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GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES

THOMAS PYNCHON'S *MASON & DIXON*

So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for.
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §499

At the conclusion of *Mason & Dixon*'s thirty-second chapter, Jeremiah Dixon receives a letter from his long-time mentor, William Emerson, who has entrusted Dixon with a watch of perpetual motion that never requires winding. Emerson's letter, in response to Dixon's report that R.C., a member of the surveying party, has swallowed the watch, bears the taunting postscript: "Time is the Space that may not be seen.—" (326). This enigmatic statement is not just the witty banter of one surveyor to another, but is in fact the problem that Pynchon's novel commits itself to solving. Just because time is invisible does not mean that it does not radically affect our understanding of the world. Regrettably, its invisibility makes it easy to overlook when one is, say, drawing the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland in colonial America, or even when one is reading a book about said border. Contending that time can and should contribute to knowledge rather than undermine it, Pynchon rethinks the relation between instant and duration, offering readers a fully temporalized engagement with *Mason & Dixon*'s narrative form.

In his letter to Dixon, Emerson explains precisely how the watch produces its perpetual motion: "With the proper deployment of Spring Constants and Magnetickal Gating, Power may be borrow'd, as needed, against repayment dates deferrable indefinitely" (317). The watch borrows against the future to run perpetually in the present, creating disequilibrium between the power put into the watch and the energy it expends. In

short, it runs on credit. Rather than indexing the dissipation of energy to its expenditure over a linear course of time (which would be the assumption of Newton's law of the conservation of energy), any given use of energy in the present moment depends on the future's deferral, on the assumption that there will always be more future, and hence energy, to be had. As its own engine, the watch runs on a strange economy in which it incurs and settles debts in terms of itself. But the debt settled must remain perpetually incongruent to the debt incurred because only the failure of equivalent return (a full repayment of the debt) ensures its perpetual motion. Time thus moves forward by looping back on itself without ever perfectly returning to itself; an imperfect circularity generates its forwardness.¹ Such mechanics permit the watch to not just measure time, but to be time.

Although the watch's perpetual motion directly affronts Newton's law, it nevertheless resonates with a basic understanding of human experience—including the experience of reading—as motion through time. But as Wilder's tricycle ride revealed in the previous chapter, and as I suggested in the discussion of Grosz in the Introduction, perpetual motion's immanence to experience mitigates the possibility of meaning and understanding. Dixon's many attempts to discern the meaning of the watch's message—which closely echo the struggle to understand Wilder in *White Noise*—exemplify this problem. For instance, when Emerson first entrusts him with the watch, Dixon feels as if he is being told something, but the narrator notes that Dixon's history with Emerson "has been one of many such Messages, not necessarily clear or even verbal, which Dixon keeps failing to understand" (318). Assuming that the watch is some kind of "message," Dixon goes to great lengths to interpret what "it might be confiding to him" (319). He even dreams of Emerson presenting him with a sheaf of legal papers "emboss'd with some intricate Seal, which if not read properly will bring consequences Dixon cannot voice." In the dream, Emerson is "reading [Dixon's] Thoughts," and "the Watch wishes to speak, but it only struggles, with the paralyz'd voice of the troubl'd Dreamer. Nonetheless, Dixon's Salvation lies in understanding the Message." Only in the daylight does Dixon begin to hear the watch saying: "When you accept me into your life [. . .] you will accept me . . . into your Stomach" (320–21). As long as no one "internalizes" the watch, its message remains compromised, but swallowing it complicates the retrieval of its meaning. Such is the paradox of producing meaning out of perpetual motion: the watch's meaningful message can be delivered only once that message is unreceivable, and as long as the message is receivable, it will be inadequately given. In the same way, time's immanent passage makes fully knowing it impossible, while stopping time to know it compromises time's truth.

And this is why Emerson's description of the watch's peculiar economy is so important. The watch does not simply move forward linearly in time but instead functions recursively; it predicates the linear forwardness of perpetual motion on the circularity of exchange transpiring in every instant of its passing. To wiggle his way through the paradox of time and knowledge and to solve the problem of time's invisibility, Pynchon thus creates his own perpetual-motion machine, reimagining the instant as the constitutive component of time, its motion, and its meaning. Tellingly, in the midst of Dixon's anxiety over the watch's meaning, Pynchon's newly conceived instant asserts itself at two critical junctures, each time in relation to R.C., the man who ultimately "internalizes" the watch by eating it. First, we learn that R.C. "covets" the watch "[f]rom the Instant he sees [it]" (321). Then, when the members of the surveying party speculate critically about his watch consumption, he defends himself, averring that he had to make the choice "the Moment presented": "I had less than one of the Creature's Ticks to decide" (323).

In this formulation the instant initially ruptures or freezes time, forcing R.C. to stand outside temporal experience. For example, when his cohorts question, "Shouldn't you've set it down someplace, 'stead of swallerin' it?" R.C. literalizes the instant's ostensible negation of time by retorting, "There wasn't Time" (322). On closer inspection, however, the moment of choice, purportedly instantaneous and without time, actually contains two versions of time, both instant and duration, and functions more like the pure, passing form of time itself. After R.C. rhetorically asks, "What were my choices?" the narrator intercedes, explaining that the watch "was either bewitch'd, by Country Women in the middle of the night,—Fire, monthly Blood, Names of Power,—or perfected, as might any Watch be, over years, small bit by bit, to its present mechanical State, by Men, in work-Shops, and in the Daytime. That was the sexual Choice the Moment presented,—between those two sorts of Magic" (323). This description is odd. First, if the choice presents itself in a Moment, from where does the time to choose between two things come? Apparently some smaller unit of measure subdivides the present moment and permits the formulation of choice, while simultaneously rendering that choice a non-choice.² Even weirder, this choice, isolated in a moment, itself contains both a moment and more than a moment—time as both instant and duration. The narrator claims that the moment presented a "sexual Choice" between women who cast a spell, instantly instilling the watch with its powers of perpetuity, and men who have performed the same feat "over years" and "bit by bit." To sum up, a choice between two things presents itself in an instant that is logically only one, but that instant contains not only a choice of two,

but also a choice of two constituted by one (the Country Women's instant curse) and more than one (the Men's enduring work-Shop labor). Rather than an oppositional relation between instant and duration, Pynchon here splits open the instant and locates duration at its very heart. Of course, that duration is itself composed of instants which contain other durations composed of even more instants and so on. Foundational to this iterative structure, however, is Pynchon's basic predication of duration on instantaneity; that is what makes meaning possible *and* allows for time's motion. Treating the instant as constitutive of rather than hostile to duration embeds meaningful content in time without having it swept away by time's linear flow.³

Global Instants

But why make time meaningful and knowable by rethinking the instant rather than engaging a more scientifically sanctioned, conceptual apparatus such as relativity, quantum physics, or chaos theory, as we might expect from a former Boeing employee like Pynchon? I will be arguing that despite setting *Mason & Dixon* in pre-Revolutionary America, Pynchon's temporal manipulations critique the way globalization and its attendant technologies accelerate time in their pursuit of instantaneity and immediacy. In the midst of such accelerated times, a new vision of the instant will be more instructive than a recapitulation of the temporality of chaos theory or quantum physics—ideas already treated in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. While equally global in their scope and political in their critique of violence, these prior novels do not muster the full-blown critique of late-twentieth-century globalization that *Mason & Dixon* does.

Of course, *Mason & Dixon* does not explicitly consider our contemporary global moment marked by transnational trade pacts, the growth of the Internet, or President Bush's 2006 repeal of the embargo on Indian mangoes (a delicious prelude to the less palatable repeal of U.S. opposition to India's nuclear program), all of which were designed to make both business and pleasure much, much faster. As the lessons of the past take a backseat to the joys of synchronicity and an insatiable thirst for progress and the future—a future which is always now—such global technologies constantly search for the transaction, exchange, or production of knowledge that is more instantaneous than the previous one. Because global instantaneity is a function of temporal acceleration, however, this “globalized” instant is not an instant that ruptures and stands outside of time, nor is it a Pynchonian instant that constitutes time by embedding duration within itself. Instead it is an instant defined simultaneously by speed and presentness,

motion and immediacy. In critiquing global time, an instant that stops time might usefully slow down its manic temporality, but then time would be stopped. Pynchon's instant, however, does not just tell globalization to slow down; its embedded durations also allow it to retain time's motion and passage.

This effect is most pronounced in the novel's treatment of history and its relationship to the present. Indeed, when *Mason & Dixon* first appeared in 1997, many reviewers wondered at Pynchon's sharp historical turn, particularly given the intensely modern concerns of his previous work. But with the increasing obsolescence of history that is a byproduct of globalization's temporal acceleration and embrace of instantaneity, it seems clear that Pynchon's continued interest in history has everything to do with the crisis of modernity. We could argue, for instance, that Pynchon's decision to set his novel in the eighteenth century works to remind us of the importance of history in an era when history has become obsolete. However, because the accelerated eighteenth-century temporality presented in *Mason & Dixon* is no different from our current temporal acceleration, I suspect Pynchon is up to something a bit more complicated than telling his readers to remember the past. After all, if the past were to function as a solution, it would presumably need to offer us something different; but instead of difference, we find the Enlightenment and rampant colonialism—the two dominant prongs of Pynchon's eighteenth-century vision—manifesting the same globalized urge to instantaneity that we experience today. The novel thus reveals that time accelerates during the delineation-obsessed eighteenth century—an era of drawing boundaries, categorizing knowledge, and marking longitude on the globe—in the same way that it does in the border-erasing twentieth century—an era of transnational capital, supersonic air travel, and technological interconnectedness. Because Pynchon insightfully highlights the formal similarity between these two times, not the superficial differences of technological content, we cannot simply see history as the antidote to a contemporary problem.

In setting his novel in the eighteenth century, therefore, Pynchon contradicts the contemporary belief in history's obsolescence (i.e., he calls our attention to history), but he does so by showing us that there were other times in history when history was just as obsolete. In effect, he shows us that history is real by showing us that it is not. Consequently, the novel's interface between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries has historical duration (the span of time between the two centuries), but it is also flattened into two homologous instants (the same temporal dilemmas face both moments in time). Most elegantly, this simultaneously lengthened and collapsed version of history enacts the aforementioned relationship

between duration and instant only on a larger scale, suggesting that in history time both passes and repeats itself. Everything and nothing changes.

Finally, not only does *Mason & Dixon* represent this historical interface between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, but its parallax narrative form also manifests the historicity of that interface for its readers. Pynchon's rejection of a transparently isomorphic relation between time's forward motion and that of the reading process is crucial to his production of narrative meaning in and through time's passing. As we saw in the previous chapter, such a Wilder-esque version of timely knowledge production reduces its participants to wild communicative gestures, stranding them outside the event. Pynchon's success lies in his resistance to this aleatory temptation. By dissociating time's motion from futurity and connecting it instead to instantaneity, he produces a temporalized reading experience in which instantaneity embeds duration. Such temporal conditions then force time to move both cyclically and linearly, which in turn allows for the productive interface of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries that we see in *Mason & Dixon*.

In effect, the novel's temporally parallax narration expands the representational instant, forcing readers to embed multiple narrative durations at the heart of a single instant of reading. While different narrators deliver their stories from different moments in time, the singular act of reading unifies these multiple temporalities into a single moment.⁴ These narrative techniques unite linear and cyclical models of time into one textual form so that any instant of linear time also contains cycles of time looping around inside it; Pynchon fractalizes the temporality of *Mason & Dixon*'s narrative form, making its inside larger than its outside.⁵ My goal here is to show that this version of time effectively undoes the time-knowledge paradox and offers a productive literary response to globalization's challenge to temporal experience. In the midst of global trends that increasingly accelerate and shorten our sense of time, Pynchon's innovative narrative form locates a thicker, more enduring temporal experience at the very core of globalization's drive to immediacy in both the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Consequently, because its temporal form sidesteps the time-knowledge paradox, *Mason & Dixon* achieves a level of social critique that the same paradox prevented *White Noise* from attaining.

Representing Perpetual Motion

Pynchon's narrative innovations offer a useful response to Gilles Deleuze's challenge to represent a version of time he names Aionic time. In *The Logic*

of *Sense* Deleuze describes two different forms of time: “Chronos” is the time of the limited present and causality, while “Aion” denotes the time of an unlimited past and future which perpetually subdivides the present. This perpetual subdivision empties the Aionic present, and Deleuze contends that this is the true source of aleatory time, or what he calls the time of “becoming,” the “*pure empty form of time*, which has freed itself of its present corporeal content” (165). Just as Pynchon detaches time’s motion from futurity, here Deleuze derives aleatory openness from an infinite subdivision of the present instant, not from the inevitability of time’s next moment. Instead of a present to which past and future are always relative (Chronos), Aionic time recasts the present as an aleatory instant of non-space, always divided into either past or future. It is the empty point where past and future touch.

Deleuze’s idea that the instant functions as time’s pure form rather than as its hostile enemy draws on a tension in Henri Bergson’s much earlier treatment of the instant and its relation to *durée*.⁶ Generally, Bergson describes the instant only as an obstruction of time’s flow: “real time has no instants,” he writes in *Duration and Simultaneity*.⁷ Despite his aversion to any concept that divides time’s pure flow, however, Bergson also describes the instant as more than just the spatialized cessation of *durée*. Another passage from *Duration*, for example, provides the foundation for imagining the instant as an infinitely subdivisible presentness as Deleuze does. Bergson says that because “the instant is what would terminate a duration if the latter came to a halt,” the instant “does not exist actually, but virtually.” Although for Bergson virtuality abstracts and thus spatializes time, he does not dismiss it out of hand as he does more egregious spatializations of time. For instance, he implies that the instant is unavoidable: “we practice it instinctively. Its recipe is deposited in the language” (54). Bergson elaborates on this rather Wittgensteinian explanation by noting the use-value of the instant: “We need this simultaneity of the instant in order (1) to note the simultaneity of a phenomenon with a clock moment, (2) to point off, all along our own duration, the simultaneities of these moments with moments of our duration which are created in the very act of pointing” (54). “Simultaneity” here suggests that instants appear wherever more than one *durée* exist. Any given *durée* “has no instants,” but multiple *durées* exist simultaneously and need instants to interact and intersect with each other, an idea that anticipates the move that both Deleuze and Pynchon make, locating *durée* within the instant.

But, of course, Bergson does not go that far, and it instead falls to Deleuze to imagine the instant, not *durée*, as the true form of time. But Deleuze too leaves work undone, asserting that despite the lack of obvious

referents for its unique temporal mode, “the instant . . . must itself be represented.” Conspicuously absent of examples, however, *The Logic of Sense* merely notes, “The present of the Aion representing the instant is . . . the present of the actor, dancer, or mime” (168). Deleuze’s reference to these particular art forms strikes me as a retreat to the kind of performative present that Wilder represents in *White Noise*. In the same way that those witnessing his wild ride across the interstate remain trapped “outside the event,” the audience watching an “actor, dancer, or mime” is not receiving linguistically communicable information. Consequently, Deleuze’s recourse to the performative arts only reinforces the time-knowledge paradox as it proves that knowledge must be compromised whenever time intrudes into its transmission. Put differently, Deleuze’s examples do not do justice to his theory of Aionic time. It thus falls to Pynchon to figure out how to represent this unique temporal model in which instants predicate durations rather than stopping them.

Not surprisingly, this representational challenge thematically dominates *Mason & Dixon*, as characters constantly struggle to reconcile the problematic relation among knowledge, time, and motion. As travelers to a new land, Mason, Dixon, and their surveying party confront a territory and a nation growing so rapidly that their interpretations of events, along with the knowledge and understanding that such interpretations produce, are constantly contested.⁸ In this America still in the process of becoming, the present and the future retain a gossamer connection to the past, but the historical events transpiring on the ground move too fast for anyone to determine precisely what they mean: the future is now and there is no time to worry about history. To achieve meaningful understanding in the midst of such accelerated time, characters must frequently sacrifice some component of their perspective on an event, a sacrifice that produces an unavoidable incommensurability between an event and its history, or an object and its representation, or space and its temporality. For example, as part of their surveying instruction, Emerson teaches his students to fly, a lesson intended to instruct them about “the great Invariance whereby, aloft, one gains exactitude of Length and Breadth, only to lose much of the land’s Relievo, or Dimension of Height,—whilst back at ground level [. . .] one regains bodily the realities of up and down, only to lose any but a rough sense of the other two Dimensions, now all about one” (504–5). The moment that perspective becomes comprehensive, the observed becomes unreal, its truth only ever “truth-like,” forcing observers to choose between totally and perfectly knowing something utterly unreal or partially knowing the truly real.

The Rev^d Wicks Cherrycoke, the novel's principal narrator, articulates this contradiction in representational terms while meditating on consubstantiation and transubstantiation, concepts that find their political analog in speculations about the government's representation of its citizenry, a prime concern for the colonists during Mason and Dixon's tenure in the yet-to-be United States. Cherrycoke and the citizenry wonder whether the government's symbolic embodiment of the people adequately subsumes and stands in for the populace that it represents, a populace Pynchon cleverly dubs "the mobility." In terms of governmental policy, transubstantiation seems woefully inadequate for representing such a protean target: "this giggling Rout of poxy half-wits [Parliament], *embody* us? *Embody us?* America but some fairy Emanation, without substance, that hath pass'd, by Miracle, into *them?*" Although these pre-Revolutionary complaints express the colonists' desire for a more material representation than Parliament can offer, Mason quickly points out the possible failures of a consubstantial model: "whatever they [Parliament] may *represent*, yet do they remain, dismayingly, Humans as well" (404).

Just as an aerial perspective sacrifices time for knowledge, Pynchon here indicates that acts of representation, be they theological or political, commonly sacrifice temporal experience. Further complicating things, this discussion about political representation implies that temporalizing the represented object would only make representation more difficult. Mason realizes this when one of his interlocutors inflammatorily (or so it seems to Mason) calls for organized resistance to the "Tyranny" of the Stamp Act. Cherrycoke narrates Mason's response:

Mason expects shock'd murmurs at this,—that there are none shocks him even more gravely, allowing him a brief, careening glimpse at how far and fast all this may be moving,—something styling itself "America," coming into being, ripening, like a Tree-ful of Cherries in a good summer, almost as one stands and watches,—something no one in London, however plac'd in the Web of Privilege, however up-to-the-minute, seems to know much about. What is happening? (405)

Here, the perpetual motion of the mobility's "coming into being" foils both the transubstantial and the consubstantial models of representative government. The material reality named "America" has not only space and breadth (it moves "far"), but also the kind of temporality (both "fast" and "up-to-the-minute") that I earlier associated with globalization. As Pierre Bourdieu might say, America is "real activity as such," and anyone trying

to figure out what kind of government can “represent” that fact must do so from “within” that real activity. Trapped in its archaic representational models, however, London will never occupy a subject position that can adequately grasp America’s accelerated motion. Instead, one can only ever ask, “What is happening?”—a rhetorical question that opens onto time rather than onto satisfactory, content-based answers.

Mason’s encounter with America’s becoming occurs in New York, as he and Dixon have taken separate trips prior to surveying the boundary line between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Although not precisely simultaneous with Mason’s “brief, careening glimpse,” Cherrycoke also narrates Dixon’s concurrent trip to Virginia where he meets Thomas Jefferson at a tavern. As the men exchange politicized toasts, Cherrycoke notes Dixon’s exposure to “the unmediated newness of History a-transpiring.” Immersed in history’s constant flow, Dixon carefully avoids stepping on any politicians’ toes and instead raises his glass “To the pursuit of Happiness,” a phrase in which the young Jefferson delights, asking Dixon if he might “use [it] sometime” (395). As this phrase produces the notion of endless possibility that goes on to drive American expansion and exceptionalism over the next two centuries, we readers are here privy to our own “careening glimpse” of history in the making.

Of course, we understand the significance of our witness to history’s production only because of our retrospective view of the event, a perspective that sacrifices the event’s temporal dimension by default. The dramatic irony of the scene requires that the characters make the opposite sacrifice: their presence in time’s flow comes at the expense of their historical understanding. And this is the kind of problem that perpetual motion creates for observers throughout the novel, a difficulty that Pynchon portrays through an array of objects that can be seen only when they stop moving. Such is the case, for instance, with a mechanical duck that develops emotions (376) and a Jewish golem that walks through the forests of western Pennsylvania (486). These two machines mimic life so perfectly that they become living despite remaining invisible while in motion, much like time itself. “[C]ertain stars in Chinese Astrology,” which lose their invisibility once they come to rest, also share this condition, and in an alternative ending to the story, Mason and Dixon acquire this property as well: “The underlying Condition of their Lives is quickly establish’d as the Need to keep [. . .] a fix’d Motion,—Westering. Whenever they do stop moving [. . .] they lose their Invisibility, and revert to the indignity of being observ’d and available again for earthly purposes” (707). In each of these examples, motion functions as time. The narrative relates that the duck and the Jewish golem acquire their lifelike status only when time acquires “additional Properties”

(379), and the duck's unique relation to time explains its ability to oscillate between visibility and invisibility: time no longer matters to the duck, or time passes in some different way for the duck, or the duck moves in and out of "the Stream of Time" whenever she wants (637).

All of these examples suggest that only the static instant can make sense of perpetual motion, and yet the static instant stabilizes time only by rupturing it, an externalization that sacrifices time's formal motion to better observe its content. This is, for example, the version of the instant that Mason and Dixon use to secure accurate measurements in their observation of the Transit of Venus in Capetown, the first assignment they share. The Royal Astronomical Society has enlisted their assistance in determining the solar parallax, a measurement that Cherrycoke defines as "[t]he size of the Earth, in seconds of Arc, as seen by an observer upon the surface of the Sun" (96). The observation involves measuring four distinct moments of Venus's transit across the sun: the moment it first makes contact with the sun, the moment it enters the circle of the sun, the moment it touches the other edge of the sun's circle, and the moment it disengages from the sun.⁹ Suggesting that the instant is not as stable as they think—and thus pointing toward a more expansive function of the instant in the text as a whole—Dixon's recorded times of the four instants "are two to four seconds ahead of Mason's," which is not to say that Mason's measurements are correct (98). Here the instant proves less reliable than they had hoped, functioning as an expanded instant through which time passes rather than as an eruptive instant hostile to time. Like the months preceding Venus's transit that "crept unnaturally" and like the months following which "hasten by miraculously," Mason and Dixon might both be incorrect, with the only true measurement of the event occurring within the expansive temporality of the instant itself. To the extent that these astronomical measurements underpin Britain's colonial enterprise, allowing it to delineate and bound its territories across the globe, such variability suggests a fatal flaw at the heart of the Enlightenment and its attendant politics.

Cherrycoke's Cherrycoke

In each of these cases, measurements are imprecise, ducks are invisible, and America cannot be represented because time's aleatory motion exceeds the instant's capacity to produce certain knowledge. One of the exciting things about locating the aleatory in the instant, therefore, involves bringing some form of bounded containment to aleatory time without compromising its motion and action: the instant remains bounded by its singularity while its

infinite subdivision by the aleatory leaves it simultaneously unbounded. To more fully consider how Pynchon achieves this double effect in *Mason & Dixon*, it will be helpful to consider how reading is itself always a simultaneously bounded and unbounded event. The intentional and interpretive eye with which we read a text bounds its meaning in the instant of textual apprehension; at the same time, however, every instant of reading depends on the unbounded possibility of textual meaning. Or as Derek Attridge would put it, reading is both an act (something that we do) and an event (something that happens to us). Wittgenstein makes this same argument in *Philosophical Investigations* when he notes that no clear dividing line exists between the intentional act of reading and the accidental event of a child who correctly speaks a series of words appearing on a page despite not being able to read. No necessary boundary line between the procedural and the random, the bounded and the unbounded, can be determined, suggesting that neither exists without the other (§163). If Wittgenstein is correct, then reading is always a mixture of intent and accident—a singularity that embeds multiplicity—just like the temporality of R.C.’s “choices” in which an instant contains both instants and durations.

This fuzzy boundary between intent and accident requires us to reconceive reading as a mode of engagement. More than just the apprehension of textual content, this approach to reading also demands a consideration of literary form and its specific temporal structure. Consequently, if we want to understand how Pynchon copes with the representational challenges posed by the relationship between instant and duration while also leading his readers to gain timely knowledge of his text, we should examine *Mason & Dixon*’s form in the context of the simultaneously bounded and unbounded act/event of reading. Broadly speaking, Pynchon recognizes that narrative cannot internalize the perpetual motion of its content in the same way that R.C. can eat a watch, and so the novel’s form does not even try to mirror perpetual motion or link it to an unbounded future. Instead of finding motion in time’s linear irreversibility, Pynchon locates it in the pregnant space of an instant expansive enough to “contain” both instant and duration, a structure of mutual invagination in which durations comprise instants that themselves contain durations and instants, and so on. On a textual level Pynchon grafts this relation between instant and duration onto the relation between the novel’s form and content. Like the instant, the text’s narrative form contains and is constituted by content and form simultaneously. In this scenario, form and content, like instant and duration, are neither identical nor mutually exclusive. Rather, they are mutually invaginated and mutually productive; each delivers both, and their commingling produces meaning.¹⁰

This structure allows Pynchon to pack narratives within narratives like interlocking Chinese boxes. Although the Rev^d Wicks Cherrycoke is the primary narrator, his narrative represents just one of many narrative perspectives and frames. The conclusion of chapter 32, for example, quickly runs through several narrative times in the course of one page:

“You wish’d release from your Promise,” Mason reminds [Dixon]. “Think of R.C. as *Force Majeure*.”

The Letter, in reply, proves to be from Mrs. Emerson. “When he receiv’d your News, Mr. Emerson was quite transform’d, and whooping with high amusement, attempted whilst in his Workroom to dance a sort of Jig, by error stepping upon a wheel’d Apparatus that was there, the result being that he has taken to his Bed, where, inches from my Quill, he nevertheless wishes me to say, ‘Felicitations, Fool, for it hath work’d to Perfection.’

“I trust that in a subsequent Letter, my Husband will explain what this means.”

There is a Post-Script in Emerson’s self-school’d hand, exclamatory, ending upon a long Quill-crunching Stop. “Time is the Space that may not be seen.—”

(’Pon which the Rev^d cannot refrain from commenting, “He means, that out of Mercy, we are blind as to Time,—for we could not bear to contemplate what lies at its heart.”) (326)

In addition to narrating the dialogue between Mason and Dixon, Cherrycoke tells us of the letter, within which Mrs. Emerson narrates her husband’s misfortune. Within her narration Emerson’s voice comes through in her citation of his speech (“Felicitations, Fool, for it hath work’d to Perfection”), and he appears more materially when he appends, in his own hand, the not-so-clarifying explanation, “Time is the Space that cannot be seen.” This commentary on his wife’s commentary (“I trust that in a subsequent letter . . .”) on his commentary (“Felicitations . . .”), all quoted by Cherrycoke despite the fact that he never saw the letter, receives a final commentary from Cherrycoke (“He means, that . . .”). Just before Cherrycoke’s clarification, however, another narrator (I will refer to him as the “supra-narrator”) parenthetically intrudes to comment on Cherrycoke’s inability to “refrain from commenting” (326). This short passage presents the reader with five interlocking times: the time of Cherrycoke’s narrative; the time of dialogue between Mason and Dixon; the time of Mrs. Emerson’s letter which itself contains the time when Emerson received Dixon’s letter, the time of Emerson’s “Felicitations” to Dixon, the future time of a “subsequent letter,” and the time of Emerson’s “Post-Script”; the time of Cherrycoke’s

commentary; and the time of the supra-narrator's commentary on that commentary. In any given moment of reading, these multiple *durées* are simultaneously present, requiring the reader to enter into these expanded instants and absorb the multiple durations composing the text's form and, by extension, its meaning and a reader's knowledge of it.

The parentheses enclosing the final paragraph of the chapter circle back to its beginning where another set of parentheses also narrates Cherrycoke's narration:

If Mason's elaborate Tales are a way for him to be true to the sorrows of his own history (the Rev^d Cherrycoke presently resumes), a way of keeping them safe, and never betraying them, in particular those belonging to Rebekah,—then Dixon's Tales [. . .] seem to arise from simple practical matiness. [. . .]

“Directly before the Falmouth Packet sail'd” he begins, one night as they wait for a Star, “William Emerson presented me with a small mysterious Package. . . .”

“Twill not be an easy journey,—” quoth he, “there'll be days when the Compasses run quaquaversally wild, boxing themselves, and you, into Perplexity,—” (316–17)

First, the supra-narrator narrates Cherrycoke's resumed narration. Then Cherrycoke tells his frame-tale listeners that he is about to tell a story that exemplifies the “matey” stories Dixon shared with Mason, a story that turns out to be about the deferred arrival of the watch's message. In short, an unnamed narrator narrates the narrator Cherrycoke's exemplary narration of Dixon's narrative about the message of a watch that never stops running.

But what temporal effect does this Chinese-boxed narrative structure have for its readers? The resumption of Cherrycoke's story (“Cherrycoke presently resumes”) contains the beginning of Dixon's typical story (“he begins”) as narrated by Cherrycoke. These two narrative “beginnings,” appearing in consecutive paragraphs, function like a Klein bottle in which the entrance is always both entrance and exit. The text's single reading surface unifies the otherwise distinct temporal moments at which these multiple narrations occur. Chronologically, the watch's narration is first, followed by Dixon's, then Cherrycoke's, and finally the supra-narrator's. However, the singularized moment of reading subsumes this chronology, twisting and looping the linear duration to compress these multiple times into one expanded instant, creating a simultaneously circular and linear structure that mirrors the logic that allows the watch to run on credit.

Instead of stretching forward into the unknown vastness of infinite possibility, the narrative and its “motion” derive from the infinite subdivisibility of the instant.¹¹

Several curious moments in the chapter are symptomatic of this effect. First, Cherrycoke narrates the beginning of Dixon’s story, but it remains entirely unclear where Dixon’s story ends because so many different narrative times combine to form the same story. For example, immediately after Cherrycoke signals the beginning of Dixon’s story, Dixon tells Mason what Emerson said: “‘Twill not be an easy journey,—’ quoth he.” Just as Dixon assumes the narrative mantle, however, Cherrycoke quickly reappears with “Emerson told him,” a line in which “him” names Dixon. Eventually, this oscillation of narrative voice between Cherrycoke and Dixon gives way to pure dialogue, making it impossible to know if we are reading Dixon’s narration to Mason or Cherrycoke’s narration of that narration. Even more complicatedly, the ambiguity of the word “Now,” in the first line of the paragraph after the dialogue between Dixon and Emerson (i.e., the moment that would ostensibly mark the end of Dixon’s narration), blurs the transition from Dixon’s to Cherrycoke’s narration: “Now what seems odd to Dixon, is that ten years ago . . .” (318). Although clearly narrated by Cherrycoke, “Now” could refer to the present time of Dixon’s dialogue with Emerson, to the present time of Dixon’s narration of his story to Mason, to the present time of Cherrycoke’s narration; or it could be a conjunction, lacking all temporal reference and meaning simply, “in view of the fact that . . .”

Another narrative quirk unifying these multiple narrative temporalities involves Cherrycoke’s tendency to ventriloquize the speech of his story’s characters. In two different instances, this ventriloquization follows a rhetorical question. First, as we have already seen, when R.C. asks about his choices, Cherrycoke’s narration follows his direct speech: “‘What were my Choices?’ R.C. nearly breathless.” Here, Cherrycoke’s words intervene while we wait for R.C. to catch his breath, after which point he will presumably continue to defend himself with more than just a rhetorical question. Instead of R.C.’s words, however, we read the description of the two choices, narrated by Cherrycoke but sounding exactly like a continuation of R.C.’s speech. The phrasing and syntax are seamless, creating the illusion that the person narrating the choices was present at the time, but the nonsensical choices instead call attention to Cherrycoke’s absence from the event. A second ventriloquization occurs in the paragraph succeeding R.C.’s watch consumption. Mr. Barnes, another member of the party, notes that they are in “The Wedge,” a space left over from some imprecise surveying of Maryland’s eastern border with Delaware. (The two borders, much like all

other pairs in the novel, fail to unite into one contiguous border.) Barnes asks rhetorically, “Has anyone consider’d where we are?” after which the narrator again fills in the openness of the rhetorical question by explaining, this time with quotation marks even though the words do not belong to Barnes, “All know that he means, ‘where just at the Tangent Point, strange lights appear at Night [. . .]’” (323). Such narrative peculiarities are not simply a function of omniscient narration, however, because Cherrycoke frequently uses his absence from an event to explain his inability to narrate. Instead, I would suggest that only the narrative’s complex temporal structure, in which multiple durations are present in the same instant, can reconcile the fact that Cherrycoke both can and cannot narrate events he never witnessed.

In fact, this peculiar form of non-omniscient omniscience marks Cherrycoke’s entire narrative, which begins with a telling caveat to his listeners: “I was not there when they met,—or, not in the usual Way. I later heard from them how they remember’d meeting. I tried to record, in what I then projected as a sort of *Spiritual Day-Book*, what I could remember of what they said,—tho’ ’twas too often abridg’d by the Day’s Fatigue” (14). This qualification of what will clearly be an unreliable narrative contains another curious element: what does Cherrycoke mean when he says he was not present “in the usual Way”? The answer appears in a later scene when Mason tells a story at a bar in England. Cherrycoke narrates Mason’s speech, but then the supra-narrator steps in to remind us parenthetically that Cherrycoke was not actually present to hear Mason’s story. Instead, Cherrycoke “was there in but a representational sense, ghostly as an imperfect narrative to be told in futurity” (195). Although he is not sufficiently present to avoid having the supra-narrator swoop in and parenthetically narrate the fact of his absence, here we see that even when absent from events, Cherrycoke is always at least representationally present.¹²

Just as Cherrycoke “projects” the representational existence of his *Spiritual Day-Book*, the expanded instant permits events throughout the novel to always-already contain their future narration. Temporally, like Deleuze’s notion of Aionic time, the future here functions as a subdivision of the present rather than as an extension of it. For instance, speculation about how an event will be narrated in the future consistently subdivides that event’s present happening: “Afterward, none in the Household will be able to agree which was which” (98); “Whenever she tells the story after that, she will put in [. . .]” (368); “Mason and Dixon, happening to be lost at nightfall (as they will later tell it) [. . .]” (412); “Mr. LeSpark, as he will come to tell the Tale” (430); “a mischievous glint in her eyes that [. . .] others will later all recall” (446); and “Later, not all will agree on what

they have seen" (485). In each of these cases we see the future's possibility deprived of its aleatory extension and instead contained within the present moment of the event as "imperfect narration."¹³ The effect of this structure is further elaborated when Mason tells Dixon that he had the privilege to enter the eleven days that the Calendar Reform of 1752 removed from the calendar. He says that those who jumped ahead eleven days became ghosts that haunted the eleven days not from the past, but from the future (560). Pynchon's reformulation of the instant thus has important implications for futurity: the future in *Mason & Dixon* is never a blank slate of possibility. Instead, since Pynchon locates such aleatory openness in the instant, the future is always-already written and contained in the present.

This same structure obtains for the relation between Cherrycoke and the supra-narrator. Just as Cherrycoke is only "representationally" present for many of the events he narrates, so too is the supra-narrator an always-already "representational" presence in the frame tale. As the narrator of Cherrycoke's narration, he must logically inhabit a narrative instant somewhere in the chronological future, but the absence of information regarding his narrative position (so often parenthetical and always in the frame tale) allows the present moment of Cherrycoke's narrative to subsume that ostensible futurity. This possibility arises when Mason encounters Dr. Samuel Johnson and Boswell in a pub, and Mason nostalgically tells Boswell, "I had my Boswell once [. . .] Preacher nam'd Cherrycoke. Scribbling ev'rything down, just like you, Sir." Then Mason has the meta thought, "Have you [. . .] ever . . . had one yourself? [. . .] . . . a Boswell, Sir,—I mean, of your own" (747). Indeed, Mason's curiosity forces us to ask whether Cherrycoke has a Cherrycoke, and to the extent that his narration is so frequently narrated, the answer seems to be yes, at least in a "representational sense."

Complicating matters even further, while Cherrycoke's Cherrycoke appears most frequently in the frame tale, various instances in which Cherrycoke appears in the third person in his own narrative (i.e., not in the supra-narrator's parenthetical narrative where we are used to seeing Cherrycoke in the third person) suggest the supra-narrator's representational presence in each of the novel's different narrative temporalities. In one instance Cherrycoke appears in the third person in his narrative description of Mason's journal. Mason writes, "Should I seek the counsel, God help me, of the cherubick Pest, Cherrycoke? He will take down ev'ry Word he can remember" (434). In this case Cherrycoke's third-person appearance is plausible if he had access to Mason's journals, although we do not know if he did or not. However, the same slip into the third person also occurs elsewhere without any plausible explanation: in quotation marks, Mason

says to a ghost seeking a chaplain, “Of course. Our Reverend Cherrycoke”; absent quotation marks, while in counsel with the ghost, we read “The Rev^d cannot help having a fast look over at the Visto” and “The Rev^d runs thro’ the possibilities” (537); when Cherrycoke meets Mason and Dixon on the ship to Capetown, Cherrycoke appears as “the Rev^d” (35); and when they are all snowbound at an inn prior to surveying the line, Cherrycoke appears as “young Cherrycoke” and “the Rev^d” (384–85). Although this short sampling of slips into the third person could simply represent Cherrycoke narrating himself in the third person much like Henry Adams does in *The Education of Henry Adams*, they also suggest the at-least representational co-presence of Cherrycoke and Cherrycoke’s Cherrycoke, a coincidence that seems to occur only when Cherrycoke is physically present for the described events.

Finally, the mutual invagination of these narrative temporalities produces a similar effect for the texts that populate them. For instance, the *Ghastly Fop*, a work apparently published serially, appears throughout Cherrycoke’s narrative: St. Helena’s population, ax-men out on the line, Mason, and Mason’s son back in England all read the text. Even in the frame tale, Ethelmer and his younger cousin Tenebrae steal away from Cherrycoke’s story to read its saucier lesbian sections. As readers of *Mason & Dixon*, however, we discover that Ethelmer and Tenebrae are reading the *Ghastly Fop* only after we have read a significant portion of it seamlessly inserted into Cherrycoke’s story and the text of *Mason & Dixon*. Only after reading far into the story of Eliza, Zhang, and their Jesuit enemies does the narrative telescope out, forcing us to realize that what we have just been reading is only the *Ghastly Fop* text as it is being read by Ethelmer and Tenebrae in the frame tale. But later, when Zhang and Eliza run into Mason and Dixon’s surveying party, the two narratives converge, not only narratively, but also temporally: the action in the *Ghastly Fop* occurs in the same present time of the surveying party. Despite being a logical impossibility, when the *Ghastly Fop*’s characters and narrative action intersect with the time of the surveying, the time of Cherrycoke’s 1786 narration, and the time of our own reading, all three times are effectively rendered concurrent—the instant expands and all, readers included, move freely and meaningfully within it. This simultaneous looping and linearity of textuality has an effect similar to that experienced by the people chosen to populate the eleven days removed from the calendar: they inhabit a non-elapsing temporality, a kind of perpetually moving non-motion, or a simultaneity of instant and duration (555).

With its curious interweaving of textual and narrative temporalities along with its formal superimposition of circularity and linearity, bound-

edness and unboundedness, *Mason & Dixon* answers Deleuze's call to represent the aleatory potential of the instant. The narrative's complex historicity—the way multiple narrative temporalities interlock and converge in a singular moment of reading—animates the text's historical content, creating the effect of temporal duration out of the recursive exchange structure that defines the act/event of reading. Instead of simply casting his textual content into time's linear flow, the effect of temporal motion, of history's historicity, comes as the multiple narrative times intersect with a singular moment of reading in which readers simultaneously access time and meaning, duration and instant, form and content, without conflating each into each other.

The Form of Historicity

A representational sensibility and a good book thus seem indispensable for treating temporality as an expanded and infinitely subdivisible instant. Cherrycoke literalizes this idea when, during a discussion of implements such as levers and pulleys that “multiply the apparent forces, often unto disproportionate results,” he cites “the printed Book,” with its “thin layers of pattern'd Ink, alternating with other thin layers of compress'd paper, stack'd often by the Hundreds,” as an example of one such synergistic implement (390). Cherrycoke here references the book's singular multiplicity, the single surface formed from its multiple pages, as the property causing its inside to be disproportionately larger and more powerful than its outside. Similar fractalizations of space occur throughout *Mason & Dixon*: a 1756 uprising between local Indian leadership and the East India Company results in the Black Hole of Calcutta, a minuscule cell in which 146 Europeans were purportedly imprisoned (109); James's Town, the city in St. Helena where Mason makes some observations, appears “small in secular Dimensions [. . .] yet entering, ye discover its true Extent,—which proves Mazy as an European City . . . no end of corners yet to be turn'd. 'Tis Loaves and Fishes [. . .] and Philosophy has no answer” (126); Cherrycoke tells of traveling in a coach, “a late invention of the Jesuits, being, to speak bluntly, a Conveyance, wherein the inside is quite noticeably larger than the outside, though the fact cannot be appreciated until one is inside” (354); and one night while lost in the woods, Mason and Dixon stumble across “a cabin, hardly more than a shed” that upon entering reveals “more room inside than could possibly be contained in the sorrowing ruin they believ'd they were entering” (412).

Another description of Cherrycoke's magical carriage ride reveals how

these infinitely subdivided spaces relate to time. After describing its multiplicitous interior, Cherrycoke speculates about the carriage's relation to time and eternity:

“What machine is it,” young Cherrycoke later bade himself good-night, “that bears us along so relentlessly? We go rattling thro’ another Day,—another Year,—as thro’ an empty Town without a Name, in the Mid-night [. . .]. Long before the Destination, moreover, shall this Machine come abruptly to a Stop . . . gather’d dense with Fear, shall we open the Door to confer with the Driver, to discover that there is no Driver, . . . no Horses, . . . only the machine, fading as we stand, and a Prairie of desperate Immensity. . . .” (361)

The carriage, with its supra-dimensionality, runs like Time itself, ostensibly measuring distance and duration while actually subsumed by the expansiveness of the pure form of infinitely subdivisible Time. The paragraph preceding this speculation further reinforces this reading. In explaining why boundaries and surveying so inflame people, one of the vehicle's passenger's reasons, “It goes back [. . .] to the second Day of Creation, when ‘G-d made the Firmament, and divided the Waters which were under the Firmament, from the Waters which were above the Firmament,’—thus the first Boundary Line. All else after that, in all History, is but Sub-Division” (360–61). Again we see subdivision responsible not just for delineating our spatial reality, but also for constituting our temporal experience of history and its passage.

It is this same sense of being in time that *Mason & Dixon's* parallax narrative form creates for its readers, providing us with both a representation of history and an experience of historicity. As multiple narrative times swirl through any given instant of reading, readers cannot help incorporating time into their understanding of the text. As I suggested earlier, such incorporation—modeled on the mutually invaginated relationship of instant and duration—responds to time's accelerated drive to instantaneity and attempts to make time both meaningful and full. Most importantly for *Qualified Hope's* larger theoretical concern, Pynchon's techniques also resist treating time exclusively as object or as immanent motion. Instead, Pynchon suggests that we think of time as a complicated mode of being in the world, an idea that several fantastical landscapes throughout the novel aptly represent. Much like the all-absorbing experience of reading a good book, from the outside the inhabitants of these spaces seem trapped, but they experience life inside these bounded domains as infinitely expansive. The liminality of the Bermuda-Triangle-like Wedge (324), the subjunctive

status of those living on the inner surface of the Earth (740), the cyclical inhabitation of the eleven days that were removed from the calendar during the 1752 calendar reform (559), the five degrees that Zhang claims were removed from the measure of the circle (630), and any space larger inside than out, all provide their inhabitants this experience of time as a mode of being.

In what Cherrycoke describes as an alternative ending to his story, Mason and Dixon also inhabit their own alternative space of perpetual motion. They become Lethe's ferrymen, a career choice adumbrated by a ferryman named Mr. Ice who appears earlier in the novel. While shuttling them across a river, "[e]xactly at the middle of the river, for a moment," Mr. Ice tells the story of his massacred family. Because "[t]he Ferryman's Grief is immune to Time,—as if in Exchange for a sacrifice of earthly Freedom, to the Flow of this particular Stream," time stops while he speaks (659). However, only time as linear duration stops; the ferry rests not outside of time, but rather in an expanded instant at the very heart of pure time, figured as the Heraclitian river of time flowing all around them. The same could also be said for Cherrycoke and his own narration which, like Mr. Ice's, also begins postmortem as he has come to town to attend Mason's funeral. And in telling his own story, he, too, like both Mr. Ice and the watch of perpetual motion, borrows his power from repayment dates that can be indefinitely deferred. Specifically, his host permits him to stay as long as he can keep the children entertained, a credit-based exchange that transforms Cherrycoke into an engine of perpetual narrative motion working to fend off death's finalizing survey. Indeed, despite Mason's death, the coexistence of the narrative's multiple temporalities permits Cherrycoke's story to subdivide infinitely without ever becoming coextensive with the moment of its telling or with the moment of Mason's funeral. Thus the novel's alternative ending conspicuously ignores the fact of Mason's death and instead follows Mason and Dixon to an island in the middle of the Atlantic where travelers between Europe and America can stop and rest. There, we learn, "They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless Spectacle of Transition" (713).

Which returns us to the idea that the world of *Mason & Dixon's* eighteenth-century plot speaks directly to the world of its twentieth-century publication. As global trade accelerates time toward an ideal of instantaneity, Pynchon identifies a counterweight in the expanded instant through which all durations must pass, a condition of being in time that retains time's motion while also renewing its meaningfulness. Time cannot be preempted in such a scenario because both the future and the past are contained in the present; and yet they maintain their meaning because they are

not reduced to the present. Like Mason and Dixon on their transatlantic island, Pynchon offers globalization a place to rest without compromising its perpetual “Spectacle of Transition.”

But why is the role of ferryman not a cop-out? Functioning like a shuttle in the middle of the river or ocean, does the ferryman really get the best of both worlds (old and new, meaning and motion)?¹⁴ Why should we not read their island as a purgatory of subjunctivity that violently cuts them off from the future? Because, in both the New World—where Manifest Destiny has already overdetermined the future, making violence and greed the order of the day—and in our contemporary world—where global technologies reduce the horizon of our future to pure instantaneity—the future no longer functions as a source of hope. The unrelenting forwardness of the Mason-Dixon Line, dividing the country and penetrating the wilderness, must be contained, and only the text’s many narrators, existing in their specific moments of time like so many ferrymen telling their stories in the midst of time’s river, can do so. Rather than reminding us of history, then, Pynchon’s unique temporal model reminds our constantly accelerating global economy that multiple durations course through every instantaneous currency exchange, day trade, and wire transfer. In the same way that *Mason & Dixon* accounts for the victims of calendar reform, boundary drawing, and the standardization of the longitude—that is, for those individuals forced, by this array of rationalistic, colonial technologies, to inhabit the eleven days removed from the calendar, a house built on top of the Mason-Dixon Line, or “the Wedge”—so too might the embedding of durations in instants remind us that global capital does not transcend the *durées* of malnourished Africa, indigenous South America, tribal Afghanistan, or any other region ostensibly removed from the fast-paced world of finance and industry. Instead, its instantaneity relies on and gains meaning from those excluded spaces in the same way that Pynchon’s narrators, in their uniquely parallaxic style, tell stories, produce knowledge, and experience history’s becoming by grounding each of these narrative acts in that “moment” in the middle of the river where time stands still, but only because one rests at its very heart.