

The Mittelwerke: Site–Para-Site–Non-Site

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What is it about the middle that makes it such an unreliable place? Is it that, when standing exactly midway between two points, one can regard the overall distance as both half-traveled and half-untraveled? Apparently, the fuzzy logic of the middle does something to the road: it submits it to contradictory predications—traveled/untraveled. Equally, the middle does something to the traveler: it delays his arrival at the destination by making him first pass an infinitely recursive midway of (the midway of (the midway of (the midway . . .))) (Zeno’s dichotomy paradox). Somewhat like a hurdle, the middle intervenes between beginning and end and precludes simple duality and facile directness in their relation. Instead, it breeds complexity, hesitation and difficulty. A confusing bifurcation and a veritable vortex of possible roads can emerge in the middle of the way. And what if this vortical middle swallows up the beginning and the end? What if everything becomes middle? What if nothing remains for the traveler to do except roam in this medial limbo—this in-between interval, stretched to infinity?

When the middle takes over, it can turn even the most sensible journey into a schizophrenic stroll (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, AO 2) that neglects purpose and destination and yields to the delirium of a movement for movement’s sake. To prolong movement indefinitely, the middle organizes itself as a medium of straying, swerving and lingering. Moreover, its dynamics of deviation can govern not only the journey but also the story that renders this journey into literature. Such a strolling story is very different from the classical quest romance that starts from a beginning and, passing through some commotion of experiences in the middle, manages to close on a tidy ending. The teleological structure of the traditional quest narrative seems to undervalue the trials and tribulations of the middle as if they were a mere action-sequence serving to fill in the interval between the truly substantive questions “Where are you going?” and “Where are you coming from?” The formula of origin-and-destination and the successful transfer of meaning between them despite the turmoil in the middle “impl[ies] a false conception of voyage and movement . . . that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic” (Deleuze and Guattari, TP 25). Though edifying, this “methodology” of beginning and ending fails to do justice to what actually makes up the journey: the peregrinations,

passages and vortical motions. As if performing a phenomenological reduction, the origin and telos of the classical quest story bracket the middle, two sober impasses bounding on two sides a delirious process of passing.

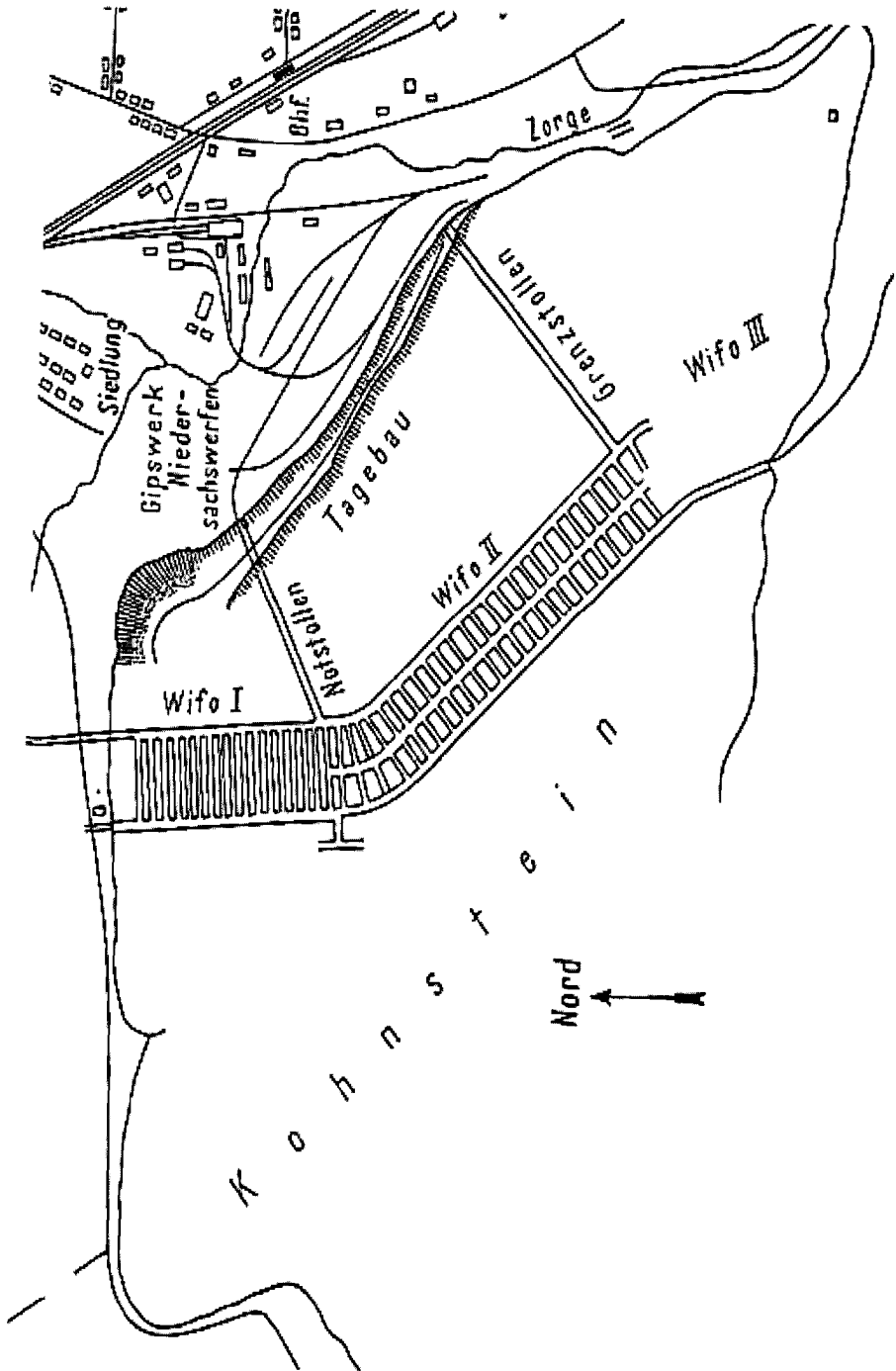
What will happen, however, if “[t]he brackets swing open” (Massumi 16)? When the reductionist principle of origin-and-telos gives way to an enchantment with the middle, the quest narrative turns into a peripatetic text-milieu (mi-lieu = middle-place). The literature of the middle replaces the methodology of beginning and ending with a tactics of proceeding. “American literature, and already English literature, manifest this [medial] direction to an ever greater extent; they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings” (Deleuze and Guattari, TP 25). Accordingly, one way to view such peripatetic narratives—*Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example—is to focus on their middles.

Gravity’s Rainbow has no proper beginning and no proper ending; it both starts and finishes *in medias res*. Its hero, Slothrop, rather than enjoying the comfort of a stable being, occupies the seismic middle regions of an “interbeing” (Deleuze and Guattari, TP 25) among his many personae disseminated all over Germany. Neither can he overcome the forces of attraction generated by the middle that the Zone represents as a crossroads of worldwide political strife. Just like the overall narrative, the story of Slothrop’s Zonal journey falls short of a conclusion: the narrator admits that in theory “there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn’t” (GR 738), and the story is abandoned in the middle of things. So instead of a Grail knight, Slothrop resembles an errant knight who does not aspire to any final goal in his quest that is no quest but, rather, a schizophrenic stroll. Actually, Slothrop’s journey through the Zone is suspended without a true ending because it never had a proper beginning either: it starts from a significant middle, the Mittelwerke (Central Works), the first place Slothrop goes to look for the Rocket in part 3 of the novel, “In the Zone.” The fact of this starting point (near the middle of the novel [295–312] as well) signals the importance of the factory in the context of the whole novel. So I will do a very local reading of the space of the Mittelwerke to show how a middle operates.

The subterranean rocket factory known as the Mittelwerke was a dynamic medium in which the exigencies of the war promoted the mixing of military opportunism and visionary science. The works lie deep under Mount Kohnstein in Thuringia, in Germany’s geographical middle; hence the appropriateness of calling the factory the

Mittelwerke. Still another middle—this time temporal—marks the period when Slothrop visits the factory as an “interregnum” (294) between the collapse of the Reich and the Russian occupation. But there is even more middle ground in the underground V-2 works as they are depicted in the novel. Thus, as indicated by its plural name, the factory consists of several dimensions among which it shuttles. In effect, the tectonic articulation of the Mittelwerke is complex and difficult to follow, but as modern thinkers from Deleuze to Serres put it, one must “bear the difficulty of the middle . . . because it is worth it” (Genosko 32). Above all, what must be grasped about the nature of a composite middle like Pynchon’s Mittelwerke is that its dimensions have nothing to do with the usual parameters of length, width and height. The latter are *extensive* dimensions: linear measurement is the only way to define them. The length-width-height model would do if one had to describe the real Mittelwerke from primary historical sources such as Pynchon himself used while working on the novel. The rocket factory would be notable—precisely for its extension—as “the largest underground factory, as far as is known, in the world” (Mallory and Ottar 261). However, as *Gravity’s Rainbow* writes the real Mittelwerke into its imaginative texture, it translates it into a weird architecture where knights-errant like Slothrop can be chased and get effectively lost in 50-foot-deep twilit pits and secret passages, discover a spacesuit wardrobe and the Raketen-Stadt, experience the Icy Noctiluca, etc. Because of this weirdness the space of the Mittelwerke deserves to be examined intensively and qualitatively rather than extensively and quantitatively. The three intensive dimensions of the Mittelwerke can be named site, para-site and non-site. Unlike length, width and height, the intensive dimensions create not a calculable volume but rather an unpredictable milieu.

So, how are site, para-site and non-site qualitatively defined? These three terms have been the focus of some attention in art theory—especially in site-specific construction and photography—which seeks alternative ways to present space with all its anomalies and multiplicities. In fact, as critics have noted, there is considerable affinity between Pynchon’s treatment of space in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and that of artists like Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark and Edward Ruscha from the early 1970s.¹ The concept of site versus non-site occurs in Smithson’s essays; and a theory of the para-site has been developed more recently by architectural writer Mark Wigley (in the wake of general discussions of parasitism by Serres, Derrida and J. Hillis Miller). These ideas will inform my description of the Mittelwerke. I will show how the complexity of the factory relates to the complexity of



Pynchon's novel, that is, how the intensive dimensions of the Mittelwerke correspond to the intensities—political, existential and otherwise—of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a whole.

Indeed, the site, para-site and non-site also seem to mirror the three main agencies in the novel, namely, the Force, the Counterforce and Slothrop. First, the site seems a dimension where order and control attempt to gain the upper hand; so the site is comparable to the agency of the Force. Second, the para-site may be conceived as an eccentric, subversive and secretive pocket of space which baffles every thrust at unified order—a strategy it shares with the Counterforce. Third, the non-site is a dimension emerging out of perceptual madness in which one can experience what is nonexistent and yet surreally present to the exploded senses. In the general scheme of the novel, the agent who manifests a similar intensity of exploding, scattering, madness and confusion—as well as dubious existence toward the end of the story—is Slothrop. And just as the overall plot shows the impossibility of keeping Force, Counterforce and Slothrop rigorously apart, so the Mittelwerke reveals the site, para-site and non-site as three correlated dimensions that tend to both diverge from and overlap with each other.

Site: The Axis and Symmetry of Speaking Architecture

Although the three intensive dimensions form an unruly complexity when taken together, the site itself exhibits a high degree of stability, harmony and control compared to the para-site and the non-site. The site of the Mittelwerke comprises two long, symmetrical, curved tunnels connected by many parallel cross-tunnels, so the whole can be pictured as “a ladder with a slight S-shaped ripple in it, lying flat: 44 runglike Stollen or cross-tunnels, linking the two main ones” (GR 299–300). The site asserts itself as the most representative dimension of the factory, and that neat ladder image inevitably appears as the “official vision” (297) of the Mittelwerke on the maps in historical books and various other documents about the V-2 program. As can be seen from one such map (page 140), the site dominates the factory by giving a controlled impression of it as a well-ordered and unified—almost Gestalt-like—military-industrial institution. This impression is intended for the visiting “ribbon clerks,” who are “programmed to expect” nothing but “streamlined corners, pylons, or simple solid geometries” in the factory's architectonics (297). For tourists the site must embody the plain yet efficient organization of V-2 production at the Mittelwerke, and it does so through a most conspicuous feature: symmetry.

The forty-four cross-tunnels or Stollen are strictly parallel to one another, and share the two long tunnels' look. The conception of such

a perfectly symmetrical design seems overambitious for an underground site—not to mention its carving in the “‘living stone’” (302) of the Kohnstein mountain. Yet symmetry must have been worth the effort, for it facilitated production immensely: “Out of these Stollen, the 20s, 30s, and 40s, Rocket components were fed out crosswise into the two main assembly lines” in the long tunnels (304). Apart from contributing to the efficiency of the Mittelwerke, the symmetrical layout has stylistic and symbolic value. It is an “inspiration of Etzel Ölsch” (299), a fictional megalomaniac aesthete schooled under Hitler’s most eminent urban planner, Albert Speer. Instead of a simple factory, Ölsch has created an “allegorical statue” (300) informed by such artistic principles as order, symmetry and harmony.

So, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the Mittelwerke does not belong to the category of mere building, to which military-industrial structures are traditionally relegated and in which aesthetic concerns hardly matter, but is true Architecture. Though stuck with a military-industrial project, Ölsch does not despair of civilizing its site and goes on designing in the vein of the civil architecture of “Autobahn overpasses, sports stadiums u.s.w.” (298). Pynchon seems very perceptive in singling out this aspect of the Mittelwerke, because during the war Germany was the only country to have an aesthetically viable style of military building that could compare with civil building in form as well as function (Mallory and Ottar 275). The main function of civil architecture in the Third Reich was ideological control and propaganda; so it consisted largely of the likes of “shimmering, Albert Speer-style alabaster open-air stadium[s] with giant cement birds of prey up at each corner” (GR 687). Such monumental architecture symbolically supported Nazi power, especially the power of the Führer—a fact on which Ölsch’s megalomania seems to be based. When Ölsch gets “into a grandiose idea of what an architect’s life should be down here, insisting now on the title ‘Master’ from all his helpers” (300), he may be hypostasizing himself after the model of the Führer, who was known as “the master-builder [Baumeister] of the Reich.”

To represent stark grandeur and authority, Nazi architecture was usually designed in an unimaginative pseudoclassical style. Its proportions and axial symmetries were “supposed to provide discipline, order, liberation from the chaos of everyday life” (Teut 107). In reality, the unrelenting symmetry of Nazi building² functioned as “a medium of subordination” rather than liberation (Teut 104): it offered an architectonic metaphor for the rigid, homogeneous and thus easily controllable form that the body of the *Volk* was to assume. In the Mittelwerke, however, it is not the body politic but the individual’s body that manifests a homology with the axial arrangement of the two main

tunnels. The tunnels' double-sigmoid shape reminds Slothrop of the bodies of two lovers (himself and Katje) lying next to each other—though not making love, but “curled asleep” (GR 302), petrified in a somnolent and, as it were, thanatomaniac symmetry. This association of death and symmetry imposes itself because we regard symmetry as a “property of that which is dead, inorganic (the mineral kingdom)” (Bois 14). There is a certain attitude of cadaverous rigidity about double images because their identity suggests equilibrium and hence a stasis verging on inanimacy. As they flank a central axis, each of two symmetrical objects, be they tunnels or bodies, seems trapped inside a perfectly balanced architecture—so perfect that it “will never need a design change” (GR 318–19).

According to Ölsch, the layout of the factory site is “‘based [. . .] on the double lightning-stroke [. . .]—the SS emblem’” (300). “That is one meaning of the shape of the tunnels down here in the Mittelwerke. Another may be the ancient rune that stands for the yew tree, or Death” (302), represented as ↓. A prominent analogy to, or perhaps even prototype of, Pynchon’s motif of gigantic ancient symbols carved deep in the flesh of mountains is to be found in Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, where the underground passages trace an Ethiopian inscription. In *Pym* the author of the hieroglyphs is the white god, Lord and primeval architect of the universe; in *Gravity’s Rainbow* the author is the megalomaniac “Master” Ölsch posing as God’s human counterpart. The glyphs inscribed by such authors are not some superficial writing *on* the walls but a constitutive, structuring writing *of* the walls of the caves, which gives birth to their solid and immutable architecture. In Poe as in Pynchon, the most salient characteristics of such a written tunnel are its symmetry and uniformity:

Passing down, however, beyond the limit spoken of, the interval rapidly contracted, and the sides [of the cave] began to run parallel. . . . Upon arriving within fifty feet of the bottom, a perfect regularity commenced. The sides were now entirely uniform in substance, in color, and in lateral direction. (Poe 871)

Yet another similarity between Poe’s and Pynchon’s tunnel inscriptions resides in the fatal messages they carry. In *Pym* the Ethiopian letters signify blackness, which the white god seeks to destroy. The yew-tree rune of the Mittelwerke, as we have seen, is associated with Death,³ as is the double lightning-stroke of the SS, whose insignia, moreover, was a death’s head. So the site of the factory does achieve the representational purpose assigned to architecture by the aesthetic ideologues of the Third Reich:

Each great epoch finds the ultimate embodiment of its values in its architectural works. When nations experience a great epoch inwardly, they seek to give this epoch a corresponding outward expression. In this, one word is more convincing than whatever can be merely said: I mean the word in stone. (Hitler qtd. in Adam 229; my translation)

The Mittelwerke is a word, or rather a letter standing for several significant words and concepts appropriated by Nazi propaganda. The factory's word carved in the living stone of the mountain thus makes for a true *architecture parlante*, speaking architecture, which is symbolically outspoken about its ideological messages.⁴ The *architexture* of the Mittelwerke speaks to us about Death, though not in order to invite dialogue but rather to impose silence, obedience and, as in Slothrop's two sleeping lovers, a thanatomaniac stasis.

The meanings of the Mittelwerke's tunnel layout are not exhausted by the double lightning-stroke and the yew-tree rune. As one of Ölsch's apprentices recognizes, the shape of the two rocket-production tunnels is also the double integral sign (GR 300)—aptly, since double integration is used in the V-2 guidance. The Rocket integrates twice "[t]o get to distance from acceleration." "'Meters per second' will integrate to 'meters,'" "so that time falls away: change is stilled. [. . .] The moving vehicle is frozen, in space, to become *architecture*, and timeless" (301; emphasis added). The V-2 is thus immobilized in its parabolic trajectory, which consists of two—once again—symmetrical semi-arches joined at the Brennschluss peak. Apparently the "rigor mortis" (Bois 14) peculiar to symmetrical images can smite not only inert human bodies but even something as mobile as the Rocket. Symmetry and double integration effectively reduce the "dynamic space of the living Rocket" (GR 301) to a dead architectural form, to a sepulchral design couched in "the solid fatality of stone" (302), like the numerous mausoleums, valhallas and temples of honor built in the Third Reich to nurture the Nazi cult of death. Symptomatically, the nomenclature of integrals and differentials goes back to the term *calculus*—a diminutive of the Latin *calx*, meaning stone. So, for the Rocket to be subjected to computing and stoned into architecture is, in a way, to return to the root—to the original sense of the operation of calculus.

Such architectural stasis affects the Rocket not only after the launch but already at the Mittelwerke. The cross-tunnels or Stollen of the Mittelwerke are arranged at regular intervals and numbered, each Stollen supplying a particular rocket component. As one walks the cross-tunnels, one can actually "retrace the Rocket's becoming," cut into separate stages (304). Thus the make-up of the Rocket bears the

stamp of the site's architecture: both are compartmentalized in accord with "the German mania for subdividing" (448). Being so architecturally structured, Stollen after Stollen, component after component, the Rocket is also endowed with the main properties of the site—order, precision and calm dignity. It has come a long way from the chaotic "'flying laboratory'" (427) it was in the pre-Mittelwerke period. Early on, in the development works at Kummersdorf, for example, everybody "from von Braun, the Prussian aristocrat, down to the likes of Pökler" had worked as one in a disorganized, frenzied space of invention and experimentation. Only later, at Peenemünde and then the Mittelwerke, did social lines and divisions of labor start to matter, "when the bureaus and paranoias moved in, and the organization charts became plan-views of prison cells" (402).

That reference to paranoias is suggestive. The site is indeed a paranoid space if one defines paranoia as the thrust at order and control characteristic of the Force and its military and industrial establishments. Paranoia also entails a proclivity to stasis: "every paranoid's wish [is] to perfect methods of immobility" (572), since immobility seems to be a prerequisite for constancy and security. Paranoid spaces are quintessentially safe; they provide the psychotic with "the comfort of a closed place" where "no one stares, no one is waiting to judge you" (299). Before and during the war, there was a pronounced vogue for defensive structures of all kinds and sizes. Along with offensive shocks like the Blitzkrieg, the war witnessed a grand spectacle of defence paranoia, the fortification of all kinds of spaces—military, civilian, industrial—into a Fortress Europe, or *Festung Europa*, largely sunk underground. Think of monstrous buried strongholds like the Maginot Line and, on a smaller scale, deep air-raid shelters. The Mittelwerke is part of this pattern: it was excavated at inaccessible depth to protect the rocket program from surface catastrophes like the Allied bombing of Peenemünde in August 1943 (see GR 423). In the course of the war, subterranean refuges became an increasing obsession of both civilians and the army. Populations all over Europe dramatized Hitler's maxim that "life is haunted and filled with the idea of protection" (qtd. in Virilio 32). Here and there, governments even had a presentiment of a true pathology developing from the underground-shelter trend, which they diagnosed as "deep shelter mentality" (Mallory and Ottar 223).

Gravity's Rainbow has its own equivalent to this pathology: "There is that not-so-rare personality disorder known as Tannhäuserism[, . . . loving] to be taken under mountains" (GR 299). Both the womb-like security of the underground and its association with Earth goddesses ("Venus, Frau Holda" [299]) explain why it holds such fascination for everybody from heroes of medieval/Wagnerian legend like Tannhäuser

to common people of the mid-twentieth century. However, “womanly tunnel-systems” (195) such as the Mittelwerke are also tomb-like by virtue of their subterranean location. With “[a] couple hundred feet of rock mountain, at the deepest, press[ing] down overhead” (300), the aura of the factory could not but be “sepulchral” (299) and cause one, like Ölsch, to develop a “‘deathwish’ problem” (300). Paradoxically, paranoid spaces offer a refuge from death and destruction only at the cost of immersing one in an equally deathly ambience. The paranoid’s safe and comfortable closed place is also “where everyone is in complete agreement about Death” (299).

Thanks to Paul Virilio’s pioneering exhibition on the aesthetics of German war architecture, *Bunker Archeology* (1975), architects now widely recognize that issues of style and representation were relevant to military building during the Second World War. Loading a mere military structure with so much “inspiration” and with so many of the symbols essential to the novel—calculus, symmetry, hieroglyphics, as well as the V-2 parabola which shapes one of the factory’s entrances (298)—Pynchon was well ahead of most architectural historians when he viewed a military factory as an intensely symbolic and paranoid site.

Para-Site: The Domestic Mysteries of Furniture

Pynchon’s description of the Mittelwerke makes a good case for the dominance of control and paranoia in subterranean defensive structures. Yet undergrounds are sometimes ambiguous, since “underground” can also imply insidious subversion, which, of course, conflicts with the principles of clarity and harmony governing the site. Precisely this subversive underground defines the dimension of the para-site at the Mittelwerke—hence the affinity between the para-site and the Counterforce mentioned earlier. The para-site undermines the totalized order of the site through its eccentricity and secretiveness. While the site offers an official vision of the factory, the para-site allows one an intimate half-glimpse of something mysterious that must be hidden. However, the para-site is hidden not due to any paranoias but because it would spoil the unified impression of the factory which the site creates.

The most distinctive feature of the para-site is that it cannot be exactly located. It comprises “secret [. . .] rock passages that lead through to Dora, the prison camp next to the Mittelwerke” (296), and “a few private drifts that don’t appear on any map of the place” (300). So the position of the para-site remains uncertain; one cannot tell whether it belongs truly to the Mittelwerke or rather to Dora. The para-site is, in a Derridean fashion, both internal and external to the factory.

Against the centrality and the unified axial arrangement of the site, the para-site sets up a cunning marginality and labyrinthine fragmentation. Significantly, the passages of the para-site are not numbered (as are the forty-four Stollen of the site), which means that they were not part of the original architectural intention for the Mittelwerke. On the contrary, they are a deformity that might disrupt the neatness of Ölsch's symmetrical site. The para-site is not shown to the sheepish ribbon clerks—only to more perceptive visitors who disbelieve the official vision of the Mittelwerke and dare to ask, ““What *really* went on in here?”” (296).

The first experience of the para-site's oddities is the encounter with the ghosts of Dora prisoners along the secret passages between the main factory tunnels and the camp. For the prisoners, “Death came like the American Army, and liberated them spiritually. So they're apt to be on a spiritual rampage now” (296). While Death is associated in the site with paranoid stasis and immutability, in the para-site it acts as an animating force: it propels the half-comical, half-scary ghosts on their mission to attack the adventurous tourists. By incorporating Death, the para-site resembles a drafty Gothic crypt more than a calm and dignified Nazi mausoleum where nothing stirs. Yet, regardless of any spatial metaphors, the important thing about the para-site is that its impish specters “never simply occupy the space but elusively haunt it” (Wigley 181), whereas in the dimension of the site space is territorialized, heroically structured and distinctly occupied—even mastered by Master Ölsch. The crucial difference is that the ghosts of the para-site are mere “household pests” (Wigley 178) rather than masters of the house. Their role is not to lord over a serene household but to roil its “domestic mysteries.” As a result, perceptive visitors to the Mittelwerke may catch a vague half-glimpse, not “of what might have happened,” but “of what likely *did happen*” (GR 303) attendant on rocket production. For example, much can be inferred from the prisoners' reaction to the so-called liberation: they “went on a rampage after the material—they looted, they ate and drank themselves sick” (296).

Speaking of household pests, not only does the para-site in the Mittelwerke house some ghostly parasites; it turns out to be a parasitic space itself, especially as one approaches its second “popular attraction,” “the elegant Raumwaffe spacesuit wardrobe, designed by famous military couturier Heini of Berlin” (296). While in the site, down the factory's assembly tunnels, one sees the Real Thing, the Rocket, the para-site's wardrobe offers only some spacesuit finery. In typical parasitic fashion, the wardrobe is a superfluous ornament attached to the essential body of its host, the site. The frivolity of the para-site's levitating *prêt à porter* is interesting only insofar as it provides a

counterpoint to and a diversion from the gravity of the V-2s found in the site. Tourists diverted by the para-site pay "extravagant sums" (296) to tour its labyrinthine passages. In addition, visitors must pay "an extra few marks" (297) if they want to try on the eccentric outfits from the wardrobe, which are "dazzling enough to thrill even the juvenile leads of a space-operetta" (296). Once inside a Space Helmet, for instance, the tourist is grotesquely affected by its strangeness: "looking out now through neutral-density orbits, the sound of your breath hissing up and around the bone spaces, what you thought was a balanced mind is little help" (297). The peculiar trait of parasitic luxury is to be disorienting, nauseating and generally "unpleasant" (296). But then every parasite causes some damage to its host.

Parasitic disturbances are kept at bay thanks to the fact that the para-site is folded into an outlying secret pocket of space, on the periphery of the factory. Accordingly, besides being ghost-ridden and crypt-like, the para-site is also cryptic in the sense of hidden. A clandestine crypt of this kind contrasts with the grand scale and conspicuous architecture of the site. Rather than in official Architecture, the crypt finds expression in intimate furniture—particularly the boudoir furniture of (spacesuit) wardrobes, closets and beds—in which the parasite's domestic mysteries are concealed. One mystery, for example, is encrypted in the factory quarters where the Schwarzkommando lived before the end of the war. Steeped in privacy and holy secrecy, this "compartment" is also the space of bodily secretions: here tourists can discover the mystery of Enzian's "Illumination" by observing a "dark stain, miraculously still wet"—the trace of his revelatory "wet dream where he coupled with a slender white rocket" (297). The Schwarzkommando fit perfectly in the para-site because they are the product of an illegitimate collusion between colonizers and colonized. Similarly, the para-site "has no legitimate place within the system" on which it sponges (Wigley 180). Like every undesirable supplement, it was not an intended part of the factory or of the V-2 program.

However, Pynchon's text somewhat reverses the relation between host and parasite, or between system and supplement. Normally, the parasite must follow the host. But in the case of the Mittelwerke the description of the para-site (the haunted passages, the spacesuit wardrobe, the Schwarzkommando's quarters) comes before that of the site. So, perhaps, it is not true that the site with its V-2s provides the ground on which the para-sitic eccentricities are based. Rather, it is the other way round: without the eccentric fantasy of space travel, nurtured by all sorts of strange birds from scientists to (quite conceivably) couturiers, no one would have started developing rockets

—not to mention winning support from the military and launching an industrial-production program.

Non-Site: The Speed of Light-Space

Of the factory's three intensive dimensions, the non-site comes closest to being the middle of the Middle Works. If a middle grows "where things pick up speed" (Deleuze and Guattari, TP 25), then the non-site, with all its turbulence and acceleration, certainly qualifies as one. Triggered by some perceptual anomaly, the non-site emerges as a sudden and almost epiphanic bang in the midst of either the site or the para-site. It is a pure becoming that takes place without itself being a proper place. In short, the non-site is space-as-event. It is that dimension of space which has almost zero spatial substance and even less physical solidity.

One surreal non-site emergence in the Mittelwerke is the apparition of "the Icy Noctiluca" (GR 311), or the Icy Night-light. It bursts out right in the middle of the site when Marvy's Mothers, chasing Slothrop, fire a phosphorus flare down one of the main factory tunnels. The Icy Noctiluca partakes of the violent suddenness and confusion in visual perception peculiar to a non-site: "'Stand by, good buddy!' // With only that warning, in blinding concussion the Icy Noctiluca breaks, floods through the white tunnel. For a minute or two nobody in here can see" (311–12). It also takes place with a tremendous velocity: "There is only the hurtling on, through amazing perfect whiteness. [. . . N]ever has [Slothrop] been as close as now to the true momentum of his time." As it gathers momentum, the realm of the Icy Noctiluca is less and less likely to end and more likely to spread forever, as if by "blind inertia" (312). To Slothrop's confounded mind and senses, this non-site connects with something momentous, beyond the factory and the immediate present: "Slothrop feels a terrible *familiarity* here, a center he has been skirting, avoiding as long as he can remember[. . . F]aces and facts that have crowded his indenture to the Rocket, camouflage and distraction fall away for the white moment" (312).

Slothrop perceives the Icy Noctiluca as a presencing, out of nowhere, of forbidden yet terribly familiar psychic content. In fact, throughout the novel, he often experiences this uncanny effect, as when, in part 2, he visits the Himmler-Spielsaal. However, he is attentive not to the locations themselves but to some perceptual anomalies in the midst of these locations that create an aura in which "the Forbidden" (203) can manifest itself. Thus in the Himmler-Spielsaal, "There may, for a moment, have been some golden, vaguely

rootlike or manlike figure beginning to form among the brown and bright cream shadows and light here" (202). Just like the phosphorus flare in the Mittelwerke, the play of shadow and light amidst the "German-Baroque perplexities of shape" (208) in the Spielsaal provides the perfect conditions for the emergence of the Forbidden. Slothrop cannot help but figure his psychic content as space—as a non-site, "the Forbidden Wing" (205), where he is "[d]ancin' like a fool [. . .] / Waitin' fer th' light to start shiver-ing" (203).

Light is an indispensable component of the non-site, both in the Mittelwerke and in the Himmler-Spielsaal. Over-bright light floods and drowns the rigid substance of the site to make room for the imaginary non-site. A non-site, though necessarily embedded in and thus delimited by physical space, always refers to something boundless and "oceanic," and it is the role of fluid light to facilitate this reference. Light liquefies solid spaces to let in the tide waters of the Forbidden—an ocean that can hardly be contained by the site but rather itself "contain[s] the lack of its own containment" (Smithson 50). Along with this ocean, the associations with Poe leak back into the Mittelwerke. In fact, the "*Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* seems . . . [a] prototype for rigorous 'non-site' investigations" (Smithson 49). The fluid light of Pynchon's non-site recalls *Pym's* Antarctic water "of a milky consistency and hue," out of which "a luminous glare arose" (Poe 880, 882). In both cases, effects of radiance, liquidity and amazing perfect whiteness converge to create the surreal ambience of the non-sites: Poe's hallucinatory South Pole, Pynchon's Icy Noctiluca. And both non-sites are approached "with a hideous velocity" (Poe 882). Also, just as the Icy Noctiluca represents Slothrop's unconscious, the rushing to the milky Pole represents, for psychoanalytic interpreters like Marie Bonaparte, an incestuous urge for the mother which *Pym's* God/Father finally frustrates by getting in the way of the boat before it descends into the cataract.

These same elements of acceleration and white luminosity typify the Mittelwerke's second non-site phenomenon, "the Raketten-Stadt." This one appears within the para-site, in the quarters of the Schwarzkommando, where "[t]he wall-paintings [. . .] transform [. . .] to dioramas" of the "Rocket-City, so whitely lit against the calm dimness of space." The emergence of the Rocket-City non-site results, once again, from a perceptual anomaly: a confusion of brightness and shadow causes "[t]he wall-paintings [to] lose their intended primitive crudeness and take on primitive spatiality, depth and brilliance" (GR 297). The Rocket-City, then, does not exist outside the anomalous visual horizon of the tourists. They "stare" at the murals until they can "make out actual movement" in the depicted scenes and even become

part of this speedy and turbulent movement themselves: “yes, we’re hanging now down the last limb of our trajectory in to the Raketen-Stadt, a difficult night of magnetic storm behind us” (297). The landscapes of the non-site once again turn out to be mindscapes. The Rocket-City sets into motion the psychic content of those who experience it: thus, “tourists have to connect the look of it back to things they remember from their times and planet.” In Slothrop’s case, the City-scape taps part of his forbidden memory: “indole molecules, especially *polymerized* indoles, as in Imipolex G” (297).

To summarize, the non-site is a nonexistent, surreal, epiphanic, ephemeral, experiential space. Persistent homologies are discernable among the many non-sites of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. For example, the Icy Noctiluca realm has an affinity with ““the Kingdom of Lord Blicero[, a] white land”” (486). Indeed, one can conceive of the novel’s non-sites as forms yielded by a continuous topological morphosis every time its twisting plane cuts through the narrative space. The Raketen-Stadt is a case in point: it spawns quite a few avatars in the novel notable for their pliant urban architectonics. Toward the end, for instance, the Raketen-Stadt appears as a system of buildings “you can [. . .] raise or lower [. . .] to desired heights or levels underground” (674). This makes it an outright “transformation-space” oscillating between “phantasms and, mostly, exact theorems of phase transition” (Serres 110; my translation).

The model employed here to read the Mittelwerke posits the site as an ordered territoriality; the para-site as an eccentric, subversive and encrypted place; and the non-site as a mad emergence, a space-as-adventure. Perhaps this tripartite distinction can also work in other discussions of *Gravity’s Rainbow’s* composite, heterogeneous loci that every now and then wreak havoc in our critical household economy and cause us to suffer from “spatial intoxication” (Hollier 59). Of course, to make use of the model one can always modify it at will; a key point of such spatial concepts is that they should be supple. In this sense, even Smithson considered his site/non-site theory only provisional, and kept redefining it. The task of such concepts is to alert us to the specificity of spatial constructs and not constrain our perceptions of them. As Pynchon writes about one of the oddest places in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “The White Visitation,” “from a distance no two observers, no matter how close they stand, see quite the same building in that orgy of self-expression” (GR 83).

Notes

¹Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and John Johnston discuss the relatedness of *Gravity's Rainbow* and Smithson's dialectical site/non-site works as well as the *Spiral Jetty*. On entropic space and the "Zone" in Matta-Clark and Ruscha, see Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss.

²The most representative example of the use of symmetry in Nazi architecture is Albert Speer's plan for a monstrous North-South axis in Berlin's center. Its two sides were so identical that even Hitler was shocked: he recommended some changes in the design to relieve its monotony (Teut 112).

³The yew-tree rune is associated with Death because "the yew is the holy tree of which the Germanic warrior made his weapons and under which he buried his dead" (Erb 848; my translation).

⁴The term *architecture parlante* applies to French Neoclassical architecture of the eighteenth century in which the outward shape of a building had to express some relevant meaning or message. So *architecture parlante* is a very representational or symbolic architecture. Since Nazi architecture made use of Greco-Roman and Neoclassical styles, the term can justly be transferred to it.

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