ENGAGING FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVES IN MORRISON'S *PARADISE* AND PYNCHON'S *MASON & DIXON*

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> *It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.*
> —Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983).

In a 1996 essay entitled "The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations," Toni Morrison outlines a dilemma recurrent in her novel *Paradise* and Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* concerning the difficulties involved in trying to collectively envision America. Morrison begins her argument in this essay by declaring that "time, it seems, has no future" (170), and closes with the opposing statement that "time does have a future. Longer than its past and infinitely more hospitable to the human race" (2008, 186). In the in-between space of this sweeping movement, Morrison outlines the devastating conflict in which our contemporary imagination of the past reduces the possibilities of envisioning a future. Through the loudest and most violent voices—the discourses of militarism, profit, and genocide—under the thin guise of nationalistic progress, we have rendered the past available only "through the selectivity sifted grains of past time" where "the future thins out, is dumbed down, limited to the duration of a thirty-year Treasury bond" (176). It is only in the realm of literature, she concludes, that this problem becomes visible and the hope of a collective vision of the future becomes possible: "Literature, sensitive as a tuning fork, is the unblinking witness to the light and shade of the world we live in" (185).

As in Morrison's essay, time is an obsession in both *Paradise* and *Mason & Dixon*, which critically frame the thinking of time as a question of *whose time it*

COLLEGE LITERATURE: A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL LITERARY STUDIES 41.3 Summer 2014
Print ISSN 0093-3139 E-ISSN 1542-4286

is. Time in the imagined communities of these texts is a value under question at the same moment that it is the duration of that question. It is a problem that presents itself as a simultaneous occurrence. As the object of consumption, time is consumed by groups of people who reflect on a common past, present, and potential future in order to form a collective idea of themselves as a community. But time is also that which seemingly lies outside any agency, the unconscious backdrop in front of which life is lived. In this sense it holds a transformative potential, making visible the limits of a community (in its attempt to control time) and opening a closed space to new structures and interventions. The struggle between these two uses of time forms the major sites of contention in these novels. The imagined communities of these texts, Ruby and the Convent in *Paradise* and the numerous communities in *Mason & Dixon*, are caught in this struggle and make it visible for the reader. It is particularly strong in the attempted scaling up of these communities to larger conceptualizations of national or global community and the attempts to show through these larger formations a livable future. However, we quickly see in contrast to these larger collective ambitions a procedural breakdown. In their attempts to form ideological boundaries and clear communal identifications, these imagined communities are constantly penetrated by apparently external forces and made to reassess what is inside and outside of their communal spaces.

Set in a thirty-year period stretching before and after the American Revolution, *Mason & Dixon* satirically portrays the coming together of America through the story of two minor historical figures. Pynchon's sprawling novel seems poised to take up the task of American self-conceptualization on its two major axes, the unification of the colonies on the East Coast and the frontierism of westward migration, but continuously (and purposely) fails to do so by following digressive and baffling narrative paths. While different in its focus, *Paradise* raises similar wide-ranging questions. Opening in July of 1976, the bicentennial of the United States, it is no coincidence that the death of the Convent women is perpetrated by the founding fathers and leading men of Ruby, an all-black town in Oklahoma. In the racially coded killing that opens this novel ("They shoot the white girl first"), Morrison strangely repeats and reconfigures in this frontier and allegedly "perfect" space the exclusionary violence of race tied to America's founding (1997b, 1).

It is not difficult to draw a parallel between this dilemma and many contemporary discussions of national and transnational perspectives on history. The contentious and layered relationships between national and transnational viewpoints in Morrison and Pynchon's texts fit into what Shelly Fisher Fishkin outlines as the necessary self-probing of American studies more broadly. As an "important site of knowledge marked by a very different set of assumptions" than that of an "American foreign policy . . . marked by nationalism, arrogance, and Manichean oversimplification" (Fishkin 2005, 20), American studies requires a self-reflexivity which always creates a communication between national and transnational forces. Critically, it is an understanding that "requires looking

beyond the nation's borders [to grasp] how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders," so that it can become a disciplinary location "where borders both within and outside the nation are interrogated and studied, rather than reified and reinforced" (20). The interrogation and development of this perspective is a hidden process in these texts. Not available through a surface reading of these novels, it is seen through the conflict and anxiety over the question of whether foundational or inclusive cultural narratives are tangible enough to function as markers of identity. On the one hand, these texts deconstruct such identity. Seen through Mason and Dixon's adventure, narratives which claim an Americanness are almost always couched in an exceptionalism that reveals their artifice, and the continent is replete with European influences and interests that subvert this idea. In addition, America is not a place where "non-American" others are subdued by great American narratives but rather a place that clearly reveals the constructed nature of these narratives and that the game as rigged. Morrison pushes the unreality of this idea even further. Ruby shows that, even in a near vacuum and built along racial lines (a sort of nation in a bottle), narratives that rely on exceptionalist self-imagining and rigid inclusion will still collapse. We are left reading the rubble and fragments, piecing together how such inflated ideas about ourselves fail to address basic human antipathies, to say nothing of other complex issues of race and the interpretation of the past.

Yet, while Pynchon and Morrison clearly show us how these foundational/nationalistic narratives fail to convince us of their legitimacy, both authors refuse to completely abandon the idea of a cohesive nation. Pynchon insists on a sort of Americanness, albeit one that is submerged and morally grounded, a resistance that strikes out at larger global forces of commercialism and imperialism. Morrison sees a similar cohesiveness persistent in the idea of "paradise" itself. Paradise, while in ruins, is still held out to us as a common goal at the end of the novel, suggesting the persistence of a work ethos as communal identification that is papered over by more abstract definitions of Ruby's history. Both Morrison's and Pynchon's novels indicate, through their national narratives, the need for something akin to a transnational perspective in constructing and configuring foundational narratives. It is not a cosmopolitanism or globalism that is needed—the transcendence or breaking down of national lines by individuals or corporate structures—but rather a contrapuntal reading of nationalism which refuses to disable those deemed outside its lines of demarcation. The timeline of the nation is rewritten as a dividing line in these texts. It refuses to legitimize itself and progresses paradoxically through the divisions of peoples and interests. By including what Edward Soja calls a "critical human geography" (Soja 1989, 1) in their texts, Morrison and Pynchon work toward a transnational perspective that revises American history to show the transgression of national boundaries by those deemed beyond them and therefore "outside" the project of constructing the United States of America. They emphasize the necessity for any collective project of this kind to "see the inside and outside, domestic and foreign, national and international, as interpenetrating" (Fishkin 2005, 21). In doing so, they do not

dismiss the nation *de facto*, but insist on it as a collective body whose construction is similar to their own complex and dynamic literary histories.

The complication of foundational narratives is linked to the way the past is conjured in order to project a roadmap for the future through its own obsolescence. As Daniel T. Rodgers explains in *Age of Fracture*, this vision of older forms of technocratic idealism characterizes an American intellectual movement of the 1980s and 1990s. In a period which saw the splintering of collective forms of identity and their associated ideological frameworks and a plethora of shifts ranging from the ending of the Cold War, the expansion of free market ideology, and the rise of libertarianism to the new gender politics of the 1990s, history and how we imagine our past were by no means immune. Foundational narratives were meant to disappear in being rendered transparent and universal. Part and parcel of a language and rhetoric meant to "fold the very processes of time back upon themselves [and] make the nation's past and present part of each other . . . equally and immediately present" (Rodgers 2011, 224) is the need to have almost all spheres of public and private life modified: "Individual liberties, market economics, and democracies—once stacked in time as products of modernization—slipped out of history to become universal, global, immediate goals" (251). Mason and Dixon observe, and are a critical part of, the process Rodgers describes though their involvement in the mapping of the world. Pynchon extends the flattening of three-dimensional spaces inherent in cartography to a flattening of almost all dimensions of reality. An inability to occupy a narrative space, the space of ideas, the connections between events, ironically occurs at the same moments those spaces are being formed in a nation that is just being born.

This impotent position is also clear in *Paradise*. Where this all-black town looks to establish its unique future in the richness of personal histories, narratives, and expanding physical wealth, that future collapses. The space opened up by the great risk taken in creating the town is subsequently closed in attempts to memorialize those founding acts and Ruby becomes, in the words of Richard Misner, just another unremarkable and homogenous small Midwestern town. In showing this specific mode of appropriating the past in order to violate it, Pynchon and Morrison point toward strategies and possibilities of interpreting the past that do not reduce it. In line with the opening of a transnational perspective, these texts utilize the multiple times of their narration and reading—the eighteenth-century simulation and praeternatural time of *Mason & Dixon* and the biblical and Convent time of *Paradise*—to highlight the practice of reading as an interpretative ethics linked to the opening of new spaces. The same dedication felt in devotion to a moral purpose, which for Pynchon is the morality so necessary to defining the US and which for Morrison is the morality necessary for finding a space for race in America, must be devoted as well to the more oblique task of rendering these phenomena as readable and *literary*. Otherwise, if this literary understanding is ignored, then the persistence of unintelligibility haunts every larger project of cohesion and violence lurks with the potential to explode in every misunderstanding.

With this context in mind, this essay traces how Pynchon and Morrison engage the issue of foundational and exceptionalist narratives and how these two novels produce strategies to counteract their damaging potentials. The following discussion is divided into three sections. First, I examine how Pynchon and Morrison deconstruct the clear ground or framework conjured by the collective national project. In showing the incomplete nature and failures of more conventional modes of nationalizing and collectivizing, these texts move from a perspective on foundational narratives which is time-centric and hermetically closed to one that is more spatially aware and human-centric. In the second section, utilizing this new viewpoint, this essay explores how such a time-centric viewpoint comes to destroy and fragment attempts to collectivize and form larger bonds in and beyond these communities. The third section explores the opening up of spaces possible in such destructive practices. We see here how Pynchon and Morrison deconstruct the myth of cohesive and "allegorical" readings of foundational narratives in order to foreground the presence of alternative and submerged narratives of collective space and, critically, to understand what *defines* those alternate spaces, how they are formed, and what is needed to enable them. I argue that Morrison and Pynchon engage their respective narratives without authorizing a singular or authentic reading of them. Consequently, they foreground the layering and simultaneity involved in reading foundational narratives, pointing to more spatially conscious models of envisioning collective narratives and futures.

THE PARADOXICAL GROUND OF READING IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

In understanding these two texts and their attempts to produce spatially conscious literary histories and foundational narratives, it is critical to locate them in discussions about nationalism and transnationalism that link literary practices to the construction of national and transnational identities. In "DissemiNation," Homi Bhabha, building on the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), provides a strong theoretical base in this regard when he observes a "kind of 'doubleness'" (Bhabha 1990, 293) in the process by which the nation turns into a metaphor or is imagined by its occupants. This doubleness distinguishes and addresses the perplexing double time in which the metaphorizing of the *people* of a nation diverges from the dominant and privileged *narratives* used to represent them. In more conventional narratives of nationalism, the ideologies, symbols, and images of the nation are processed through a cultural artifact or document whose "'centered' causal logic" (293) yokes abstract representations to the individual experiences of the nation. The nation, as Anderson has classically shown, is an "imagined community," linked to the very way a person constructs his or her sense of self out of the chaos of everyday life. When writing at and about the margins, however, and in writing the nation within the context of modernity, this "causal logic" finds its traditional linear and "simply horizontal time" of the nation split through a tension between representing its people "as an

a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object" and "the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign" (Bhabha 1990, 299). Morrison and Pynchon make use of Bhabha's "double-writing" in exposing the eroded relationship between the "local" grounds or spaces of their texts and the expansive claims of their grander narrative visions.

This erosion occurs in the attempt to plant mythical and foundational lines from which the growth of the nation or community can be tracked, only for the real description of Pynchon's United States and Morrison's Ruby to begin *after* the logic of those lines have destroyed that possibility. In Pynchon's monumental narrative, Mason and Dixon's expedition across America occurs as an inset story, told by a narrator named Reverend ("Rev^{d}") Wicks Cherrycoke in the Christmastide of 1786 and in the house of Cherrycoke's brother, gun proprietor Mr. J. Wade LeSpark. Summoned into existence by LeSpark's children Pitt and Pliny, who, upon hearing fantastic stories about "the Accursed Ruby of Mogok, Ship-wrecks in Indies East and West, an Herodotic Web of Adventures and Curiosities," request a "Tale about America" (Pynchon 1997, 7). Reverend Cherrycoke produces a narrative spanning seventy-eight chapters and separated into three parts which follows the amazing exploits of the astronomer Charles Mason and the land surveyor Jeremiah Dixon as they travel across the globe observing and recording the transit of Venus and drawing the Mason-Dixon Line. With the bulk of the text taking place in the "America" section of the novel, and in the context of the call for a successful tale "about America" that is critiqued along the way by family members of LeSparks, Pynchon conflates the narration of America's origin with the vested interest in identifying it.

With numerous references to America as "newly born" (346), to the rampant religious fervor of the continent (261), and to the analogy between the cartographic lines Mason and Dixon draw and the lines of creation in Genesis (361), there is no shortage of originating narratives. They serve the important function of mapping out a US national identity. This type of narrative move, as Sacvan Bercovitch notes, looks to bring the discursive elements of a nation into a cohesive "single synthetic ideal" (1978, 176). From their heterogeneous and uncertain regional and colonial identifications and the vast and transcontinental influence of Enlightenment thought, these supposedly simple narratives help the colonists to *isolate* and *create* an American geography all of their own and identify themselves as a part of this new thing called "America." As Mason and Dixon observe:

> Massachusetts Bay accents were heard for the first time, out in the Allegheny . . . New-Yorkers in Georgia, Pennsylvanians in the Carolinas, Virginians ev'rywhere . . . all took time to appreciate the musick of Voices from far away, yet already, unmistakably, American. (Pynchon 1997, 571)

Through a narrative framework that suggests their own exceptional status, the colonists produce a certain differentiated space to identify themselves. In producing their own "Tale[s] about America" (7), colonists culturally map the

space of this continent alongside the ongoing bureaucratic and administrative mapping, of which the Mason-Dixon Line is a prime example. Fictional narratives are so important because of how the colonists can exploit their dual function of closing down and opening up representational spaces. When making claims to territory, myths and stories seek to legitimize and root these claims as culturally unique and work to craft communal borders by championing certain cultural attitudes and making others taboo. At the same time these stories suggest a principle of self-generation, an idea that these narratives stretch back into time immemorial and will continue undisturbed into the future. This legitimizes the storytelling practice and makes available a certain space in which the colonists can create their own cultural mythologies.

In *Paradise*, the production of communal boundaries and investment in narratives of origin are set in the context of a racial reimagining at local, national, and global levels. In her 1997 essay "Home," Morrison outlines what will be an obsession in her novel, the attempt of the Rubyites and the Convent women to grasp the fragile and critical metaphor of the "Home." It is this metaphor which "domesticates the racial project, moves the job of *unmattering* race away from pathetic yearning and futile desire; away from an impossible future or an irretrievable and probably nonexistent Eden to a manageable, doable, modern human activity" (Morrison 1997a, 3; emphasis added). The work of unmattering race, emphasizing "racial specificity minus racist hierarchy" (8), is bound to the reworking of the space in which race is thought. Specifically, Morrison stresses the borderless properties it must take on, physically and conceptually. Physically, it is a type of geography that ascribes a certain freedom to its most vulnerable populace (black women) to walk freely "because nothing around or beyond considered her prey" (10). Conceptually, it is an extremely ambitious borderlessness which forms a new signifying space where the "inwardness of the outside, the interiority of the 'othered,' the personal that is always embedded in the public" is known and where one can imagine "safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third, if you will pardon the expression, world" (12).

While the conceptual exposition provided in Morrison's essay is largely absent from the novel, is it is immediately apparent that Ruby at least looks to capture this physical safety in its self-narrativization. Distanced from the rest of the United States through their geographic isolation, Rubyites rely on foundational narratives to justify their continued separation and self-perceived exceptionalism. Spanning a period from the 1870s to July 1976, the text tracks the northwest journey of the descendants of nine freed slaves and their families from Louisiana and Mississippi. First stopping in the town of Fairly in the Oklahoma Territories, these nine families are denied assimilation into the town on the grounds that their poverty would erode local prosperity. The leaders of these families take this social rejection by the lighter-skinned population of Fairly as a new form of racism, totally unanticipated, as they "believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white

against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black." (Morrison 1997b, 194). This rejection, described throughout the text as an act of "Disallowing," galvanize these migrants around the idea of themselves as racially pure and motivates the push further west across Oklahoma and the establishment of the isolated town of Haven. However, when Haven disintegrates in the 1940s, the memory of this Disallowing does not disintegrate with it, but is taken up and re-inscribed ("the Disallowing, Part Two") as the foundational narrative for Ruby. Plays are performed which depict the event, oral narratives are passed down through generations, heroes are memorialized, books of genealogy are kept, and the communal oven of Haven is rebuilt brick by brick with the (apparent) words of their ancestors. Such actions commemorate and legitimize the memory of this racial line in mapping the geography of Ruby; Ruby comes to be regarded as a safe haven from white racism, economic hardship, and government intrusion, but also a place that accepts interracial "disallowing."

The underlining irony of these narratives of origin is that they are only available to us once they have fallen to pieces. Indeed, it appears that the narratives we are examining are in disarray precisely because of their own implicit logic. Pynchon's tale of America is told when the "War [is] settl'd and the Nation bickering itself into Fragments, wounds bodily and ghostly, great and small, go aching on, not ev'ry one commemorated,—nor, too often, even recounted" (Pynchon 1997, 6). It is further told in the uncertainty of "Times as impossible to calculate, this Advent, as the Distance to a Star" (6). The indication that the time of the narrative frame is as "impossible to calculate" as the "Distance to a Star," while the expedition of Mason (an astronomer) and Dixon (a land surveyor and cartographer) relies *precisely on* calculating the earth's distance from the stars in time, suggests in a tongue-in-cheek fashion that Mason and Dixon have undermined (in their fantastic folly) the reality behind their story. While they have not of course broken or dismantled the legitimacy of the scientific discourse they rely on to form the Mason-Dixon Line, the opening of Pynchon's texts points toward a disjuncture between this discourse and a narrative discourse or knowledge. Through the utilization of cartography and the geographical sciences so necessary to the mapping and conceptualization of the nation in one sense, this type of knowledge nevertheless fails to bolster or aid the formation of a grand metaphor or an allegory for the nation. This disjuncture, as we see later, provides the energy for many other perversions that occur on the continent.

A similar disjuncture and metalepsis occur in *Paradise* as we enter the text at the very moment where Ruby is about to dissolve. Performing an act of lynching against the women of the Convent who live at the town's edge, eight Ruby men "trashed two hundred years of suffering and triumph in a moment of such pomposity and error and callousness it froze the mind," and they end up imitating the white man they "think they have outfoxed" (Morrison 1997b, 306). While Ruby is claimed as a paradise by patriarchs like the twin bankers Steward and Deek, this claim is constantly contested as the story is told through the irreducible viewpoints of Ruby's residents and the occupants of the Convent.

Controversies over the language of the Oven and its importance signal in the text the immanently polemic nature of narrating this history. Ultimately, as the preacher Richard Misner laments, Ruby will lose its exceptional status and become "like any other country town: the young thinking of elsewhere; the old full of regret" (306).

The circumscribed or already written breakdown of these originating narratives calls into question the logic of linear and "horizontal time." Pynchon and Morrison foreground not only the way memory and vantage point render history open, but also the representational or signifying problem of what *constitutes* the proper space from which the community can be uttered. Clearly, this is neither the "present" spaces that launch these novels, LeSpark's kitchen and the Convent, nor the space claimed in a coherent image of the past. Rather, as Bhabha's "double-writing" indicates, this ground is liminal, interspersed, and in process. Pynchon's America and Morrison's Ruby are purposely caught in attempts to "compose" cultural authority in a "powerful image" (Bhabha 1990, 3). From the vantage point of this liminality, Pynchon and Morrison show us how human lines, particularly the identifying lines of self/other and exterior/interior, begin to displace the importance of temporal lines in imagining these communities. This move to what Pedro Garcia-Caro calls "history in a critical rather than an epic mode" (Garcia-Caro 2005, 108) reconnects human *work* to the composition of a collective identity, but in a problematic arrangement. Where the colonists and townsfolk attempt to create a national narrative in a sanctified, mythic, or pre-historical space, they can only do so in a form of narration that signals the very destruction of that space. Morrison and Pynchon alert the reader to the fact that the mapping of spaces necessary to compose a collective identity can also render those spaces uninhabitable. Consequently, we can also begin to view what many scholars note as a transnational understanding of the problems of forming a national identity. It is an understanding that works from an interspersed position as "a strategy for identifying the ideological work of the nation" (Briggs et al. 2008, 14) and one that identifies "literary works, authors, regions, and ideas as more complex and multi-faceted than their reductive images within . . . national projects" (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2002, 36).

FROM RESTORATION TO CONSUMPTION: NEGATIVE REWRITINGS OF THE LINE AND THE OVEN

The imagined communities of both these texts clearly experience the absence of a "centered causal logic" (Bhabha 1990, 293) in very different contexts and with substantially different effects. However, they parallel each other in the way this absence engenders rewritings of a foundational narrative. In *Mason & Dixon*, this process coincides with the way that the famous line and its line of sight (or "Visto") perverts the structured and cartographic eye of Mason and Dixon. In doing so, Pynchon puts under erasure another line, the trans/national line, to show a deterministic mode of mapping and narrating underpinning both.

Global corporate structures, as Robert Hill notes, insidiously pervade this new continent through the Line. Mason and Dixon, through their expedition, are inadvertently part of "global schemes" (Pynchon 1997, 669) that work to enlist "America's religious, governmental, scientific and military institutions not to solve democratic problems but to consolidate operational force" (Hill 2003, 159). In what the Jesuit priest and conspirator Zarpazo outlines as the "Model [of] Imprisonment," where totalizing "Walls are to be the Future" (Pynchon 1997, 522) of the continent, the Line's visibility is tied to the decrease of the vision of all who try to use it. Mason and Dixon find that, as they experience more and more of the continent, they can form connections based on the interiorizing blindness these spaces offer. From their ironically privileged position, they witness among other things this negative connection at work in their push westward and in the operation of slavery.

Toward the end of their expedition Mason and Dixon face a culminating realization of this negative dimension of the "Western" implications of the Line. In establishing their line, the expedition is forming "geometrick scars" (256). These scars, as Brian McHale notes, *disappear* the "subjunctive space" (McHale 2000, 44) of the continent. It is a "space of wish and desire, of the hypothetical and the counterfactual, of speculation and possibility" (44). The disappearance is also a transgression, occurring in a pivotal section of the text where the expedition crosses into its own imagination: "As all History must converge to Opera in the Italian Style, however . . . *Suppose* that Mason and Dixon and their Line cross Ohio after all, and continue West" (Pynchon 1997, 706; emphasis added). This disappearance/transgression of one boundary signals the affirmation of another, an implicit deep commitment to the intellectual agenda of the Enlightenment and its imperialistic implications. As Joseph Dewey notes, such a transgression inaugurates a neurosis where "the gift of a New World itself is acknowledged as nothing less than a paradise by its legion of despoilers whose fervid push West methodically destroys the very paradise they hymn" (2000, 128). The West, though in the process of being conquered physically, is split and divided because of the manner in which it is engaged representationally. Mason and Dixon's experience suggests that this Western frontier space is in crisis precisely because *it is not real* and that the danger lies in its impulse to be constantly rethought, often from metropolitan centers. The conflict, of which Mason and Dixon are really on the wrong side, is succinctly stated by Patricia Limerick: "Western American history was an effort first to draw lines dividing the West into manageable units of property and then to persuade people to treat those lines with respect" (1987, 55). The pastoral and romantic notion of the West as the unimagined frontier of a self-evident "America" is debunked in the horizontal movement of the expedition. This movement coincides with another line being drawn on the continent, namely that between masters and slaves.

Pynchon also suggests that the success of the text's "global schemes" relies on the power of its lines to other and obscure those who view it from those

who produce it. Undoubtedly the mass exploitation of Native Americans for their land and African slaves for their labor are the two hidden economic engines of this Line, producing its momentum as they are excluded from identification or written outside the symbolism and logic the Line itself produces. The implications of this exploitation are not avoided by Mason and Dixon in America, but rather are only fully realized there. Dixon, on the cape of St. Helena and before the expedition, already declaims these global pretenses of slavery: "for Commerce without Slavery is unthinkable, whilst Slavery must ever include, as an essential Term, the Gallows" (Pynchon 1997, 108). An obviously contemporary awareness of slavery, Dixon's rage will boil over in the New World in witnessing the bifurcated rhetoric of the colonist which distinguished the slavery of the colonial subjects under Britain (571) from the practice of African and economic slavery, the rhetoric of legitimate westward expansion from the self-determining rights of indigenous populations, the violence done against whites from the violence done against blacks or Indians, and a host of other contradictions which eerily take on the form of their own dividing lines. Dixon, in this regard, sounds what is the ethical yet impotent core of the novel:

> Here we are again, in another Colony, this time having drawn them a Line between their Slave-Keepers, and their Wage-Payers, as if doom'd to re-encounter thro' the World this public Secret, this shameful Core. . . . Where does it end? No matter where in it we go, shall we find all the World Tyrants and Slaves? America was the one place we should not have found them. (Pynchon 1997, 693)

There is a disturbing cartography at work on the continent. It is one which links an expansion of communal borders and the congregating impulses of many colonists to an almost willful blinding (or dividing off) of the social dimensions created by this process. In linking the two processes through functional aspects of a dividing line, Pynchon ties the formation of a foundational narrative to an absence of social justice. Where the country grows materially and territorially, its citizens diminish by creating more imaginary lines with which to divide and segment themselves from one another. This is the backdrop of the US national project. As with the confused vantage point from which to engage this history, it is impossible to measure this relationship clearly. For example, we do not know for sure whether the desire for land (and the justification of this desire) generates a specific type of racism and sadism, or, somehow and for whom and at some point, the desire for land is just a pretense and an excuse to practice racism and sadism (i.e., the Paxton Boys). It is a dismal configuration and it is only exacerbated by the presence of Mason and Dixon as agents of "global schemes" and their complicated position as transnational influencers on the continent.

Mason and Dixon, as British agents with connections to many European bureaucratic organizations, clearly attest to the United States' development beyond national borders. Through their central role in the text, we clearly understand an idea of America that is not developing in hermetically sealed isolation. The two exert a transnational influence on the continent, showing in almost every area they explore some European influence, either explicit or

clandestine. Yet, in a critical turn, it also becomes clear that what Mason and Dixon articulate and envision through the Line is also that which destabilizes their very position as transnational mappers of the globe. The catalyst for this is the continent itself, where the implantation of European thought through the Line is transmuted and morphed in its very application to the landscape. Mason and Dixon experience the negative effects of the Line in their position as ideological and romantic witnesses to a forming America. Part of what Pynchon calls in his article "Is It OK to Be a Luddite?" the "cheerful army of technocrats who were supposed to have the 'future in their bones'" (1984, 1), Mason and Dixon find their privileged title as "Men of the Enlightenment, personifications of the Age of Reason" (Griener 2000, 78) subverted in the drawing of the Line. Dixon comically sums up: as "Men of Science" they are "but the simple Tools of others, with no more idea of what they are about, than a Hammer knows of a House" (Pynchon 1997, 669). The problem is internal as well, rationalized by Dixon in the importance he gives personal "flight" in cartography: "but before they learn'd to fly, they had to learn about Maps, for Maps are the *Aidesmemoires* of flight" (504–505). Dixon sees in his work an opportunity to get "above Time itself" (505) and Mason sees a similar analogy in his work as a "Uranian Devotee" in the "realm of pure Mathesis" (134). Neither can realize these ideal aspirations in their American adventure because they come to be filtered by more trivial and vulgar concerns. As Mason exclaims to Samuel Johnson, in America "I've ascended, descended, even condescended, and the List's not ended,—but haven't yet *trans*-cended a blessed thing" (746). In a scene pages earlier, Mason ironically realizes this idealized and transcendent state in the cramped confines of a meat ship. With the "beyond Dead" carcasses of this ship and "owing to the untallied Tons of Fat that had long made frictionless ev'ry surface," Mason instantly recognized the "same proximity to pure Equations of Motion as he had felt observing Stars and Planets in empty Space" (736).

Connecting the loftiest vertical ambitions of the cosmos with the basest horizontal movement of commercial goods, Pynchon dramatizes how the "organized grid" of the map charts and cancels even those who claim to master it. Clearly Mason and Dixon are serving the function, as Stacey Olster notes, of "reconnection to, not separation from, a European capitalist world system of which its settler society is a fragment" (2004, 288). They do so severed into absurdity by crisscrossing lines of interest and at the expense of their agency and a whole economy of meanings attached with how they *practice* Enlightenment philosophy and thought. This de-agenting culminates on Mason's deathbed, when he reveals to Benjamin Franklin his last great calculation of "a great single Engine, the size of a Continent" where, though the continent is still largely invisible, "day by day . . . more points are being tied in . . . as above, new Stars are recorded" (Pynchon 1997, 772). America, the single-engine continent, forms in the very consumption of a spatial imagination, whether national or transnational or global. Mason's experience serves as a warning for us, exposing the disturbing cartography ingrained not only in how we represent space through

frameworks like the national and the global but also how we *experience* and *practice* space. Indeed, these multiple terms—national, transnational, global—which often unquestionably delineate space, are themselves interpenetrated by the dimensions of the dilemma Pynchon introduces. Be it Mason or Pitt and Pliny or whoever adopts a similar vision "about America" (7), they are not free to roam in imaginary landscapes but must respond to the continuous mapping and remappings of their own possibilities of reading. To ignore this is to engage in an act of self-negation and to become complicit in a form of cultural amnesia and alienation. It is a lesson, Pynchon suggests, as urgent for the eighteenth century as it is for the twentieth (or twenty-first). As readers of cartographic symbols like the Mason and Dixon Line, we almost instinctively engage the past as if it were weightless and beneath our feet, unconscious of the collective past embedded in those geographic symbols. Pynchon foregrounds this danger, that to live with "no Glimmer at all of the Debt . . . taken on" (346) is not only in the realm of ethical or moral choice but is in the semiotic structure that forms the protracted narrative of the nation.

Where the connotations of the Line become for Pynchon a way to expose the dangers possible in rewriting or appropriating a foundational narrative, Morrison achieves a similar effect through the town of Ruby itself and the place of the Oven within it. Morrison, though, shifts the focus of the creation of an imagined community to the racial line. Ruby, as outlined above, gives the appearance of having broken with the racial and class politics and history of its occupants. Rather than ignoring race, many Rubyites attempt to connect the escape and migration of their descendants to an escape and migration of racial imperatives and categories. The possible success of this project, both for Ruby and for us as readers trying to grasp these ideas about a foundational narrative, is mixed. As we see below, the attempt to define this town along new and "purified" racial lines is bound to fail. It involves projecting a space and image not really there and serves as a thin cover and pretense for internal animosities and power struggles within the town.

Ruby is consistently a site where the racial act of "disallowing" is perversely read back through the thoughts and actions of its residents, and where meanings dissolve because they cannot root themselves in a communal space. As Morrison indicates with her temporally ambiguous, circular, and fragmented prose, Ruby's self-destruction is not produced in a clear, concise, or total manner. It does not follow the clear shape of a line that comes to an abrupt stop or the destruction of a clearly marked-off fortress. This violation has concentric circles of influence within the text, temporally paralyzing the town, destroying the visibility of a social space, and repeating the novel's formal concern with the ability to signify the imagined community. Consider in this regard the intricate symbolism of the Oven and what Patricia Cato calls its "ramifications of those ramifications" (Morrison 1997b, 189). Rebuilt from a functional use in Haven to a symbolic significance in Ruby, the Oven is an extremely controversial site in this text. In Haven, the Oven's primary function was as the town's one genuine

social space. It was a place where, in order to survive, people gathered foods and materials to share communally. Subsequently, it was also a symbolic and political space: a place where people gathered to discuss the issues prevalent to the town's survival. Its principal function or aim, despite its flaws and failures, was *blending* the heterogeneous experiences of Haven into a shared and visible space: an Oven that "both nourished them and monumentalized what they had done" (7). In Ruby, however, its artificial revival does not signal a repeat of this attempt at unity; instead the Oven becomes a palimpsest of constant rewritings and remappings of the town with little need or interest in resolving differences that arise. What had been Haven's primary social space is replaced in Ruby by all other sorts of spaces (psychic, ideological, commercial, gendered) in an attempt to *prioritize* certain versions of history over others.

This prioritizing is visible in the conflict over the words on the Oven. Nominally, the conflict is between the older generations of men (known as the New Fathers), led by the twins Steward and Deek, and the younger generation over words remembered by one of the town's oldest members, Miss Esther, from when she was five years old. The words of the older generation, "beware the furrow of his brow" (93), look to confirm the town's metaphysical certainty and secure a clear continuity from its exceptional origin (based in hard work and humility). Personified in the twins' "powerful memories, between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened—things they witnessed and things they have not" (13), these words are the canonical mapping of Ruby. They reify lines of judgment based on an image of tenacity, submission, prophetic vision, and faith that the twins associate with the inset story of their grandfather Zechariah. It is immediately apparent, though, that these words are also a litmus test for the masculine power structure dominating Ruby and an excuse for its inhabitants to exclude themselves from the civil rights movement emerging around them. Steward personally "didn't give a damn" about the words, as the "point was not why it should or should not be changed, but what Reverend Misner gained by instigating the idea" (92). Likewise, Steward's political disappointment in a statewide election, his accusation that Thurgood Marshall is a "stir-up Negro" (82), and the twins' rampant economic successes are hardly acts guided by these words of their ancestors. Rather, if the twins indeed do have "total memories" (107), they use them selectively and are aware of the possibility of exploiting the grander implications of the Oven's words for their own ends. In light of the opening act of murdering and attempting to murder the Convent women, this duplicitous possibility acquires a particularly malevolent tone. When evoking their ancestors, the twins "repeated the Old Fathers' refrain: 'Oklahoma is Indians, Negroes and God mixed. All the rest is fodder'" (56), a formula whose words reverberate with the violence we know they are capable of and the narrow-mindedness of their agenda to keep Ruby pure.

Embedded even deeper in the twins' interpretation of the Oven's words is an unacknowledged conflict between their patriarchal and racial visions of Ruby. Where the racial vision of the twins (ironically) purports to provide a safe space

for women, its most vulnerable population, it does so through idealizing a vision of women drawn from outside its own conception of racial purity. In justifying the exclusion of the Convent women and in judging the women of Ruby, the twins hold up as paradigmatic their memory of the women of Fairly they saw when they were young boys: "the tinkling in the merry and welcoming laughter of the nineteen ladies who [were] scheduled to live forever in pastel shaded dreams." (279). These women, though, are *lighter-skinned* and the likely descedents of that very group which rejected the twins' grandfathers. This internal contradiction, that the desires the twins have for Ruby places them both *inside* and *outside* of its boundaries, is repressed in the very act of interpreting its boundaries. But its effects are felt. Steward, despite being the economic core of the town along with his twin, lacks a self-affirming center. As Dovey observes of Steward, this erosion of the self is in inverse proportion to the accumulation of power: "When Dovey Morgan thought about her husband it was in terms of what he had lost. . . . Contrary to his (and all of Ruby's) assessment, the more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses" (82). Steward's particular case is personified by Ruby at the communal scale, as the town continues but erodes through the strange curse of producing neither children nor deaths. In this context of external expansion and internal erasure, it is not surprising that the younger generation of Rubyites (led by Richard Misner) reinterprets the Oven's words in hopes of a fundamentally different vision for the town.

The words the young men claim for the Oven, "be the furrow of his brow" (93), are in many ways the antithesis of the words of their elders. In opposition to thinking of Ruby as a separate nation unto itself, this message is a way in which this generation looks to graph Ruby onto a larger, contemporary black history. In confrontations with white authorities, the unidentified painting of a clenched fist (101), and Misner's back-to-Africa theology (213), the youths' activities are comprised of grasping attempts to comprehend and participate in a range of black social movements (civil rights, black power, liberationist theology) from an *outside* and *peripheral* position. The isolated position of Ruby is critical in this sense, as it again confronts us with another borderland in the text and makes visible the spatial practice of these ideologies. Misner, who, as Billie Delia pejoratively states has "scripture and the future" (150) on his side, encourages these youths to alter the Oven's words to accent individuality and to orient these words toward a heretofore unknown future. But, in attempting this, they also claim these words in a haughty disregard for custom, a reduction of their own genealogy, and a self-willed historical amnesia. The "impudence" of their remarks is only surpassed by their claim that the legacy of slavery can be summed up in one tautological sentence: when Deek observes, "Everybody born in slavery time wasn't a slave. Not the way you mean it," Destry insists that "There's just one way to mean it, sir" (84). Similarly, the youth "talked about white people as though [Destry] had just discovered them and seemed to think what he'd learned was news" (104). The young men's amnesia and disregard for their own tradition is hardly a solution to the flaws of the older generation. On the contrary, it highlights the atmosphere

of mistrust that pervades the town. We see how the symbolic significance of the Oven for these young men comes to organize the town along lines of mutual intolerance and difference rather than unification.

Soane's perspective, while not totally disregarding the men's understanding of these words, gives us a new measure and critique. As Katrine Dalsgard notes, it is from Soane's perspective that we see the Oven as "reified and canonized, like the community's exceptionalist self-narrative, it has become a signifier emptied of content" (Dalsgard 2001, 239). It is Soane who clearly states that the Oven "had no real value. What was needed back in Haven's early days had never been needed in Ruby"; she goes so far as to state that the women even "resented the truck space given over to it" (Morrison 1997b, 103). Emptied of use value in Soane's revised history, the Oven acquires a dangerous signifying potential when understood through the sharp sense of loss Soane has acquired in the death of her four sons and her enigmatically aborted child. Her critique of the Oven not only identifies its function as a "signifier emptied of content," but we also see her ability to read and narrate new meanings *through* this supposedly empty space. She articulates the controversy over the words through the effects of an "emptiness that would weigh her down, an *absence too heavy to carry*" (102; emphasis added). She redraws the signification of the Oven to its most erudite and ironic parameters:

> Oh, how the men loved putting it back together; how proud it had made them, how devoted. A good thing, she thought, as far as it went, but it went too far. A utility became a shrine and, like anything that offended Him, destroyed its own self. Nobody better to make the point than the wayward young who turned it into a different kind of oven. One where the warming flesh was human. (Morrison 1997b, 103–104)

Soane not only shows us the bifurcated historical understanding of men and women in Ruby but also formulates a damning critique of the town that directly connects its violent signifying process to its downfall. The Oven's words, through the men's interpretation, transgress the line that separates the celebration of their ancestry from the idolatry of this memory. The primary use of the Oven shifts from its origin in Haven, as a blending of experiences in a shared space, into a cannibalistic self-consumption which fuels its endless proliferation of deadening and disconnecting symbols and narratives. In trying to crystallize the words of the Old Fathers in Ruby, the New Fathers turn the inevitability of other perceptions into modes of fragmenting this community. Soane's viewpoint, in this regard, is a double misfortune. Already repressed by the New Fathers' vision of Ruby, her critique is ineffectual because it de facto participates in the destruction of a "centered causal logic" for Ruby. She cannot recover what the New Fathers forgot, that the "finger memory" of Miss Esther—the "remembering [of] invisible words you couldn't even read by tracing letters you couldn't pronounce" (83)—has a double meaning. Beyond memorializing the town, the second meaning is that the history and narration of this community *includes* an element of mystery or doubt. It includes a necessary *openness* that performs the work of rooting the individual experience of the community with its communal identification. Morrison also

takes a broader view by pointing from the condition of Ruby to the problems of nationhood which routinely self-identifies in terms of a teleology of progress and symbols of perfection. In the parallel between this Oven that consumes "human flesh" and the crematoria of the Holocaust, Morrison disturbingly hints that Ruby has succumbed to a deadly signifying process similar in type and effectiveness to Nazi propaganda.

Like Pynchon's Line, the Oven in Ruby is an absent foundation that is also self-consuming. In exposing this configuration, Morrison and Pynchon render as inadequate those authorities in their texts who claim mastery over these spaces and show how such authoritative claims work more to convince us of their merit than to actually address the deeper questions posed by historical circumstances. Such renderings of the past into a present in order to determine a future fail to find sufficient closure in both these texts. As Pynchon and Morrison make clear in these failures, the danger lies in the out-of-control proliferation of these established misuses of the past and their ability to infect our reading so deeply that we cannot treat these imagined communities without the influence of their distorted lenses. These novels, then, offer not only strategies for reading differently but point to alternative human experiences of collective space as possible new models for historical narration.

THE SPACE OF POSSIBILITY: REVISIONARY REWRITINGS

The new models these texts point toward are set in the context of the remodeling of national history in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. In a period Samuel Cohen calls the "interwar decade" between the "fall of the Wall and the fall of the Towers" (Cohen 2009, 4), the late 1980s and the 1990s saw a "historical turn" (3) in American culture, somewhat distanced from the good/evil binaries and national rhetoric of the Cold War era and its (altered) resurgence after 9/11. This in-between period saw a plethora of narrative rehearsals of the past, many of which exhibited a national and collectivist bent. The voices and points of view were many, including: the "culture wars" of American conservatives adamant that a near-perfect past American society existed to be reclaimed; Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" diagnosis which saw the sinking of historical value through the plasticity and evolutionary nature of Western liberal democracy; and Fredric Jameson's emphasis on the immense difficulties of understanding historical reality in the era of late capitalism (as witnessed through the "postmodern" inflections of the novel). It was also the period when the national past rapidly underwent a new type of commodification and commercialization. Through the creation of the History Channel and an increase in television historical documentaries, the past became increasingly televised for mass audiences. Events as recent as the Cold War were packaged and remediated into history-by-the-hour or half-hour, put forth to the public in a communication structure that is "always on."

Reviews of Morrison's and Pynchon's novels often reflect this atmosphere, where—whether expressing admiration for or critiquing the novels—readers

are perplexed by their complexity and intricacy. As Peter Kearly details, many readers of *Paradise* were exasperated by how complex and fragmented its language was (2000, 9), prompting Morrison to respond with the observation that "people's anticipation now more than ever for linear, chronological stories is intense because that's the way narrative is revealed in TV and movies. . . . But we experience life as the present moment, the anticipation of the future, and a lot of slices of the past" (Mulrine 1998, 2). In a negative review of the novel David Gates explains that, although Paradise was "intelligently conceived, elegantly constructed," it nevertheless "asked [us] to swallow too many contrivances" (1998, 62) about the communal relationships between men and women and what it means to construct a paradise or perfect community. Similarly, many reviews of Pynchon's novel hail it as a masterpiece, though nearly inscrutable because of its mixture of eighteenth-century prose, its engagement with obscure Enlightenment-era theories of astronomy and physics, and its many anachronisms. In a review in *Commonweal*, Frank McConnell encapsulates this feeling when he states that if *Mason & Dixon* "is a great eighteenth-century novel, it's an even greater twentieth-century one, a perfect distillation of the ironies of faith and despair that define the America of the soul" (1997, 22). This sense of instability and indeterminacy in many reviews is, as noted in the previous two sections of this essay, an intentional effect of reading and attempting to construct the imagined communities of these texts. It highlights the availability of an impoverished although common framework for reading complex foundational narratives. Linearity, simplicity, and closure are, even when dealing with two of the most famous American "postmodern" writers, still the expectation, and deviation from this expectation needs to be qualified. Morrison and Pynchon are set at odds with the "historical turn" in how they explicate the constructed nature of this limited framework for reading and in doing so point toward the ideological nature of the "historical turn."

Integral to the "historical turn" is the way that the dilemma of fragmentation plays out at the level of language, whereby "the very language for society threatened to break into fragments, the past became a sphere onto which desires for community and cohesion could be projected" (Rodgers 2011, 221). There was a particular tendency in this regard not just to load historical narration with partisan ideologies and convenient interpretations, but to reduce, attack, and commodify it in terms of packageable and transportable total systems. Through diffuse events such as the attempted transplantation of capitalist market systems onto ex-Soviet states as "shock therapy" (248) and the increase in originalist interpretations of the Constitution in court practices (232), history was often radically de-spaced and decontextualized in attempts to deploy and program time itself. This paradoxical projection of the past was to attempt, as Jean Baudrillard notes, to "run the events of the century back through the filter of memory, not in order to find a meaning for them—they have clearly lost that en route—but in order to whitewash them, to launder them" (1997, 447). Where Pynchon and Morrison demonstrate the power of this type of projection to lose or distort the meaning of the past "en route" to building the cultural structures

and frameworks for potential futures, their texts also make claims to collective futures by instilling a radical locality and plurality in the process of narrating and reading foundational narratives.

Resting very close to negative rewriting, *Mason & Dixon* and *Paradise* offer alternative appropriations of a foundational line/narrative which signal the absence of a "centered casual logic" not as a consumptive space, but as a space of possibility. While the "global schemes" and the binarisms of the Line subjugate Mason and Dixon, they are never as complete in their abilities as they purport to be. America, as Reverend Cherrycoke notes, is full of heterogeneous narratives about itself which do not form into "a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All," but are "rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep" (Pynchon 1997, 349). If the Line is to become this great bureaucratic symbol of organization and information at the expense of the populace who try to utilize it, the Line is also a dowsing rod that opens and reopens spaces thought to be fictitious and opposed to direct experience. With talking dogs, a flying mechanical duck, a giant electric eel, and a whole shantytown that develops around it, the Mason-Dixon Line finds itself occupied by the utopic, romantic, and fantastic it thought to expel. The return or reemergence of these fantastic elements alters the shape and status of the Line. In a telling conversation with a group of Mohawk chiefs, we see how the mappers failed to *anticipate* that they could be influenced by the fantastic occurrences on the Line and those "others" who exist around it. When Mason condescendingly tells one of these chiefs that "they who control the Microscopick, control the World," implying that these Indians are the "other" viewed underneath the global microscope of the Enlightenment, he receives a sharp rebuke:

> Long before any of you came here, we dream'd of you. . . . Yet you never dream'd of us, and when at last you saw us, wish'd only to destroy us . . . Now you begin to believe that we have come from elsewhere, possessing Powers you do not. . . . Those of us who knew how, have fled into Refuge in your Dreams, at last. Tho' we now pursue real lives no different at their Hearts from yours, we are also your Dreams. (Pynchon 1997, 663)

They occupy not an explicit position in relation to the Line, as servant to it or figure of resistance outside it, but rather are ambiguously interior to its presence. The Indians' identification of each other through dreams, stories, the inexplicable, and "sub-real" spaces is not something that mystifies them but an element of human connectivity ignored by the West. They attest to the presence of an *intersight* and to the *interspaces* that develop, resisting the binary connections the Line implies.

These interspaces assert themselves on the continent. Mason and Dixon's final movement eastward and back into the "past" of civilization is influenced by the "[Indian] Warrior Path" which engrosses "more of their sentimental Horizon, even as it recedes into the West" (684). They appear in what Dixon initially fears his future map will convey, "[those] Spaces *not yet enclos'd* . . . forever

unshelter'd" (241; emphasis in original). As Christy Burns states, it is only by incorporating a "radically distant point-of-view" that Mason and Dixon can produce and convey the "true 'measure' of the past" (Burns 2003, 12). It is a past full not of blank spaces waiting to be explored but of gaps that rest in the visible and the mapped. In this sense, what Pynchon does here is to shift the function of transnationalism we have come to associate with Mason and Dixon. Though a transnational perspective is certainly valid and present here, its consideration is placed outside of a local nationalism (a hostility toward the Line as European meddling) or a grand scheme (the subjection of the world to Enlightenment thought and European domination). As anticipated in the difficulty of framing this foundational narrative, we see both the local and the grand scale attempting to be filtered through a process of "interplay" or "intercultural" dialogue. The movement between national narratives and transnational or global interventions occurs most clearly on "nodal" and "intra-national points of dispersion" (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2002, 36).

This point is broadened in what the fictional epic poet Timothy Tox calls the "Mobile Invisibility" (Pynchon 1997, 485) of the continent. While this term is used to describe Tox's Giant Golem, it conflates with the ability of the fantastic and unexplainable to speak to power through fiction and alternate modes of narration. To employ the formulation of Pynchon's earlier essay "Is It OK to Be a Luddite?," the Golem and Tox signal countercultural forces that "through literary means which are nocturnal and deal in disguise . . . deny the machine" (1984, 3). A figure of legend itself, the Golem's movement does not mirror the right angles of Mason and Dixon's maps and lines, but moves through a collage of dialogue, argument, poetry, song, and legend: Dixon asks "Have thoos summon'd it here, with thy verses?" to which Tox replies, "Somewhat as ye may summon a Star with a Telescope. I pray no more than that" (Pynchon 1997, 490). It is a creature fashioned from Exodus and the Lost Tribes of Israel. As the Kabbalists whom Dixon encounters state, the Golem is fit for a textual America where the "'New World' was ever a secret Body of Knowledge,—meant to be studied with the same dedication as the Hebrew Kabbala" and where "Forms of the Land, the flow of water, the occurrence of what us'd to be call'd Miracles, all are Text,—to be attended to, manipulated, read, remember'd" (487). Juxtaposed with the cartographic eye, which delineates people and things in space, these interspaces form from the ground up. They create a community through the half-invisible, half-visible way we read and narrate the nation as text to one another. These interspaces are intertextual. Though America in the eighteenth century saw the "corruption and disabling" of this "ancient Magick" (487) as a cultural practice, it continues from these counterpositions on a wide scale. Pynchon moves us beyond a functional and secondary view of myth and fiction and shows how they are able to "deny the machine" of a rigidified foundational narrative/line by exploiting its internal boundaries, its contradictions, and its arrogance in thinking that human affairs and emotions can ever be representationally closed. It is in these alternate and shared spaces of fiction where the hard contradictions

of the imagined community, locked out of memory in its conventional narratives, can begin to be thought through and transcended.

Where the Oven is a palimpsest and a site of rewritings dominated by men who reflect the socially fragmented space of Ruby, the Convent is dominated by women who reflect a possible alternative model of communal space. Populated by women whose personal lives have rendered them outcasts, the Convent appears antithetical in conception to Ruby. Where the occupants of Ruby can trace their ancestry all the way to the formation of the country and through slave times, the Convent is rootless and composed of women who are transient. Where Ruby functions as a modernized town with a capitalist economy, the Convent is rural and functions with a much simpler economy of sharing and directly selling local produce. The greatest difference though, as Peter Kearly states, is that these women and their space contradict the fundamental gendered myth of Ruby. This myth is that Ruby exists to protect women who cannot protect themselves from the world: "The women of the Convent do not need men to heal themselves, and in fact in their distance from men create a strong maternal space of community that poses a stark contrast to the patriarchal lineage and architecture of Ruby" (2000, 12). This space is clearly not an ideal model of societal harmony, as it holds a bitter internal rivalry between Mavis and Gigi over Consolata's affection. But it nevertheless counters the very axioms and masculine narratives Ruby uses to construct its identity. Morrison does not let this distinction settle, though, as the Convent from the opening of the novel is intractably tied to Ruby.

Differentiated geographically and through its values, the Convent comes to resemble—through contrast—Ruby in its central concerns about narrating its history and about racial exceptionalism. Like the Oven, the Convent is a palimpsest and site of rewritings. Its own history (which predates Ruby) as part of an embezzlement scheme and its subsequent conversion into a Catholic school for Indian girls is partially written over by its contemporary occupants. The nuns who buy the mansion from its decadent creator attempt to whitewash its opulent walls and nude statues, but can only strip away its more superficial characteristics: the four sisters "diligently canceled the obvious echoes of his delight but could do nothing to hide his terror" (Morrison 1997b, 71). It is Consolata, though, who defines this space most clearly as a space of rewriting. It is a space where, unlike the rigid barricading of the Oven in order to maintain exceptionalist differences and attitudes, acts of compassion and insight embody larger meanings.

Rescued by Mary Magna from a depraved life as an orphan in Portugal, Consolata is the enigmatic link between these "new" women, the older order of nuns, and Ruby (through her relationship with Soane and Deek). She is also transformative, gifted with what Lone Dupree calls "stepping in," a "gift" free to "anyone who wanted to develop it," and one that is constituted by "stepping in to find the pinpoint of light" (247). Unlike the twins' "total memory" and Steward's "nothing or everything" (301) vision, Consolata's power includes the development of interspaces, places where the "foolish babygirl wishes" (222) of these new women can turn into plans for the future. A culminating scene in this regard is

the "loud dreaming" (264) and ritualistic drawings on the cellar basement. In acts of "loud dreaming" where "monologue is no different from a shriek" and in the therapeutic drawings of their trauma, the women find that they "could not leave the one place they were free to leave" (262) and that "unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted" (266). It is Consolata herself who characterizes this new power, defining it in terms of how her own life has been split and denied by dominant narratives (the Catholicism of Mary Magna which denied her gift of insight, and Deek's duties to the town which denied their love):

> My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. It is good, like bones. One sweet, one bitter. *Where is it lost?* Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's Mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve. (Morrison 1997b, 263; emphasis added)

Shifting the connection between the embodied past ("bones") and their interpretation/representation ("spirit") to a *question* rather than a *declarative* statement, Consolata moves us away from a consumptive and fragmenting spatial imagination to one that is incomplete but open. In this social space, these women are able to incorporate those things that are either lost or cannot be explained—but which nevertheless demand thinking about—into their narrative discourse. They can incorporate, for example, the death of the children or their personal traumas. This shared space is not a space of healing the past, but allows them to move beyond it by acquiring new knowledge and new insights. And it is a space where they can reread themselves in the world. Morrison's placement of this critical scene in the basement of this taboo house is significant as well. She suggests both its sub-real operation within the discourses of the imagined community, but also its very rooted and essential position. By placing this power in an outsider and this space outside the authorized boundaries of Ruby, Morrison penetrates the scope of national discourse in relation to its perception as a racial discourse. As Katrine Dalsgard notes, by ascribing "the possibility of attaining temporary salvation to a group of homeless women outside the boundaries of her narrative's exceptionalist community," Morrison

> considers this possibility [of temporary salvation] independent of African American national aspirations. People attaining the kind of salvation offered by her narrative may come from everywhere, including . . . places beyond African American boundaries. (Dalsgard 2001, 245)

Consolata, an orphan from Portugal herself, and the other vagrant women open up a transnational or transposed perspective on the community by the very way they act within its national boundaries. Similar to the place of the Native Americans in Pynchon's America, these women solve the apparent contradictions by connecting multiple spaces through developing interspaces or intersights. For the reader it opens the possibility, as Morrison says in "Home," of "enunciat[ing] and then eclips[ing] the racial gaze altogether" (Morrison 1997a, 9).

The space of possibility for Pynchon and Morrison is reinforced and expanded to its broadest parameters in the endings of their novels. While both texts break the coherence of a foundational narrative in order to investigate how it operates, their endings return us from these investigations and point us to what implicitly frames both texts: our own contemporary context of reading. The Convent women, marked for execution from the very beginning of *Paradise*, escape into the pages of the text itself. With their names forming all but three chapter titles of the novel, they haunt Ruby as "bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (Morrison 1997b, 18), unaffected by and outside of the town's claims for paradise. In the final chapter, named "Save-Marie," Morrison turns their beyond-status into an invitation for a new point of view. Beyond the evaluative paradigm of pessimist/optimist ("Who saw a closed door; who saw a raised window") lies the spatial-which-is-future question for this imagined community: "What would happen if you entered?" (305). Two closing images fill in this new question: Richard Misner's vision of Save-Marie's coffin/window and Piedade's song in the last paragraph of the novel. Misner looks at the coffin and sees the "window in the garden, felt it beckon toward another place—neither life nor death—but there, just yonder, *shaping thoughts he did not know he had*" (307; emphasis added). This "shaping" is replicated with a difference in Piedade's song. An enigmatic and mythic figure who "sang but never said a word" (264), Piedade's song closes the novel by reopening and reorganizing it to the substantial connections and desires implicit in the explicated history of this town. Piedade evokes "memories neither one has ever had . . . the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home—the ease of coming back to love begun" (318). The involuntary processes of memory, which we see in the return of these repressed women laterally across the text, is also a collective narrative and space. This collectivity is neither an automatic nor carelessly utopic space in our discourse on the nation, but one made in taking up the fluid and "endless work" (318) of narrating the past to each other and one that leads from that past into a possible future.

Pynchon's text signals the implicit frame of our own reading in a similar return of those at the margins of the story toward its absent "center." Back in LeSpark's kitchen, Timothy Tox emerges in the "Hook of Night" and brings with him those "Black servants, the Indian poor . . . all unchosen Philadelphia . . . their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, *whose shape none inside this House may know*" (Pynchon 1997, 759; emphasis added). Those peripheral, invisible, marginalized, and implicit in the story ironically move to its center with no desire to claim it. Indeed, it is apparent that they are not so much marginal but marginalized when their own space of narration and storytelling is reduced to the time and space of LeSpark's kitchen and Cherrycoke's narration. By placing this realization toward the end of the narrative, Pynchon redeploys the positional assumptions we have been making and directed to while reading. As Stefan Mattessich notes, Pynchon often performs this sort of flip to show that those who populate the edges of his fiction actually represent a "time deeper than the memory" of the text. It is an "immemorial space that does not ever appear except

insofar as it alters reading (perception) toward a commitment to the polyvalences of language" (2002, 240). Dixon's journey to the North Pole and into the hollow earth captures the importance of this point. An impossible place, the hollow earth is being extinguished in the total mapping of the globe. The lives of the people of the hollow earth differ in "Convexity, [on Earth] each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else," while "here in the Earth Concave, everyone is pointed at everyone else,— ev'rybody's axes converge,—forc'd at least thus to acknowledge one another,—an entirely different set of rules for how to behave" (Pynchon 1997, 741). In this utopia turned conspiracy, the hollow-earth people are at the edge of a world history which could or could not occur and thus are at the point of possibility. They represent, for Pynchon, a necessary transgression of history by fiction, one necessary to the very survival of the planet. As Samuel Cohen states, "Pynchon insists . . . on the possibility that other worlds might exist in order to ask if things might have turned out differently, or might still. If this is the way history has happened to run, it does not follow that it has had to" (2009, 52). It is this necessity of fiction to the practices of history and community that orients our bodies to each other. Such a way of reading and narrating encourages confrontation, the facing of contradictions, and the emergence of the submerged in building a collective narrative. It also encourages energy, the empowering recognition of what we can do together in the same space.

It is clear that both Pynchon and Morrison wrote about history, communities, and foundational narratives before their 1990s novels. But *Paradise* and *Mason & Dixon* share a hyperawareness of these issues that is reflexive and atypical for the time. In a period where history repeatedly comes to an end—in ideologies that declare it exhausted, in commercialized and cultural spheres that petrify it for the purposes of commodification and packaging—Pynchon and Morrison wonder about history's dynamic and in-process qualities. These texts encourage a willingness to engage in the language of foundations and historical narratives and to challenge them. They do so from a fragmented position, with full knowledge that "fewer intellectual resources" are adequate for "understanding the ways in which the past pressed its legacies on the present" (Rodgers 2011, 271). Such an engagement neither sanctifies nor erases the period under investigation or the contemporaneity of any reading. Rather, these texts include the human geography that almost always operates beyond the temporal and point to our own immanent treatment of these complex and distanced national and transnational narratives.

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