Introduction

Narrative linearity and its system of implications, of causality, closure and teleology* pose a "structure of exclusion" (Currie 79), which goes quite against the grain of postmodernism. Any appointment with the postmodern does not provide such easy exits. Yet this study paradoxically languages towards generalizations and generic classifications, which it cannot do without. Nor can it forsake in its telling the conventions of coherence which get 'dedoxified' (Hutcheon, Politics 3) in postmodern narratives.

Our interest gets pinned down to the narrative re-presentations of time in postmodern fiction and the experience of time as a condition of postmodernity: textual readings get interwoven with the speculative and theoretical issues they evoke and illustrate. The way we recollect, construct or narrate our lives depends on our concept and experience of time, and the study would seek relations between narratives and their temporalities. Largely derived from the postmodernist, poststructuralist theoretical assumptions, the background will help to fix categories for the analysis of fiction. Postmodernism however is about how categories get transgressed and space will be provided for the politics of such transgression.

* Key concepts elaborated in notes: p.236
To limit the study to some representative works of postmodern American fiction—Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969)—becomes another instance of exclusion, which seeks vindication in that postmodern experience can get reduced to an American experience effectively experimented in such fiction of our choice. As Steve Katz says, "Contemporary writing has to echo in its form the shape of American experience" (LeClair and McCaffery 231). Notwithstanding the kind of tightrope-walk it portends, these encounters with fiction would involve tackling their structures and their thematic preoccupations, how they determine and get determined by the postmodern experience where the "reality coordinates within which we apprehend and order sense data" (Steiner 253) have assumed radical changes.

This introductory section is intended to hold up in order a progressive account of ideas relevant to the prospective arguments, which would cover reflections on time, time and narrative, time and the postmodern condition, narrative shift from the modernist to the postmodernist, "chronoschisms" in postmodern fiction (Heise), postmodernism and history, "historiographic metafiction," and the politics of narrative 'de-doxification' (Hutcheon, *Politics* 3, 14). Then, it is hoped, it would be easier to trace the development of the thesis and put it in a synoptic nutshell not too hard to crack.
Time

Whether it be philosophical musings, religious doctrinal divides or scientific quantifications, the time-enigma has been a vital stimulant to human thought. That which we call 'time' dawns upon us as the single-most coordinating factor of all experience, hence any interpretative discourse of existence, historical, philosophical or scientific gets preoccupied with time. Throughout the ages philosophers have wrestled with concepts of time—death and eternity, linear and cyclical time, being and becoming. The early association of time with the mystical and the mental gave way through centuries towards establishing time as a fundamental measurable quantity crucial to “the law-like cosmos” (Davies 31). From Newton's definition of “absolute, true and mathematical time” (qtd. in Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy 805), to Einstein's path-breaking revelations on relativity, we have seen bizarre possibilities and revolutions in the perception of reality and time.

In the search for a coherent picture of the world and time, one confronts a bewildering range of disparate and endlessly fascinating ideas in philosophy, science, art and culture, religious belief and the ordinary commonsense of everyday life. Before the plunge into these troubled waters let attention linger on the shore awhile and rest assured in the time of our 'everydayness' (Heidegger 3). It is the determinate clock-time not subject to change through external
influence, in which an identical temporal sequence is constantly repeated, and which measures time in terms of the duration of an event compared with identical sequences on the clock (Heidegger 4).

In this commonsense conception of time we assume that there is only one time-series, it does not speed up or slow down. Moreover, the relations of simultaneity between any two events are the same for everybody (Smith and Oaklander 164). It is as if to conceive of an irreversible 'arrow of time' (Savitt) giving a certain linearity and direction to any course of events, and thus to the way we think of life.

This 'objective' time cannot, however, exist without a subjective human cognition the vicissitudes of which are difficult to formulate: “all humans tend to apprehend time through its discrete measurements: days, weeks, years, as well as the way it is imposed on us—by the regularity of work schedules, railway timetables, licensing hours [. . ].” (Cobley 16).

J.R.R. Tolkien’s reflections in Tree and Leaf may seem pertinent to our appropriation of time:

We need to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity [. . .] the things that are familiar, are the things we have appropriated [. . .]. We say we know them [. . .]. We laid hands on them, [. . .] and acquiring ceased to look at them. (qtd. in Nash 55)
In the usual complacency of living within 'time,' which gives life an easy causal sequence and coherence, one shrugs off any thought to the contrary. Once the contraries strike it would be hard to keep oblivious of the elaborate temporal projects of the human mind.

The issue of time as a mental construct, not a pre-existing universal threads the history of human thought, Eastern and Western (Davies 23). Hark to the sixteenth century mystical poet Angelus Silesius:

Time is of your own making,
its clock ticks in your head.
The moment you stop thought
time too stops dead. (qtd. in Davies 23)

In such thinking time evolving as a linear progression of past-present-future would be a mere convenient equation to interpret history or the world. To St. Augustine it becomes a recognition that “time past, time present and time future exist not just in the mind of man but as the essence of the mind of man, in the form of the interaction of memory, perception, and anticipation or desire” (Jaques 23). There has been a long philosophical tradition of identifying time with the 'consciousness of time,' and with individual consciousness. Even the more recent interpreters like Bergson and Husserl do not break away from the tradition. Bergson speaks of the “qualitative
duration as seen exclusively by the deeper self," while Husserl reduces
the problem of time to that of the "phenomenology of the
consciousness of time" (Gurvitch 35).

It would be safer to avoid taking positions on the subject of the
primacy of ontological time or of time-consciousness, not to confront
the several concepts of time held by thinkers, poets, scientists, for
their various purposes, from their various points of view. Any point
of entry into 'time' has "so many connotations and so many potential
research implications that at some point researchers must simply
select those few areas on which they will concentrate and reconcile
themselves to the fact [. . .]" (Cottle 6). As Frederick Kummel writes,
"far from representing a unitary self-contained form, such a concept
is always conditioned by man's understanding of it" (31). Only that
in the course of history man has devised methods of taming time
that in effect render it objective and measurable.

The practitioners of mechanics, for whom time concept is most
important, have somewhat limited themselves to the satisfaction of
the general comprehensibility of the concept. Traditional Newtonian
physics is consistent with the commonsense conception of time. In a
scholium to the Principia, Newton declares that, "Absolute, true and
mathematical time, of itself and from its own nature, flows equably
without relation to anything external" (qtd. in Cambridge Dictionary
of Philosophy 805). Before Galileo and Newton time was subjective,
organic, not a parameter to be measured with precision. The scientific picture leaves in the dark vast realms of thought in which time is known intuitively as cyclicity, natural rhythm or eternity. Thus “when Newton brought time into the domain of scientific inquiry, it proved a fruitful method of analyzing physical processes, but it taught us little about time itself” (Davies 16). With Newton emerges the picture of a ‘clockwork universe,’ with time as a fundamental parameter, predictable in every detail—universal, absolute and completely dependable time” (Davies 31). This definite image of time has significant implications for the nature of reality it portends in the form of the so-called Newtonian world-view.

Einstein’s theory of relativity brings with it a collapse of Newtonian rigidities, introducing an intrinsically flexible notion of time, a time that is ‘relative.’ Bertrand Russell in his ABC of Relativity explicates:

There is no longer a universal time which can be applied without ambiguity to any part of the universe; there are only the various ‘proper’ times of the various bodies in the universe, which agree approximately for two bodies which are not in rapid motion, but never agree exactly except for two bodies which are at rest relatively to each other. (43)
Even simultaneity becomes relative to a particular observer: it is not the same for different observers, unless they are at rest relatively to each other. Einstein’s theories force human perception to unusual possibilities: the possibility of the same event being future for me and past for you; the possibility of time slowing down and speeding up, depending on the motion of the body; of a time which can be closed like a circle by its reversibility (Smith and Oaklander 164). It is possible for a multiple time-series to exist. There is even talk of living one’s life in the reverse and of a possible time-travel (Smith and Oaklander 164). This analysis of postmodern time would intersect at several points with Einstein’s concept of relativity, which has theoretical ties with postmodern representational and experiential time.

All such questioning centering on the basic nature of reality, as in current scientific theory, leads to a “philosophical metaphysics” (Smith and Oaklander 1), so that the theory of the universe coming into existence fifteen billion years ago with a “big bang” is accounted in formulating metaphysical theories on the beginning of time and the universe. Time’s central role in ontological studies can date back to Plato, with the division of reality into the true everlasting being and the imperfect being that passes away in time, the tendency gaining even more prominence in medieval metaphysics (Smith and Oaklander 2). There Eternity becomes the paradigm of being. With modern
thinking this emphasis on eternity shifts to a greater emphasis on

time as the central feature of reality: to Kant "time is the fundamental

way in which the mind understands reality" and to Heidegger's

existential thinking "time is the meaning of Being itself" (Smith and

Oaklander 3). True to this tradition, time plays an equally fundamental

role in the twentieth century—the nature of substances, events,

changes, eternity, divine foreknowledge, fatalism, the universe," all

understood in terms of their temporal characteristics or their relation
to time (Smith and Oaklander 3). Issues about freedom, for example,

involve time in the question whether we have 'free will' or whether we

are 'fated' to live our future in a certain predestined way, all depending

on how present time is related to future time (Smith and Oaklander

3). Such a tradition forms an extensive backdrop to the discussion of

'time' in postmodern fiction, which experiments with the temporal

possibilities of narrative development, shattering the Absolutes of

Time and Reality.

**Time and Narrative**

"Narrative" can be etymologically traced back to the Latin *narrare*

("to relate") and *gnarus* ("knowing") or the Sanskrit root *gna* ("to know"),

leading to a possible definition, "to relate in order to know" (Ashok 4).

As the simple medium of cognition of life and its events, narrative

orders events in a linear sequence (linearity) based on the logic of

cause and effect (causality). For the historian David Carr it is narrative
which brings "shape and coherence" to all experience (62). Paul Cobléy in *Narrative* refers to Bryan Appleyard's *Sunday Times Magazine* article: "We tell stories to ourselves; of our journey from birth to death [. . .] about history and politics[. . .]. At each moment of our lives these stories place us in space and time[. . .] the human impulse is to make sense of each moment by referring it to a larger narrative" (qtd. in Cobléy 1).

One cannot deny the ubiquitous nature of 'narrative,' which shapes our dreams and memories, tales and traumas, in fact all forms of knowledge and understanding. Mark Currie admits, "If there is a contemporary narratological cliché it is exactly this claim that narratives are everywhere"(1). He continues, "Narrative is as inescapable as language in general, or as cause and effect, as a mode of thinking and being"(Currie 2).

Paul Ricoeur opens the way for reflections on narrative time, bringing in the 'structural reciprocity' of temporality and narrativity: "Indeed, I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent" ("Narrative Time" 169). "Narrativity and temporality are closely related," he says, "as closely as [. . .] a language game and a form of life" ("Narrative Time" 169). In the narrative representations of life it is 'time' which plays the key role as "that 'in' which events take place" ("Narrative
Ricoeur in his *Time and Narrative* elaborates on his conception of narrative as a solution to life's discordant temporal experience: in narrative "concordance mends discordance" (1: 31). Time needs narrative because "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode," and "narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (1: 52). He accords to temporal experience what he calls "inchoate narrativity," "prenarrative quality" (1: 74) or "prefiguration" (1: 54). The function of narrative in the "redescription" of time or being is thus effected in a circle—"a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time, through the mediation of a configured time" (1: 54).

Narrative, the large category with which we systematize our understanding of and our negotiations with reality, is thus pregnant with 'time'—may be why philosophical thinking on language, consciousness and the self has been inextricably linked to the concept of time. Howsoever different these conceptions be, narrative and time invariably function as "boundary condition on phenomena" (Turetzky 1). To borrow from Peter Brooks, "we live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed" (3).
In the analysis of postmodern narratives the problem that occupies central position is whether narrative 'elicits' a structure from events or 'imposes' a shape on events that are themselves shapeless (Ashok 5). Even with structuralist narratology occurred the major shift in perception of narrative as 'construct' rather than a reflection of the real world, “that the outside world is always mediated by language and narrative, however much it is naturalized by the transparency of realist language” (Currie 62). Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* seeks mention as a major document of French structuralism addressing the temporal relationships between the narrative and the 'actual' events being narrated. Genette's categories of time focus on “the temporal order of the events that are being told and the pseudotemporal order of the narrative,” “the duration of the events and the duration of the narrative,” and the “relationships of frequency of repetition between the events and the narrative” (Genette 182). Focusing his attention on Marcel Proust and the temporal structure in *A Remembrance of Things Past*, he dwells on the narrative functions and manifestations of the reshuffling of chronology like 'retrospections,' 'anticipations,' also on specific instances of 'achronism'—episodes entirely cut loose from any chronological situation whatsoever” (185). Genette here arrives at a kind of narrative with events following “a geographical rather than a chronological pattern” (185).
“Isochrony” is defined as “a uniform projection of historical time on narrative extension, that is, number of pages per duration of event” (Genette 186). The ambiguity involved in the idea of an “isochrony” between narrative and what is narrated (“history”) is exposed in terms of the impossibility of attributing a “definite duration” to narrative units. There is also the relative, unpredictable reading time of the text. The fundamental forms in which the relations between historical and narrative duration get manifest in traditional narratives are identified as “the summary,” when narrative duration is reduced compared to historical duration; the dramatic scene (dialogue) when narrative and historical durations are supposedly uniform; the “narrative stasis,” when the narrative discourse continues with historical time standing still as in descriptions; and “ellipsis” suggesting the passing of an amount of historical time in a ‘zero’ amount of narrative (188).

“Frequency” involves the categories of “singular narrative” that “tells about each event once” (181); “repetitive narrative” repeating key episodes at various points in the text; and “iterative narrative” in which “a single narrative assertion covers several recurrences of the same event, [...] several analogical events considered only with respect to what they have in common” (189). Genette makes an elaborate technical study of the iterative mode in Proust’s narrative, also extrapolates an interesting psychological inquiry attributing the
iteration to Proust’s “feeling for the analogy between different moments in life: “His moments have a strong tendency to blend into each other, a possibility which is at the root of the experience of spontaneous recollection” (191). The structuralist study therefore also makes incidental correlation between a sense of time or experience of reality and the narrative form it ‘constructs.’

Poststructuralist thinking brings with it an “ideological unmasking of narrative” (Currie 12) as a ‘construct’ rather than as deriving a stable and coherent meaning from life. From “an indispensable mode of knowing the truth of life,” narrative now gets deflated or de-naturalized as “an unavoidable falsifying additive that makes an invented shape masquerade as a natural scheme” (Ashok 5-6). In the “constructionist” approach to narrative representation one identifies the thoroughly social/cultural nature of the construction of meaning (Cobley 3). It is the mode selected for the showing or telling that determines the construction: in the selection and sequential rearrangement of events, narrative allows some things to be depicted and not others. It is the same as with language, which depends on ‘signs’ standing for something else in the world, only representing it (Cobley 9). Narration is thus both “a means of ideological production and a mode of consciousness” (Newman, Centuries’ Ends 4).
The assumptions of the thesis rest on narrative as directly dependent on its "deployment in and as time, and where changes in the cultural conception of temporality can therefore be expected to play themselves out more visibly and with the greatest impact on literary form" (Heise 2). The nineteenth century narrative tradition in history, philosophy, literature, and a host of other fields conceived kinds of knowledge inherently narrative, understandable and expoundable by way of sequence, in a temporal unfolding that corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants laid out chronologically (Brooks xi). Such telling pays allegiance to the 'grand narrative' of an Absolute and irreversible time, which gets radically reinterrogated in the unsettling narrative experiments of the postmodern period. Thus in the new possibilities of narrative as proposed in Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," one finds 'a new refutation of time'—an attack on the idea of time as linear, inescapable, driving on in one direction—smashing notions of causality and closure. Here we have definite implications for 'ideology' where a traditional narrative is seen to exclude other possibilities (times).

**Postmodernism**

'Postmodernity' is generally explained as a post-Second World War condition of existence in a 'post-industrial' society, and 'postmodernism' as a cultural phenomenon involving complex
processes of cultural production and ideological transformation. The expanding concept is "broadly speaking a conjunction of [. . .] postmodernist aesthetics, poststructuralist philosophy and literary theory, and post-Marxist sociologies"(Maltby 3). The 'post' thus signifies both its occurrence after modernism—in some respects an evolution from it—and an attitude of resistance to universal modernism's vision of the world (Kaplan 1). Such attempts to comprehend postmodernism through generalities should not, however, be incognizant of the heterogeneous range of art forms, theoretical domains, and 'language games' through which it has renounced the urge to totalize itself. Brian McHale attempts a cautious entry into postmodernism:

[. . .] no doubt there 'is' no such 'thing' as postmodernism. Or at least there is no such thing if what one has in mind is some kind of identifiable object 'out there' in the world localizable, bounded by a definite outline, open to inspection, possessing attributes about which we can all agree. [. . .] postmodernism exists discursively, in the discourses we produce about it and using it. (CP 1)

Among the various possibilities of definition are its radical breakaway from the modernist Enlightenment project, the "late-capitalist"(Jameson) context and its social/cultural manifestations, the facets of commodification of art and culture (Harvey; Baudrillard),
several features of the formal and thematic subversion of artistic conventions, and the numerous theoretical domains complementing and contesting among themselves to create a "Zone" (Pynchon) of irresolvable multiplicities: in short, "a mutation in artistic practice, an epistemic shift in western thought, and an epochal transition to a new cultural order" (Maltby 3).

'Universal modernism' has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production. Postmodernism, by way of contrast, subverts the Enlightenment project and privileges heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse (Kroker and Cook). Elizabeth Ermarth examines what is happening to discourse in the Post-Enlightenment West:

Across a broad range of cultural manifestations a massive reexamination of Western discourse is underway: its obsession with power and knowledge, its constraint of language to primarily symbolic function, its ethic of winning, its categorical and dualistic modes of definition, its belief in the quantitative and objective, its linear time and individual subject, and above all its common media of exchange (time, space, money) which guarantee certain political and social systems. (7)
The shifts registered in cultural theory can be correlated with the transition from the modernist to the postmodernist in literature. While preserving the tropes of modernist literature like alienation and ennui, postmodernists have rejected the 'order' that modernist 'high' art attempted to invoke out of 'chaos,' through patterns of allusion, symbol, and myth. Amidst feelings of anxiety, alienation, fragmentation and the transient the modern artist seeks the 'universal' and 'eternal' (Brookes). The ambition for the eternal, surpassing all the chaos, fosters the modernist preoccupation with language and form, as with Joyce or Eliot, leading to new codes, significations, metaphorical constructs and allusions. Postmodernism is seen to derive from modernist writings this characteristic conception of art as 'self-referential construct' or 'artifact' (Klinkowitz, "Spatial Form" 39).

Postmodernism’s basic tenet that “language constitutes, rather than represents, reality” (Bertens 9) is crucial to the study of postmodern narrative time. It is this realization which sets off the postmodern “crisis in representation” (Bertens 11).

Postmodernist Context and Time

For any utterance the context might be not simply its gross external or physical setting, but rather the total set of conditions determining its form and occurrence. To seek relationships of postmodernism with and integration into the culture of daily life,
David Harvey in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* draws "innumerable points of contact" between producers of cultural artifacts and the public: "architecture, advertising, fashion, films, staging of multimedia events, grand spectacles, political campaigns, as well as the ubiquitous television. It is not always clear who is influencing whom in this process" (59).

The present analysis of fiction takes cue from the several inquiries relating the postmodern reworking of narrative form to the changes in "cultural time-sense" (Heise 23). One has to recount in this context Harvey's concepts of "time-space compression" and "accelerated turnover time" in the global market (284-307); the temporal modes of 'simultaneity' and 'instantaneity' upheld by the technological culture of computers and telecommunication; the television collage of simultaneous but discontinuous scenes which hop in and out as we switch channels, divorced from their geographical and historical locations (Harvey 61).

Harvey relates the "time-space compression" to the basic goals of capitalist economy—to overcome spatial barriers, and to speed-up the turnover time of capital (time it takes for invested capital to return as profit)—consequent to which is the accentuation of "volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products [. . .] ideas and ideologies" and an emphasis on the values of 'instantaneity' and 'disposability' (285-286).
The new technological time of computers is a "hyper-present," a "rapid succession of micro events" which makes it difficult for the individual to envision past and future (Heise 26). In this "hyper-intensified immediacy" or "permanent present" long-term historical coherence becomes hard to envision (26). Structural analogies can be traced between these cultural processes and the fragmented discontinuous narratives of postmodernism.

Ursula Heise's organized account of the challenges to conventional narrative and causal assumptions posed by "the shortening of temporal horizons" in the new capitalist technological context, and the individual's exposure to the "incompatible time-scales," i.e. from the infinitesimally small "nanoseconds" of the computer to the billions of years in contemporary cosmology (6-7), also serves to fix the context for the analysis. The collision of radically incompatible time scales, the human, the technological and the cosmological, has a destabilizing impact on the understanding of time as a unified, homogeneous, and neutral medium (Heise 7).

The investigation thus turns to how human perception and temporal sensibility responds to this 'new time.' Heise puts it in place: "the multiplication of time scales available to the postmodern imagination contributes to the experience of temporal discontinuity in the individual and social domains, and to the uncertainty regarding any relevant description of past and future" (46). A range of factors
scientific, cultural and political have been identified as possible breaks from the conventions of time, which also include, along with Harvey and other cultural theories, the theory of Special Relativity and some feminist theory like Julia Kristeva’s “Woman’s Time” (Earnshaw 70). Kristeva, for instance, links female subjectivity to ‘cyclical’ time and ‘monumental’ time (eternity), suggesting the inadequacy of the linear time of history in representing the multiple, heterogeneous female preoccupations (192).

The labyrinthine, discontinuous narratives of postmodernism can thus be assigned contextual analogies.

**Time and Postmodern Narrative Form: “Chronoschisms”**

In his *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* Italo Calvino addresses his readers:

You fight with the dreams as with formless and meaningless life, seeking a pattern, a route that must surely be there, as when you begin to read a book [. . .]. What you would like is the opening of an abstract and absolute space and time in which you could move, following an exact, taut trajectory [. . .]. (26-27)

Fictional narrative has traveled a long way from those stories which looked forward to either the idyllic marriage of its characters or ‘ended’ in their death, its temporality limited to the unperturbed continuity of life or the inevitability of death. The nineteenth century
realism and the novel form effectively constituted a tradition embodying the ideology of the dominant bourgeois class and established a “rationalized consciousness of time and space” (Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus* 12). In this commonsensical, “self-evident, unquestioned means of access to the real,” time is invariably “discrete moments along a straight line” (Cobley 91), any disruption or lingering happening only to serve the narrator’s exposition or intervention.

This generic temporal structure has been undergoing changes: whereas temporal succession was the principal medium of narration in the realist novel, modernist novels tend to emphasize on ‘simultaneity’ in their temporal organization (Heise 50).

Joseph Frank’s study of “spatial form” in modern literature considers how the novel form, essentially temporal and sequential, breaking free of its conventional chronological arrangement, effects a ‘spatialization’ by juxtaposing narrative units in space (not as unrolling in time) for ‘simultaneous’ perception. In Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, understanding is less a process unfolding in time than a spatial reconstruction of patterns and associations (McHale, *PF* 191). Every discussion of ‘simultaneity’ in ‘spatial form’ however ends with a realization of the limits of language and the reading process in doing away with sequential time. Postmodern texts can be studied for their self-conscious conception and the degree of transgression of these limits. McHale, for instance, introduces a
category of texts that go "beyond this 'necessary limit'" of spatial form: the postmodernist "split text" with a parallel arrangement of two or more texts, to be read simultaneously (PF 191).

The narrative transition from modernist to postmodernist can be traced in terms of the shift in the treatment of narrative time. The change has generally been thought of as "the shift in emphasis from time to space" (Heise 1). Modernist representation is preoccupied with 'time,' as we find in Proust, in Henry James' 'flow,' in Bergson's 'duree,' and in the cyclical conception of history found in poets like Eliot and Yeats. Postmodernism is attributed a similar preference for spatial categories like 'websites,' 'cyberspace,' and 'information superhighway'; the 'frames,' 'borders' and 'boundaries' of cultural and literary theory; also its experiments in architecture (Heise 1). Heise points out how such a fixing of the dominant tends to obscure the cultural reconceptualization of both time and space as experiential categories in the postmodern period (2). Postmodern narrative experiment can be studied therefore as a break from the modernist conception of time, in the context of the new cultural experience of time.

The transition is manifested in the way modernist reinvention of narrative form to explore the "flow of memory, duration and expectation in human consciousness," gives way to the deliberate designs of postmodern narrative to make "temporal progression
difficult or impossible to conceive" (Heise 13). Modernism's "individual and psychological temporality" counters the implications of the standardized and mechanized public time of its period; with postmodernism there is a "weakening of the individual as well as social and historical time as parameters for organizing narrative" (Heise 7). As Heise infers:

One of the most striking developments in the transition from the modernist to the postmodernist novel is the disintegration of narrator and character as recognizable and more or less stable entities, and their scattering or fragmentation across different temporal universes that can no longer be reconciled with each other, or justified by recurring to different psychological worlds. (7)

Billy Pilgrim of SF experiencing temporal schisms, and Tyrone Slothrop 'scattered all over the Zone' in GR are telling instances.

Modernist texts in their characteristic 'perspectivism,' retell the same event from the perspective of different narrators, as in William Faulkner (The Sound and the Fury; Absalom! Absalom!), or as in the juxtaposition of the meandering consciousness of various characters in Joyce's Ulysses or Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (Heise 50). These individual temporalities in relation to each other and to 'objective' time however do not present impediments to coherence, but remain mainly psychological or in McHale's terms, "epistemological" (PF 9). McHale
makes a simple statement of his idea: “postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues” (PF xii).

McHale explicates the concept adopting from Dick Higgins' *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes Towards a Theory of the New Arts* questions characteristic of the two 'dominants.' By the 'epistemological dominant' of modernist fiction is meant those strategies of fiction which foreground epistemological issues like “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” (qtd. in McHale, PF 9). Modernist readings try to reconstruct the chronology from fragments:

[... ] impart intelligible motivation to enigmatic sequences and abrupt transitions, motivate large scale parallelisms, doublings, and analogies; discover narrators and evaluate their knowledgeability and reliability; reconstruct psychological processes, and the external reality which they mediate, [... ] and so on. (CP 63)

This kind of world building proves fruitful with modernist fiction, to which the stable ontology of an external reality and the textual reality are fundamental; postmodern fiction provides only “provisional realities”(CP 66).

Postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text or the ontology of the world projected, with questions of
the nature, “Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of
my selves is to do it?” (qtd. in McHale, PF 10). Postmodernist novels,
unlike their modernist antecedents, have contradictory and mutually
exclusive narratives undoing all paths towards closure, denying any
coherent story and reality. Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter,” for
instance, offers a set of alternative stories as one story, which cannot
be explained either as happening simultaneously or in sequence;
they can only substitute each other or else they will cancel out each
other. The story divided into hundred and eight sections when “read
consecutively (i.e. with the causal logic of realism), or even spatially
(i.e. with the associative logic of modernism), does not form a unified
non-contradictory story” (Waugh 138).

Thus postmodern narratives realize the kind of temporal forking
evened in Borges’ story “The Garden of Forking Paths,” where
multiple possibilities of narrative development are said to exist
simultaneously: “an infinite series of times, [. . .] a dizzily growing,
ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times.
This web of time [. . .] embraces every possibility” (100). In the making
of a story, the author, confronted with several alternatives of narrative
development, chooses one at the expense of others. Borges’ imagined
author Ts’ui Pên chooses all of them simultaneously, creating diverse
futures and times which themselves proliferate into ‘possibilities.’
The study is induced by the implications these narratives implode: how ‘time’ in its ‘amazing malleability and elasticity’ (Higdon 1) as a mental construct serves the particularities of art expression. As David L. Higdon says, “Authors pursue it forwards, trace it backwards, fragment it into slivers of varying duration, or arc it gracefully in circles, ellipses and even spirals” (1). The particular devices which hold our concern here would be the metafictional loops and labyrinths characteristic of postmodern fiction, the “self-consuming narrative” (McHale, PF 100), the ‘spatial form,’ “frame-breaking” (McHale, PF 197-98), ‘heterotopia’ (McHale, PF 44), ‘historiographic metafiction’ (Hutcheon, Poetics)—all those experiments with time which violate linear sequentiality. Not only the structural devices but the thematic overtures and silences would be heeded to to serve our purpose of analysis. Vonnegut’s SF, for instance, foregrounds a Tralfamadorian time where “there is no beginning, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. [. . .] in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time”(64). Pynchon’s GR considered the paradigmatic postmodern novel proposes different interpretations of the relations between time and causality, thus holding the postmodern concern of “the viability of history as an organizing parameter” (Heise 179) as one of its central issues.
History – Historiographic Metafiction

Pointsman, a character in Pynchon’s GR, exclaims how Mexico, the statistician, can ‘play,’ so at his ease with Tyrone Slothrop’s rocket connections:

Innocent as a child, perhaps unaware [. . .] that in his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico’s whole generation have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but ‘events,’ newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history? (56)

Postmodern American fiction has sought to open itself up to history. The time-centered reading becomes even more significant in that many of them—Ishmael Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, John Barth, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, E.L. Doctorow et al.—are explicitly concerned with historiography as well as history. These histories or reworkings are very unlike the earlier versions of History with a capital ‘H’: “a way of looking at the past in terms which assigned to contingent events and situations an objective significance by identifying their place and function within a general schema of historical development usually construed as appropriately progressive” (Jenkins 5). Postmodern historiography ‘de-doxifies’ or questions the “doxa” which states that “the only legitimate study of the past is one which disinterestedly and objectively understands it
in its own terms’ [. . .] to get to ‘the truth of the past’ “ (Jenkins 2).

The relation of ‘story’- and ‘history’-writing to ‘truth’ and exclusion gets questioned by the postmodern concern for the “multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s), truth(s) relative to the specificity of place and culture” (Hutcheon, Poetics 108).

This is how Shoshana Felman correlates history and narrative:

That ‘something happened’ in itself is history; that ‘someone is telling someone else that something happened’ is narrative. If narrative is basically a verbal act that functions as a historiographical report, history is parallely but conversely, the establishment of the facts of the past through their narrativization. (Mcquillan 262)

She also adds how this classical philosophy of history based on a “principle of progress” and “as the materialization of a universal, overarching meaning” was consumed by the holocaust (262).

History is as much a product of “emplotment” as fictional narrative, holding the reader in what Ricoeur calls an “interpretative triad” of “expectation-attention-memory”(qtd. in Coble 19). The ‘fictionality’ of history lies in its narrative tropes of emplotment and sequence which historians adopt to invoke process and causality in renderings. In the New Historicist revelations “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation”(White 122). History, like all discourse, is made up of
signs, offering only a re-presentation, a selective account of prior events.

The challenge to the "hegemony of History" is in fact not considered a 'crisis' or 'end,' but as an 'opening' of "a sense of alternative possibility foreclosed by History" (Ermarth, Sequel to History 7). Fredrik Jameson, however, recognizes this as a matter of 'historical deafness' or a 'crisis in historicity' where "the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience" (25). He calls this experience "schizophrenic," after Jacques Lacan: "a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (27), inability to unify the past, present and future of one's own biographical experience or psychic life. He relates this to "a new depthlessness" (6) or the culture of the simulacrum, taking examples from what he terms 'postmodern pastiche' (16) or the "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" in postmodern architecture (18), or the "discontinuous variety" of the television screen (31).

Heise's intervention proves pertinent here, when she explains the nature of the "crisis of historicity" that postmodern theorists refer to as "not so much a closure of the historical process in the conventional sense as a speed-up of temporal experience that tends to erase historical differences and to open the present up to a multitude of historical moments" (12). Postmodernism disagrees with
the 'ahistoricist' adjective, and defines itself in terms of its relation to the past: its attempt to rewrite the past in fiction and history and to 'open it up to the present,' 'to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological' (Hutcheon, Poetics 110). "Historiographic metafiction" as such installs and then blurs the line between fiction and history. The issues of subjectivity, intertextuality, reference and ideology become the shared concerns of both history and fiction, thus bringing to the fore the constructed, imposed nature of the meaning that these signifying systems mediate through the narrative conventions of selection, organization, diegesis, anecdote, temporal pacing, emplotment, etc. (Hutcheon, Poetics 111). Postmodern narrative, in Linda Hutcheon's words, simultaneously installs and disrupts these narrative conventions ("Beginning to Theorize" 243), upsetting such basic structuring notions of causality and logic, refusing any closure and telos which narrative usually demands.

The Politics of Dedoxification

There has been a radical reconception of politics and an enlarged notion of the political in the postmodern late-capitalist period, when the "culture-language sphere" becomes the primary locus of power (Maltby 24). A "counterculture" emerges as a new mode of dissent, challenging all forms of cultural supremacy or "hegemony" (Gramsci)---technocratic, bureaucratic, militaristic, linguistic, etc.—activating formerly "apolitical" realms to new forms of protest. It is a shift from
the "totalizing macro conceptual" systems like the Hegelian or Marxist to a "micro politics of everyday practices" and "single-issue movements" (Maltby 25).

Postmodern novels, in their "internalized challenges to historiography" (Hutcheon, Poetics 106) and to narrative linearity reveal them as always ideologically and discursively constructed: "Novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology" (Davis 24). These constructs are what Foucault terms as 'epistemes' of how a culture represents itself to itself, "doxifies' or naturalizes narrative representation, making it appear as natural or commonsensical; it presents what is really constructed meaning as something inherent in that which is being represented" (Brookes 232). The postmodernist subversion or transgression of such limits of language and representation involves a deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions, demonstrating an "incredulity towards" what Lyotard calls the totalizing claims of our "metanarratives" (72)—those systems which facilitate the unification and ordering of contradictions or multiplicities in order to make them fit. This challenge foregrounds the process of meaning-making in the production and reception of art, effectively dismantling the very art objects that traditions held invulnerable.

In the dissolution of linear narrative there is a repudiation of the so-called 'reality' and its representation, and a revolutionary break
with the ideology of conventional ‘narrativizing’ or storytelling. The nonlinear narratives of postmodernism embrace other possibilities of time and reality, which is the politics of inclusion and transgression.

Jeremy Tambling reads Borges’ story of “Forking Paths” to assert ‘time’ as inseparable from narrative and as “having implications for ideology” (79). Our interest, as with Ermarth in her Sequel to History, is in the politics of the postmodern subversion of historical time: the rationalist-realist-humanist construction of time is historical and linear, which in the nineteenth century realist fiction embodied the ideology of the dominant bourgeois class, and postmodern narrative subverts this temporality and its projects (7).

**Explanation of the Title: “The Ever-becoming Time”**

The postmodern condition is found to undergo an existence which is always in a process of ‘becoming,’ never ‘being.’ This is not only the case with the ontologically unsettling narrative experiments of postmodern fiction. In the intense phase of postmodernist “time-space compression,” “accelerating turn-over times in production entails parallel accelerations in exchange and consumption” (Harvey 285). This phenomenon is consequent on the “volatility” and “ephemerality” of fashion, production techniques, ideas and ideologies, and established practices (Harvey 285). Media images (Baudrillard’s *simulacra*) saturating the market also mastermind this volatility through an increasing manipulation of desires and tastes, which are
thus instantaneous and short-lived (Harvey 287). Such a condition of the ephemeral and surface images triumphing over 'time' and 'depth' ('being') may give in to being called "ever-becoming."

Harvey also calls it the kind of environment in which deconstruction can flourish: "If it is impossible to say anything of solidity and permanence in the midst of this ephemeral and fragmented world, then why not join in the [language] game?"(291). In the Derridean conception of language and meaning, the meaning of a sign is produced by the "play" of signifiers that engenders the differences (Saussure) on which meaning depends. Meaning is not in itself complete, nor is 'present' in itself, but bears the "trace" of the signs which surround it, which have preceded it and which follow it (Currie 77). This "indefinite referral from signifier to signifier" (Derrida 25) or the Derridean model of "diérance" does not stop at any "original or transcendent" meaning. This play or "sliding" of signifiers is perpetual; meaning is forever "deferred" or postponed. The simple concepts of time or history cannot adequately explain this "ever-becoming" play of signifiers (Currie 77). The use of 'play' again brings in the concept of 'carnival,' which Bakhtin defines as "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming [. . .] hostile to all that is immortalized and complete" (qtd. in Ashok 58).

The formation of 'identity' in this postmodern context of proliferating and indeterminate meanings can also be called an
‘endless becoming’: “an endless fluctuation of sensibilities, rather like a film sprocketing through a projector. At any given moment the focus or frame changes. The self is not so much thought as lived; its existence is predicated on shifting multiple states of consciousness” (Slade 152). Identity is not ‘absolute,’ but multiple, shifting and contingent (Cooper 4), for instance, Fausto Maijstral in Pynchon’s V takes on a sequence of provisional “selves” to expose “the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous” (Cooper 5). In GR the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop’s dissolution ends in his getting “scattered all over the Zone,” not to be “‘found’ again, [...] ‘positively identified and detained’ “ (GR 712).

To arrive at yet another instance of “ever-becoming” in this context, one might go to the preface of Pynchon’s GR. Notwithstanding the irony implicit in the selection from the writings of an architect of the rocket technology, Werner von Braun, it can be said to provide insights into Pynchon’s sense of “the never-finished becoming of nature’s process” (Nadeau 196). The quotation goes like this: “Nature does not know extinction: all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me, and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of spiritual existence after death (GR 1). It might be Pynchon’s answer to Western man’s either-or categorical systems of thinking imposed on life, which for him is “a fluid process”: 
[...] nature [...] if the big bang theorists are correct, will continue to evolve out of itself new modes of being. Further, if mass is a form of energy, and if all particles function in terms of and in some sense are all other particles, there is a continuity in all natural process which includes us even if a particular configuration of molecular activity (self) ceases to be. (Nadeau 138)

The time of this “never-finished becoming” (Nadeau 196) of nature's being is “cyclical,” the message of 'eternal-return' inherent in Kekulé's dream in GR, of the Serpent with its tail in its mouth. It is not a linear movement towards death, but to a 'circularity' promising 'return' and 'renewal' (Cooper 84-85)—one among the many alternatives awaiting the reader in GR. GR also exhibits an 'ever-becoming' narrative negotiation on alternatives to simple causal and temporal explanations. It is “the moment and its possibilities,” as Leni Pökler puts it in GR (159). The chapter on GR would further our explorations of what Pynchon's words/worlds 'become': “each utterance is a closed flower capable of exfoliation and infinite revealing”(GR 94). Vonnegut's metaphysics also evokes such alternatives to being and time (death) in the concepts of 'Tralfamadorian time' and 'chrono-synclastic infundibula' discussed in the analysis of SF.
Therefore 'time' can be qualified as 'ever-becoming,' since fashions, ideas, deferred signification, nature's processes, conceptions of self, every phenomenon is predicated on 'time.'

This introductory section is intended as necessary theoretical accompaniment to the orchestration of the thesis. The three texts are discussed severally in three chapters, for their transgression of the conventions of linear narrative, their experiments with time like 'time-travel' and 'reversal,' and their self-reflexive reworking of fictional form. In the 'afterword' we further the explorations into the temporalities of the texts chosen to reach a possible 'temporal poetics' of such postmodern narratives. The study is also an experience of being caught in "the endlessly mutating self-consciousness" that necessarily follows contemporary attempts at ordering (Newman, Centuries' Ends 3). The conclusion holds room for a 'metareading' (McHale, CP 113) of the thesis.