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# Delayed Action or Locomotion? Con/versions of Reality in Dramatism and *Inception*

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DELAYED ACTION OR LOCOMOTION?  
CON/VERSIONS OF REALITY IN DRAMATISM AND *INCEPTION*

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A Thesis  
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English

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by  
Jacob Wes Greene  
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## ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to draw out the connections between perceptual conversions of reality within the work of Kenneth Burke and the film *Inception* (Christopher Nolan 2010). By establishing the degree to which *Inception* portrays an impossible pursuit of objective reality, one can better understand how dramatism implicitly instigates a similar pursuit of a mythic reality separate from any kind of orientational contingency. As way of reacting to this misconception of dramatism made apparent through the metaphor provided by the film, I want to foreground the concept of “delayed action” as the fundamental basis of Burke’s formulation of dramatism in *A Grammar of Motives*. By directing attention to Burke’s dependence upon literary representations for his definition of this concept, I reveal the ways in which dramatism is better defined as a critical attitude, or an act of delay.

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## DELAYED ACTION OR LOCOMOTION? CON/VERSIONS OF REALITY IN DRAMATISM AND *INCEPTION*

Much of dramatism's allure is in the way that it offers specific methods designed to expose the symbolically constructed contingencies of one's orientation which, as Kenneth Burke defines them, are "a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be" (*Permanence and Change* 14). The most compelling analysis of Burke's focus on the disruption of orientations comes from Bryan Crable's article "Distance as Ultimate Motive: A Dialectical Interpretation of *A Rhetoric of Motives*." For Crable, Burkean dialectic is tied to Burke's idea of "pure persuasion," which Crable defines as "an appeal whose explanation lies not in its end, but in its own perpetuation" (230). For this reason, Crable regards pure persuasion as a "mythic image" that is necessary for dialectic because it inhibits stagnation in any one orientation due to its inherently unattainable (mythic) quality that perpetuates one's pursuit of it. To safeguard against misconceptions of Burke as offering a means for arriving at this mythic realm beyond orientation, I want to show how a fully formed conception of Burke's use of the mythic can be seen in his formulation of dramatism in *A Grammar of Motives* by directing attention to the theoretical ties between dramatism as the adoption of a critical "attitude" and the ways in which this attitude manifests for Burke as a "delayed action."

For this reason, I want to propose the term con/version as descriptor for the orientation provided through dramatism. By emphasizing the delay that prevents the completion of an incipient act, I hope to expose the degree to which dramatism resides in the suspended movement between two perceptions of reality. Describing the disruptive

act of dramatism as a con/version helps us to think about dramatism not as a movement *towards* an arrival at the mythic but as a movement *away from* a singular orientation.

There is still a version of reality that is maintained, it is simply separated from the perpetual movement denoted by the term in its complete form (conversion). The prefix can now act less as a proscription for constant movement and more of a reminder of the inevitable contingencies of symbolicity that are present in any version of reality. In addition, if dramatism implicitly reinforces the moment of conversion as a way of moving towards a non-contingent perception of reality, then we must foreground the degree to which this moment is inevitably yet another con/version (false version) of reality.

A mythic pursuit outside of an orientation is portrayed in an even more explicit manner within the film *Inception* (Christopher Nolan 2010). Reading Burke alongside the metaphor of this film serves to expose the tension between conscious and unconscious instigations of reorientation (transfers between alternate perceptions of reality) through the film's representation of the inevitability of foundationalism and relativism elicited by the disruption of one's orientation in pursuit of an objective (conscious) reality.

For the most part, my analysis revolves around Dom Cobb (played by Leonard DiCaprio) and his inception of his wife Mal (played by Marion Cotillard). After spending years (in dream time) together deep within Mal's subconscious, Mal comes to accept her dream world as reality. Fearing the consequences of an eternal dream limbo, Cobb convinces Mal that she is living in a dream by altering her "totem," a small, familiar trinket specific to each character that allows one to maintain the distinction between

dream and reality. When Cobb reveals to Mal that her totem is defying its realistic physical properties, she is forced to acknowledge her reality as a dream and thus agrees to commit suicide by laying in front of a train in order to wake up and return to conscious reality. Once awake, Mal is so plagued with uncertainty about the verity of her world that she eventually commits suicide in order to escape what she believes to be a construction of her subconscious. My analysis will reveal how Mal's pursuit of conscious reality dictates the film's relativist ending because of its misdirected attention on the mythic image of objective reality as opposed to the incipient space (attitude) enacted through this pursuit.

In relation to my use of *Inception*, I want to focus on the ways in which the film represents the impossibility of a third reaction between foundationalism and relativism due to its dependence on the invasive (unconscious) instigation of this third space between two realities. In its misrepresentation, the film renders dramatism's delayed act of disrupting one's orientation (perception of reality) into an act of sheer motion (relativism) through the symbol of the barreling train that Cobb and Mal use to instigate an arrival at a conscious perception reality. The problem with *Inception's* representation of altering perceptions of reality is that it misconstrues the degree to which motion is a necessary factor in reorientation. Indeed, the very image of locomotion that the film employs as a symbol for altering perceptions of reality reflects the perpetual movement amongst alternate locations that characterizes Mal's pursuit of an objective reality.

However, the film's misrepresentation of unconscious motivations (inception) for reorientation is also useful in the sense that it foregrounds the necessity of "delayed

action” in reorienting one’s perspective. Dramatism is a conscious act; however, it is a conscious act that is deprived of a certain degree of terminal awareness due to the uncertainty that is necessary for instigating a liminal space between two perceptions of reality. Through this, I hope to reinforce a conception of Burke’s dramatism as the instigation of an act of delay. Contrary to the unconscious process of inception that is foregrounded within the film, a reorientation of perception must start at the level of a conscious dismantling of one’s current reality in order to confuse adherence to it. Through this con/fusion, the dramatisitic subject is simultaneously separated from their current reality and drawn towards but not quite connected to, a new, illusory one.

The critical movement encouraged by dramatism is in need of further exploration. In the same way that *Inception*’s myth of an objective reality moves the characters on a path of perpetual conversion amongst different perceptions of reality, Burke’s disruptive movement implicitly encourages a move towards a perception of reality that is beyond orientation. It is for this reason that the *delayed* aspect of dramatism’s disruptive act needs to be brought to the fore Burkean scholarship.

### ***Inception and Dramatism: The Basics***

Kenneth Burke writes in *Permanence and Change*:

A Babel of new orientations has arisen in increasing profusion during the last century, until now hardly a year goes by without some brand new model of the universe being offered us ... The only thing that all this seems to make for is a reinforcement of the interpretative attitude itself (117-8).

In this rhetorical call to arms, Burke highlights a fundamental aspect of his theory of rhetoric and language which he would later coalesce under the term dramatism: one's perception of "the universe" is not of an objective reality but is in many ways simply one "model" amongst many others. Thus, due to the symbolic influence of our perception of reality, Burke argues for the privileging of an "interpretive attitude" that forces the exposure of its symbolic contingencies. In his now ubiquitous essay "Terministic Screens," Burke describes a fundamental relationship between language (our "terms") and perception when he writes "much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (*Language as Symbolic Action*, 46).

Burke's vast corpus contains many calls for the instilling of an appropriate attitude of critical response to our situation as "symbol using animals" (*LAS*, 3). However, I believe that Burke most effectively characterizes this attitude at the end of his contribution to *Modern Philosophies and Education* when he summarizes the implications of the various pedagogical methods he proposes therein. He writes that "the ultimate value in such verbal exercising would be its contribution towards the suffering of an attitude that pointed towards a distrustful admiration of all symbolism" ("Linguistic Approaches," 287). In his use of the oppositional phrase "distrustful admiration" to characterize the sort of "attitude" he hopes to inspire, Burke places emphasis on the inherent uncertainty that arises through one's use of his methodologies. Near the end of this article, Burke alludes to the idea that this attitude can be conceived of as a mystical "ultimate reality that stretches beyond the fogs of language" (300). Through these

somewhat enigmatic descriptions of dramatism, Burke reinforces the idea that dramatism (to return to his metaphor from *Permanence and Change*) affords us the opportunity to witness the dismantling of our “models” of reality. Dramatism seeks a third route in between the belligerent acceptance of one’s current orientation (foundationalism) and the utter rejection of any orientation (relativism). As I will argue through the film *Inception*, it is in the paradoxical tension between a deteriorating reality and the advancement of a mythic “ultimate reality” from which the misconception concerning dramatism’s ability to move outside orientation arises.

For the most part, *Inception* is faithful to the elements of a typical Hollywood heist film. A band of disparate criminals embark upon a bafflingly complex, do-or-die mission in the hopes of landing a major hit on a morally corrupt, corporate antagonist. In addition, the protagonist’s attention to the heist is consistently diverted by a personal, parallel story line that runs throughout the main action of the film which, in *Inception*, manifests through Cobb’s recurring projection of his deceased wife Mal. Although I will be focusing primarily on the latter of the two major storylines, I will outline a brief synopsis of both in order to provide a complete conception of the film’s overall structure and various character motivations.

Dom Cobb is the leader of an illegal band of subconscious infiltrators whose specialty is entering an individual’s dream space to surreptitiously extract pertinent information. Early in the film, Cobb is hired by Saito (played by Ken Watanabe), a wealthy energy magnate, to infiltrate the mind of Robert Fischer (played by Cillian Murphy), the heir to a powerful energy conglomerate; however, Saito does not want

Cobb to extract an idea but to “incept” one. Through this inception, Saito hopes to motivate Fischer to the conscious act of liquidating his father’s energy monopoly. Confident, yet reluctant, in his ability to accomplish the job, Cobb agrees to the terms on the condition that Saito will help clear his criminal record and reunite him with his children. Then, through an elaborate series of subconscious maneuvers, Cobb and his team enter Fischer’s dream space three levels deep (a dream within a dream within a dream) and implant the idea.

As they carry out the inception of Robert Fischer, the team utilizes various techniques of deception, some of which could be found in any ancient sophist’s rhetorical tool kit. For example, when the team is discussing the possibility of inception, they begin with the assumption that the incepted idea must appear to arise naturally from the mind of the target (the one being incepted). Burke even refers to this concept of audience identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives* when he writes how in such cases of persuasion the audience “feels as though it were not merely receiving, but were itself creatively participating in the poet’s or speaker’s assertion” (58).

The film’s representation of the process of inception allows for an opportunity to elaborate on the distinctions between Burke’s conception of dramatism (and the pentad specifically) as a persuasive device and as an analytical method. According to Burke, dramatism, in its most basic sense, is a method for analyzing human motivations through five distinct terms: Scene, Act, Agency, Agent, and Purpose. Through these terms, Burke argues, one can reconsider “what is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it” (xv). The process of inception within the film inverts Burke’s

conception of dramatism in the way that it manipulates the pentadic terms as a way of persuading a “target” through the instilling of a specific “attitude.”

In this scenario, the four terms Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose are all motivationally privileged as utilities for prompting a specific action, which is defined by Burke as “the human body in conscious or purposive motion” (14). Cobb and his team appear seemingly unique in their ability to manipulate these four terms within the mind of Robert Fischer in the aim of creating a set of motivations that will elicit his “purposive” act of dismantling his father’s energy conglomerate. Thus, the team can control motivational elements that one typically considers uncontrollable, hence the elaborate and complex process of inception that the film portrays.

However, this process of inception is not much different from the way in which Burke argues one is realistically moved to action. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke defines attitude as “an incipient or delayed action” in which the “potentiality” of a specific act is motivationally plausible but not yet actualized. Furthermore, Burke argues that the “inception” of a specific attitude (incipient act) is as ubiquitous as the “rhetoric of advertisers and propagandists who would induce action in behalf of their commodities or their causes by the formation of appropriate attitudes” (236). Burke even foregrounds his preliminary description of dramatism by referencing the scenic construction of communistic colonies in New England that were intentionally designed to foster certain types of acts: “the colonists were to arrange a social situation of such a sort that virtuous acts would be the logical and spontaneous result of conditions” (14). In this way, the contrived parameters of a scene are privileged as primary factors in creating the set of

motivations necessary for the realization of a certain kind of act. Throughout his work, Burke is focused on exposing the ways in which one's induced attitudes, and consequently one's orientations, are derived from the influence of these outside forces and thus make necessary the kind of interpretative framework he proposes through his theory of dramatism and, in the beginning of *GM*, the pentad.

Much like this limited conception of the pentad, *Inception* privileges the coordination of these four pentadic elements (scene, agent, agency, purpose) to implicitly, or subconsciously, construct an attitude through which a particular act (the fifth term) will materialize. This can be seen in the film's attention to the complex wrangling that takes place within Fischer's subconscious to establish the requisite motivations for his actions in conscious reality. Thus, much like Burke goes on to predict in his discussion of the term, the potential for the term Act to be seen as the sole originator of motive is neglected in favor of its ability to merely *actualize* the implicit motivations of the other four terms.

In the section "Act as Locus of Motives," Burke predicts a propensity to "slight the term act, in the very featuring of it... We see this temptation in the search for an act's motives, which one spontaneously thinks of locating under the heading of scene, agent, agency, or purpose, but hardly under the heading of act" (*GM*, 65). In noting one's natural tendency to neglect the motivational possibilities provided by this pentadic term, Burke highlights the problematic conception of reality that he strives to make apparent through his disruptive theory of dramatism. In this scenario, an act is relevant only to the extent that it is the "location" (locus) at which the other four motivational terms of the

pentad converge and make “explicit the implicit” motivations that were rhetorically constructed by the parameters of a particular situation (7). The incipient act (unconscious) instilled by the four terms is *realized* in the (conscious) act.

However, in privileging the motivational priority of the four terms Scene, Agency, Agent, and Purpose one simultaneously illuminates their innate illusory quality. Equating each of his five terms with the major philosophical trends of his time, Burke aligns Act with “realism,” thus explicitly relegating the other four terms to a more elusive status (128). Likewise, as early as *Permanence and Change*, Burke outlines how the attitude-inducing manipulations of these four terms are masked by the symbolic construction that is made real in the act. He writes, “In periods of firmly established meanings, one does not study them [symbols], one uses them” (162). In keeping with the pentadic metaphor provided by *Inception*, these four terms are only real in the degree to which they are made real (conscious) in the locus of the act and, without their manifestation in this form, are merely the illusory characteristics of a dream.

*Inception* represents Burke’s idea of act as the exclusive locus of motive through its portrayal of the conversion between alternate realities through death. In *Inception*, death is conceived primarily as a device for returning to reality. Characters can only be certain that they are not dreaming if they die and presumably wake up to a conscious reality. However, evident from the first scene of the film, they cannot be any more certain that the alternate reality obtained through death is any more “real” than the previous one. Although there are moments throughout the film that discuss this fundamental rule of

dream-hacking, the idea is presented most clearly in one of the final scenes in which Cobb reveals his inception of Mal.

After her inception, Mal enacts Burke's act--as--exclusive--locus--of--motive in the way that her motives for terminating her current reality did not arise out of a conscious recognition of the symbolically constructed nature of her orientation. As she and Cobb walk to the train, her reality remains intact, revealing her lack of genuine belief in the need for the encroaching reorientation instigated by the approaching train. It is in this way that Mal's forced reorientation is less the conscious action of dramatism and more the unconscious locomotion of inception. The locomotion of inception provides nothing other than sheer movement to an alternate version of reality (conversion) as opposed to the conscious reflection of the current reality (con/version). Where dramatism promotes delay (incipient act, attitude), inception promotes arrival (complete acts).

### **The Divergent Responses to Dramatism**

In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke outlines two reactionary perspectives on reality with which his theories continually wrangle. In Burke's estimation, the most typical reaction is "a kind of naïve verbal realism," or foundationalism, that is due to either fear or denial of the symbolic contingency of one's orientation (*LAS*, 5).

Conversely, Burke notes that one's discovery of symbolic influence could also lead to an endless denial of all orientations, or a kind of "mere relativism" (*LAS*, 52). Although Burke alludes to the former reaction (foundationalism) in *Counter-Statement* when he argues, rather succinctly, that a prolonged period of doubt often leads to a "hysterical

retreat into belief,” he presents a more fully formed articulation of the idea in *Language as Symbolic Action*. In this passage, Burke describes the extreme and almost unconscious resistance that occurs when we are confronted with the symbolic contingencies of our perception of reality: “Can we bring ourselves to realize...just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by ‘reality’ has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems?” (5). Burke continues by citing that this moment is much like “peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss” and coming to the realization that our perception of things such as social events, political processes, and even scientific “facts” all pass through the screen of language and thus affect the way in which we come to understand them.

Burke also observes that the fear that comes from one’s realization that reality is, to a certain extent, a construction is but “one reason why” an individual adheres to their preconceived perceptions. Another reason, which Burke posited early in *PC*, is the inevitable symbolicity that inheres in any orientation, even in one’s attempt to criticize it when he writes that “one must leave some parts of it intact in order to have a point of reference for his criticism” (*PC*, 169). Although one’s “model of the universe” (orientation) must begin to fall apart in order for it to be recognized as a constructed model in the first place, it cannot be completely dismantled in the process.

However, Burke’s claim that orientations are inevitable does not lead him to the conclusion that we should not be critical of them. Rather, Burke seems to argue that because orientations are inevitable the only way to deconstruct one orientation is to usher in a new one. Burke foregrounds his description of reorientation with an emphasis on the

movement which makes this shift possible: “for all the self-perpetuating qualities of an orientation, it contains the germs of its dissolution...The ultimate result is the need of a reorientation, a direct attempt to force the critical structure by shifts of perspective” (*PC*, 169). Although Burke is not interested in merely replacing one model of reality with another, he recognizes the necessity of the act of re-placement, or re-orientation, in forcing one’s current “model of the universe” to crumble. However, much like Bryan Crable argues that “Burke’s emphasis upon the symbolic does not lead him to an extreme social constructionist or perspectivist position,” we should keep in mind that Burke is just as interested in avoiding a response that attempts to escape from orientations altogether (relativism) (Crable, 310).

In “Terministic Screens,” Burke describes the relativist reaction to the symbolic construction of reality, which he sums up in the heading to section V as “mere relativism” (52). Here, Burke emphasizes the sense of “resignation” inherent to this type of reaction, but it is not a resignation to one’s current orientation but rather to the endless movement away from any kind of orientation, a perpetual “termination” of one’s current reality. He writes, “Must we merely resign ourselves to an endless catalogue of terministic screens, each of which can be valued for the light it throws upon the human animal, yet none of which can be considered central?” (52). Although Burke makes clear in this section that he is not calling for a sweeping rejection of all perceptions of reality (the full title of section V is “Our Attempt to Avoid Mere Relativism”), he is also clearly drawing attention to the necessity of this kind of reaction in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of dramatism’s effectiveness in altering orientations.

Abram Anders discusses this concept of a kind of maintained movement when he foregrounds the idea of separation as a key underpinning of dramatism. In his analysis of the pragmatic aspects of Burke's claims about the potential of literature and art for instigating alternate orientations, Anders argues that the critical shifting of dramatism originates from a desire to seek an external perspective on one's orientation. He writes, "If we experience reality through the categories of our orientations, then any attempt to resolve the 'problems' produced by these situations are necessarily attempts to think and explicate their 'outside.' That is, the orientation itself is the problem to be encompassed" (Anders). In Anders' estimation, Burke's attention to the possibility of moving outside of an orientation is provided through "poetry and literature." Anders' attention to the mythic qualities elicited through Burke's use of literature similarly works to reinforce the necessity of an ambiguous, almost mythic conception of a place beyond orientation, pursuit of an "outside," or, an "ultimate reality" similar to the kind that he discusses in *Modern Philosophies and Education*.

Bryan Crable posits a similar conception of a sort of maintained movement when he writes that Burke's rhetorical motive inheres in the "creation of distance" (236). He claims that Burke's notion of the "rhetorical motive" is "the drive to transcend the nonverbal, to create distance between oneself and one's world" (236). Likewise, by drawing out Burke's dependence on this movement, Crable proposes a fundamental conception of Burke's thought as the instigation of distance perpetuated by the pursuit of an unattainable "mythic image." Crable defines "pure persuasion" as "an appeal whose explanation lies not in its end, but in its own perpetuation" (230). The perpetual and non-

empirical characteristics of pure persuasion create what Crable refers to as the “mythic image” of Burke’s transcendent dialectic: “Understood as a mythic image, pure persuasion transcends the particularity of empirical (positive) imagery. As a formal condition, it lies beneath our acts, yet ‘exists nowhere’ -indicating the archetypal or ancestral elements eternally funding rhetorical appeals” (231).

The mythic image is that which instigates the pursuit of critical reflection by virtue of its potential existence. The tendency to conceive of dramatism as a purveyor of objective reality is the incepted myth of dramatism. It is analogous to Cobb’s inception of Mal in the way that it acts as a catalyst of movement away from a current orientation even though it does not exist in a verifiable form. The mythic image of Burke’s dramatism is in the implicit tendency to conceive of its methods as not only offering enough distance from a current orientation but all orientations and thus eventually arriving outside of any orientational contingency.

Bridging off of Crable’s idea of the implicit “mythic image” of Burke’s transcendent dialectic in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, I want to bring attention to the ways in which this mythic image of Burke’s rhetoric is evident in his formulation of dramatism in *A Grammar of Motives*. Through this I hope to expose the mythic qualities that “lie” beneath an analytical conception of the pentad yet at the same time “exist nowhere.” *Inception* helps to explore the implications of Crable’s claim of the possibility that the disruptive impetus behind dramatism is the initiation of an act that has non-existent, or “mythic,” motives.

Within *Inception*, there is a similar pursuit of the mythic image of objective reality initiated by Cobb's suicidal-inducing inception of Mal. This moment in *Inception* reinforces the extreme degree to which the actualization of an incipient act must be held in abeyance to prevent this perpetuation of distance from ceasing. *Inception* works to foreground the degree to which Burke's dramatism can be seen not only as the pursuit of a mythic perception of reality initiated and maintained by delayed action but as the pursuit of a mythic reality initiated (and thus not maintained) through sheer locomotion.

By intentionally vacillating between alternate orientations, Burke instigates the necessary tension between the foundationalism ("naïve verbal realism") and ("mere") relativism required to elicit a dramatistic perspective which seeks to avoid a permanent position in either one. As a result of his emphasis on the provocation of two simultaneous orientations, Burke establishes a link between dramatism's dependence upon indeterminacy as well as the paradoxical simultaneity of motion/stasis. The way in which the film represents the ability to arrive at an objective reality through death helps to conceptualize Burke's emphasis on the necessity of the delayed "execution" of the act of conversion.

### ***Inception's Locomotion***

Continuing his description of dramatism in *GM*, Burke makes clear that the pentad is not simply a device to be used for highlighting the myriad ways in which one can construct the four parameters of Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose in the aim of prompting a specific Act. Rather, he argues, one must establish a sense of parity amongst

the various term-inistic loci in order to recognize that “a fully-rounded vocabulary of motives will locate motives under all five aspects of our pentad” (65). In this description, Burke is referring to his earlier discussion of pentadic ratios in which various terms (such as Scene: Agent or Agent: Agency) are isolated in order to comprehend the influence that a particular term may have had in influencing another. Through this lens, the pentad is more like what Clark Rountree describes as “a universal heuristic of motives” (Rountree).

Stemming from this idea of the pentad as a heuristic device that allows one to locate an act’s motive under any combination of the five terms, it follows for Burke that motivation could just as easily be located within the act itself. Although Burke notes the motivational possibility of Act when he writes that “any act could be treated as part of the context that modifies (hence, to a degree motivates) the subsequent acts,” he later brings up the idea of the Act as motivation in a more exclusive sense (*GM*, 7). He writes, “However confusing the subject may become...it is at least obvious enough on this first level: That among the resources of the pentad is the invitation to locate motives of an act under the head of Act” (69). An act that is the motivation for itself would be deprived of Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose in the sense that their involvement is now even more detached from reality because the act is a self-contained motivation no longer contingent on the parameters set up by the other four terms. Thus, Burke is then able to consider the ways in which act can be a “locus of motives” not merely in the sense of a location where the other terms can materialize but also as a motivational source in itself, imbued with “a newness not already present in elements classifiable under any of the other four headings” (*GM*, 65).

The Act's "invitation" to function as the nexus of motivation undergirds dramatism's disruption of perception. One's orientation is not traceable to a distinct substance and thus can only constantly reveal itself as a sub-stance through action. Through this action, the disruptive aim of dramatism is revealed as the desire to shift one's present perception of reality to an alternate perception of reality that exposes the positioning (sub-stance) inherent to any perception. Building off of Locke's original discussion of the inherent deflections provided by the term "substance," Burke writes:

[T]he word 'substance,' used to designate what a thing *is*, derives from a word designating something that a thing *is not*...the word in its etymological origins would refer to an attribute of the thing's context...And a thing's context, being outside or beyond the thing, would be something that the thing is not" (*GM*, 23).

Dramatism reveals an orientation's sub-stance (illusory foundation) through the act of disruption. This disruption of one's perception of reality is inseparable from Burke's theory of dramatism in the way that it emphasizes the constant sub-version (or con/version) of one's present-version of reality. Indeed, in relation to Cobb and Mal's return to conscious "reality," the way in which this disruption is made possible through an immanent alternate reality (orientation) privileges the degree to which this perpetual dramatistic distance is contingent on the conversion of one's orientation. Although *Inception* is misleading in its representation of this moment, when a conversion in

orientation takes place we are necessarily presented with the *conversion* (falsity) of our current orientation.

The motif of the barreling train that Cobb and Mal use to extricate themselves from the illusory dream world they had built within the depths of Mal's subconscious reinforces a misconception of the kind of sheer motion that dramatism seeks to avoid in its disruption of reality. The motion embodied in the imagery of the moving train is exemplified through Mal's seemingly deranged refrain of the train's (death's) ability to bring her back to reality:

Mal: You're waiting for a train, a train that will take you far away. You know where you hope this train will take you, but you don't know for sure. But it doesn't matter.

Due to the way in which this incepted myth originated in Mal's unconscious, her impossible pursuit of an objective reality results not in the kind of delayed action of dramatism but a locomotion, or a perpetual (relativist) movement from place to place in which one's destination not only "doesn't matter" but is perpetually sought. Mal's reorientation was instigated through a chaotic ("loco") motion as opposed to a conscious delay of action warranted through a realization of the contingent nature of her reality.

Cobb's inception of Mal, although misleading in its misrepresentation of the kind of con/version instigated by dramatism, is useful in revealing the lines between insanity

and uncertainty that Cobb alludes to in his use of the phrase “it doesn’t matter.” Although dramatism may require a similar kind of incepted “mythic image” of pure persuasion that Crable calls for as a necessary precondition for the creation of distance between alternate orientations, the creation of this distance must not be bought at the price of a loss of consciousness. In considering Mal’s forced encounter with this moment of conversion, one will have recourse to consider how, for Burke, that although dramatistic disruption initiates a movement towards an unknown destination, it is only valuable insofar as there is conscious recognition of the need for this movement.

When Mal becomes trapped in the unyielding acceptance of her constructed dream world, the only option that the film seems to offer as an alternative is the perpetual relativism initiated by the forced disruption of reality instigated by Cobb’s inception. The inevitability of Mal’s relativism is due to the incepted idea that the “mythic image” of non-contingent reality is attainable. The damage elicited by Cobb’s inception of Mal is not so much the idea that her current reality is a construct but the idea that a conscious, objective reality exists and is attainable through death, that the mythic image can be attained at all. In this sense, Mal’s relativist motion is inextricable from the myth (inception) that incited it.

As Cobb and Mal walk towards the train that will return them to reality, her constructed dream world remains intact. Although Mal accepted the (incepted) idea that her world is not real, it would seem that the fact that her universe does not crumble as a result of this inception helps to expose the lynchpin that separates dramatistic disruption through delayed action and forced disruption through unconscious locomotion. The

destruction of one's symbolically constructed "model of the universe" must be made evident in order to avoid the routes of foundationalism and relativism that plague Mal after her unconscious reorientation.

Without rejecting her current orientation, Mal had merely accepted a loco-motive of disruption and had no conscious grounding from which to justify her disruptive reorientation. To elicit the con/version of a current orientation one must propose the possibility (incipient attitude) of an alternate orientation. But, unlike Cobb's use of inception, this proposal is not enough on its own. The new orientation must be genuine and, for Burke, a new orientation is only genuine by virtue of the fact that it is *not* one's current orientation; therefore, the new orientation is not a completely new reality with clear barriers set up through the binary of consciousness/unconsciousness. Dramatistic disruption resides in this moment of con/version after the incipient act of reorientation and before the "execution" of the act of reorientation. Dramatism's disruptive effect on perception is not a device for arriving at a fixed, non-contingent orientation such as the kind sought by Cobb and Mal, but is the instigation of a simultaneous acceptance and rejection of alternate orientations.

### **Dramatism's Delayed Act**

Referencing Alfred Korzybski's idea of "delayed action," Burke defines this concept (and thus his appropriation of it) as ranging "indeterminately over the areas of both purely physiological movement and critical consciousness" (*GM*, 241). In his description of delayed action, Burke references a moment of convergence between the

unconscious/conscious binary in his use of the implicitly unconscious phrase “purely physiological movement” and the explicitly conscious phrase “critical consciousness.”

Burke continues by citing how this “indeterminate” movement between consciousness and unconsciousness establishes the terministic paradox of “delayed action,” or the delicate balance required to vacillate between alternate orientations. He writes, “insofar as we can reduce the concept of ‘delayed action’ to its purely physiological moment, note that it must be the very opposite of a delay” (241). Here, Burke notes that although this moment occurs in the context before an act, it is still an act itself. It is “the very opposite of delay” because, despite its incipient qualities, it is the action occurring at the present moment. Consequently, Burke is led to conclude that it is motion which prevents the act from being completed and maintains the kind of “distance” between the act and the incipient act which Crable claims is fundamental to Burkean rhetoric: “the very delay of action is thus maintained by motions, since the attitude of criticism, or delay, or ‘consciousness of abstracting’ must be maintained by its own peculiar physiological configuration” (*GM*, 242). The disruptive impulse of dramatism is necessarily elusive (and illusive) because it exists in this moment of delayed action where the incipient-ness of an act is just as much an act as that act’s completion. It is for this reason that I want to direct attention to delayed action in considering Burke’s continual call for the reinforcement of an “interpretive attitude” (an incipient act) when comprehending the symbolic contingencies of an orientation.

Wrapping up his discussion of delayed action, Burke begins to assess the destabilizing effects elicited by the inherent incompleteness of this disruptive moment.

He writes, “All told, the attitude or incipient act is a region of ambiguous possibilities, as is well indicated in the Latin grammars...where ‘inceptive’ verbs are also called ‘inchoatives’ while ‘inchoate in turn means ‘beginning,’ ‘partially but not fully in existence,’ ‘incomplete,’ and is now often used as though the writer thought it a kind of metathesis for ‘chaotic’” (242). By revealing the requisite tension between the notion of “beginning” and “incompleteness” embedded within the concept of attitude-as-incipient-act (inception), Burke is able to reveal how this moment of “delayed action,” because it necessarily instigates ambiguity, carries with it “chaotic” consequences. This tension created in the moment between incipient and explicit acts necessarily entails a degree of uncertainty because it is not only the moment in which one is uncertain of the reality that is in the process of coming into being but it is also the moment in which one is most uncertain of the crumbling foundations of a current reality. This paradoxical moment of delayed action is made possible through motion which maintains the moment’s impetus toward a complete act while at the same time keeping it within the realm of attitude.

This movement/stasis between alternate perceptions of reality reflects how the Act-as-exclusive-motive formation is a key function of Burkean rhetoric. When an act is no longer read simply as the manifestation of the other four terms (locus of motives) but can be seen as a motive for itself, a degree of what could be termed the conscious acceptance of motion is present in the act. Similar to the way that Burke describes in *Studies in Logology* how “faith must ‘precede’ the rationale,” dramatism is dependent on a conscious awareness of reorientation not an unconscious (incepted) reorientation (qtd. in *LAS*, 47). The conscious, disruptive movement of dramatism elicits the instability

necessary for comprehending one's orientation. However, when this concept of altering a perception of reality through movement is taken to the extreme (as seen in *Inception*), this fundamental act of dramatic reorientation shifts from conscious movement to locomotion and thus establishes the propensity for foundationalism that exemplified in the film's ending.

After Cobb and his team complete their inception of Fischer and return to reality (or so it seems), Cobb travels home where he then takes out his totem and spins it on his dining room table. Before the audience can see what happens (if it keeps spinning he is dreaming and if it falls he is in reality) Cobb runs off camera and the image of the spinning top cuts away to the credits.

Much of the media buzz and popular scholarship surrounding *Inception* focuses on this ambiguity in the film's ending<sup>1</sup>. For the most part, these analyses agree that Cobb's decision to abandon his totem is the most important interpretive clue because it represents his rejection for any concern for the constructed nature of his reality. Christopher Nolan even points to this kind of interpretation in an interview where he states that the most pivotal aspect of the film's ending is not in whether or not the top keeps spinning but in the significance of Cobb's decision to abandon his totem altogether (Schrader). Through this ending, the film offers no viable solution for managing the bombardment of alternate realities. One must follow Cobb and settle on one reality by abandoning the ability to gauge its verity (totem) or face the perpetual termination that plagues Mal as a result of her refusal to accept any reality in which she finds herself.

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<sup>1</sup> See Johnson pp. 77-108.

However, unlike the scenario represented within *Inception*, dramatism offers a third route. The disruptive quality of dramatism avoids the film's portrayal of the inevitability of either foundationalism or relativism due to the way in which it privileges the disruption of one's current orientation as opposed to the unconscious movement that results in endless reorientation or, for Mal, endless "termination".

### **Between Two Realities, Between Two Entelechies**

A pivotal aspect of the liminal space enacted through Burke's dramatism is made apparent through his use of Aristotelian entelechy. Stan A. Lindsay's extrapolation of this concept in *Implicit Rhetoric: Kenneth Burke's Extension of Aristotle's Concept of Entelechy* provides one of the best introductions to how Burke's third way exists in the enactment between the polarizing realities of incipience and actualization. Indeed, much of Lindsay's research into Burke is concerned with the ways in which Burke's thought is tied to the term entelechy and how this exposes an emphasis on the implicitness inherent to Burke's conception of the fundamental nature of rhetoric. For Lindsay, Burke's entelechy can be defined as the "process of changing from what something is into what something should become" (5). Through this formulation, entelechy is what works implicitly as the motivating force behind the inevitable realization of the act and "which allows the thing to possess internally the final form toward which the thing is changing" (5). In this way, Crable's privileging of distance should be considered less as a means of departure and more as a means of arrival. Lindsay's description of entelechy problematizes dramatism as a "creation of distance" in the way that it emphasizes the

simultaneous embodiment of *potential realities* rather than a departure from a singular reality. There is no escaping orientation; therefore, the only way to critically assess an orientation is to set it against another one without completely rejecting the current orientation or accepting the next.

The film attempts to portray the possibility of a similarly dramatic space between two orientations in the moment when Cobb and Mal are waiting for the train that will kill them and return them to their “real” (conscious) life. Similar to the way that dramatism’s disruption of perception necessarily invokes the possibilities of foundationalism and relativism, Mal’s divergent responses to the termination of her current orientation necessarily lead to either the perpetual termination of her conscious life (relativism) or the unquestioning acceptance of the constructed dream world in Cobb’s psychotic projection of her (foundationalism). However, the importance of this moment is derived from its defining characteristic as the locus before the possibility of these divergent responses is activated. This scene works to reinforce the necessarily impermanent and fleeting nature of this moment between an act’s “becoming” (incomplete) and “being” (complete) that dramatism instigates.

Burke privileges the realistic possibility of a similarly liminal moment when he writes about the tension between an invention’s state of “being” and its “state of having become” (*GM*, 109). It is in this paradoxical moment prior to the culmination of “being” towards which the “becoming” must necessarily strive that Burke claims an invention is able to “more fully represent” human motivations. Once “externalize[d]” the invention itself is merely a faint trace of the “internal aptitudes” that initiated the act’s becoming.

Through this moment, and others that betray Burke's concern with incipient-ness (attitude), one can see that a key factor in dramatism's disruptive act is in its ability to establish the legitimacy of this moment between "being" and "becoming" as an act in itself.

Burke also defines act in terms of its ability to produce something new, as a kind of force that elicits a "motivation that cannot be explained simply in terms of the past, being to an extent, however tiny, a new thing" (65). The necessity of action in dramatic reorientation is made apparent through this term's ability to bring something "new" and, consequently, its inherently ambiguous features that allow for a scenario similar to *Inception* in which you may know "where you hope this train will take you, but you don't know for sure."

Dramatism's disruptive effects on one's perception of reality reside in this moment of delayed action and, unlike *Inception*, can be realized through an attention to Burke's idea of delayed action. The imagery of the barreling train that Cobb and Mal use to extricate themselves from their constructed reality analogizes the degree of maintained uncertainty that establishes the necessary dramatic distance between two realities (orientations). This scene, however, is lacking in its representation because it capitulates to the impossibility of maintaining the stability of this moment due to the way in which Mal's constructed world never crumbles before her act of departure as she walks with Cobb to the train.

In order to develop the "interpretative attitude" necessary for critical reflection on the constructed nature of one's reality, one must become an active participant in

witnessing its destruction. This moment is critical because the instability it creates does not merely expose the constructed elements of the current reality (perspective) but simultaneously ushers in the construction of the next one. Establishing distance between two versions of reality is a vital aspect of reorienting one's perspective because it is the moment that cannot be deterred; it is the moment in which a singular perception of reality simultaneously ends (but is not yet gone) and begins (but is not yet realized).

Although dramatism may be dependent on a disruptive force to some extent, it does not seek a disruption to the degree which *Inception* deems necessary. Unlike Mal, who rejects her reality while it remains intact, dramatism seeks to disrupt one's perceptions only for the purposes of revealing its construction. Dramatistic disruption is not dependent on loco-motion but rather delayed action which is not intended to initiate the beginning of an *eventual* arrival at an objective reality but the *present* arrival of a critical attitude (a delayed act). Although this disruption is characterized by the movement to an unknown destination, the uncertainty that this necessarily entails must come from a conscious apprehension of the instability of a current orientation and not from a manufactured, unconscious, or incepted sense of this instability. Mal carried out the motions of witnessing the destruction of her orientation without the act of destruction ever taking place. Because Mal was denied the opportunity to consciously recognize her false perception of reality, she was led to the kind of extreme reactions (foundationalism and relativism) that dramatism seeks to avoid.

In looking at how *Inception* provides no solution to the problem it poses, one can consider through Burke how its conception of the problem itself is faulty and thus better

conceive of the difficulty inherent to maintaining the kind of dramatistic instability Burke aims to instigate and how even the film itself resists this difficulty. Thus, in keeping with Crable's concern with the "perpetual creation of distance," one can more effectively tease out the difficulty inherent to a continuous, conscious reorientation of perspective.

### ***Inception's Illusory Borders***

Although *Inception* has been useful in its similitude for extrapolating dramatism's effect on one's perception of reality, it is just as useful in considering the ways in which it diverges from and misrepresents dramatism's disruptive effect on perception. When dreamers are conscious of the moment of conversion between the dream world and reality, their surroundings simply crumble indiscriminately without reference to the influence from the next version of reality. Although certain scenes within the film attempt to portray a bleeding over of this immanent reality (such as in the opening scene when Cobb is dunked into a tub and a flood of water appears in the dream) the barrier between the current reality and the next reality remains clear.

Burke contends that we are always dependent on our use of symbols for comprehending the construction of our orientations. It would then seem more akin to a dramatistic reaction if the constructed dream world merged inconspicuously with the dreamer's conscious reality and did not simply fall apart of its own accord. A dramatistic representation of this moment of con/version could not portray a moment of disintegrating reality without a concatenate moment of burgeoning reality. The train (death) that ushers in Mal's next reality did not effectively elicit a dramatistic

reorientation because it was never a part of the next reality. If one's "model of the universe" is crumbling then another model is taking its place; and not only that, but one's current model can only crumble if it has begun to be replaced by another one.

The loco-motion that *Inception* privileges as a way to instigate the pursuit of the mythic image of objective reality is misleading in its portrayal of a clear separation between two different versions of reality (two different perspectives) and thus a kind of symbol free space in which one can contemplate reality distinct from any sort of motivational influence. As Abram Anders argues, Burke did not promote dramatic analysis to avoid orientation (which is unavoidable) but rather to provide a means through which to examine the constructed influence of our orientations. He writes, "It is necessary to emphasize Burke's key innovation respective to pragmatism: namely, if truth is always instrumental—an interested, useful enterprise—attempts to provide new interpretations are never disinterested or simply attempting to better describe reality. Another way of looking at reality is not any closer to a 'truth' than the last" (Anders). Dramatism is not an orientation--free perception; it is the moment of simultaneity, the dualistic collapse of two disparate versions of reality into a con/version of reality.

My attention to dramatism as a con/version of reality connects to Margaret D. Zulick's description of Burkean entelechy which she describes as the moment when "all prior and posterior motives are bracketed" and "the entelechial motive that wills its own completion remains" (25). In this configuration, Zulick claims a certain inevitability of "completion" that is separate from all other motives. Dramatic disruption is in many

ways a (unconscious) “pure formal motive” because its defining characteristic is its ability to realize the implicit motivations that spur its drive to completion, and it is during this process of realization prior to the act’s culmination that delayed action becomes a critical aspect for maintaining dramatism’s act of delay. Dramatism seeks to expose the degree to which our perception of reality is created by the very terms we use to describe it; it exposes how language motivates of its own accord and thus promulgates motives and orientations in ways which only become apparent when that process of innate completion is delayed.

Burke proposes that the possibility of reorientation (like any orientation) is dependent on perspective. By way of Aristotle’s “unmoved mover,” Burke notes two possibilities that arise when movement is abstracted and generalized to such an extent that its characterization as movement is contingent upon its surroundings. Noting the first of two requisite environments in which movement can occur in this configuration, Burke writes that “the ‘motionless’ would be all that was left to serve as the dialectical counterpart or ‘ground,’ of a concept so comprehensive” (*GM*, 254). The other environment is one in which “universal motion” becomes the ground of reaction for a “particular motion.” In either scenario, motion occurs by virtue of the fact that the same kind of motion is not occurring either because it is motionless or because it is a different.

In this way, an act (action) is also an indication of an inverse relationship to motionlessness (not action). Thus, it would seem that a place in which no version of reality has taken hold is an impossibility due to Burke’s contention that the conscious movement which instigates the exposure of symbolic construction cannot move (or at

least be perceived to be moving) without some kind of ground (an-other reality) from which it can re-act.

As Crable argues, this ground of re-action for Burke is the mythic image of pure persuasion which remains possible as a perpetual creator of distance only because it is never actualized, or made into a “a tangible, empirical piece of the experienced world” (221). Discussing Burke’s conception of mythic image, Crable emphasizes that the non-empirical contingency of this concept is due to its dependence on movement:

[I]f we resist the abstraction of the mythic image from the movement...we will not mistake it for a reflection of reality-collapsing logical and temporal priority (*Rhetoric* 201-203). Just as Platonic transcendence cannot be separated from its embodiment in a dialogue, a mythic image cannot be separated from the dialectical movement that produced it, the systematic transcendence of both ideas and images. (222)

The mythic image is the ground for the “perpetual creation of distance.” It must inevitably remain in this intangible realm of possibility because it is this quality of *potential* reality not *actual* reality that makes it “mythic.” As Crable points out, Burke argues rather succinctly in *RM* that “without it [interference/disruption] the appeal could not be maintained. For if union is complete, what incentive can there be for appeal?” (qtd. in Crable, 271). Likewise, Abram Anders claims that one of the fundamental aims of Burkean rhetoric is contingent upon a similar degree of unknown potential when he

writes about Burke's disruptive technique of perspective by incongruity. Perspective by incongruity disrupts one's perception of language by exchanging and inverting specific words and phrases to reveal the degree to which alternate perspectives can be generated by language itself. Anders characterizes this concept as "the pursuit of an interval, *a slender space of possibility*, discovered once we understand language as force" (emphasis added, Anders).

For Burke, the instigation of mythic pursuit occurs within literature (hence his use of the term *dramatism*). It is in the literary realm that the mythic image of a collapsed duality between alternate orientations (the con/version of reality) is realized. In his analysis of Burke's oft cited chapter "Literature as Equipment for Living" from *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, John McGowan claims that Burke depends upon literature because by

altering what one can perceive and, thus, act upon, [literature] is transforming reality itself. 'Opening up new worlds' to someone is no metaphor, but a precise description of what occurs when we shift the terms and attitudes through which the individual previously established and maintained her engagement with the world. (142)

Bryan Crable highlights a similar dependence on literary representation when he references Burke's use of *The Book of the Courtier* in *RM* for capturing the mythical moment of transcendence towards which his rhetoric perpetually strives. Describing

Burke's use of the book, Crable writes that it can serve as a model for the mythic image of pure persuasion in the way that it conveys a sense of "arriving at a transformative vision of the world, an ultimate image of oneness...which cannot be contained within finite reason" (229).

### Literature "Bridges" the Divide

In *GM*, near the end of his section on "Incipient and Delayed Action," Burke references Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" to explore its representation of transition which he utilizes for its ability to represent a moment wherein "the very process of transition is made motionless: for the imagery is that of a crossing, but the crossing just is" (246). For Burke, the dramatic tension of delayed action required to contemplate the symbolic construction of reality is realized through a literary representation where the mythical simultaneity of stasis and movement is holistically exemplified. Burke's decision in neglecting a detailed analysis of this poem reflects the point he wishes to establish about literature's utility as a representation in which a poem itself can both convey (move) and remain "by reason of its summarizing nature" (246). To set up clearly its connections to *Inception*, I would like to quote Burke's description of the Wordsworth's poem at some length:

It is not the incipience of the internal debate, arrested at the moment of indecision prior to a decision from which grievous consequences are inevitably to follow. Nor is it a retrospective summary. It just *is*, a state of mind that has come to rest

by reason of its summarizing nature. It encompasses. We are concerned not with its potentialities, but with it as an end in itself. It has conveyed a moment of stasis (we are aware of the pun at the roots of this expression). It envisions such rest as might be a ground, a beginning and end, of all action (Burke's emphasis, *GM*, 246).

Here, Burke appears resolute in his discovery of a representative state of delayed action that is "not concerned with its potentialities" but "as an end in itself." Unlike the kind of complete action that Burke says requires a ground of non-movement (an-other movement, an-other orientation) in order to be perceived, the delayed action in this poem is not contingent on its *movement from* something because it has paradoxically "conveyed a moment of stasis." It is through the representation of this moment between two conflicting perceptions (movement and stasis) that the paradox of delayed action is "conveyed."

Burke's dependency on literary representation begs a multitude of questions: is literature for Burke merely an illustration or is it more like the transitory permanence of Wordsworth's position on the bridge, "an end in itself?" Is this moment of con/version locked within the imagery of poetic (or filmic) representation from which we can only catch a glimpse?

In his attention to literature, I believe that Burke is enacting something similar to what James L. Kastely describes in his analysis of Plato's *Gorgias*. Kastely's essential claim is that Plato's disparaging representation of rhetoric in *Gorgias* functions as an

attempt to foreground the importance of rhetoric's relationship to philosophy through its ability to create "dialectical refutation" (106). For Kastely, this provocation of dialectical refutation is accomplished due to the unsatisfactory dialectic that unfolds between Socrates (Philosophy) and Gorgias (Rhetoric). Similar to the way in which Burke's use of Wordsworth captures the paradox of stasis/movement, Kastely argues that Socrates' liminal stance at the end of *Gorgias* remains unresolved through his "refusal to claim that his position is true and by his maintaining only that he has not yet been refuted" (97). By leaving the argument unresolved, Kastely argues that Plato's *Gorgias* instigates the necessary attention to rhetoric required to maintain the suitable dialectical structure of philosophical inquiry. The dialogue is meant to provide an unsatisfactory characterization of the role of rhetoric within dialectic and philosophy so as to prompt further exploration from the audience.

Likewise, I would argue that *Inception* is vital for not merely illustrating the complexities of Burke's thought but for instigating an unsatisfactory sense of reorientation that is so crucial to dramatism's effect on perceptions of reality. Burke considers the motivations and desires that occur within literature (drama) inseparable from the same kinds of motivations and desires that occur within our perception of "reality." Literature is effective in instigating the con/version of that Burke seeks to expose as the primary misconception concerning our orientations.

Burke's dependence upon the Wordsworth poem seems to argue that literature can provide a means for not simply subverting expectations but of realizing the ambiguities that literature (re)presents as a possibility. He is exposing in this moment

how the disruptive impetus of dramatism and, most importantly, his use of (and our use of) language functions in the same manner as it does in literature. Literature for Burke is a moment of action which seeks to move the reader in the same way that we are moved by the symbolic action of other uses of language. Dramatism is the inducing of a critical attitude initiated by the “slender space of possibility” neglected in our inattention to language yet made apparent through our attention to it within literature (Anders).

*Inception* does not represent the kind of achieved transcendence (arrival of mythic image) that Burke establishes through Wordsworth but rather the harsh consequences of seeking to attain a non-contingent, objective reality such as the kind sought by Mal. Although the film attempts to deny a definitive arrival at an objective, conscious reality, the way in which it structures the binary between conscious and unconscious worlds reinforces the myth that reality exists in the perpetual conversion to the next reality, that the only way to alter one’s reality is through an unconscious conversion which will lead to either perpetual termination or foundationalist denial. Contrary to the way that *Inception* privileges the desired attainment of a mythic, objective reality, Burke’s literary emphasis within dramatism reveals that the mythic image must remain in the realm of possibility in order for it not to be translated into the foundationalist retreat into one particular “model of the universe.”

In contrast to the bridge metaphor that Burke discovers via Wordsworth, I believe *Inception* brings something new to the conversation concerning dramatic disruption of reality in the way that it emphasizes the inability of unconscious motion (loco-motion) to adequately instigate a moment of delayed action between two perceptions of reality. As

*Inception* reveals, an effective dramatic disruption of reality requires the simultaneous initiation and delay of reorientation. If Mal truly accepted Cobb's inception then why did she fear the train? She did not consciously initiate her reorientation but merely inhabited the relativistic fear enacted by her unconscious acquiescence to it.

Dramatism, although certainly elusive, unstable, and contentious is nevertheless a perspective that Burke believed adoptable. It is a disruption that forces us to recognize the constructed contingencies of our perceptions without sliding into the perpetual termination of relativism or the "hysterical retreat" to foundationalism. To follow Burke is to acknowledge the inability of completely terminating one's orientational contingency. Dramatism does not seek the complete removal from any "model of the universe;" it merely seeks to distort one's belief in their unwavering stability.

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