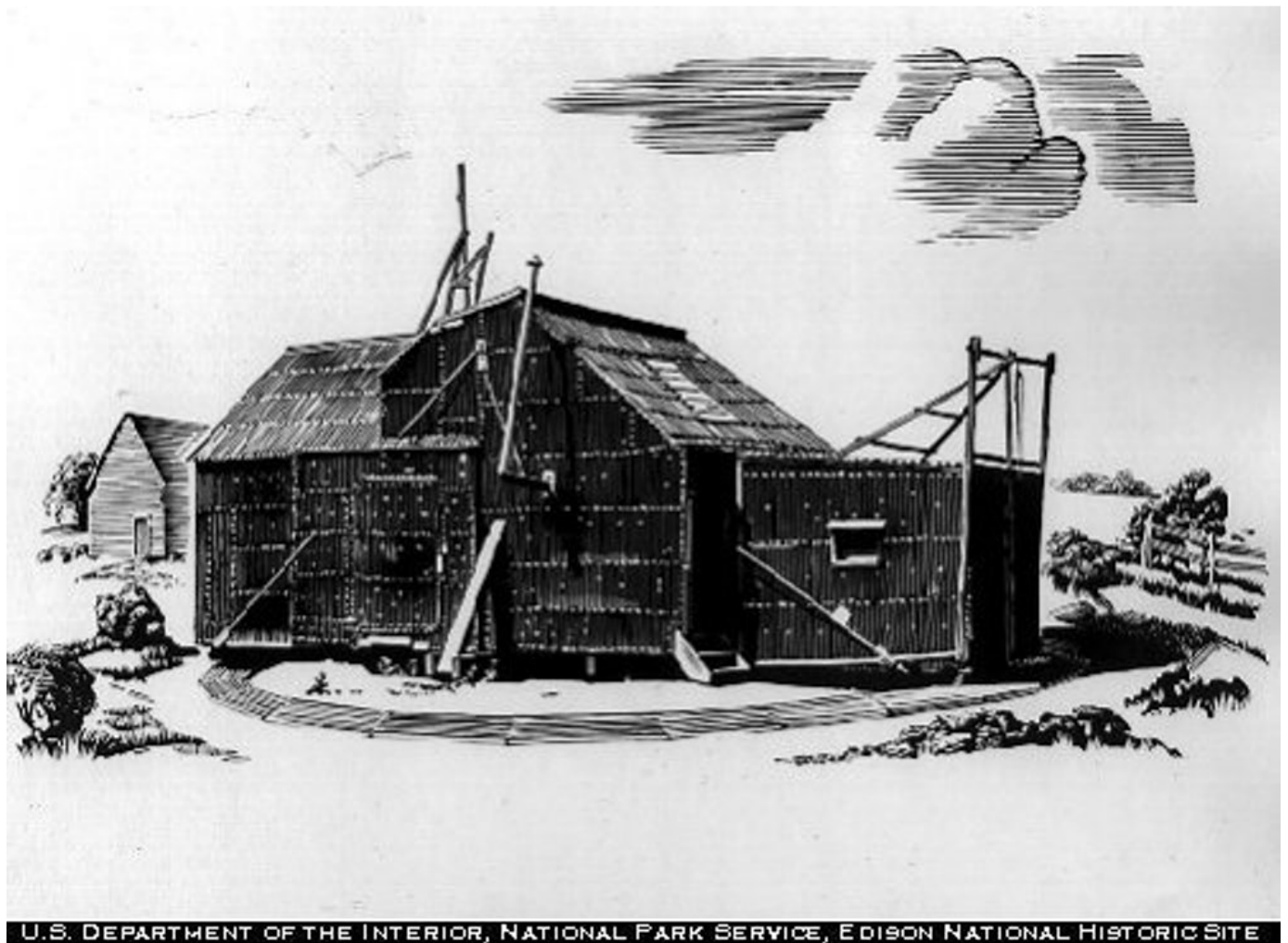
… the German authorities of the time seized Lang's film on the grounds that it was too close to reality. A decade later, on 7 July 1943, von Braun and Dornberger presented Hitler with film of the real launch of the A4 rocket. The fuhrer was in a bitter mood: "Why was it I could not believe in the success of your work? If we'd had these rockets in 1939 we'd never have had this war.'" There exists no clearer proof for the power of film: Hitler, the cineaste, who was bored by all demonstrations of the real V-2 (cf. Dornberger 73-7, 99-101) was convinced through film.

[Media and Drugs in Pynchon's Second World War. Friedrich Kittler. p184. footnote 25]

Film, software, temporal bandwidth and time axis manipulation.

Pornography (equally as paranoiac detail) and film as executable (proposed action), and provoking world view, is divined within a particular motif in Gravity's Rainbow: Ghost children/cannon fodder conceived, doubled and unidentified within the Alpdrücken (filmed) rape sequence (cf. GR. p 398)

c) W.A.S.T.E as hidden/carrier for hiding and as contemporary networked action

Fiction as conspiracy theory par excellence. Language and betrayal/treason to the codes.

Again taking inspiration from Pynchon's first novel for its title, W.A.S.T.E will examine the acronym-laden domain of so-called Darknets, hidden means of modern electronic communication, in relation to technology and fiction.

W.A.S.T.E as "a hoax that counterfeits such a conspiracy"

W.A.S.T.E (We Await Silent Tristero's Empire) presents four possibilities within the context of the potential existence (provoked by experiential evidence) of an underground network: Firstly, that the network exists, secondly that the network is an hallucination, thirdly that the evidence is a plot (against you) and lastly, that such a plot is being fantasied or imagined. A final possibility exists within the realm of anti-paranoia; that there is no connectivity
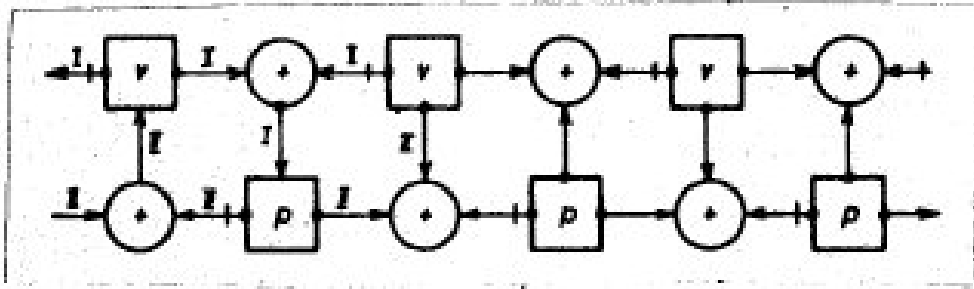
d) Endophysics in practice

Fig. 30

Endophysics proposes a notion of physics from the inside, thus implying an exterior to the project of rationalism and, in some relation, technology. This workshop examines the potential for practical, scientific and artistic experiments within this realm.

e) The black box

A working group towards the design of an interior CPU (interiority itself) to be mapped over the world (as exposure), as literary, false data sheet, as Jabberwocky API and as elegant diagram (early constructivist). Peenemünde map/aerial photography/investigations.

Life coding is described as a mapping of the descriptive means of hardware and programming onto the world, a concern with an interiority of the project of rationalism (the CPU) which can be expanded with reference to data sheets, instruction sets (for example) and an operating system in its widest (divine) sense. (code brut and Gnosticism). A relation to free software and open hardware is also imagined.

Helmut Hoelzer: "transformation of equations into hardware"

f) EM practice

But oh, Egg the flying Rocket hatched from, navel of the 50-meter radio sky, all proper ghosts of place […]

[Gravity's Rainbow. Thomas Pynchon. p.509]

This working group is occupied with investigation of electromagnetic (EM) phenomena (primarily as a translation into the audio domain) as a philosophical exploration of ideas of substance; landscape and the exposure of its hidden (EM) double. Ghost radio (EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena), and ITC (Instrumental Transcommunication) provoke new ideas regarding the intentionality of transmission within this context of decoding.

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