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Abstract:

Through Pynchon-written songs, integration of Italian opera, instances of harmonic performance, dialogue with Plato's *Republic* and Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica performance, *Mason & Dixon* extends, elaborates, and investigates Pynchon's own standard musical practices. Pynchon's investigation of the domestic, political, and theoretical dimensions of musical harmony in colonial America provides the focus for the novel's historical, political, and aesthetic critique. Extending Pynchon's career-long engagement with musical forms and cultures to unique levels of philosophical abstraction, in *Mason & Dixon's* consideration of the "inherent Vice" of harmony, Pynchon ultimately criticizes the tendency in his own fiction for characters and narrators to conceive of music in terms that rely on the tenuous and affective communal potentials of harmony.

Music in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

John Joseph Hess

Few readers of Thomas Pynchon would dispute William Vesterman's claim that "poems and particularly songs, make up a characteristic part of Pynchon's work: without them a reader's experience would not be at all the same."¹ While Vesterman was specifically interested in Pynchon's poetic practice, Pynchon's fifty year career as a novelist involves a sustained engagement with a range of musical effects. Music is a formal feature with thematic significance in Pynchon's early short fiction and in every novel from *V.* (1963) through *Bleeding Edge* (2013). In addition to Pynchon's "songs," Pynchon's novels reference and emphasize a variety of historical and imagined musical styles, forms, instruments, keys, performers, and cultures. Pynchon deploys these musical elements to narrative ends that range from exposition and description to sustained thematic development.² The word "music" itself appears over 300 times in Pynchon's fiction, appearing approximately every 15 pages.³ As if to underscore the significance of music to his fiction, Thomas Pynchon helped to promote *Inherent Vice* (2009) by distributing a playlist of the novel's music to Amazon.com.⁴ This playlist/Amazon MP3 sales directory juxtaposed such Pynchon-written songs as Meatball Flag's "Soul Gidget" and such historical pop songs as The Beach Boys' "Wouldn't It Be Nice" (1966) and The Rolling Stones' "Something Happened to Me Yesterday" (1967).⁵ Given the ubiquity of Pynchon composed songs and specific and general musical references throughout his work, to emphasize the importance of music to Pynchon's fiction is to risk stating the obvious.⁶

At the same time, to emphasize Pynchon's use of music is to highlight the paradoxically underexamined. While music is not the only guide to his work and while not every musical reference in Pynchon's work possesses the same significance, his use of music within his fiction has attracted a diverse and growing body of critical attention. This work insists that there are important arguments to be made about Pynchon's use of and textual

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investigation of music. Critics like Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight have argued that in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), "music turns out to be one of several major methods by which Pynchon's characters try to bring order into their reality... [receive] glimpses of less mundane, alternative realities... and direct attention toward future realities."⁷ David Cowart has described Pynchon's personal interest in music and identified a variety of allusions in his early fiction.⁸ J.O. Tate has catalogued the variety of popular and classical music references in *Gravity's Rainbow*.⁹ Charles Clerc has produced a shorter catalogue for *Mason & Dixon*.¹⁰ Carmen Pérez-Llana Auría has looked at the "musical fugue structure of Thomas Pynchon's 'Entropy.'"¹¹ Thomas Schaub has seen "the dialogue between Gustav and Säure [in *Gravity's Rainbow*] as more than realism, more than comedy; rather than incidental, it is a miniature (for Pynchon) of the argument at the heart of modern history—social, psychoanalytical, and political."¹² All of these accounts suggest some of the variety of ends to which Pynchon has employed music: for character development and aspiration, for verisimilitude, for formal order, for thematic development.¹³ Yet, in spite of these important critical accounts of what music Pynchon has used and how he has used it, music has remained strangely undertheorized in Pynchon criticism.¹⁴

A broad enumerative and theoretical account of the full diversity of Pynchon's engagement with music is necessarily beyond the scope of the present argument. Considering the complexity of Pynchon's development of specific musical themes within one of his least apparently musical novels, however, suggests the importance of continuing to analyze the relationship between Pynchon's use of music and the historical, political, and aesthetic dimensions of his work. That music should prove integral to those aspects of *Mason & Dixon* (1997) might sound implausible. While Pynchon's self-composed song lyrics appear in the novel with roughly the same frequency that they do in his other works, *Mason & Dixon* includes a radical reduction of *specific* musical references relative to other novels. Where *Inherent Vice* produced an entire playlist of references and *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990), and *Inherent Vice* have presented various aspects of the economic interests that have developed around the advent of recorded sound (including performance, recording, management, and sales), in the eighteenth-century narrative framework of *Mason & Dixon* there is no recorded music industry and the list of specific musical references is brief. *Mason & Dixon* refers to John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and to what sounds like a Pynchon creation but is actually the quite real composer and musician Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf.¹⁵ Yet music is everywhere in *Mason & Dixon*. A partial catalogue of the music

of *Mason & Dixon* reveals a variety of keys and styles performed by (or imagined in) an orchestra of roughly thirty unique instruments that include (but are not limited to) fife, guitar, mandolin, organ, hurdy-gurdy, glass armonica, bagpipe, clavier, ukulele, trombone, violin, banjo, drums, whistle, accordion, bugle, cymbals, tambourine, and dulcimer.¹⁶ Indeed, the general term “music” appears nearly as many times in *Mason & Dixon* as it does in *V.*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, or *Vineland*.¹⁷

Charles Clerc has identified some of Pynchon's various uses of music in *Mason & Dixon*. Although Clerc's book *Mason & Dixon & Pynchon* does not specifically focus on music, Clerc includes a three page catalogue of the novel's songs. Linking Pynchon's lyric writing to such earlier novels as *Gravity's Rainbow*, Clerc outlines a broad set of general approaches to understanding how Pynchon's lyrics function (in *Mason & Dixon* and generally). Clerc explains that:

The novel contains several dozen songs and verses, ranging in length from a couplet to twenty lines or so. As in *Gravity's Rainbow*, they both interrupt and bolster the action; they change mood and focus; they render protests and pay tribute; they show the lighter side of a sad or tragic event; they show rifts between illusion and reality; by making fun, they affirm the necessity of laughter and joy.¹⁸

In spite of this enumerated variety, if he does not (as some readers might) outright dismiss Pynchon's use of music as simply another example of Pynchon being zany, Clerc does too narrowly circumscribe the value of music in *Mason & Dixon* through his attention to its entertainment value. In his reading, “a dozen and a half songs accompany, lighten, amplify events. Their primary function is to entertain both their singers and audience.”¹⁹ In claiming that the Pynchon-written songs are meant “to entertain” characters in the novel as well as (presumably) Pynchon's own audience of readers, Clerc suggests that the primary end of Pynchon's lyrics is multidiegetic delight inside and outside of Pynchon's narrative worlds. In such a framework, Pynchon's music ruptures and comments on the narrative (“interrupt[s] and bolster[s] the action”) in order to provide commentary and critical evaluation. Clerc does not fully develop his analysis in this direction, but by suggesting the potential of Pynchon's self-composed lyrics to “render protest,” he briefly identifies a crucial function of Pynchon's songwriting practice whereby Pynchon's lyrics might be considered as a sort of Brechtian “alienation effect.” In this sense Pynchon's musical practice might be seen as following from both Gay's use of the ballad opera format and Brecht's epic theater.²⁰

Mason & Dixon in fact offers an extension, elaboration, and investigation of Pynchon's own standard musical practices. Through its Pynchon-written songs, its integration of Italian opera, and especially in its various instances of harmonic performance, *Mason & Dixon* offers Pynchon's sustained investigation of the domestic, political, and theoretical dimensions of musical harmony. Harmony functions as the key element of the idealized America that is projected by Pynchon's characters and that is undercut by Pynchon's novel. In songs like "The Transit of Venus" and "Americans All," Mason and Dixon consider the possibilities imagined by fictionalized historical characters like George and Martha Washington.²¹ At the same time, musical numbers like the "Black Hole of Calcutta" and the performance of Lord Lepton's intercolonial "Slave Orchestra" indicate the illusory nature of such theoretical harmonies.²² In this way, music becomes an essential part of the novel's specific critique of American history as well as Pynchon's more general indictment of Enlightenment rationalism, racial exploitation, and colonial violence. In its specific reference to Plato's *Republic* and in Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica performance, Pynchon also indicates that musical forms themselves demand more abstract, theoretical consideration. By using the discussion of Franklin's glass armonica to introduce the phrase "inherent Vice" to the Pynchon lexicon a dozen years before it would reappear in the novel of the same name, Pynchon reconsiders the possibilities for—and limits of—harmony.²³ *Mason & Dixon* not only extends Pynchon's musical practice to unique levels of philosophical abstraction. The novel ultimately criticizes the tendency in his own fiction for characters and narrators to conceive of music in terms that rely on the tenuous affective and communal potentials of harmony.

In the novel's use of Italian opera, Pynchon indicates the extent to which he has integrated musical forms and novelistic themes. After Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon depart for England at the conclusion of the penultimate chapter of the "America" section of the novel, the narrative is interrupted by the announcement of a program of music: "As all History must converge to Opera in the Italian Style, however, their Tale as Commemorated might have to proceed a bit more hopefully."²⁴ Rather than returning Mason and Dixon directly to their deaths (which will feature in the closing chapters of part three of the novel), the protagonists come to much more satisfying imaginary narrative ends. They retire to a floating ocean community beyond national borders, where "neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean."²⁵ Although the novel does not specifically identify the "Opera in the Italian Style" as *seria* or *buffa*, the context of this "more hopeful" imagined history makes this clear. In place of the real, the

final chapter of the “America” section of the novel offers an idealized, comic, happy ending.

By definition, “opera” refers to a work in which the incorporation of music is “integral” rather than “incidental.”²⁶ The imagined interlude of “Opera in the Italian Style” is an interruption of the narrative progress of the novel’s plot. It could not seem more incidental to a reading of what might be construed as a historical novel, yet this brief interruption participates in what the novel itself highlights as the contrast between grammatical moods of existence. In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon specifically distinguishes between what he identifies as the “subjunctive” and the “declarative” (or “Indicative”) modes of narrative.²⁷ Instead of telling the story as it was, *Mason & Dixon* explains that the narrative often offers something “contrary to fact” via the “subjunctive” mode.²⁸ This mode offers what is hoped or wished for as well as what might be or might have been the case. Although this musical program has been largely unattended by critics, history as “Opera in the Italian Style” therefore offers an additional iteration of the novel’s frequently discussed subjunctive mood.²⁹

Beyond offering a “more hopeful end” to the protagonists, this example of “History [...] in the Italian Style” reflects an anxiety over the extent to which the subjunctive remains imaginable primarily in terms derived from the “Indicative” world of human existence. Mason’s and Dixon’s comical imagined end at sea reinscribes the serious issues that had plagued them on land. Indeed, the majority of imagined spaces of their sea community are commercial enterprises that extend the “Land-Speculation Industry” across the ocean.³⁰ Mason and Dixon are able to succeed on the “Sea-Road of a thousand Leagues” *because* of the contractual world of economics and possession. The narrative specifies that Mason’s and Dixon’s more profitable, speculative narrative end would only have been possible due to “a number of foresighted Stipulations into their Contract with the Line’s Proprietor, the transnoctially charter’d ‘Atlantick Company.’”³¹ Living implausibly at sea between the two nations whose histories have vexed them throughout the novel, Mason and Dixon still live in terms conceived in the real world. Mason and Dixon still have contracts. Owners still own space, however theoretical it may be. The narrator’s claim that “all History must converge to Opera in the Italian Style” links music to Pynchon’s career-long investigation of the writing and reception of history.

If the seven page interlude of “Opera in the Italian Style” seems to offer simply the thematic “accompan[iment] and amplif[ication]” that Clerc identified in Pynchon’s general use of music in *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity’s*

Rainbow, Pynchon's sustained investigation of harmony emphasizes the extent to which music is integral to the social and political critiques of *Mason & Dixon*. (Indeed, the theme of harmony is itself musical.) Harmony is so integral to the narrative that it provides Dixon's (and the novel's and the nation's) ill-informed but foundational vision of America. Stranded, like Doc Sportello at the end of *Inherent Vice*, in the fog at the edge of the coast of what he is told (but does not quite believe) is America—but what is actually still England—Dixon hears a multi-genre harmonic medley that suggests the socially utopian possibilities he believes are yet to be found in America.

America materializes via the immaterial sounds of music. Harmony is central to this vision. In this scene, music appears to promise the appealing potential for social synthesis: "And just then, out there, like Hounds let loose, the church bells of America all begin to toll, particularly lucid in the fog, a dense Carillon, tun'd so exotically, they might be playing anything,—Methodist hymns, Opera-hall Airs, jigs and *gigues*, work songs of sailors, Italian serenades, British Ballads, American Marches."³² This vision of America is an auditory version that promises what might still be found in America.

The word "all" in this passage is crucial not only to Mason's and Dixon's America but to the multi-part critique that will follow in *Mason & Dixon's* "America." "All" is the key word in America's self-imagination (along with its Constitutional corollary "We"). Dixon's musical imagination therefore presupposes the nation that will be called into existence by the foundational political documents that the novel's historical American politicians (Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington) will be on the verge of composing in *Mason & Dixon*. "All" is equally central to Pynchon's musical critique of an emerging national consciousness in *Mason & Dixon* (via the song "Americans All") and in Pynchon's own investigations of harmony. Lost in the fog, Dixon suspects that he is not yet in America ("if this be America") and the novel itself, as critics have noted, dramatizes the steady diminishment of everyone's imagined America.³³ Yet in this moment, on the eve of "sign[ing] the Contract" that will bring them to the colonies that will sign the contract that will make them the United States of America, the imagination of America is musical. Significantly, the utopian political harmony that is apparently promised by America is idealized and non-existent. The "Voice lifted in harmony" suggests an image that "made possible some America no traveler's account has yet describ'd."³⁴

In his work on genre fiction in *Against the Day*, Brian McHale argues that "Pynchon has been refining his practice of what we might call mediated historiography—the writing of an era's history through the medium of its

popular genres.” In this way McHale states that Pynchon is able to “capture the way a historical epoch represented itself to itself.”³⁵ In their use of music, Pynchon’s novels show a similar attention to periodized musical genres.³⁶ For *Mason & Dixon*, the primary genre is what is now called classical music. To music theorists and historians, one of the defining period details of this movement is its use of harmony.³⁷ In his multi-part history of western music, Richard Taruskin identifies “the standardizing of harmonic functions” as “something going on in all music at the time” in the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁸ Leonard Ratner has similarly discussed the importance of harmony as a compositional principle in the music of the late eighteenth century. As Ratner explains “for classical music, harmony is the broadest theater of action. Harmony governs the form of an entire movement through the classic sense for *key*.”³⁹

Describing the move to “affirm” key by regularly “begin[ning] and end[ing] in the same key,” Ratner also emphasizes the broader eighteenth-century cultural conception of harmony.⁴⁰ Although Ratner is primarily interested in the musicological features of classical music (and indeed relies on period manuals of instruction to clarify these principles), he also explains that for eighteenth-century thinkers—drawing on the era’s own tendency toward clear, rational expression as well as traditions reaching back to Pythagoras—harmony was linked to math, philosophy, and astronomy.⁴¹ In addition to this connection between arts and sciences, Ratner notes that eighteenth-century music employed the language of rhetoric. Ratner is interested in how the compositional vocabulary of music followed the rhetorical models of the day, but in *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon links harmonic musical expression to political rhetoric in order to extend the idea of harmony from the musical to the domestic to the national sphere.

The connection between musical and social orders can be seen in eighteenth-century musical and literary texts. In 1763—the same year that Mason and Dixon began their survey of the line—the eighteenth-century British minister John Brown (rather than the nineteenth-century American abolitionist of the same name) included in his theoretical history of music, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruptions of Poetry and Music*, an example from Plutarch in which statues of Greek gods were posed with musical instruments in order to emphasize the connections between musical and social harmony.⁴² The self-consciously national literature of republican America that emerged in the late eighteenth century also suggested links between music and the social sphere. Royall Tyler’s play *The Contrast* (first produced in 1787, the year

of the framing of the U.S. Constitution) begins with a command to “Exult each patriot heart!” and later provides a model for this exultation when a character named Jonathan sings “Yankee Doodle do” live on stage.⁴³ In *Wieland* (1798), Charles Brockden Brown less exultantly and more implicitly linked musical expression with the era’s neo-classical ideals of domestic and political order. In this novel, the “friends” initially live in a virtual Eden of philosophy and poetry. Discussing “Latin writers... history and metaphysics of religion,” the characters are “frequently reminded how much happiness depends on society.”⁴⁴ In what the narrator describes as this group’s earliest, happiest incarnation, their tranquility is rooted in a synthesis of history, writing, religion, art and other pleasing pursuits. The initial version that Brown outlines is a utopian paradise of moral, philosophical, and domestic happiness and its audible metaphor is musical harmony. The “happiness” of this society is augmented by “two violins, an harpsichord, and three voices” in concord.⁴⁵

Following the era in conflating musical and social harmony, in the 1760s narrative of *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon roots his critique of political harmony in the pleasant (if problematic) domestic sphere of a man who would come to mistrust political factionalism during his time as the not-yet-revolutionary nation’s soon-to-be-first president, George Washington.⁴⁶ As critics have noted, Pynchon’s Washington takes drugs and sings.⁴⁷ Washington’s singing, which might be misconstrued as incidental, in fact provides the first of several movements in the novel’s sustained critique of the rhetorical conflation of musical and political harmony. Brought together ostensibly by their shared interests in surveying, Mason and Dixon and George Washington share some recreational hemp and dine on food brought by Washington’s wife, Martha. Washington jokes in a manner that he believes to be good-natured with his African house servant, Gershom. Then, inspired by Mason’s and Dixon’s experience observing the Transit of Venus, George Washington begins to sing a recently popular tune about the Transit.

Along with his kinder memories of Washington, the historical Thomas Jefferson described the historical Washington as having a mind that “was great and powerful, without being of the very first order” as “it was slow in operation, being little aided by invention or imagination.”⁴⁸ Pynchon provides Washington with some of this lack of “imagination” when the man stumbles over the words of the “Transit of Venus” song. Washington inserts “She’s the something something” for words that he has clearly absent-mindedly forgotten. At that exact moment, Washington’s voice is joined by the unexpected contribution of his wife. Martha Washington offers a vocal correction “in a pleasant tho’ impatient soprano” that identifies the

correct, missing phrase (“Goddess of Love”).⁴⁹ Sharing the song’s musical bridge (“Col° Washington joining her for the Bridge”), George and Martha Washington conclude the song in harmony as “By the last four Bars, they are facing and gazing at one another with an Affection having to do not so much with the Lyric, as with keeping the Harmony, and finishing together.”⁵⁰ The form matters more than the song’s content. Indeed, in this example, the harmony is so important that Washington, who had forgotten the words, literally could not have finished the song without his wife. The affective appeal of this harmony is equally important. Emotionally satisfied at having joined their voices together in song, the Washingtons suggest the symbolic relationship between musical concord and domestic bliss.⁵¹

Having established a link between musical harmony and domestic bliss in the Washingtons’ home at Mount Vernon, Pynchon quickly expands his analysis from the domestic to the national sphere as the agitation of the American colonies over the 1765 Stamp Act increases. Having separated from Dixon for the winter, Mason comes upon a group of people whose song reflects Dixon’s own earlier imagined version of American unity in the “bells of America [...] all [...] tol[ling].” Mason discovers in America an embodiment of the chorus that Dixon had imagined when lost off the coast of what was not America. Mixing voices and moving people between the once distant colonies, the chorus synthesizes “Massachusetts Bay accents” with “Yankees, [...] New-Yorkers in Georgia, Pennsylvanians in the Carolinas, Virginians ev’rywhere.”⁵² As these accents merge they become “the musick of Voices from far away, yet already, unmistakably, American.” This chorus of Americans sings:

It is time for
The Choosing,—
Americans all,
No more refusing
The Cry, and the Call,—
For the Grain to be sifted,
For the Tyrants to fall,
As the Low shall be lifted,—
Americans all...⁵³

The song recalls the patriotic zeal of the era’s historical accounts, music, and literature. In the claim that “the Low shall be lifted,” the song also self-consciously echoes Pynchon’s own interests in the fate of “the last poor

Pret'rite one" in the "hymn by William Slothrop" that concludes *Gravity's Rainbow*.⁵⁴ While critics like Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight have read some ambivalence in William Slothrop's song, "Americans All" appears to offer an unambiguously inclusive chorus.⁵⁵ United in their opposition to "Tyrants" and identified as "Americans all," the song explicitly appeals to "Whoever ye be,/Daughter of Erin,/Scotia's Son."⁵⁶ Pynchon is specific that Mason hears the blending of voices promised by the lyrics of the song. These lyrics are addressed not only beyond the sorts of colonial boundaries that Mason and Dixon were helping to map with their line but also beyond ancestral and national histories of once European settlers.

In the imagination of American political discourse, the word "all" has an especially resonant meaning. It is the key word in the Declaration of Independence. The first of the "truths" described as "self-evident" that are enumerated in that document is "that all men are created equal."⁵⁷ In the Constitution of the United States, the "all" of the earlier document becomes the Constitution's similarly inclusive opening, "We the People."⁵⁸ "Americans All" therefore offers a precursor national anthem for what in the 1760s narrative frame of *Mason & Dixon* was the then still-only theoretical nation. Dixon had already imagined the sound of a "nocturnal Voice lifted in harmony." In the response to the British Stamp Act, Mason hears "The Cry, and the Call" of the medley of the newly unified harmonic voice of "Americans All."

If this all sounds too triumphal, it is.

Where some early American literature had been content to sing "Yankee Doodle," *Mason & Dixon* is not. Pynchon's novel is clear in its critique of American history. "Americans All" unequivocally presents the satirical mode often offered by the songs in Pynchon's novels.⁵⁹ Clearly, in "Americans All," as in the Declaration of Independence, the apparently inclusive word "all" has a restricted meaning. In fact, the "time for/The Choosing" of "Americans All" effectively possesses a double meaning. It means both choosing to fight for independence as well as choosing how to define who will count as "Americans all." Slave voices are not heard among the chorus. Nor are the voices of the Americans that Mason and Dixon note living without proper authorization in the already mythologized west that will become the America of Huckleberry Finn, Billy the Kid, Turner's Frontier Thesis, *Against the Day*, and Pynchon's "California Novels."⁶⁰ The emphasis on choice in "Americans All" ("time for/The Choosing") reflects both the ideal basis of democracy *and* the restrictive sense that democracy would be given by Washington and the other framers of the Constitution of the United States.

In *Mason & Dixon*, slaves are not only left out of the chorus. They are instead provided a separate but unequal musical space in the form of Lord Lepton's intracolonial "Slave Orchestra." This orchestra is described as "includ[ing] the best musicians the Colonies, British and otherwise, have to offer." It features "a Harpsichord Virtuoso from New Orleans, a New-York Viol-Master, Pipers direct from the Forests of Africa."⁶¹ This intracolonial performance group has no domestic space. They have been brought from around the globe to perform and live in a space whose inclusive "all" does not apply to them. Pynchon's specific language is typically suggestive. The viola player is a "Viol-Master," a designation that incorporates the relationships of slavery. This designation also indicates that, as a slave who has no personal sovereignty, the only thing the slave is allowed mastery over is his instrument. Even that mastery has been put in the services of his patronizing lord. Like the "Americans All" whose harmony they mirror (but are not allowed), the intracolonial "Slave Orchestra" is international. It draws not only from the "Forests of Africa" and British New York but from a New Orleans that—at that historical moment—would have been recently transferred from France to Spain. Nor are their instruments incidental. In addition to the "harpsichord" being one of the very instruments of *Wieland's* brief Eden, the word "harpsichord" carries within it the basic unit of harmony—the chord.

The contrasted music of the "Slave Orchestra" and "Americans All" is essential to the social critique of *Mason & Dixon*. Rather than offering incidental realistic details, music is integral to the development of the novel's themes. Indeed, the illusory project of American political harmony is articulated and explored in music's own language. "Entertaining" though it might seem, Pynchon's use of music is carefully considered, complex, and comprehensive.⁶² As Pynchon returns to the end of the eighteenth century from the end of the twentieth, the exclusion of African Americans from the emerging harmony of eighteenth-century musical and national political concord becomes a way to represent the realities of American history. Instead of "be[ing] lifted" by the emerging political harmony metaphorically imagined by the chorus of "Americans All," the slaves of *Mason & Dixon* remain in the exact places given to them by colonialism.

Pynchon's exclusion of African Americans from political and musical harmony follows the exceedingly fine distinctions of the Enlightenment's unenlightened views on race. As Paul Gilroy has argued in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, "scientific racism" is "one of modernity's more durable intellectual products."⁶³ This falsely objective "scientific racism" extended even to eighteenth-century evaluations of

music. Thomas Jefferson offered a careful distinction that reflected the complexity of his own attitude as well as the metaphorical musical relationship that Pynchon traces throughout *Mason & Dixon*. In his "Notes on Virginia," Jefferson described "black[s]" as possessing superior "ears for tune and time" (i.e. melody and rhythm) relative to "the whites," adding that "whether they [African Americans] will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved."⁶⁴ This exemption from harmonies musical, domestic, and political had been implied by Pynchon in the Washingtons' duet on the "Transit of Venus." Their satisfactory harmonic conclusion is interrupted by their African "servant" performing his own nightclub routine of monarchy jokes. In the specific political critique of *Mason & Dixon*, when the united voices of "Americans All" explicitly promise in song to be "Slaves ne'er again," the claim is neither self-evident nor universally applicable.⁶⁵

Although *Mason & Dixon* features a sustained examination of the links between musical and political harmony in the 1760s and the 1780s—two key moments that depict America in its process of becoming the United States of America—not all of the novel's musical performances or musical critiques are specifically American. The example of the "Broad-Way" musical, "*The Black Hole of Calcutta, or, The Peevish Wazir*," for example, indicates the complex ends to which Pynchon employs music.⁶⁶ In emphasizing one of the most common examples of the Pynchon musical style (the multi-voice chorus), the musical also reminds readers of the potentially multiple possibilities of harmonies. While the "Slave Orchestra" and "Americans All" had focused to a large extent on reimagining the American political project as it has been imagined through narratives of U.S. history, those songs also participate in *Mason & Dixon's* (and Pynchon's) frequently noted, more general, critique of the Enlightenment.⁶⁷

The global racial exploitation of this historical era—what Paul Gilroy has called "the history of racial terror in the new world"—has been one of Pynchon's persistent themes since *V*.⁶⁸ In her essay on the complexity of connections in *Mason & Dixon*, Katherine Hume briefly and suggestively examines the link between music and global colonialism that Pynchon develops in the imagined space of the so-called "Black Hole of Calcutta."⁶⁹ According to Hume, "science, mythology, and pre-scientific belief all connect to this theme. The Black Hole of Calcutta yields erotic stimulation in a Cape Town brothel. It exposes the biased values of colonizers, who think nothing of a similar number of Indian lives lost every night in Calcutta. It serves as a model for Hell and as the plot for a musical." In Hume's

reading, “this infamous fragment of empire and its culturally biased attitude toward death thus connects to brothel sex, popular entertainment, and the present-day overcrowded battery of chickens of agribusiness. These all drive home Pynchon’s point that many things are connected in ways we would not expect.”⁷⁰ Hume is primarily interested in the connection between the musical’s plot and other non-musical iterations of the “Black Hole of Calcutta” that she traces throughout *Mason & Dixon*. The lyrics of the musical suggest Pynchon’s conflation of musical features and thematic concerns. In a set-piece musical in which “a Corps of two dozen Ladies appear, strolling about in quasi-Indian Dress and singing,” the song links pain (“groan and mutter”), comedy (“’tis cheerier in the Gut-ter”), commerce (“Little Su-gar for one’s Cof-fee”) and casually indifferent racism (“the Na-tives, rah-ther huffy,—”).⁷¹ The lyrics of the song therefore continue Pynchon’s practice of employing music ironically in order to undercut the unconsidered cultural beliefs of his characters and his audience.

Unlike the emerging American republic, Pynchon does not implicitly identify harmony as necessarily positive in *The Black Hole of Calcutta* musical. Indeed, the “Black Hole of Calcutta” number is an iteration of a type of Pynchon song that appears throughout his fiction. One of R. Wilshire Vibe’s theatrical successes in *Against the Day* is “his current ‘show’ *African Antics*.” This musical includes what the narrator calls the “catchy” tune about “na-tives, run amuck!” The narrator promises that this tune offers “great fun for everybody” to “sing along with.”⁷² (The specified “everybody” of the musical’s offensive “great fun” choruses explicitly does not include Fleetwood Vibe and presumably would not include the identified “na-tives” or anyone whose views of race differ from R. Wilshire Vibe’s.) Hume’s discussion of the link between musicals, brothels, and colonialism in *Mason & Dixon* also offers a reminder of a network of sexual fetishism of race that recalls events of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as well as the “Be my Hottentot bondsman tonight” sex ballad of *V*.⁷³ If, in Pynchon’s fictions, it is possible for characters to propose monocultural harmonies that certain characters believe offer “great fun” to “sing along with,” then clearly harmony is not, on its own, a musical feature that is always unvaryingly positive. Indeed, the entire preceding reading of *Mason & Dixon* has suggested the ways in which Pynchon’s music parodies and upends the idea that harmony is valuable.

What makes *Mason & Dixon* unique among Pynchon’s investigations of harmony is its theoretical nature. In addition to the novel’s uniquely American colonial contexts and its specific attention to global slavery, in its discussion of Plato’s *Republic*, *Mason & Dixon* also features a suitably eighteenth-

century commitment to the investigation of pure forms as Pynchon moves from the specific to the abstract, the national to the philosophical sphere. Thus, instead of only attending to the potential or the limits of *specific* harmonies, *Mason & Dixon* examines the *potential* for musical harmony to correspond to or to offer a future vision for social harmony. In the 1786 Philadelphia narrative of *Mason & Dixon*, Ethelmer and Euphrenia specifically invoke Plato's *Republic* in their discussion of musical forms. Echoing Plato, Ethelmer explains that "When the Forms of Musick change, 'tis a Promise of civil Disorder."⁷⁴ This reference to Plato, the philosopher of forms, introduces a level of abstraction that encourages the critical analysis of Pynchon's general use of forms.⁷⁵

Ethelmer's Platonic excerpt appears in the fourth book of *The Republic* as Socrates and his companions briefly reconsider the program for musical education in their ideal republic that they had proposed in the third book. In that earlier discussion, Socrates had concluded that music education "ought to end with the love of the beautiful." Socrates reached this conclusion after much consideration of the strict limits that he believed should be proposed in the ideal state with respect to all aspects of musical culture. In Socrates' analysis of the aims of musical education, the production of musical instruments and the allowance of particular musical forms ultimately should focus on the inculcation of what the "guardians" deem to be the appropriate civic virtues of "law-abiding and good men."⁷⁶ Recognizing the emotional power of music's "rhythm and harmony [to] enter most powerfully into the innermost part of the soul" in the fourth book of *The Republic*, Socrates reflects on what he perceives to be the possible dangers of music.⁷⁷ Socrates explains that although music "is looked on as an amusement which can do no harm," it can, in fact, be dangerous to the proposed, ideal social order. Summarizing what he perceives to be the ideal relationship between virtue, order, and musical aesthetics, Socrates claims that "when the children make a good start in their amusements, and through music are inspired with loyalty... Loyalty pervades the whole state, fostering its growth and restoring any institutions that may have fallen into decay."⁷⁸

If the language of Socrates sounds familiar to readers of Pynchon, it should. Socrates is essentially the classical precursor to the Richard M. Zhubb who attempts to prohibit "irresponsible use of the [...] harbodica" near to the conclusion of *Gravity's Rainbow*.⁷⁹ Like Socrates, Zhubb proscribes specific instruments and forms such as banned "chord progression[s] on the Department of Justice list."⁸⁰ In a much discussed passage from *Gravity's Rainbow* in which postmodern highwaymen are "playing harmonicas and

even *kazoos*, in full disrespect for the Prohibitions,” Zhlubbb explains that—as Socrates had feared in antiquity—things “have fallen into a state of near anarchy because of the musical instrument.”⁸¹ For Socrates and for Richard M. Zhlubbb, music can inspire the potentially transformative passions outlawed in *The Republic*.⁸²

This joint transformation of musical forms and social visions is precisely what Euphrenia and Ethelmer debate and hope for in *Mason & Dixon*. Euphrenia is dissatisfied with “the songs and hymns of your own American day” that “gravitate toward B-flat major.” This tuning, Euphrenia insists, enables false, martial music. It is appropriate only for “Marches and Anthems, for Triumphs that have not yet been made real.”⁸³ Instead, Euphrenia longs for musical expression of “madness, and Rapture.”⁸⁴ These features recall Socrates’ anxiety over “the innermost part of the soul.” As the music or cultural historian knows, such “Rapture” would soon appear in the twin cults of nineteenth century nationalistic fervor and turbulent Romantic expression.⁸⁵ Ethelmer, meanwhile claims to know of a group of singers that “constitute a Chapter in the secret History of a Musick yet to be.”⁸⁶ Whether (and how) these forms will become manifest in Euphrenia’s and Ethelmer’s America—and regardless of their own individual attitudes toward the forms—Euphrenia’s and Ethelmer’s dialogue about Plato’s dialogue indicates their recognition of the potential complicity of musical forms. In their arguments, musical forms and social structures are inextricably integrated. Ideals shape music and music informs ideals. If Euphrenia is dissatisfied with “the songs and hymns of your own American day,” her dialogue with Ethelmer (and Plato) indicates that it is possible to continue to hope for the emergence of musical forms that *might* be in accord with alternative social visions.⁸⁷

Pynchon’s fictions frequently suggest the potential for the construction of alternative social visions, and these visions have proven particularly interesting for Pynchon critics. One of the most suggestive examples of Pynchon’s interest in the relationship between musical forms and social visions is William Slothrop’s hymn at the conclusion to *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Although Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight have noted the apparent ambivalence of this passage with “words cryptic enough for any oracle,” words that “admit of more than one interpretation, but seem to hint at total disaster, at a nuclear or divine apocalypse,” Hume and Knight also suggest the possibility that “music offers a bridge, however tenuous; it offers listeners some faint hint of a world beyond their own.”⁸⁸ In a different essay, they claim some redemptive power for *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s final moment. This reading is positive but tentative, “as if its warning words and music could almost

create a shield against the descending rocket."⁸⁹ Beyond such a temporary shield, using the words that "They never taught anyone to sing" may *not* have any value in the face of the rocket dropping outside the theater at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* but at the very least, these words momentarily focus attention on "the last poor Pret'rite one" and "a Soul in ev'ry stone." The concluding "Now everybody—" would therefore seem to invite a positively oriented chorus, however fleeting it might prove to be.⁹⁰ In such a reading, Slothrop's hymn would seem to offer a social vision that emphasizes the possibility that a change of words might produce a change of worlds.

This is, perhaps, too hopeful a reading. Yet, as Hume and Knight suggest and as critics have discussed in non-musical contexts, Pynchon's fictions regularly imagine the possibility for other alternatives. (In Hume's and Knight's terms, music "offers listeners some faint hint of a world beyond their own.")⁹¹ Pynchon's investment in exploring alternative social orders is especially prevalent in such later novels as *Vineland*, *Against the Day*, and *Inherent Vice*. Where the final chorus of *Gravity's Rainbow* is perhaps ambivalent, these later novels explicitly investigate the possibilities (and limits) of utopian communities.

Euphrenia's and Ethelmer's Platonic dialogue had suggested that these possibilities are linked to transformations in musical forms, an idea that has attracted critical notice in Pynchon's other works. In his analysis of atonalism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, Thomas Schaub argues that Pynchon is not even necessarily interested in music on a standard harmonic scale.⁹² Yet harmonies appear throughout Pynchon's fictions. These harmonies take a variety of forms including vocal, string, and trombone.⁹³ For Pynchon's characters, at least, harmonic forms offer the potential to produce positive personal affect and social effect.

The most unequivocal example of the potential for musical harmony to create positive personal and social change appears in *Against the Day*. Late in the novel, the cruel Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin (who has previously been noted to hate music twice) is reformed by the affective power of harmony. Shortly after Dally Rideout thinks that she "would never trust 'Pert' farther than she [Dally] could throw a grand piano," Chirpingdon-Groin attends an instrumental musical performance where "something happened to Ruperta."⁹⁴ Much earlier in the novel Pynchon had established Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin's dislike for at least certain types of music when she referred to music in "a concert saloon [...] in the heart of the brothel district" as "music [...] fit only for copulation of the most beastly sort."⁹⁵ Nor is Ruperta necessarily more amenable to the sacred than the profane since Pynchon also

later states that Ruperta “despised church music.”⁹⁶ In spite of this, however, the *right* music has the potential to reach even Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin. As “nine-part harmonies occupied the bones and blood vessels of those in attendance, very slowly Ruperta began to levitate [...] tears running without interruption down her face.” After this, Ruperta vows to reform her life, informing Hunter Penhallow that he “must never, never forgive me” because she “can never claim forgiveness from anyone” for the cruelty that she has previously inflicted. Nevertheless, she promises that “somehow, I alone, for every single wrong act in my life, must find a right one to balance it.”⁹⁷

Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin’s conversion relies on an essentially Romantic notion of the transformative power of art and echoes Socrates’ idea of the relationship between music and the soul. Her example should not suggest, however, that Pynchon simply validates such notions. (After all, he is careful to note that there are at least two types of music that she detests.) Nor should her example suggest (naïvely) that Pynchon is endorsing a view of the arts as essentially, and inherently, ennobling. Nor does the example fail to recognize the cultural shaping of the art consumer since Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin is transformed by a string harmony in the western style. Nor should the example of Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin necessarily seem plausible since her experience of spontaneous human transformation is perhaps nearly as absurd as the spontaneous human combustion that opens Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*. Nor does her personal conversion match the cultural scale suggested by Euphrenia’s and Ethelmer’s (and William Slothrop’s) visions.

Yet Rupert Chirpingdon-Groin’s musical conversion is doubly significant. Absurd and ironic as it might be in its description, within the narrative of *Against the Day* this conversion is a significant moment for this individual character as well as all of those characters like Dally Rideout and Hunter Penhallow, whose lives she will no longer make a hell of human cruelty. Like the choral voices in the theater at the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this may be a response incommensurate to that novel’s rocket strike or to *Against the Day*’s violently opposed workers’ strikes and global war. Her conversion may not, in fact, offer an alternate reality. At one narrative level (that of characters in novels), however, Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin’s response to “nine-part harmony” and her resultant desire to “balance” her life does suggest harmony’s potential to alter personal reality. At a second narrative level (the level of Pynchon’s novels as narrated texts that readers consume), her conversion suggests that within Pynchon’s narrative worlds harmony offers powerful affective appeals that at least some characters believe may offer equally transformative social possibilities.

In the example of Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica, Pynchon questions the value of forms themselves. Franklin's glass armonica performance is an obviously comic set piece in *Mason & Dixon*. This scene allows Pynchon to satirize Franklin, allowing Pynchon an additional opportunity to—in Brian McHale's term—"postmodernize" a founding father.⁹⁸ The ironic treatment of Franklin is unmistakable. Franklin is somewhat lecherous. He is not entirely trustworthy. He is supplied with an apparently inexhaustible assortment of sunglasses.

At the same time, however, Franklin serves a familiar musical function. He *is* somewhat lecherous. He *is* not entirely trustworthy. He *does* supply himself with an apparently inexhaustible assortment of sunglasses. Benjamin Franklin is the rock star of *Mason & Dixon*. In a pre-revolutionary America that has not yet produced such Pynchon-created jazz and rock musicians as McClintic Sphere (*V.*), Chester LeStreet (*Against the Day*), and Coy Harlingen (*Inherent Vice*), Pynchon is careful to identify Franklin as a musician. Pynchon's Benjamin Franklin has even performed the eighteenth-century equivalent of the mythological rock god challenge of lead guitarists everywhere: he has effectively built his own guitar. Pynchon emphasizes the historical fact that Benjamin Franklin has designed a glass armonica that is so perfect that even "the Mozart child" is charmed by it.⁹⁹

Franklin's status as rock star is only partially an example of "postmoderniz[ing]" a founding father. The historical Benjamin Franklin was an early American celebrity. Printer, scientific experimenter, promoter of civic culture, and early American diplomat, Benjamin Franklin was a large figure in the early republican mythology of the United States of America. In an 1818 letter to Robert Walsh, Thomas Jefferson reinforced the then current popular idea of Franklin: "When Dr. Franklin went to France, on his revolutionary mission, his eminence as a philosopher, his venerable appearance, and the cause on which he was sent, rendered him extremely popular." Franklin was so popular, Jefferson adds that the Abbé Raynal is said to have told him, "Oh... Doctor...I had rather relate your [fictional] stories than other men's truths."¹⁰⁰

Truthful or not, the historical Franklin was so popular that announcements of an April 14, 1795 glass armonica performance that appeared in the *Aurora General Advertiser* as well as *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser* over a series of two weeks identified the instrument as one of Franklin's design.¹⁰¹ Nearly twenty years later (almost a quarter of a century after Franklin's death), a July 1814 *Poulson's Daily Advertiser* notice attempted to use Franklin's prestige to sell a glass armonica. This advertisement noted two primary selling points designed to appeal to

thrifty and patriotic shoppers alike. The instrument did not require tuning and—as importantly—it had been designed by noted American culture hero Benjamin Franklin.¹⁰² Whether the Franklin of pre-revolutionary fact or twenty-first century history conforms to these personal anecdotes or public advertisements is less significant than the fact that in the post-revolutionary fictional America of Wicks Cherrycoke's "Tale About America," Franklin would still have been seen in the terms in which Jefferson had described him, "venerable" and "extremely popular."¹⁰³ Thomas Pynchon's Franklin, like Thomas Jefferson's Franklin, sounds too good to be true and somehow actually *is* too good to be true. Following Benjamin Franklin's own carefully constructed private and public images in the *Autobiography* [1791], *Mason & Dixon* suggests that whatever Franklin's flaws in private character, as a public performer, he is flawless.¹⁰⁴

What appears initially to offer only historical detail with respect to Franklin's glass armonica is, in fact, thematically significant in *Mason & Dixon*'s investigation of harmony. Pynchon's appropriation of the glass armonica appears simply to translate the more familiar harmonica back in time to the century before its introduction. In this sense, then, the armonica functions as the musical analogue to the novel's use of recurring Pynchon character Pig Bodine's newly discovered ancestor "Foretopman Bodine." The modern harmonica recognizable to readers of *Gravity's Rainbow* has often been taken by critics to be a characteristic Pynchon instrument.¹⁰⁵ The eighteenth-century glass armonica, however, is completely different. It is described in *Mason & Dixon* as having a "queerly hoarse, ringing Tone."¹⁰⁶ This description accurately characterizes the tone as it can be heard on Mozart's "Adagio & Rondo for glass harmonica, flute, oboe, viola & cello, in C major" (KV 617) or on the website for the Franklin Institute, where the interested internet visitor may actually play a virtual glass armonica.¹⁰⁷ The historical details that Pynchon relates regarding "the Mozart child, [...] Mesmer" and the "excellent Miss Davies" are also noted by other sources on the instrument. Pynchon's description of all aspects of the instrument is generally consistent with historical descriptions of Franklin's glass armonica. There are apparently only so many ways that the movement "by way of a Treadle Arrangement [of...] the horizontal Stack of Glasses thro' a Trough of Water" might be described.¹⁰⁸

While Pynchon's description of the glass armonica performance is largely mechanical, it also gestures toward the celestial. Before his performance, as Franklin approaches the glass armonica—whose name incorporates the Italian word for "harmony"—"the Instrument awaits him, its nested

Crystal Hemispheres, each tun'd to a Note on the Scale."¹⁰⁹ The use of "Hemispheres," coupled with the "hoarse, ringing Tone" of the performance suggests an otherworldliness that recalls the Pythagorean idea of the "music of the spheres." This Pythagorean theory posited that "the entire universe is built on the same mathematical principles [as notes on a music scale], so that the music we hear is an audible version of the harmony that binds the earth and sun and stars together."¹¹⁰ Although this classical concept was already antiquated by the age of the Enlightenment, David Byrne states that the idea of musical and heavenly harmony continued to guide some of the work of astronomers like Johannes Kepler and Johann Daniel Titius into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹¹ The music of the spheres also continued to exert a considerable pull on eighteenth-century poets. John Brown prefaces his musical treatise with a poem that links the planets, spheres, musical harmony, and rapture.¹¹² Twenty-seven years later, an anonymous 1790 poem published in Philadelphia's comprehensively titled *The General Advertiser and Political, Commercial, Agricultural and Literary Journal* described the music of the glass armonica in terms that specifically linked the instrument with extraterrestrial harmony.¹¹³

Pynchon's gesture toward celestial order via the glass armonica is a confusing move that suggests both the limitations and possibilities of harmony. The specific problem that Pynchon had identified in the example of the harmony of "Americans All" had been that of exclusion: not every note harmonizes, especially those relegated to an entirely different scale (or cosmos). The example of the glass armonica also reinscribes the idea of control inherent in Euphrenia's and Ethelmer's dialogue on Plato. The "mathematical principles" of the music of the spheres (and notes on the scale) suggest the rationalism that Hume and Knight have convincingly argued the Orphic references of *Gravity's Rainbow* resist.¹¹⁴ The implication of cosmic order implies the sort of natural law of "self-evidence" that *Mason & Dixon* implicitly critiques in the American political project. At the very least, the idea of an invisible celestial order implies the type of invisible systems of control that paranoids from *V.* through *Bleeding Edge* believe may exist in the otherwise visible world. At the same time, however, the idea of an invisible celestial harmony that brings everything into order, high and low notes sounding at the same time on the same scale, suggests the alternative realities that Hume and Knight have perceived in *Gravity's Rainbow* and that McHale has described as central to Pynchon's ontological concerns.¹¹⁵ After all, for the Chums of Chance to attempt to "fly toward grace" at the conclusion of *Against the Day* there must be someplace *toward* which they fly.¹¹⁶ Like much of Pynchon's work, Pynchon's invocation of the celestial in *Mason &*

Dixon offers a confusing, hybrid meaning that is revealed through the novel's integration with music.

Most importantly, Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica performance introduces the crucial concept of "inherent Vice" to Pynchon's fiction.¹¹⁷ In the process, Pynchon shifts his critique of harmony from the specific ("Americans All") and the social (the control of forms) to the abstract (harmony as concept). The nature of the glass armonica, as described by Pynchon, allows Pynchon to focus attention not on the flaws of specific attempts to shape and control harmony but on the general qualities of the musical form itself.

In introducing the concept of "inherent Vice" to the Pynchon lexicon, Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica suggests that rather than harmony being something that can be controlled, corrupted, or otherwise made complicit, harmony might instead be a form with great potential but implicitly limited value. A dozen years before Sauncho Smilax would offer his now familiar definition of inherent vice in the novel of that title, *Mason & Dixon* provides a nearly identical explanation. In *Inherent Vice* Sauncho Smilax describes "what Sauncho's colleagues in marine insurance liked to call inherent vice." As Sauncho explains, the term refers to "'what you can't avoid [...] stuff marine policies don't like to cover. Usually applies to cargo—like eggs break—but sometimes it's also the vessel carrying it. Like why bilges have to be pumped out."¹¹⁸ Sauncho's gloss on marine law clarifies the concept that Pynchon had already employed in *Mason & Dixon*. It is probable that the eggs will break. The object carries within it the possible cause of its own loss.

In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon offers the inherent vice of the glass armonica as a metaphor for harmony itself. The problem is coded in its name—there is harmony, but it is made of glass. The glass armonica, which Franklin had previously noted for its "general Frangibility," was "carefully brought hither through reef'd-Topsail seas and likewise whelming Anxieties back at Lloyd's regarding the inherent Vice of Glass added to the yet imperfectly known contingencies of voyage by Ship."¹¹⁹ The glass armonica becomes Pynchon's metaphor for harmony (musical and social) in *Mason & Dixon*. The glass armonica is difficult to insure because it is so fragile, but it is valuable because it is so fragile. This value is partly cultural and economic but it is also aesthetic and integral. The glass armonica could not be what it is if it were not fragile.

Pynchon's work has often been seen as resisting readerly, critical, and political orders of experience and intimating the possibility of other worlds or orders of existence. These orders, like the "Musick" of the glass armonica, offer "Sentiment ever held back, ever at the Edge of breaking

forth, in Fragments, as Glass breaks.”¹²⁰ What *Mason & Dixon* begins to make clear is that the external forces of Them and Richard M. Zhubb (*Gravity's Rainbow*), conservative politics (*Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*) and commerce (*Bleeding Edge*) are not the only things that shatter possibilities of harmonious interaction and powerful human sentiment. Instead, *Mason & Dixon* emphasizes the integral role of music in Pynchon's complex and sometimes contradictory social visions and it marks a transition in his thinking. *Mason & Dixon* suggests what *Vineland* had already intimated and what *Inherent Vice* expands: for better or worse, harmonies are powerful, harmonies are transitory, and harmonies are fragile. They are only as good as the notes that they contain and the vessels that contain their instruments. In the novel's sustained engagement with the idea that harmony is its own endless possibility and its own inherent limit, *Mason & Dixon* allows Pynchon to try to imagine pure music.

End notes

1. Vesterman, “Pynchon's Poetry,” 211.
2. An example of Pynchon's expository use of music can be seen as Miles Blundell and Lindsay Noseworth approach the Midway near the beginning of *Against the Day*: “From somewhere ahead too dark to see came music from a small orchestra, unusually syncopated, which grew louder, till they could make out a small outdoor dance-floor” (22). Examples of Pynchon's thematic development of music might involve the Orpheus references in *Gravity's Rainbow* that have been discussed by Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight. Other examples blur the distinction between exposition and theme as when it is noted that “scarcely any music ever came this way” at Lake's and Deuce's wedding in *Against the Day* (2006) (266).
3. This estimate is based on a total page count of slightly over 4,700 pages for standard U.S. editions of Pynchon's eight novels and *Slow Learner* (1984). By my count the word “music” appears 321 times in these nine books. This word count does not include the uncollected fiction (the word does not appear in “Mortality and Mercy in Vienna” (1959), although musical forms such as jazz do). The count refers only to the general term “music” and its variants (“musical” and “musician”) as they appear on non-consecutive pages in the texts. The word count also does not include references to specific musical instruments, forms, or performers (as for example when Led Zeppelin is referenced in *Vineland* (209)). This suggests that Pynchon's musical frequency actually cycles somewhat higher than every 15 pages.

4. For discussions of Pynchon's Amazon playlist in early media accounts, see Alison Flood's "Pynchon Draws Up Playlist for New Book" and Carolyn Kellogg's "Jacket Copy" feature on "Thomas Pynchon's Playlist" for the *Los Angeles Times*. For a more recent (but brief) critical discussion see Rob Wilson's article "On the Pacific Edge of Catastrophe, or Redemption: California Dreaming in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*" (224).
5. Pynchon, "Thomas Pynchon's Soundtrack to *Inherent Vice*." "Soul Gidget" is described in *Inherent Vice* as "one of the few known attempts at black surf music" (155). The song is also significant for being the first notable repeat in Pynchon's song catalogue. What had been FM radio innovation in the post-World War II era of *Inherent Vice* becomes "the seldom-heard oldie" on which Vyrva "contribute[s] eight bars of backup" in the early twenty-first century of *Bleeding Edge* (362). Apart from their places in popular music history and the verisimilitude that they offer to the world of *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon's use of the Beach Boys and the Rolling Stones is notable for the thematic significance of the songs selected. A hit ("Wouldn't it Be Nice") and an obscure album track ("Something Happened to Me Yesterday"), the songs relate to the idealized and actual worlds inhabited by the protagonist Larry "Doc" Sportello in *Inherent Vice*. The Beach Boys' "Wouldn't it Be Nice" fits with Doc's "velvet painting" not only for its beach theme but also in attempting to project a world "that never was" (6). The Rolling Stones' "Something Happened to Me Yesterday" comes on Doc's radio dial as he finds himself driving uphill behind "a paisley-painted VW bus full of giggling dopers" (193) in a version of California that is about to disappear.
6. In his work on music in *Gravity's Rainbow*, J.O. Tate has argued that "music, as much as social forms, history, and technology, is a measure of where we are" (10). Due to the variety and complexity of Pynchon's uses of music, it is essential to construe the term "music" broadly. In this sense, this article follows Nicholas Cook's musicological work. Cook states that "to talk about music in general is to talk about what music means—and more basically, how it is (how it can be) that music operates as an agent of meaning" (unnumbered second page). With respect to criticism of Pynchon's use of music, such a broad definition has the benefit of expanding the focus of analysis from Pynchon's songs to his other, non-lyrical uses of music.
7. Hume and Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 367.
8. See David Cowart's discussion of "'Unthinkable Order': Music in Pynchon" in *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion*.
9. Tate, "*Gravity's Rainbow*: The Original Soundtrack."
10. Clerc, *Mason & Dixon & Pynchon*, 116.

11. Pérez-Llantada Auría, "Beyond Linguistic Barriers: The Musical Fugue Structure of Thomas Pynchon's 'Entropy.'"
12. Schaub, "Atonalism, Nietzsche, and *Gravity's Rainbow*: Pynchon's Use of German Music History and Culture," 37.
13. Hear also Barry Lewis' "Three-Minute Takes on Three-Year Books: Pynchon's Legacy in Popular Music" and George Twigg's "'Sell Out with Me Tonight': Popular Music, Commercialization and Commodification in *Vineland*, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *V.*," works that appear as audio files on the website for International Pynchon Week 2013.
14. In three chapters on "Pynchon's Poetics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, for example, music is conspicuously absent. (See David Cowart, "Pynchon in literary history," Brian McHale, "Pynchon's postmodernism," and David Seed, "Pynchon's intertexts"). Music does receive brief (but significant) attention in that volume from Kathryn Hume ("*Mason & Dixon*," 65) and John Krafft ("Biographical Note," 10-11). While concerned with contemporary literature as a field (generally) and Roddy Doyle and Nick Hornby (specifically), Erich Hertz and Jeffrey Roessner's introduction to *Write in Tune: Contemporary Music in Fiction* identifies reasons for a comparative lack of criticism of popular musical forms (relative to classical forms) in literary studies (3-5). Their introduction also addresses postmodernism, aesthetic production, and consumerism (2-3). Although Hertz and Roessner do not specifically mention Pynchon, their work offers useful parallels for thinking about music's undertheorized role in Pynchon studies.
15. *Mason & Dixon* 270, 268, 750. All citations to *Mason & Dixon* follow Pynchon's capitalization. Where the ellipses are not Pynchon's own, standard practice is followed in using brackets ("[...]") to indicate a non-Pynchon ellipsis.
16. *Ibid.*, 37, 52-3, 81, 149, 177, 179, 214, 229, 262, 264, 268, 272-3, 282, 294, 338, 352, 357, 362, 432, 442, 493-4, 500-1, 506, 509, 536, 552, 566, 582, 587, 624, 638, 668, 670, 685, 720, 753, 769.
17. The word "music" appears 41 times in *Mason & Dixon*, 49 times in *V.*, 48 times in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and 44 times in *Vineland*. It appears most frequently (understandably) in Pynchon's longest novel, *Against the Day*, where it appears 63 times.
18. Clerc, 116.
19. *Ibid.*, 117.

20. John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*; Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). Strangely, critical discussions of Pynchon's notable literary influences seldom include either Gay or Brecht.
21. Not all Pynchon songs include titles. For ease of reference, untitled songs will be referred to throughout with respect to details significant to the present argument.
22. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 284, 571, 415, 562-563.
23. *Ibid.*, 272.
24. *Ibid.*, 706.
25. *Ibid.*, 713.
26. Michael and Joyce Kennedy note that "the term is an abbreviation of *opera in musica*" and that "the essence of opera is that the mus[ic] is integral and is not incidental" (546).
27. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 208, 345, 365, 511, 543, 677, 683.
28. *Ibid.*, 365.
29. See, for example, Brian McHale's "Mason & Dixon in the Zone, or, A Brief Poetics of Pynchon-Space."
30. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 712.
31. *Ibid.*, 713.
32. *Ibid.*, 244, emphasis Pynchon's.
33. *Ibid.*, 244. For a discussion of *Mason & Dixon* and America, please refer to Donald J. Grenier's "Thomas Pynchon and the Fault Lines of America" and Jeff Baker's "Plucking the American Albatross: Pynchon's Irrealism in *Mason & Dixon*." Grenier claims that "*Mason & Dixon* is Pynchon's elegy for the American dream. Both the last, best hope for humanity and the continent of despair" (82).
34. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 244.
35. McHale, "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching," 25.
36. The 1950s framework of *V.* relies on jazz while the 1940s depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow* focuses on movie musicals and the 1960s of *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice* celebrate and demonstrate various anxieties over rock and roll.
37. In "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," Kathryn Hume and Thomas J. Knight identify "music as organizing metaphor" in that novel's investigation of order, reality, "alternative realities," and art (382, 367). Like McHale's consideration of genre, Hume's and Knight's concept of "music

as organizing metaphor" is significant to any consideration of music in Pynchon's work.

38. Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

39. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*, 48 (emphasis Ratner's).

40. Pynchon notes this musical model in *Mason & Dixon* when Euphrenia describes contemporary music as "Departure [...] and at last, Return to the Tonick, safe at Home, no need even to play loud at the end" (263).

41. Ratner, 66.

42. John Brown, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruptions of Poetry and Music*, 48.

43. Tyler, 776, 800. Tyler was participating in the spirit of the day. Philip F. Gura notes that William Hill Brown, author of "what is widely recognized as the first bona fide American novel... *The Power of Sympathy*" wrote "patriotic poetry" early in his career. This work included "'Yankee Song,' [a poem that] celebrates the... recent ratification of the Federal Constitution. The poem contains the refrain 'Yankee Doodle keep it up, Yankee Doodle dandy' and upon republication the following year carried the now-familiar title 'Yankee Doodle'" (*Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel*, 4).

44. Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland*, 28.

45. *Ibid.*, 28. Clerc notes that at least one early reviewer of *Mason & Dixon* (John Leonard) connected the novel to Charles Brockden Brown (18). In his characterization of Brown's novels Gura has claimed that these novels "explored the limits of rationality, emphasizing the random irruption of the irrational into even the most settled lives" (xiv-xv). The world of *Wieland* indeed becomes disordered through deception and fear.

46. Washington spoke of the interests of party in his First Inaugural Address (1789). Edmund S. Morgan notes that nine years earlier Washington had expressed anxiety over the interests of individual states negatively affecting legislative powers under the Articles of Confederation (*The Birth of the Republic 1763-89*, 126.)

47. Baker notes "Washington's penchant for hemp" in *Mason & Dixon*, 183.

48. Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 163.

49. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 284.

50. *Ibid.*, 284.

51. The link between domestic tranquility and the imagination of empire may be seen in Edward Savage's painting *The Washington Family* (1796) in The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Washington appears with his family, posed in formal military attire with map and globe. At the edge of this family group, Savage depicts an African American servant whose features blur indistinctly into the background.
52. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 570.
53. *Ibid.*, 571.
54. Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 760.
55. See Hume and Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 378.
56. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 571.
57. The Declaration of Independence (in Morgan, 159). Jefferson, incidentally, uses the legal term "instruments" to refer to America's foundational political documents (Jefferson, 59).
58. The Constitution of the United States (in Morgan, 171).
59. For discussions of the satirical aspects of Pynchon's earlier song lyrics, see William Vesterman's consideration of the Yoyodyne songs in *The Crying of Lot 49* (216) and Kathryn Hume's and Thomas J. Knight's analysis of the "Colder than the nipple on a witch's tit" song in their discussion of "Pynchon's Orchestration of 'Gravity's Rainbow'" (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 11; Hume and Knight, 369).
60. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 616. For a discussion of the west in *Mason & Dixon*, see McHale's "Mason & Dixon in the Zone." *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice* have been considered collectively as the "California novels" by Donald Brown, David Cowart (*Thomas Pynchon & the Dark Passages of History*), and Thomas Hill Schaub ("The Crying of Lot 49 and other California novels").
61. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 415.
62. It is, as Hume and Knight suggest in the title of one of two articles on *Gravity's Rainbow*, "orchestrated."
63. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 44.
64. Jefferson, 240.
65. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 571.
66. *Ibid.*, 562.

67. Pynchon memorably represents a version of the end of Enlightenment notions of rationality and progressive history with “the fall of a crystal palace” on the first page of *Gravity's Rainbow* (3). For a discussion of the enlightenment in *Mason & Dixon*, please refer to Jason T. McEntee's “Pynchon's Age of Reason: *Mason & Dixon* and America's Rise of Rational Discourse.”
68. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 36.
69. In introducing the “Black Hole of Calcutta” theme in *Mason & Dixon* (via the simulation of “the Black Hole of Calcutta Experience”), Pynchon describes “a room nine by seven feet and five inches, [...] reduc'd to a quarter-size replica of the cell at Fort William, Calcutta, in which 146 Europeans were oblig'd to spend the night of 20-21 June 1756” (*Mason & Dixon* 152). Pynchon's brief summary follows historical accounts that also note the deaths of many of the cell's occupants (R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 283; J.M. Roberts, *History of the World*, 507).
70. Hume, “*Mason & Dixon*”, 65.
71. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 562, 563.
72. Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 163, 164.
73. Pynchon, *V.*, 257.
74. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 262. This follows Plato, *The Republic*, 103.
75. Jason T. McEntee has briefly discussed this dialogue, seeing at as an “allu[sion] to the oft-maligned musical revolution of the 1960s” (201).
76. Plato, 103.
77. *Ibid.*, 80.
78. *Ibid.*, 103.
79. Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 754.
80. *Ibid.*, 755.
81. *Ibid.*, 755, 754, emphasis Pynchon's. See also, Hume and Knight's discussion in “Orpheus and the Orphic Voice in *Gravity's Rainbow*” (307-8).
82. The discussion of musical forms in *The Republic* seems to validate Bertrand Russell's negative view of the proposed republic in *The History of Western Philosophy* (115). For a more positive musico-philosophical view of Plato's consideration of musical forms (that is also roughly contemporaneous with Euphrenia's and Ethelmer's fictional dialogue), refer to John Brown (79, 87, 88, 96, and 130-133). Brown's consideration of Plato's views on the ideal

relationship between music and society relies primarily on a discussion of Plato's later dialogue on *Laws*.

83. "Marches" serve as the partial accompaniment to the novel's "subjunctive" vision of a "Triumph [...] not yet been made real" in the example of Mason's and Dixon's experience with the imaginary "transnationally charter'd 'Atlantick Company'" (*Mason & Dixon* 712, 262, 713).

84. *Ibid.*, 262.

85. In a frequently discussed passage from *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon flags the link between Romanticism and nationalism in the "raging debate [...] over who is better, Beethoven or Rossini" when Säure Bummer states that "All you feel like listening to Beethoven is going out and invading Poland" (440). For critical accounts of this debate, see especially Thomas Schaub's "Atonalism, Nietzsche and *Gravity's Rainbow*: Pynchon's Use of German Music History and Culture," particularly his discussion of the musicological issues behind the debate depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow* (29-32). Steven C. Weisenburger has also summarized significant thematic aspects of the Beethoven/Rossini argument (*A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 247-248). See also Tate (13-14).

86. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 264.

87. Nicholas Cook notes that in the nineteenth century, "as conventional religion succumbed to the onslaught of science, music provided an alternative route to spiritual consolation" (36). With respect to Pynchon's fiction, see Hume and Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*."

88. Hume and Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 378, 374.

89. Hume and Knight, "Orpheus and the Orphic Voice in *Gravity's Rainbow*," 312.

90. Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 760.

91. Hume and Knight, "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," 374.

92. Schaub, "Atonalism, Nietzsche and *Gravity's Rainbow*".

93. Pynchon, *V.*, 230; Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 896; Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 12. By my account there are at least 42 other examples of "harmony," "harmonies," or some variation of "harmonic" (excluding the "harmonica") in Pynchon's novels and stories.

94. Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 892, 896.

95. *Ibid.*, 369.

96. Ibid., 896.

97. Ibid., 896.

98. McHale, "Mason & Dixon in the Zone," 48. Jeff Baker identifies a specific critique in Pynchon's use of Washington and Franklin in *Mason & Dixon*, noting that "in addition to the obvious parallels between the American Revolution of the late eighteenth century and the attempted radical revolution of the sixties, Washington's penchant for hemp and Franklin's tinted granny glasses allow Pynchon to indict both revolutionary generations on the charge of complicity with the system" (183). Pynchon's general interest in the ironic diminishment of "founding father[s]" is longstanding, with either that phrase or specific historical figures appearing in *The Crying of Lot 49* (15), *Mason & Dixon* and *Inherent Vice* (117, 294).

99. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 268.

100. Jefferson, 167, 169.

101. See unknown, "Grand Concert."

102. See unknown, "Very Superior Furniture."

103. A "Tale about America" is requested on the third page of *Mason & Dixon* (7).

104. Although characters in *Mason & Dixon* express private reservations about Franklin as a person and as a political figure, his stage appearances as an entertainer are described as being without peer. Franklin's first note on the glass armonica ("a C major chord") makes "the room quiet [...] instantly" (273). When he later appears in "the fam'd Leyden-Jar *Danse Macabre!* with that Euclid of the Electricker, Philadelphia's own *Poor Richard*, in the part of Death" he leads the audience from the room on an electrical hunt (295). While Pynchon is careful to note the extent to which Mason is unsettled by the experience, Pynchon is equally careful to note the excitement of Franklin's "Electrophile" followers (295).

105. Tate, 8. See also Hume and Knight, "Orpheus and the Orphic Voice in *Gravity's Rainbow*" (304). The harmonica (or "harp") appears in most (but not all) of Pynchon's novels. (See *Gravity's Rainbow*, 62-5, 68, 256, 384, 593, 622, 642, 684, 693, 736, 742, 754, 756; *Vineland*, 204, 315; *Mason & Dixon*, (as "armonica") 268, 272, 442; *Against the Day*, 78, 266, 418-425, 1021; and *Inherent Vice*, 159). Pynchon plays with the idea of the harmonica as a characteristic Pynchon instrument in *Against the Day* when the Chums of Chance appear at the constantly name-shifting "Harmonica Marching Band Academy" (418-425, 1021). I am indebted to Jeffrey Severs for this observation.

106. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 273.
107. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Comp. KV 617; Franklin Institute, "The Armonica."
108. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 268, 273. Although accounts of glass armonicass are comparatively rare in literary criticism, M.E. Grenander's discussion of "Benjamin Franklin's Glass Armonica and Henry James's 'Jolly Corner'" identifies several sources on the instrument and summarizes many of its features. For comparison between Pynchon's description and standard accounts of the device, see Grenander, especially 416.
109. Kennedy and Kennedy, 27; Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 272.
110. Cook, 32.
111. Byrne, 307, 309.
112. John Brown, 8, 18, 19.
113. See unknown, "A Reply to the Two Epigrammatists."
114. For Orpheus in *Gravity's Rainbow*, please refer to Hume and Knight, "Orpheus and the Orphic Voice in *Gravity's Rainbow*." In "Pynchon's Orchestration of *Gravity's Rainbow*," Hume and Knight specifically argue that "how music functions within the universe Pynchon has created in *Gravity's Rainbow*... is not as harmony of the spheres" (368).
115. Brian McHale considers what he identifies as the ontological concerns of Pynchon's fiction in *Postmodernist Fiction*. For the recognition that harmony not only synthesizes but "lifts" low notes to high, I am indebted to Julieann Ulin.
116. Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 1085.
117. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 272.
118. Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, 351.
119. Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 268, 272.
120. *Ibid.*, 273.

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