

**THE ATTENTION SITUATION:  
A RHETORICAL THEORY OF ATTENTION FOR MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2015

What are the available means of attention in a given situation? This dissertation offers a hermeneutic for everyday life that capacitates people to answer this question. The field of communication has long recognized how new technologies challenge our assumptions about how attention operates and how they urge us to reformulate the language we use to think about attention. Rather than provide one attention vocabulary suited to one media environment, this project takes a generative approach that aims to continually refresh our notions about attention at the rate of technological change. To this end, I propose a way of talking about attention as a situational process that must be described pluralistically through a rotation of vocabularies. I offer the “attention situation” as a guiding framework for how interdisciplinary discourses can coherently converge upon any given situation. Then, I illustrate the attention situation framework through a distinctly rhetorical approach to theorizing attention. Paralleling the idea that rhetoric is an architectonic art, attention too is the architecting of material, symbolic, and intentional processes. I illustrate this through many examples from paradigmatic thinkers in media and rhetorical theory. The works of Marshall McLuhan and Kenneth Burke help exemplify how the attention situation can be used to highlight the communication-sourced aspects of attention. From these attention concepts, I formulate “dramatic ecology” as a paradigm of ways that attention is formed within larger socio-technological dialectics, which provides a finer language to assess communicative situations than that of science’s mechanistic behaviorisms. The attention situation, dramatic ecology, and the material-symbolic-intentional

dimensions of attention together demonstrate how attention's cross-disciplinary discourses can be adapted into situational praxis. This rhetorical approach to attention offers a generative toolkit for continually re-theorizing attention through the changes ahead in technology, society, and culture.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In his account of psychic life in Nazi death camps, Viktor Frankl notes a paradox: “prisoners of a less hardy makeup often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life had less damage to their inner selves. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom” (*Man’s Search for Meaning* 47). In the face of overwhelming forces, those who possessed a preparatory attentional equipment had a vital advantage. They could assert authorship upon experience in ways that nourished them. They could tend to their privations by accessing a cache of “inner riches” that materialized what was absent and changed what was possible. A range of sustenance came from authorial tactics, such as humorizing the horror, moralizing one’s suffering, finding “negative happiness” by the absence of something, recording moments of pleasure by a mathematical calculus, and other modes of remaking situational meaning (50-58). Frankl chronicles how people facing conditions designed to incapacitate their agency and personhood can pursue various means of creating counterconditions that recapacitate them. Frankl’s accounts of their successes emboldens us to the ways in which “everything can be taken from a [hu]man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (75). The creation of the world is the victory of attention over violence, beset by complicities in both.

Suiting attention to situation is axiomatic in communicating and implicit in communication theory. We communicate with a tacit understandings of people's attention in order to guide our circumstantial choices. Experience provides us a sense of others' attention, and we rapidly acquire sense-abilities for how attention works in situations. Winifred Gallagher writes that "We are all amateur psychologists who run private experiments on how best to live" (1). Cultivating our attentional abilities, as Frankl suggests, fortifies us for the complexities of a changing world and endows us with an understanding of how to command it.

This dissertation capacitates individuals to develop their attention sensibilities by offering a generalist method for exploring what I call "the attention situation." Like "the rhetorical situation" I am emulating,<sup>1</sup> the attention situation is a framework of questions, concerns, and considerations that can be responded to however is useful for a given context. Along these lines, this dissertation offers a meta-theoretical vocabulary for attention that exercises a rotation of theories and concepts as "probes" to investigate a situation. As such, this framework liaises between general theories and particular cases in order to connect our knowledge about attention to our knowledge about the world. The attention situation provides us with a connective tissue between bodies of knowledge and bodies of practices before we encounter either. This approach to explorative explication is "designed to guide the mind toward solution of a special question which must be answered in the process of creating description, explanations, and predictions" (McGee 31).

One of the attention situation's central questions is a practical one useful for action: "what are the available means of attention in a given situation?" For many marketers and psychologists, this question is answerable by bulletpoint lists: e.g. to get people to notice your cereal box on the isle, use bright colors, depict a face, and so on. While such lists can be helpful,

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<sup>1</sup> See (Bitzer) in Works Cited

they betray the question. Using bright colors fails as an attention strategy as soon as every other box does it and when people learn to ignore bright colors. This kind of question (as I discuss in Chapter 4.2.4 on terministic screens) has its observations implicit in its terms: by asking for stable pre-constituted instructions, it returns answers of the same form, which corrupts our sensitivity to the active theorizing that guides our acts of attention. Attention's contextual, socialized, and kairotic characteristics are forsaken by its circumscriptions from context, culture, and situation. This kind of attention discourse cannot answer its own questions. To discover the available means of attention requires recourse to a higher-order question.

Thus the attention situation pursues these practical questions *by necessary recourse* through a related theoretical question: “how can one *develop capacities to discover* the available means of attention in a given situation?” Only through this modal discourse can we begin to list the means of attention and to adjust it as people, situations, and practices change around our always-obsolescing theories. The pursuit of developing our attentional capacities (the second question) envelops the pursuit of observing attentional means (the first question). We are better equipped to discover a situation's means of attention the more we can flexibly retheorize attention contextually.<sup>2</sup>

In pursuing the first question through the second, I stress the Frankl-esque importance of preserving attention's multidimensionality, avoiding reductions, and keeping an open methodology to suit pragmatic ends. At the same time, the attention situation's utility comes from its applicability to the fine nuances of situation. Since this project seeks to equip the reader with heuristics that cultivate useful attentional capacities, the method must be clear: the chapters ahead perform two roles simultaneously. They theorize upon concepts that assist in the

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<sup>2</sup> This is a common approach to praxis in rhetorical theory, which throughout history has been approached as a theory of situated action and that stresses the adaptivity of both theory and practice for communicative ends.

discovery of attentional means. At the same time, they perform an example of provisional *theorizing in action*. For example, in Chapter 3.1 I argue that material form configures attentional form through the senses. Learning to drive a car constructs a “car-shaped attention” that deploys in other activities (e.g. riding a horse) and materializes in communication (e.g. “let’s all switch gears now,” “don’t green light that proposal yet”). My argument that “material form configures attentional form” conceptualizes a process in answer to the first question posed above (what are a situation’s means of attention?). My overtly constructed example of a “car-shaped attention” performs one *possible* way of theorizing the concept. I explicate in language the implicit theorizing in attention. Readers might theorize the situation another way suited to their situation and goals (and I hope they do). This method<sup>3</sup> pursues the second question (how can one *develop capacities to discover* a situation’s means of attention?). The attention situation’s two guiding questions are answered heteroglossically. The chapters ahead provide concepts and model their use as “strategies for dealing with situations” (PLF 296). I try to illustrate their range to foster Kenneth Burke’s critical ideal “to use all that is there to use” (PLF 23).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define communication as a subset in the art of attention. The art of attention can be defined as the adaption of consciousness to purpose through situation. Communication is a special kind of attention, though one does not subsume the other. Any act of communication is an exchange of attentions through various modalities. The study of rhetoric concerns how to influence attention while the study of media concerns the technologies people attend through. All of the humanities indirectly study attention. Texts of any reading are attention artifacts of how someone attended in what way when. The hermeneutics to read texts are a menu of attentions we can enact on them, depending on what we

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<sup>3</sup> McLuhan and Burke do this too, notoriously, to create participation in the readers and foment the skills of doing that which they theorize.

seek. Through this dissertation, I conceive the history of the humanities, such as Frankl's text, as a legacy of attentional artifacts, hermeneutics, and commentaries directly, though implicitly, on attention itself.

Across both disciplinary and public discourses, the vocabulary for attention is impoverished. Two vague terms dominate: focus and distraction. Most conversations explicitly about attention default to a quantitative terminology of attention (e.g. more/less attention put here or there) and an implicitly mechanistic theory (e.g. filter, selective information processing). This quantitative-mechanistic vocabulary is imported from the sciences and suits a small set of human behavior for measureable task performance. This terminology omits much of what attention is and how it works socially, historically, and when people are not fulfilling instructions to a task. It seeks those things about us that are common and predictable. Attention's lingua franca misleads us through the world and diminishes our ability to think critically and creatively about how we alternatively engage the world.

To remedy this lack of common language outside the quantitative-mechanistic vocabulary, I advance the attention situation by a qualitative-humanistic vocabulary. According to Merleau-Ponty, "experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience" (73). The same could be said of the humanities, writ large. Merely describing experience is a way of *participating in* experience, and thus descriptions of experience carry vestiges of the contextual systems that shape those experiences (e.g. driving metaphors fossilizing car-shaped attentions). The qualitative-humanistic languages record histories of people's theory-guided attentions. This language highlights how we always attend to something "in terms of." We always attend to "something as," which reveals the implicit theories in our terms. Worldviews are encoded and a repertoire of language contains the keys for living in a

social ecology. Recovering this language in the analysis and synthesis of attention emphasizes attention's inseparability from our nature as social communicators and our development within communities, practices, and historical conditions. Our attention is in a situation and our situation is in our attention.

This qualitative-humanistic language is the chief means of how I intervene in attention at the site of its formation. Doing so allows us to modify attention by the same processes that allow us to develop and maintain it. My focus here on communication involves figuring out new languages and vocabularies for reckoning ways that attention is formed in a communication process. This constructivist approach studies how the ideas of attention become produced in communication rather than how attention is transmitted. To find the available means of attention, we must ask: what are the conditions in which an attention can come about and come to be seen as natural? What are the processes by which attention takes its form? How does culture and technology standardize communication practices that come to produce forms of attention and their accompanying terminology? Pursuing these questions helps us attend differently by recognizing what we already are. And what we can be.

In this frame, this dissertation begins to advance a communication explanation of attention. This is to say that the ways we attend are formed in and through communication, rhetoric, and media. It is through our situational encounters with these that attention takes form and steers our course into what we will do and the kinds of people we become. Our attention is largely the result of complex systems. Treating attention as a situational process removes the presumptions that lead us to take the deficiencies of the individual as the starting point of analysis. By putting at risk what we have taken for granted, we are refreshed to interrogate our continuities with systems that produce life itself, forming how we act and think, and configuring

attention as outcomes of their processes. It is hoped that thinking communicationally about attention gives us a better handle on dealing with many other individual and collective problems.

Chapter 2 establishes the foundations of the attention situation and introduces the particular paradigms of analysis I have chosen to focus analysis upon communicative situations. I break the chapter up between “What Has Attention Been?” and “What Can Attention Be?” The former outlines a short history of the idea of attention. It locates my theorizing in a constellation of histories, methods, and aims. These ideas of attention have mostly focused on a part of attention, offering a synecdochal idea of what it is. At the same time, their utility endures for application in the attention situation heuristic and in the various aspects of attention they illuminate.

The latter half of Chapter 2, “What Can Attention Be?” introduces my use of the attention situation heuristic to formulate my theory of attention for rhetorical and mediated situations. The situations I emphasize are those especially conditioned by language and technology, which range from generating discourse in a media, consuming mass media, experiencing a new technology, and silently thinking alone in one’s head. My theory of attention for these situations involves two guiding ideas: treating attention as a three dimensional phenomenon, encompassing material, symbolic, and intentional dimensions, and focusing each dimension through the paradigm of dramatic ecology.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss the material, symbolic and intentional dimensions of attention, respectively. In these chapters, I detail the importance of each dimension to conceptions of attention through a focus on two paradigms that are well established in the field of communication: Marshall McLuhan’s ecological paradigm and Kenneth Burke’s dramatic paradigm. Drawing on these theorists, I collect ecological and dramatic concepts of attention

that are insightful to rhetorical and mediated situations and then I discuss their situational heuristicality. The two perspectives together form “a dramatic ecology of attention,” a rich social-technological lens for studying attention through the changes ahead in technology, society, culture, and consciousness.

McLuhan and Burke suit the nature of this project in several ways. Their meta-theoretical approaches are useful to projects aiming towards original theories, such as this one. They also provide material of scale. They move from case studies to theories of everything, offering methodology at both of the levels that this project also pursues. Their complementary emphases on media and rhetoric provide accounts of how attention formation is distributed across systems of symbols and media, language and environments, and drama and ecology. Their sweeping meta-theories do not intend to remain in bird-eye-level perspective. On the contrary. They theorize in the service of capacity building for continually changing praxis. They seek to uncover the ways in which the individual is constituted by dialectics of material and symbol, with strategies for intentionally navigating them. In many ways, their projects parallel the one here and have inspired much of it.

These theorists and I advance an ethics of multi-perspecticality that entails training ourselves to have multiple kinds of attention active simultaneously. Both thinkers demonstrate the importance of self-conscious reflexivity and of willfully using attention divergently. McLuhan focuses on the dangers of not attending to the medium, the senses, and their effects. Burke focuses on the follies resulting from symbols’ directing people more than people directing people. Both authors provide systems-level understandings of symbolic and mediational mechanisms of mass inattention and homogeneity.



Fittingly, Burke and McLuhan both write performatively and with heterodox methods. What they lack in citational rigor they gain in performing many of their assertions, namely, the mode of attention to materials and symbols. Their audacity and iconoclasm is part of their very method for revealing what is obscured in method itself. McLuhan's "collide-oscope" and Burke's "verbal atom-cracking" rupture the somnambulism of analysis, jolting us into a wakened renewal with our object of study and relations to it. Their forerunning "probes" and "strategies" open up fields of analytical possibility for the reinvention of method itself. This makes them rich stimuli for rethinking what "attention" means to us today and for retooling our methods of studying it robustly and humanistically.

## 2.0 WHAT IS ATTENTION?

Three motivating questions born of communication concerns motivate re-examining the idea of attention. First, what do we mean by the term “attention”? Behind this slippery word lies many different meanings: the directedness of consciousness, the suppression of sensation to focus on a stimulus, a preparatory perceptive field, an alerted state, object identification, acts of care and contemplation, and so forth. Any description of attention assumes an underlying metaphor, such as attention as a focused light, an allocated resource, or a canvass of the mind’s eye. Our terms for attention, across the sciences and humanities, are narratives for experiences that language helps preserve, identify, and recreate.

This dissertation keeps an eye on how the terms used for attention reveal assumptions about what it is, how it works, and what we ought to do with it.

Of the many senses of “attention,” this project makes salient the aspects of attention that are all too slighted by over-psychologization. When attention is seen primarily as a cognitive capacity contained in individuals, the concept shortchanges the roles of environment, training and culture. A communication-based interest in attention requires attending to a range of environmental concerns, communicative interplay, and individual transformation. This points toward emphases upon the qualitative rather than the quantitative, ideational rather than the behavioral, and a dialectical conception of the social ecology in mutual development with the

individual's capacities. All of this is contained in this project's overall emphasis on attention's relation to situation.

Second, how can we develop the various capacities for attention? This is of special concern when the collective assumption is that something external and uncontrolled is guiding the process of attention. Since attention is not one thing but rather a multiplicity converged, the discourse of attentional training must draw from this wide breadth of issues. Certainly most any training in a craft implicitly fosters attentional abilities, just as the poet learns to hear meter, the musician overtone, the gunman his own heartbeat. Such crafts abound with wondrous insights to human attention's versicolored manifestations and suggest general principles for making sense of how we attend. But little of a generalized discourse of attentional development exists apart from craft, for the topic is impossibly expansive. Thus, this project concerns attention *for communication* with regard to the insights from craft, the philosophy of the human, and the rapid changes in technological environments.

Third, how can we induce in others an intended kind of attention? This is a particularly communicative, even rhetorical, question. Communication occurs in an attentional context and with an implicit theory of how attention will begin and change through communication. Communicants routinely make assumptions and estimations about the terms of theirs and others communicative engagement and resultingly about their communicative decisions. A general theory of human attention equips communicants to assess situations and how they affect the attention of audiences. In response, strategies can be formed to maintain and create audiences.

These guiding questions motivate this dissertation toward capacitating people to discover what attention can be in a given situation. The generalized nature of this pursuit is preparatory, providing engines for generating circumstantial insights fitted to unforeseen situations. As such,

the literature review will focus upon works pertinent to this project. I begin with the dominant paradigm of attention and the scientific endeavors that have created it.

## 2.1 WHAT HAS ATTENTION BEEN?

### 2.1.1 Scientific Conceptions of Attention

Modern scientific concepts of attention come from the empirical study of limited cognition, the bottleneck on perceptual processing, and the biological parameters on mechanism. The cognitive science idea of attention is generally approached by measureable characteristics. As a result, this idea of attention is behavioristic rather than ideational, as it concerns empirical assessments of task performance, i.e., response time, accuracy. It locates attention in just the receiver, filtering out influences on attention from sender and message. It posits preconstituted objects and subjects that do not change in the act of attention. It describes attention to stimuli immediately present and perceptible, excluding attention to immaterialities such as meaning. It isolates attention in one sense, usually visual. It describes attention for task completion, thereby divorcing attention from the array of behaviors where we arguably need it most, such as decisions, deliberations, creativity, etc. This approach to attention has a well-documented history, full of theorizing adapted to situation, which I briefly preview.

For Descartes, attention activates clear and distinct ideas' epistemic potential (*Meditations* 'Replies to Objections', 309). For Berkeley, attention makes abstract thinking possible (*Principles of Human Knowledge* Introduction to 2nd edn. §16). For Locke, attention is one the mode of thinking that takes notice of an idea and puts it into memory, unlike

reverie's ideas without reflection (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II, 19 §1). These proto-scientific conceptions of attention were not explicated beyond a few passages and were not framed with the need to lay out a theory of attention. In the late 1700s, discussion of attention broadened beyond merely acting on already-received ideas and into the initial formation of ideas. Henry Home Kames thought attention to be a preparatory feature of perception that determines the strength of the sense impression (*Elements of Criticism* 18). Douglas Stewart highlighted the role in the production of behavior, maintaining Locke's view that attention figures how things are stored in memory (*Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* 53).

Through the late 1800s, attention was attributed to an increasing amount of phenomena by psychologists. E.B. Titchener conceived "sensory clearness" as attention's central feature (180–182). Alexander Bain conceived attention's role in action to be its essential feature (*The Emotions and the Will*). G.F. Stout endorsed a school of thought that argues for understanding attention as key to reflective thought (23–53). Attention became a salient topic in the understanding of perception, memory, and skilled action, which urged for more developed explanations of the various phenomena. The 1880s-1920s generated a great deal of writing about the psychology of attention in terms of how attention changes the conscious perception of an object, divided attention and task performance, the possibilities of attending to several simultaneous inputs, and response time and attention.

As these debates lacked an established methodology, it was difficult to resolve disputes and tease out attention's workings. Despite this setback, "this should not obscure the fact that many of these authors succeeded in describing the texture of subjective mental life with great subtlety and clarity, and actually shared many important points of agreement" (Pashler, *The Psychology of Attention* 5).

After the 1920s, attention was relegated to obscurity when learning theory and behaviorism dominated American psychology and provided a more observable and testable approach to psychological science. Some foundational attention research occurred between 1930-1980, such as the popularly known Stroop effect where people have a difficult time reading “green” when it is printed in a non-green color. Since the 1980s, cognitive psychology has led the research efforts in rigorously understanding attention now that modern research technologies overcome the limitations originally stagnating attention research.

Drawing on ~150 years of attention science, the field of psychology has a well-established, stable body of literature and extensively rendered models of attention processes. The “psychology of attention” has enough literature and research interest that it is understood as a standard area of the field. It understands attention as one of the basic cognitive functions fundamental for all higher cognition, processing, and learning. Its terminology posits metaphorical abstractions of “resources,” “channels,” and “filters” in order to functionally model the variables in behavioral experimentation. The psychology of attention also seeks to direct connections to physiology and neurology. It has historically asked: what does the word “attention” refer to and how can it be influenced? What are its characteristics, limits, and disorders? How does attention relate to other processes and parts of the body? More contemporary questions ask: How can we process so quickly given the slowness of the hardware? What are the control processes and data processes? How can we process many parallel actions when required? How can computers be made to process data as well as the brain can?

Attention is one of the most active areas of experimental research in cognitive science today. As the main source of definitive understandings about attention and the brain, it becomes

all the more important to note the conceptual framework cognitive psychology uses to describe the brain. It uses the terministic screen of the computer: the brain as a data-processor hard-linked to behavior. Prominent attention researcher Harold Pashler summarizes in his authoritative overview of the field that since WWII, the field of cognitive psychology “views the mind as an information-processing system whose function can, it is hoped, be revealed most clearly by making systematic observations of the fine-grained features of human behavior in laboratory situations. The ultimate goal is to work out some account of how the mind processes information, an account that is mechanistic but posed at the functional level. ...The core idea of the information processing approach is to analyze the mind in terms of different subsystems that form, retain, and transmit representations of the world” (6-7). Attention as an information-processing phenomenon is studied at three levels of understanding: by controllable variables in behavior, by functional models that map observations, and by neurological experimentation. In each, introspection is widely considered incidental and unreliable as evidence, especially for very fine time scales and for decomposing processes into parts. The literature also debates the degree to which people have direct access to and influence over their own mental activities.

Illustrative of this framework, Pashler defines features of attention in information-processing terms. Selective attention is “an internal process that selectively enhances processing.” Attention arousal is “enhanced processing over a period of time across tasks.” Vigilance is “the ability to maintain attention for extended periods.” These terms defer to the paradigmatic master term of “processing,” which itself is a metaphor for data transmission. These ways of talking about attention are purposely ambiguous in order to not overdefine what something is known to be and not be. With divided attention, for example, the science does not assume that there is one thing to be divided, if such an entity even does exist. Attention may not

be *one thing* and the term is often not used to refer to a putative internal process or mechanism (e.g. *is attention required for memory?*). Rather, attention is term continually scrutinized for what it refers to. Psychologists keep very close watch on the use of their attention terms so as to not to assume an ontology and to challenge the assumptions embedded in vernacular (e.g. that attention is a discrete thing rather than an epiphenomena of other events). This continual scrutiny role models how the humanities should watch carefully for unintended assumptions creeping into observations, becoming overgeneralized, or getting overapplied.

This highlights the importance of the word *attention* and the importance of the way scientists talk about it. They use *attention* minimally when talking about these processes in hopes of avoiding vernacular's pitfalls: for fear of suggesting mechanism or hastily assuming its precise function. They are skeptical of the metaphysics assumed in folk psychology and in vernacular descriptions of attention, e.g. paying, focusing. Scientists are however not skeptical of individuals' subjective experiences of attention, as captured in metaphorical language. Any comprehensive psychological theory of attention must account for elements of subjective experience: the degrees of accessibility to one's own attention and variations in individuals' reports of their experience (Pashler 9).

The core phenomena addressed by attention research is selectivity, capacity limitation, effort, perceptual set, and attention pathologies. These interests elaborate on Descartes', Berkeley's, Locke's, and other proto-scientific theories about attention's role in perceiving, thinking, acting, and learning. Pashler elegantly summarizes that "selectivity is a problem for predicting behavior purely on the basis of the objective stimulation making up the animal's learning history" (6), a problem well-articulated to also express the crux of rhetorical practice for millennia. One's awareness always involves a very small portion of sensory systems. What



determines what reaches awareness? What is the nature of selective processing, prioritization, and automation? How much voluntary control do people have on selectivity? These questions of selectivity are studied in the performance abilities of visual tasks, but they are the same wider questions of communication.

*Capacity limitation* refers to a limited ability to do one thing or to carry out various mental operations at the same time when the activities are not physically incompatible. How much can someone see at once? How much information can be processed? What tasks can be executed at the same time and how much error can be predicted? *Effort* refers to the aversive experience of exertion is associated with attention. The relationship between effort and attention is multifold depending on a variety of control factors. Effort is induced from testimony and from performance declines, behind which lies the age-old rhetorical problem of audience limitations and the solutions of style, arrangement, and elegance. *Perceptual set* refers to the tendency for our perception of a stimulus to change depending on expectation about it (e.g. people hearing what they want to hear). The relationship between expectation and perception is behavioristically demonstrable and is well established to be reproducible in a variety of controlled scenarios. The vital and acknowledged roles of expectation, language use, and personal history in the nature of attention are welcome doors for the humanities to converse with the science as each underlie the dynamics of the other. The way people talk, expect, and form their own history of encounters occurs in systems of meaning that create, define, and preserve experience, which becomes the basis for future experiences and a controlled variable in the science of attention. The information processing paradigm acknowledges this as well as its limited ability to control for the many dimensions of behavior-altering meaning in subject and objects (Schneider).

An overview of the modern cognitive approaches to attention illustrates a few influential ways attention has been conceived and major concerns of the field. In many cases attention is considered more important than the stimulus, and in all cases the brain is assumed to have some kind of control mechanism for managing single decisions of an immense neural complex of parallel specialized functions. For instance, Donald Broadbent's seminal 1958 text *Perception and Communication* lays the groundwork for much modern theorizing of attention in the cognitive sciences. Drawing from his earlier work in behaviorism, Broadbent has people listen to stereo headphones and perform various tasks listening for pre-selected stimuli. His experiments investigated the nature of the "bottleneck" in the middle of a series of processing stages. Trying to tease out the differences in pre-attentive behavior and post-attentive behavior, he posits a "selective filter" early in the processing stream that processes all stimuli for simple characteristic and selects one stimuli for further processing of its identifying features.

Late selection (or late filter) theory held the same basic structure but differed in the processing stage at which the filter is applied. In various experiments, late filter claims that the bottleneck in process occurs between identity and awareness, as opposed to physical properties and identity in early filter theory. Late filter theory claims that perceived but non-attended stimuli are processed to the point of identification before being discarded from awareness. Only the attended stimulus moves on to awareness, memory, and response (Deutsch and Deutsch, Norman, MacKay, Duncan). Early and late filter debates contest the degree to which non-attended stimuli are processed. They debate whether attention projects already-processed representations into awareness, or whether attention occurs in the midst of the representation's formation.

Attenuation and capacity sharing theories take a different approach to early and late filter theories. Where early and late filters are modeled on a total block of all stimuli in order to attend to one, these approaches posit degrees of selection. They are analog instead of digital and binary. Rejected stimuli are filtered out partially rather than fully. Treisman could account for phenomena not well accounted for in total selection models, like priming, but it could not account well for divided attention. Where attenuation models the reduction of processing, capacity sharing models put analog models in positive terms. MacLeod modeled attention as the amount of resources dedicated to processing over time. These models focused on divided attention while the filter theories modeled selective attention. None of them are clear about how much attention rejected stimuli receive.

Other more recent concepts detail elaborate and complex models of attention. Treisman's feature integration theory posits attention as an active process not only of perceptual selection but also in perceptual formation. Her influential 2003 work conceives attention to be a process that "binds" together the various component features of perception such as color, shape, and motion. Coherence theories argue that the brain is well equipped to process many things at once (evidenced by our very capacity to be distracted) but that attention is a required reduction to accord with the limitations of the body's parts being able to do one thing at a time (Neisser) or the body's need to sustain coordinated scripts of action (Allport). Rather than conceiving attention as a way of managing the cognitive limitation, these theories conceive attention as a process of finding coherent reductions of excess processing.

Entirely separate from these theses are competing theories that posit a mechanism of selection different from bottlenecks and limitations of processing capacity. They conceive attention as an organized competition of many parallel processes. A "winner" is selected for

attention when it fulfills a given dimension supplied by recent winners. This is much like students raising their hands to be called on in a classroom. Any number of hands may raise with little influence on attention. Selection occurs usually based on the first hand up or on the highest hand up. These two selection methods have cognitive models that select among many processes based of completion and relative salience (Bundesen, Desimone and Duncan)

These conceptions summarily conceive attention as a bottleneck, as capacity limitations, as resource allocations, as perceptual integration, as cohering excess processing, and as a competition system of distributed processes. All of these conceptions share the ideas that information flows along different channels that are related in ways that interact and interfere with each other. Attention has a negative character in its limiting and selecting functions, but it also has a positive character in influencing non-attention processes and in creating parts of perception. Each particular conception includes a form of its breakdown. The pathologies of attention, which lie beyond the scope of this project, should be cautioned and scrutinized in relation to the discourses that produce them. Attention is a central or associated feature of hebephrenia and schizophrenia (too many attention interruptions), catatonia (too few interruptions), paranoia (attending too much to one stimuli), PTSD (hypervigilance), visual neglect and blindsight (selective attention), and so forth.

The science of attention offers the humanities some major ideas about attention. We are beings of both limited and excess capacities. We perform some tasks exceedingly well and other tasks exceedingly poorly. Attention is economic, always managing cost/benefit tradeoffs of cognitive resources and what mental abilities develop over time. Attention is the result of hybrid systems, neither one thing nor the other. Attention can be modified but has very stubborn limits. Attention's fundamental parameters have broad consistency across individuals and it changes

with age. Attention as a modelable mechanism is more robust and complex than the humanities have dreamed, and these literatures should inspire the way we think about attention and the language we think with.

What is limited in attention science is how to understand lab results about test subjects doing repetitious behavior tasks once they enter the uncontrolled world outside the lab—where they live, act, and change in a swirl of communication, conflict, motivations, and meanings. The science excludes what cannot be controlled for as a variable, thus leaving its scope of application to very specific studied situations (e.g. a bus driver's vision scanning routine).

Attention science does not offer or claim a well-rounded understanding of attention in lived contexts or the kind of attention used aside from task performance. It does not inform much about attention over the long periods of time, attention as a space for the possible, or attention's substantive of value and basis for meaning. Only recently has attention begun to be studied in emotionally activated people, which is precisely the state much communication seeks to create and operate within. Who is to study the cultural shaping of attention and evaluate uses of attention across society? How should one apply the science of attention? To what ends and in what manner? What are the ethics of attention? Might there be an attention health? What is happening to our attention in today's media-saturated, socially reconstituted environments? What vocabulary can individuals develop not to analyze lab subjects but to attend to their own attention for action like Frankl did?

From Munsell and James' introspective methods to today's advancing, functional brain imaging of neural networks, the science of attention has been driven by accounts of lived experience, expressed in language that reaches toward metaphor to capture what it is like and use it. Where society has sought to extend the attentive capabilities of its citizens, and where art has

captured attention moments and aestheticized their import, science trails behind in seeking to master what has long been in effect. So what happens when our attention experience changes? What happens when people very quickly live in different attention environments from the previous generation? What happens when we feel our mental management abilities changing faster than we can understand? The poetic, the humanistic, and artistic representations lead the way into the brave new world, hastily scrambling to confront the textures of mental life with vivid representations. However inconsistent or theoretically debatable they may be, the descriptions of lived experience guide our lived experience, and as the early psychologists prove, forecast some important breakthroughs in scientific understanding.

Far from complete, this overview gestures toward a historical legacy of conceptions of attention that can inform our theorizing. These scientific theories generally pose questions of human consistency and of what is shared across population and situations. The scientific concepts of attention are also examples of attention concepts crafted to explain an implicit attention situation. By understanding them as such, we reveal attention concepts as they mediate an environment. These concepts become useful to our non-laboratory thinking when we understand them as precise, partial conceptions of attention *under particular conditions*. The science of attention has its place in using the attention situation heuristic. However, I caution the importation of its terminology to situations and purposes that it does not suit. I briefly critique this line of attention thought, not for any issues internal to itself, but so that it can be adapted to situations and humanistic contexts. Our theory of attention should not be imported wholesale from science. The lab results account for almost no attention events in the conditions where attention operates and is attuned to: the socially-embedded, meaning-driven, free-willed, communicative, politically-tinged situations that concern humanists. While much of the

humanities already discusses various conceptions of attention, the humanities are generally isolated from the science of attention beyond a few poorly translated fragments that are overgeneralized in application. So too does the public translation of attention science import findings ill-matched to new domains and used as fallacious evidence in technical arguments. In order to assist a more accurate and useful translation of attention between science, humanities, and public discourse, I briefly describe some of the ways attention has been conceived for situations and purposes related to communication.

### **2.1.2 A Select History of Attention and Communication**

Attention's philosophical history is traced out in Ciaran McMahon's 2007 dissertation *The Prehistory of the Concept of Attention*. His history traces various thinkers' conception of attention throughout antiquity to the 1600s. Today's scientific term "attention," he argues, is the latest characterization to emerge from ancient roots in reflexive discourse about the relationship between human subjectivity and the wider environment. This master term of modern psychological language reifies attention as an internalized object. He argues that this conception emerges in Western literature in the 1600s only after three distinct discursive traditions waned in influence: philosophical, religious, and oratorical. The various ideas around the term "attention" categorize along three "perspectives." First is the intersubjective perspective from philosophic traditions where attention is embedded in practices conducive to the living of a philosophically sound life. Second is a projective perspective from oratorical traditions where attention is characterized as an aspect of another person's subjectivity to be influenced by certain means. Third is a subjective perspective from religious traditions where attention is characterized as

universal to all people and part of one's subjective relationship to God and the world in general. McMahon argues that these perspectives on attention decline in the early 1500s with the rise of humanistic and natural philosophical influences that formalize a conceptual approach to attention where a concept qua object of attention prevails.

McMahon's history provides a wealth of historical thought on the idea of attention. The philosophic, religious, and oratorical traditions speak widely to my symbolic and material dimensions through dominant media of oratory (Cicero, Quintillian) and writing (Chaucer, Shakespeare). These will provide source material for my historical chapter. His read of a "prehistory" will be cautioned since it deems the history of the idea of attention as beginning with the psychological conception of attention, the dominant idea that my project steers away from. I diverge from McMahon in my emphasis that attention is not one thing, a point that he acknowledges but extends into contemporary psychology.

Modern theories of rhetoric increasingly grapple with attention conditions as a fundamental concern of rhetoric, setting sight to the gaps between the moment of address, its mediation, and its reception. The landmark Wingspread conference, and its proceedings published as *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, is rife with a proto-rhetoric-of-attention. Wallace builds on the idea that "speech and speaking are more than articulations and structures; they are concepts implying kinds of psychological activities that the Greeks called reasoning, imaging, and remembering... speaking consists of linguistic events that accompany or follow internal rational activity" (4-5). Samuel Becker's *Rhetorical Studies for the Contemporary World* calls for new conceptions of rhetoric to address the "knowledge explosion," "communication revolution," and how the plethora of communication creates a plethora of communication problems (21).



Richard McKeon's *Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age* advocates a rhetoric that can remedy the fragmentations arising from media technology. Drawing from Aristotle, he calls for a rhetoric to be conceived as an architectonic art of structuring all principles and products of knowing, doing, and making. He suggests that "the new architectonic productive art should become a universal art, an art of producing things and arts, and not merely one of producing words and arguments; but the first step in constituting and using an enlarged objective rhetoric should be the reformulation of the structure and program of verbal rhetoric and its subject matter" (205). This anticipates Richard Lanham's rhetoric as the economics of attention in its expansion of rhetoric beyond words into something more "objective" across instances of information fragmentation.

Among the contemporary projects that feature attention prominently, perhaps the most recognized and most relevant for this project is Lanham's *Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. In this 2006 book, Lanham pinpoints *attention* as the central scarce and valuable resource in our new information economy. In unpacking an economic lineage where worth was once linked primarily to objects and information, he guides us through the changes in access to objects and data that leave us with a bounty of material and content, but with a deficit of ability for attending to it all. Lanham's emphasis on attention as the central commodity at play in the information age speaks to a market over-saturated with new media, where intellectual property surpasses other forms of ownership, and where consumers are deluged with choices in consumption. Lanham explains, "It is no longer the physical stuff that is in short supply, we are told, but information about it. So, we live in an 'information economy.' But information is not in short supply in the new information economy. We're drowning in it. What we lack is the human attention to make sense of it all." (xi)

He goes on to argue that traders in this market are charged with attracting consumer attention away from this flood of choices and towards their own product. He positions rhetoricians as key merchants in this market as an emphasis on the persuasion of packaging transforms style into substance. Moreover, he positions the humanities as a central location for understanding the changing role of attention in society as he marks those trained in the arts and letters as essential players in this market, acknowledging the growing social and economic worth of those and skilled at drawing the human eye to substance through style.

Lanham presents the definitive argument for understanding rhetoric as having always been about the allocation of attention throughout media history. The basis of rhetoric has always been related to the media involved but as our own communication revolution occurs, he is apt to address how these attention matters have been implicit. He begins a rhetorical theory of attention, or an attentional basis to rhetoric. This dissertation continues that project by enriching the term “attention” to make available a wider array of resources to incorporate into attention-savvy rhetorical activity.

Lanham’s work creates the space to better understand attention today, the value of conceiving rhetoric in attention terms, and the need to develop ways of staying attentive to attention. He starts the project rooted in classical rhetoric, media ecology, and contemporary culture and sets up the invitation to develop finer understandings of attention structures and strategies. His findings are mostly discussed in terms of business and art applications, whereas communication scholars would also be interested in their political and academic applications. His work would also be fruitfully put in conversation with the material conditions, institutions, and communication policies that contextualize rhetorical spaces. In response to Lanham’s forward-thinking call to conceive attention rhetorically, my project elaborates on the nature of

attention. For how far he goes on a shorthand definition of attention, his vision can be carried further as more kinds of attention are recognized to work with and evaluate.

Applying Lanham's argument, Thomas Goodnight and Sandy Green's *Rhetoric, Risk, and Markets: The Dot-Com Bubble* provides a rhetorical account of economic bubbles in an attention economy. They argue that economic bubbles are not driven by conspiracy, coercion, rationality, or just "herd mentality," but rather are driven by the potency of well-crafted rhetorical styling in an attention economy prone to mimesis. New communication technologies garner investment by their promised vision before they exist. Their tropologically stylized construction contributes to their fervent uptake "where information systems were extended dramatically by stylizing communications as a new information highway, even while expectations attracted investment needed to build out materially on anticipated revolutionary changes" (131).

Goodnight and Green's application of Lanham is instrumental to their call for rhetoric to pursue economic criticism. They invoke Lanham's idea that rhetoric directs the scarce allocation of attention to help explain how economic behavior is a product of the rhetoric of attention. They exemplify how Lanham's argument can be applied fruitfully to understand the digital age's changes in the labor of communication, social theory, and market dynamics. They end with a call to continue close examination of changes brought by communication in attention economies: "As more numerous and ever greater attention economy spirals open and transform risk cultures in a digital age, rhetorical studies are challenged to position and extend critical capacity under conditions of accelerating complexity" (133). Such accelerating complexity invites my project's vocabulary to better understand the nature of attention and rhetoric through technological and

cultural change.

Where Lanham explores attention's role in crafting rhetorical communication, Crary's *Suspensions of Perception* illuminates the social-historical forces that shape the very capacity for attention. His study on human attention chronicles a key era in the historical lineage of perception from about 1880 to 1905. In teasing out the connections between perception and modernization, he argues that modern attention is paradoxical in nature: as both the essence of the *individual* experience and the central constitutive element that binds us together through media, spectacle, consumption, and industry.

Crary's study reveals the potential of a humanities-based approach to attention. It is able to unpack the complex and ever-changing nature of perception across disciplines and texts, offering an approach for understanding the more unstable nature of perception and attention in our media-addled, technology driven world. Informed by the critical theory tradition, Crary's interrogation of attention-forming social forces is historical and philosophical. This is indispensable for framing questions of attention but does not offer much about what individuals can do with their attention agency. His "history of attention" invites a continuation of his socio-cultural project into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it also invites a pragmatic dimension explicating the details of what individuals can do with their attentive powers.

Continuing in Crary's critical approach, Jonathan Beller's *The Cinematic Mode of Production* uses cinema to illuminate the gaze as a seizable and valuable commodity. In unearthing a history of how film capitalizes on *the look*, he argues that attention is a key mode of capital in the global market. Beller's history ties media perception to assembly-line processes: where factory workers were once charged with the work of assembling moving parts into a whole, cinema audiences now are tasked with the job of assembling moving images into a

cohesive whole. Drawing on a range of developments in film theory and technology, he maps out the “industrialization of perception” as it feeds a global system of political and economic power and dominance.

Beller continues Crary’s groundwork on the relations between attention and capital. He offers valuable contributions to an attention theory of value by laying some groundwork on abstract universal labor time, accumulated attention as value, attention as commodity, productive value of attention, and sensual labor. Despite Beller’s fast and loose arguments and concepts, his interest to reveal the social relations of attention are indispensable considerations to my project. The available means of attention and the meanings of attending will always be situated within dense networks of power, conditioning technologies, and labor. Where Beller places emphasis on cinema as the “paradigm for the total reorganization of society and therefore the subject” (13), my project will seek a level of analysis informed by but less specific to Beller’s cinema-specific approach. I want to elaborate what the individual can bring vis-à-vis large scale forces in an attention agon with reconstitutive potential.

Also responding to Crary, Michael Hagner’s *Toward A History of Attention in Culture and Science* advocates a less deterministic process that forms the prevailing idea of attention. Hagner argues that attention was practically constructed for the philosophical and cultural status of subjectivity in modern societies. He presents case studies in late 1700s experiential psychology and mid-1800s psychophysics that admitted various experiences, definitions, and classifications of attention. Self-experience, self-observation, and self-experiment were accepted tools during this time for the self-understanding of many academics, scientists, and artists. Their emerging concept of attention-as-virtue made attention popular as common denominator of education, human development and thus the constitution of the modern bourgeois self.

Hagner is helpful in rounding out Crary's hard claims to capital's responsibility to the formation of widespread attention. He encourages a closer look at how acts of attention and the meaning of attention are negotiated between technologies, culture, and academic conception. Like Lanham, Hagner ends with a call to the task of understanding attention today: "we might use various forms of attention strategically and subversively so that neither information technologies nor an arrogant habitus of apparent cultural superiority are the manipulative masters of attention" (687). Our active, self-conscious use of attention as well as our assertions about idea of attention can prevent against technological and cultural domination. This project's humanistic theory of attention shares this multiplicity and constructivist spirit.

Demonstrating the centrality of attention in cognitive science, linguistics, and rhetoric, Todd Oakley's *From Attention to Meaning: Explorations in Semiotics, Linguistics, and Rhetoric* argues that attention is a fundamental organizing principle of different levels of meaning making. He widens the concept of attention beyond the individual mind to include facets of environment and other people. His social model of the attention system has three distinct but interdependent subsystems: the signal system, the selection system, and the interpersonal system. Eight distinct attention processes are distributed among them: altering, orienting, detecting, sustaining, controlling, sharing, harmonizing, and directing.

With this model, he suggests both "a linguistics of attention" and a "rhetoric of attention" predicated on cognitive science's evidence that mental activity and its representations often organizes to and by common attention patterns. He lays out how the eight elements of attention correlate to various linguistic phenomena such as the flow of information and represent the body in hypothetical spaces. The eight elements of attention condition emergent trends in English

language. In turn, language conditions and refines the capacity to detect, select, sustain, control, harmonize, and direct attention.

Oakley conceives a rhetoric of attention that takes attention as the starting point for understanding inducements of social action in specific discursive situations. It is “based on the logic of persuasion that goes something like this: *if you attend to X in this or that manner, you will come to believe Y. If you come to believe Y strongly enough—usually through sustained concentration and effort—you will likely do Z*” (28). This narrow but workable attentional read of persuasion intends to establish underlying attention matters implicit in prototypical persuasive discourse. He collects a few contributions to this perspective: Burke’s concept of terministic screens in drama-laden indentifications/divisions, Perelman’s universal audience as a present ideal audience, and Aristotle’s classification of artistic proofs (ethos, pathos, logos). He cites Lanham for his concept of *oscilatio*, the oscillation between looking at and looking through, which is a semiotic phenomenon highlighting how attention determines the different between meanings.

Along with Lanham, Oakley provides more justification and promise for a rhetoric of attention. Where Lanham contributes the history of rhetoric as resources to build it, Oakley contributes a rich model of attention that threads through semiotics, linguistics, and rudimentary rhetorical ideas. Oakley’s interpersonal framework for modeling “the science of meaning” does not address the art of attention savvy and its the creative potential. His careful model does provide a schematic that pairs fruitfully to substantiate the possibilities in Lanham’s artistic conception of attentional rhetoric. My project sketches out what is possible when Lanham’s call and Oakley’s model are put into conversation.

Highlighting the role of attention in social movements, William Brown's *Attention and the Rhetoric of Social Intervention* theorizes on the Rhetoric of Social Intervention (RSI) by building a communication-oriented model for understanding changes in a range of social systems. In understanding systemic change as driven primarily by the catalyst of communication rather than sociopolitical or economic and technological forces, Brown details three key components which are useful for enacting and understanding such change. These three communication subsystems are attention, power, and need. Of relevance to this project is Brown's work on *attention* (referred to in his earliest work as input-switching), as both selective and strategic. He argues that *attention interventions* play a role in systemic change when human beings begin to notice anomalies in their lives that do not fit with the structures of meaning and knowing the previously held in place. To illustrate this idea, Brown unpacks the symbolically constructed belief that "better education means a better life." He argues that potential for systemic change exists only when, for example, we begin to recognize anomalies in that mode of reasoning, when attention to experience demonstrates that better education does not always "pay out" for a better life. Strategic attention switching comes into play then, as attention is guided towards or away from such anomalies in order to construct new symbolic categories for understanding these anomalies.

Brown contributes an example illustration of the role of attention in public deliberation and highlights' attention as a necessary feature to be secured to initiate social change. His concept of attention is rather narrow and understandably does not reflect the multi-dimensional nature of attention. A more robust concept of inattention and the forces that construct it can clarify the processes that make attention interventions possible. A vocabulary for the attentional



elements all throughout Brown's scheme would illuminate his framework in the attentionally dense webs of argument and structures of social fragmentation.

Several trade books on attention have increased the salience of the topic in popular culture. These public discourses draw from attention scholarship for a wider impact of academic works. A few such books will be mentioned to show the range of application for my project, ranging from quality of life, pedagogy, institutional labor, and public culture.

In her 2009 *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*, behavioral scientist Winifred Ghallagher argues that our quality of life is determined primarily by the ways we control our own attention. In guiding her reader through the methods and means available to train one's focus, she offers a clear and accessible roadmap towards a more deliberate life. In drawing from a range of topics circulating in popular discourse about distraction, stimulus overload, and media saturation, she looks to the cognitive sciences to understand the psychological features of attention, its limits and potentials.

A key contribution of her work is her emphasis on attention as both a biological necessity and an either/or process of selection. Ghallagher uses those premises to draw out the importance of attending to attention: she lays out the evidence that we have a finite supply of attention and an infinite supply of things to attend to. Walking through case studies of individuals and groups who are expert in refining their own attentions, she insists that focus is not only possible in a world wrought with distraction, but the primary component of a healthy and meaningful life. Her work attests to the human-preserving capabilities of attention in light of her many citations of contemporary attention science and humanistic thinkers.

Vice Provost and English professor Cathy Davidson writes *Now You See It* to explore how advances in brain science of attention can inform choices about how people live, work, and

learn. She argues that schools and workplaces designed for the last century are out of touch with the technological world that students are adaptive in. She is optimistic to capitalize on our understanding of attention in order to rethink the classroom, ways of learning, and the future workplace. On her way, she challenges the old ideas of what is distraction and disruption, rethinking them for their productive potential.

Business professors Thomas Davenport and John Beck's book, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business*, like Ghallagher, Lanham, and others, marks attention as the scarcest resource in the information economy. Davenport and Beck point to attention as the most extraordinary and valuable commodity in business today. They argue that the ability to capture, control, and sustain attention (from consumers, employees, and stockholders alike) is the key currency in the contemporary market and approach attention management in four distinct ways: measuring attention, understanding the psychobiology of attention, using attention technologies to structure and protect attention, and adapting lessons from traditional attention industries. They show how almost any situation can be understood as an attention ecology in which allocations and patterns occur. Their work highlights how people can benefit from paying attention to attention in interacting with others, responding to media environments, and crafting strategic communication.

Maggie Jackson's *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* composes a view of the world as one wrought with stimulus and teeming with information. In rendering a vision of our increasingly mediated and multimediated lives, she leans on the ironies in place as communication technologies put us more in touch than other with information and with other people, but in a manner which is increasingly fragmented and unfocused. Jackson proposes a solution to the detachment and alienation we experience because of these fractured

ties— and that solution is attention. She situates attention as fundamental to our personal, social, and cultural development. Drawing on case studies that span the centuries, she articulates a history of attention as related to changes in technology and society, a history which she fears has us on track towards an erosion of culture. She does, however, speak to attention as being widely within our control and focuses her text on offering practical solutions for disengaging with distraction and attending to our humanity.

The science of attention offers the rigorous empirical study of attention. The humanities provide a legacy of thought about the attentive life and the formation of possible modalities. Popular texts draw from these domains to discuss attention today and to lead their concept of attention to public audiences. In nearly every case, attention is taken as a delimited phenomenon and developed without return to its fullness with its many parts working together. These historical legacies have been driven by the questions, limitations, and aspirations around the word “attention.” In light of what attention has been for people there-and-then, we are prepared to rethink what attention can be for us here-and-now.

## **2.2 WHAT CAN ATTENTION BE?: PROJECT OUTLINE**

### **2.2.1 The Three Dimensions of Attention**

It is impossible to speak back to each of these literatures in their own terminologies. In order to engage them in conversation, I use the strategies of reduction and meta-theory to construct a heuristic to the history of attentional thought. Its purpose is to preserve these histories and yet

remain in conversation with them all at once. Here, I isolate the *conceptions of* attention and how they *formed to suit* their situation's context and purpose. Throughout this history, people have talked about attention as phenomena of three themes: matter, meaning, and mind. Since the three themes involve so many differing concepts and relationships, they are well described as independent dimensions that comprise attention's conception. The claim that there are the three dimensions to attention is a historical summary of discourses that has explanative (not predictive) utility.

The three dimensions are *dimensions* in that each 1) describes isolatable processes of attention, 2) classifies them around a central term, and 3) can be sustained without reference to the other dimensions. My dimensionalizing of attention into matter, meaning, and mind denotes a linguistic pattern, not an ontological assertion. I am suggesting three thematic emphases in attentional thought that are relatively independent. I use them as shorthand for representing the myriad ways in which people talk about attention.

Yet, peculiar to attention is that its description conditions its enactment. The language we use affects what and how we enact a multitude of attention-related actions. Our terms used for attention are not inert descriptions that interchangeably label stable acts, such as calling tonight's sleep your "slumber," "beauty rest," or a "recharge." Rather, they are live recipes calling for mixtures of elements and for conventionalized programs of action. This is especially so with socialized ideas and communicative acts.

For example, a teacher might ask the class to *focus* on their textbook to read it, to *consider* their textbook to contemplate it, to *mind* their textbook to handle it preventatively against physical damage, and so forth. Even a single term, such as the ubiquitous "focus," unstably implies very different programs of action. *Focus on your own homework* constructs a

*denial* of sensory contact. *Focus on the symphony conductor* constructs an *additive* of visual to the auditory. *Focus on the speechgiver's hand* constructs a *selection* of one thing to the exclusion of another. *Focus on the reward* constructs a *recollection* of an *imagined future* to draw motivation. *Focus on the importance* constructs an *interpretative space* yet interpreted.

Each example illustrates that what we mean by “attention” is a rich complex of elements operating more elaborately than a singular term conveys. A variegation of *attentions* is cloaked under deceptively simple terms. Each conception of attention above hints at how much is going on when we say we are attending in one form or another. Each quietly choreographs world-making determinations without articulating their character. Some attentions stabilize with words. Some have no singularly identifiable term. Where there are consistent patternings between attention words and acts, we can study the relation between the two. Accordingly, this dissertation takes as its object of study numerous consistencies between attention terms and their associated acts.

This project furnishes concepts that detect gaps between what is said (e.g. “focus”) and what is enacted. Where attention science contributes empirical methods for detecting gaps in observable behavior, the humanities’ methods contribute interpretive concepts for detecting meaning and experience. Specifically, this project provides links between attentional equipment (e.g. a situation’s material, symbol, intentional structures) and descriptions of related experience (e.g. meanings, omissions, effects). Only the attention equipment is directly observable and we need not assume causality or directionality to its co-incidences with related experience. The presence of an observable attention artifact can share various and changing conjunctions with related experience. For example, we know that a word (e.g. *dog*) does not equate to one determined attention but many possible attentions. We can isolate one of its operant structures

(e.g. grammar) and trace through its corresponding effects (e.g. determining the parsing of syntax) and its immediate result (e.g. *dog* as one of several homonyms). Thus *dog* compared to *dog him* compared to *dog food* illustrate how one attentional structure, syntactical grammar, directs attention to *dog* toward different fields of meaning along discrete categories of thing/noun, action/verb, descriptor/adjective. A word—and most any symbol, thing, or circumstance—carries with it a bundle of attentional structures. This project collects ways of tracing out attention structures to reveal their particularized agencies upon thought. Understanding these structures enable controlled responses in parallel form (such as re-gramaticizing *dog*).

Since all words contain a bundle of structures that act upon attention, words about attention are especially potent upon attention. The choice of words and their implicit attention structures affect the ways attention is conceived, analyzed, and enacted. Attention is a matter where its theory changes its object. Any discourse on attention conspires in creating its object of study.

Modelling attention as three dimensional thus creates a functional conception of what attention is. This project theorizes groups of theories, making a meta-theoretical model for explaining, analyzing, and inventing attentions. In this dissertation, attention is a plurality, rather than singularity, of elements and their interrelations. Attention is a process, rather than a product, of select convergences from a wider situation. And attention is a narrative, rather than a mechanism, of the experiences attributed to its name. By the word “attention,” I refer to particular convergences from a situation’s possible elements in successive events of various duration. By the term “attentions,” I refer to both *modes of attention*, which are distinguished by their constituent factors, and refer to *kinds of attention*, which are distinguished by their

experiential qualities. This dissertation's meta-theoretical language fosters a meta-conceptual idea of attention. Its language preserves the multiplicities of the topic by discussing various ways that attention's ingredients and recipes come together by various amalgamating processes. Likewise, the three dimensions that summarize the history of attentional thought also condition their object. They change how we act and experience what is called "attention." Using this language as a way of conceiving three fields of concepts operates to 1) enable reflexive awareness of constituent phenomena around a central term, 2) isolate attention processes accessibly, and 3) enable alterations to component elements.

This project does not concern an essence or ontology of attention; rather, it assists in the continual refinement of concepts that enable attention's study and use. This approach to attention is in contradistinction to absolutist claims to attention, its neurobiological structure, or psychological determinations. Tracing discourses and considering their effect on the formation of attention is an aesthetic project concerning making and interpretation, two activities that motivate this method. It is characteristic of rhetorical theory and media theory to conceptualize in the service of capacitating individuals for praxis.

For theory and practice, the three terminological dimensions help us think about and enact the processes forming attention's makeup and manner. This terminology approaches attention as an epiphenomenon of matter, meaning, and mind. Each is a dimension of constituent processes that synthesize into what is called attention. A given act of attention can be defined by its constituent subprocesses in each dimension. Dimensionalizing attention does not assume the relations among the subprocesses. Rather, it hermeneutically assists the mapping of processes underlying attention in order to enable the discovery of their relations in a given situation. Each

dimension is so expansive that this project hones its scope, focusing each dimension by their salient manifestations: material for matter, symbol for meaning, and intention for mind.

The material dimension highlights the roles of objects in attention phenomena. Attention occurs through material means of the body (e.g. eyes, ears) in synthesis with technologies (e.g. surveillance camera, flashlight). Their pairings form attention's fundamental mechanics. The material dimension seeks to understand what attention operates through and how the properties of the involved instrumentalities determine the character of attention.

The idea of attention's materiality extends beyond physical matter. A spate of intangible material exists in social contexts, such as accumulations of practice, obligatory conventions, and devices of social force. Attention is shaped through the myriad ways that social structure reifies commonplace reality, such as law, custom, and history. For example, the instituting of a common currency materializes abstractions of value into a common substance (dollars) and quality. It enables modes of attention to fixed pricing, exchange value, and arbitrage. In such examples, the social materializes enduringly throughout the individual and social bodies, pervading the thought, action, and habit. These immaterial permanencies are as immanent to attention's formation as are material objects near the body. Attention's materiality also involves people's material behavior, that is, their pursuits in contexts of material necessity (e.g. survival) and by the material aspects the body (e.g. sensory limits). Such material behavior copes with the social reifications and recurring material pursuits that inhere in person's situations. Individuals develop an attentional regimen corresponding to their material structures.

The symbolic dimension highlights the role of meaning in attention phenomena. Meaning brings to attention what is materially absent. A bolus of pocket lint means something when it is attended to as continuous with something else, such as evidence to a crime or the



passage of time. Matter and meaning link in many ways. Symbols are one, particularly observable, form of meaning stabilized with a sign of human making (e.g. word, image, sound, gesture, conventional action, etc.). A word, for example, has assorted structures that proliferate the attentions elicited upon a material. A word carved into a tree creates endless attentions brought upon the same material. An English verb (e.g. *walking*) has structures that guide attention to tense (*-ing*) and continuity (*-ed*); an English noun (e.g. *he*) has structures that guide attention to gender and number (*they*). Beyond grammar, a word has symbolic substructures of definition, etymology, connotation, association, phonetic texture, rhyme, visual shape, affect and others. Where the materiality of the tree itself fosters materially-sourced attentions (e.g. as a plant, as wood, as shade), its function as a medium of signification proliferates its elicited attentions by the structures of meaning it enables: it can be carved for writing and pictures, it can signify seasonal change, it can record parts of the past such as fires and droughts, and so forth.

Every symbol hosts various structures that guide attention in different ways and to different ends. Many schools of thought have mapped various kinds of meaning in symbols in words such as the semanticists charting reference, psychoanalysts charting association, logicians charting logical implicature, and so forth. These chartings describe particular effects on attention and catalog many ways symbols can inflect attention. This dissertation generalizes across symbolic phenomena to build a framework of generalized ways that any particular kind of symbolic phenomena can form attention. Calling this “the symbolic dimension of attention” organizes the many symbolic discourses so they may be connected to recurring parts of attention’s symbolic nature.

In this way, the above example of paper money exemplifies a confluence of material and symbolic dimensions. A *twenty dollar bill* can be attended to as *twenty dollars of value* by virtue

of a cashier attending to its physical materialities as light paper, its social materialities as federally upheld, and its assemblage of symbolicities concurred to indicate a fixed quantity of currency. The same bill, when handed to a collector, will be differently attended through the same material-symbolic dimensions: physically, the bill's condition; socially, the bill's demand in the collector's market; symbolically, what it means to possess the bill. Most all attentions overtly involve matter and meaning in tandem. Many names of things and acts reflect these two dimensions of attention—material plus symbol. For example, newspaper (material) report (symbolic), television show, verbal reprimand, ritual song, homework assignment, and so on. Such names reflect how they are attended to and indicate the pervasiveness of attending as material and symbol conjoined.

While the first two dimensions trace the material and symbolic agencies upon attention, the intentional dimension highlights the agencies of the individual to form and direct their own attention. This is perhaps the most intuitive of the dimensions, demonstrated routinely in choosing our thoughts, introspecting, or imagining. This dimension explores the means by which people can assert what they attend and *how* they attend it. The *how* of attention—the mode, manner, and meaning—is more vast and undertheorized, and is the focus of this project.

Since attention itself cannot be directly observed, it is always studied through its closely related correlates. Attention science traditionally studies attention through a meticulously defined set of correlating events in behavior<sup>4</sup> and neuroimaging.<sup>5</sup> When we observe these correlates, we say someone attended to X. The humanities traditionally study attention through reported experience and its symbols of expression. When we observe these correlates, we say someone attended to X in Y way, perhaps with Z meaning. The different paradigms present two

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<sup>4</sup> Mostly measurements of task performance in terms of timing and accuracy.

<sup>5</sup> Such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) or positron emission tomography (PET).

different ways of representing attention. Both recognize the need to explicate the relations between “attention” and its observable correlates. While symbols and materials can alter how we attend, they are also the only means we have of studying attention itself.

Thus the peculiarity to the intentional dimension: we have a sense of autonomy in our attention though it can only be communicated through the other two non-autonomous dimensions. We indeed compose some of our interior experience, and we experience it vividly in a private incommunicable realm. It is neither material nor symbolic but another mode distinct from them. It is a psycho-perceptual immediacy of phenomenological reality. Matter and meaning, though not entirely separate from this realm, emphasize the *imposition* of social immediacies into this realm. Intentionality asserts *composition* of this realm, controlling the mental aspects of material and symbol.

The intentional dimension involves how attention directs consciousness in an individual’s mental realm. Selection, preparation, filtration, and creation, are among a few of the compositional functions of intention. George H. Mead writes that “Our attention enables us to organize the field in which we are going to act. Here we have the organism as acting and determining its environment. It is not simply a set of passive senses played upon by the stimuli that come from without. The organism goes out and determines what it is going to respond to, and organizes that world. One organism picks out one thing and another picks out a different one, since it is going to act in a different way” (25). Maurice Merleau-Ponty goes further, suggesting attention as a preparatory state variously manifested: “The primary operation of attention, then, is to create for itself a perceptual or a mental *field*... Attention, then, does not exist as a general and formal activity. There is in each case a particular freedom to gain and a

particular mental space to keep in order” (32). The history of attentional thought shows that what individuals control and how it can be mobilized have been conceived in a variety of ways.

While such discourses chart particular intentional capabilities, this dissertation conceptualizes the general intentionality of attention and how it links to generalities in the material and symbolic dimensions. For example, we may speak programmatically about intentional actions in attention. We can substitute one regime of attention processes for another. We can modify existing ones. Attention can be primed, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, as a preparatory field and, as Mead suggests, sustained against impositions. Any choice of hermeneutic, for example to a dollar bill, invokes a set of meanings by which to advance observations. The upcoming chapters reference how intentionality can alter material and symbolic agencies on attention.

Intentionality, in this general sense, is also central to communication as object and as means. The above discusses intention as a means to navigating one’s way through the physical and symbolic environment. But intention is also considered as something in each person and at play in communicative exchange. Intention is “read” by detecting it in others. Intention is an implicit object communication often aims for. Communication is a special kind of attention exchange, one with strategic deployments to influence attention.<sup>6</sup> Rhetorical strategies can be pursued along the three dimensions of attention, seeking ways to influence material, symbol, and intention. That people always have *some* intentional agency over their own attention is the enabling tenet that justifies an intentional dimension present in communication situations.

Intentional aspects of attention can be exercised in discrete willful acts or ingrained habits. This dimension most foregrounds the bio-psychological aspects of attentional mechanisms and their dynamics. Cray and Frankl argue that attention is among the last faculty

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<sup>6</sup> As Lanham argues in *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*

of autonomy and volition against external circumstance and domination. The power to choose one's one attention has been celebrated as a liberatory capacity as well as maligned as a culpability in conformity. However its use, attention remains a highly malleable and context-dependent faculty. It is highly susceptible to rhetorical influences and is the inner-agon of the body-mind nexus. It is a noisy junction where the body regulates its own stimuli in competition with external stimuli—the most rhetorical part of the body.

This dissertation continues how others thinkers have built meta-theoretical frameworks from investigating various *conceptions* of attention and examining the utility of their various concepts therein. McMahon, Crary, Rogers, and Oakley provide historical synopses of attention's conceptions in relation to a context. While such conceptions span the three dimensions, each historicizing account constructs a larger framework in which particular conceptions of attention can be understood. McMahon collects conceptions of attention prior to its formalization as a scientific concept in the 1800s and argues for “three largely distinct reflexive discourse perspectives on ‘attention’” that he categorizes as “intersubjective, projective and subjective” (13). Crary and Rogers critically analyze modern conceptions of attention and establish meta-theoretical frameworks to how attention forms by socio-political apparatus. Crary studies late 1800s conceptions of attention in tandem with “the immense social remaking of the observer” (4). In doing so, he seeks to “construct a relatively unfamiliar vantage point from which to study a generalized crisis in perception...” and “to detail its role in modern subjectivity” (2). Rogers continues this framework into the 1900s, building upon Crary with a methodological formulation that he calls “the attention complex” and a cross-disciplinary literature he calls “critical attention studies.” Rogers writes that his coalescing “does not exist in any one discipline or theoretical paradigm, but operates as a system of interconnected discourses,

practices, and human technologies that work together to produce self-regulating, predictable, and governable individuals” (2). Oakley culls scientific conceptions of attention and meaning to build a master framework for continually linking developments between them. He posits “a new approach to meaning insofar as it provides ‘thick descriptions’ of meaningful events as a function of attention, imagined in these pages as consisting of an interdependent *signal system, selection system, and interpersonal system*” (18-19). While these systems of attention are not ontologically real, he builds a “‘greater’ attentional system as a heuristic on which to build theories of meaning in semiotics, linguistics, and rhetoric but does not claim to present a grand unified theory of meaning” (18-19). Various fields have scholars collecting conceptions of attention in order to synthesize them into higher-order frameworks for particular purposes.

Likewise, this dissertation examines conceptions of attention in order to build a larger framework for communicative praxis. The three dimensions help to conceive attention as a trichotomy of substances—matter, meaning, and mind. Like Oakley’s “greater attentional system” or Roger’s “attentional complex,” the details of what these substances are does not matter so much as the suggestion that each dimension predicates a substance-like entity with its own kind of field and dynamics, just like electricity, gravity, or water have. In their historical use with attention, matter, meaning, and mind have been talked about in the ways similar to how substances have discussed. Conceiving attention as dimensionalized along three substances underscores its responsiveness to three classes of phenomena, whose essential features are labeled to indicate how they work regarding attention. Intention names mind attentionally-directed by the individual; material names matter attentionally-directed in the senses; symbol names meaning, attentionally-directed in signs. The posited “substances” of attention are not ontologically real but are analytically real as a model designed to access desperate historical

discourses and designed as a hermeneutic for accommodatingly interpreting the conceptions of attention and its components that make it work. Dimensionalizing attention as this triune of substances separates their discourses into three sensitivities we should have toward three the kinds of responsiveness that are central to attention. Other responsivenesses such as personal history, memory, subconscious, and chemical, are outside the common disciplinary focus of communication for this project but are nonetheless accessible through this conceptual scheme.

The three dimensions conceive of three substances so that attention can be unmoored from any one discourse and studied as three corresponding fields of possibility. This conception of attention, as meta-theory, enables us to talk about realms of analysis before selecting the particular terminology and concept suiting the inquiry. For example, one object can be examined *as containing* the three dimensions by its materialization of value that symbolizes quantity, anticipating intentions of exchange. Meanings can be examined by the dimensions, for example, how the word *freedom* symbolizes what it materializes in ideology in conjunction with the intention of its speaker. Acts of attention can be examined accordingly, for example, how a sports radio broadcaster chooses parts of the game to symbolize into words across the media of radio.

Charting these out delineates a broad picture of the available means of attention, i.e. the modalities that shape the manners of attending. Thinking of attention as three related fields provides a frame of reference through changing ideas of what attention is and is made of. These three dimensions respect the breadth of disciplinary literatures while facilitating them into synthesis. They are left broad to account for attention's disparate applications (e.g. measuring response time to non-symbolic motor tasks but also silent intrapersonal deliberation), various conditions (alone in the dark, cooperative multitasking), various conceptions (e.g. religious,

therapeutic, training animal behavior), scale of subjects (a nation, subculture, an individual), timescales (an era, a speech act), and many divisions to a singular discourse about attention. Yet the 3D framework makes one discipline's insights contiguous with another's.

Beyond the 3D framework of attention as fields of possible discourses, I further hone toward communicative and practical applications by focusing the dimensions and by drawing from the dimensions selective to communication concerns. I use a paradigm I call "dramatic ecology" to focus the framework of three dimensions upon communication theory and practice. It is a hybrid of two communication paradigms, ecology and dramatism. The three dimensions focused by dramatic ecology ultimately builds a framework I call the attention situation.

### **2.2.2 Two Perspectives on Attention Introduced: Dramatic Ecology**

This project focuses its topic of attention into *attention for communication* by narrowing the dimensions and also by focusing each dimension along two perspectives that highlight aspects of attention formation relevant to communication. The ecological perspective foregrounds the systemic elements underlying attention. The dramatisic perspective foregrounds adaptive action managing social dramas. I draw upon the works of Marshall McLuhan and Kenneth Burke, who offer extensive frameworks for these two perspectives. Their work theorizes material, symbolic, and intentional aspects of rhetoric and media in the formation of attention.

Both thinkers offer far-reaching and paradigmatic theories of media and rhetoric. They suit this project for their works' abundant fragments of attentional insights and implicit theories of attention. Their centrality to the field of communication makes their attentional aspects amenable to the field. A brief overview of McLuhan's ecological perspective and Burke's



dramatistic perspective will introduce their respective approaches to attention. Dramatic ecology will be explained as their combination in the purview of this project.

### **2.2.2.1 McLuhan and Ecology**

In a 1969 letter, McLuhan wrote, “I am quite aware that nobody has attempted to understand metamorphosis and causality in social institutions through a minute inspection of the sensory and perceptual changes resulting from the new environments. Surely the history of philosophy can never be written without a complete awareness of these matters” (MFC 3). McLuhan’s language of the senses comes largely from art criticism, which founds his philosophy of history. His analytical vocabulary connects environmental processes with perceptual processes. His aesthetics of technology contain his method for sensory awareness, equipping us to uncover the hidden grounds of figures, invisible environments of actions, and elusive contexts of texts. For McLuhan, the available means of sensation drive the engine of philosophy, history, art, and communication.

His methods befit the heuristic nature of this dissertation for their detecting capacities. His theories of how media affect us supply changeable, fluid terms by which to do analysis, craft strategies, and ask questions. “I don’t explain, I explore” he wrote when discussing how his work “explores the contours of our own extended beings in our technologies, seeking the principle of intelligibility in each of them” (UM 6). Explicit that he is uninterested in quantification, McLuhan provides resources to help interpret psychic experience and its roles in the formations of the social body. What we can know, say, and do rests on this interpretive basis. Most all of McLuhan’s approach is summed up in the preface of his first book in 1951:

The various ideas and concepts introduced in the commentaries are intended to provide positions from which to examine the exhibits. They are not conclusions in which anybody is expected to rest but are intended merely as points of departure. This is an approach which it is hard to make clear at a time when most books offer a single idea as a means of unifying a group of observations. Concepts are provisional affairs for apprehending reality; their value is in the grip they provide. This book, therefore, tries to present at once representative aspects of the reality and a wide range of ideas for taking hold of it. The ideas are very secondary devices for clambering up and over rock faces. Those readers who undertake merely to query the ideas will miss their use for getting at the material.” (MB vi)

McLuhan’s concepts seek to be penetrating, provocative, expansive, illuminating, and most of all, useful. He doesn’t seek rightness, correctness, and accuracy so much as to expose the terms of their construction. His raw material is the “variety of thoughts and feelings born of the relations between man and the machines he has made” (MB 18). These relations cannot be charted, isolated, and measured until they are conceived into concepts and paradigms, which McLuhan generates amply. McLuhan’s genius for sense-making lies in revealing the undetected aspects of technological experience. His style performs his exploratory method, which acts jolting probes that animate a sleepily-felt condition. An illustrative passage demonstrates his animatedly penetrating style awakening us to our condition:

They are merely typical of that very common condition of industrial man in which he lives amid a great flowering of technical and mechanical imagery of whose rich human symbolism he is mainly unconscious. Industrial man is not unlike the turtle that is quite

blind to the beauty of the shell which it has grown on its back. In the same way, the modern newspaper isn't seen by the reporter except from the point of view of its mushy sensual content, its pulsating, romantic glamour. The reporter doesn't even know there's a beautiful shell above him. He grows the shell, unwittingly, subhumanly, biologically. This is not even the voice, but only the feel, of the turtle. This inside point of view would coincide with the practical point of view of the man who would rather eat the turtle than admire the design on its back. The same man would rather dunk himself in the newspaper than have any esthetic or intellectual grasp of its character and meaning.

...This is an illustration of the situation of those in the modern world who contribute mindlessly and automatically to the huge technical panorama which they never raise their eyes to examine. In the following pages various sections of that panorama will be centered for conscious scrutiny. MB 4

McLuhan's probing style and concepts help recover the sense experiences of conditions of mass inattention normalized by "the strictly inside or unconscious consumer point of view of industrial folklore" (MB 4). The technologized society positions the individual into passivity favoring self-automated practicality. He writes, "For people carried about in mechanical vehicles, earning their living by waiting on machines, listening much of the waking day to canned music, watching packaged movie entertainment and capsulated news, for such people it would require an exceptional degree of awareness and an especial heroism of effort to be anything but supine consumers of processed goods" (MB 21).

To make people aware of their material conditions and psychic effects, McLuhan provides a language for the otherwise invisible and systematically uncharted. His "inventory of

effects” verbalize ineffable sensory, communicative, perceptual, bodily experiences. McLuhan’s case studies service his main contribution: his signature technique of crafting interpretive paradigms and reframing case studies. Altering the way we understand these processes alters attention and perception to “permit the reformer a sure method of diagnosis and therapeutic suggestion. It permits the reformer to co-operate with the same forces that have produced the disease, in order to point the way to health” (MB 22).

Addressing the role of delayed evaluation in his method, he writes, “When raising these themes, one is beset by queries of the “Was it a good thing?” variety. Such questions seem to mean: “How should we feel about these matters?” They never suggest that anything could be done about them. Surely, understanding the formal dynamic or configuration of such events is the prime concern. That is really doing something. Control and action in terms of values must follow understanding. Value judgments have long been allowed to create a moral fog around technological change such as renders understanding impossible” (GG 212-213).

Ecology is McLuhan’s framework for preparing strategies and his binding metaphor for various forces among proto-structures of culture, consciousness, and action. His ecology of the manmade environment converges three lines of intellectual influence: historical materialism a la Marx, the psycho-social effects of technology a la Lewis Mumford and Harold Innis, and the formal textual analysis of New Criticism a la I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. Together, they form an understanding of the historical development of environments, the way those environments configure patterns of perception, and how those patterns of perception can be understood by “close reading” the initial environment.

This line of thinking has been classed under a heading of media ecology that treats McLuhan as its icon. Neil Postman explains the choice term “ecology” for media. He writes of

how “media” welcomes the biological metaphor of the petri dish. Media is the substance that cultivates a bacteriological culture. The media substance for humans is technology around which culture grows and comes to form relations, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking. The biological term “ecology” implies a living organism comprised of symbiotic organisms living in a dynamic system of interrelations. But it too welcomes another bio-social meaning. Ecology etymologically derives from the Greek *oikos*, harkening back to Aristotle’s notion of keeping a “household” both materially and intellectually. Our technologically revised environments double back with revisions to all they affect. We may conscientiously steer these ecological dynamics so long as we keep attuned to understanding them. A “media topography” would be such a map to trace out changes, effects, and observations (“The Humanism of Media Ecology” 10). This ecological outlook starts with technology’s materiality, its formal properties and emergent relations, to map underlying patterns to culture and consciousness. Understanding media as environments assists us to act back upon the parts of experience that are technologically determined. Media as ecology provides a stable vocabulary through technological change that can help us “keep our symbolic household in order” (11).

Thus the ecological perspective on attention highlights how environments are ecosystemic and contain dynamics along which attention forms. The conjunctions between attention and environment place them both within perpetual tensions of evolution, revolution and resistances. Since an ecosystem is the composite of its relations and interactions, a change in one part also effects change throughout the total system. Attention not only responds to eco-dynamics but comprises a part of them. Attention’s regularizations are the basis of eco-processes that depend on it. For instance, television’s economics depend on audiences attending

to commercial sponsors; when people stop paying attention to them, an ecosystem of practices, technologies, and environments change.

While McLuhan's ecology provides a rich vocabulary for systems of environments, it does not account well for change. Excluded from ecology are the multiplicity of change-inducing elements that resist, counter, and remake dominant forms. The ecosystemic approach traces out dominant forms and relations, reducing the multiplicity to the most salient patterns. This offers a starting point for the heuristics of environmentally-configured attention. But to detail the multitude of co-existing change-elements, Burke's dramatism provides a rich vocabulary for human action as it develops amid the continual clash between multiplicity and opposition. Acknowledging the continual dramas that attention operates through allows us to trace out the proliferations of environmentally-sourced actions and their exertions upon the environment.

#### **2.2.2.2 Burke and Dramatism**

Dramatism is Burke's "philosophy of language and of symbolicity in general" that involves "a method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology." It stresses symbols' capacity to act upon environments and enables people's actions unique to symbols. Language, Burke's dominant example of the symbol, is understood "primarily as a species of action, or expression of attitudes, rather than an instrument of definition" (ESS 445). Symbols gain their active potential by their continuities with social structure and come to reflect the particularly social parts of the constructed environment.

Dramatism asks, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (GOM XV). It concerns the nature of action, symbolically constructed objects,

attribution of motive, forms of meaning, and audience effects. These phenomena work by a tacit “equipment” not found in the environment alone but cultivated through participation in it. Symbols moderate the creation of this equipment and the modes of action this equipment cultivates. Dramatism is “designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions” (ESS 445).

Dramatism is not metaphorical, as if something real is handled through a metaphor of stage drama. Rather, drama names human constancies that produce symbolic forms. Burke defines the human as an animal that characteristically uses and is used by symbols. The material presence and observable effects of symbols are also quite literal. When we say, in any given terms, that a person acts, then “drama is employed, not as a metaphor but as a fixed form that helps us discover what the implications of the terms ‘act’ and ‘person’ *really are*. Once we choose a generalized term for what people do, it is certainly as literal to say that ‘people act’ as it is to say that they ‘but move like mere things’ (“Dramatism”). The distinction between real and metaphorical collapses when dealing with fictions that have become socially materialized, carrying real effects. Given that all language is inherently metaphorical, dramatism seeks to understand the real effects emerging from symbols’ weavings with the life-world.

Burke’s master distinction in dramatism is between two classes of terms separated by the attribution of motive: actions (of persons) and motions (of things). The motion of matter—geologic, mechanistic, physiological, and so forth—is the underlying *sine quibus non* of human action. To say any statement that *someone acted* entails socialized forms, specifically: “the modes of behavior made possible by the acquiring of the conventional, arbitrary symbol system.” These “apply to modes of symbolicity as different as primitive speech, styles of music, painting,

sculpture, dance, highly developed mathematical nomenclatures, traffic signals, road maps, or mere dreams...” ((Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action 809). Both the naming of the “someone” and the “acted” apply such symbol systems to form the speech act (and thus attentional act). For example, humans are at once things, animals, and people, and accordingly, we see terms for humans and action drawing from our nature as a collection of objects (e.g. *the arm moved*), as a physiological organism (e.g. *tendons contracted*), and as “a symbol-using animal responsive to the potentialities of symbolicity that have a nature of their own, not reducible to a sheerly physiological dimension” (e.g. *I waved goodbye*) ((Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action 815). The language of human action not only selects among different events, it creates possibilities (waving goodbye) not contained in unmotivated “motion” alone. Human action is a special class of events that has its foundations upon “the motions of our nervous systems and the vibrations that carry our words” but that also involve the idiosyncrasies of symbol-enabled action, which are qualitatively different from that of motion. Terms for action facilitate their constitution, and they become literal when accepted, just as we take measurements in some accepted terminology of units (PC 21).

This distinction clarifies attention phenomena that span action and motion, supplying fundamental vocabulary for analysis: attention acts, attention motion, and mixes of the two. Terms for attention amply illustrate that parts of attention that *move* by sheer physiology: *it caught my attention, I couldn't help but notice, it's stuck in my head, I can't not see that now, it distracts me*. Other terms illustrate parts of attention that people *enact*: *I'm keeping my eye on you, watch out for the next shooting star, check out Ringo playing back there*. Attention acts coordinate attention motions. Various attention motions occur without action agency.



In ways like this, dramatism investigates the inevitably socialized and enculturated aspects of attentional action and motion. It charts the common structures by which “raw sense is selected and shaped into experienced reality by the symbolic forms through which data are organized” (Gusfield 14). Just as one cannot perceive a thief and his crime without knowing symbols of law, we easily forget how much of the obvious world-as-it-is arises from symbols creating it. To merely conceive any thing (e.g. thief), action (e.g. stealing), and relation (e.g. property, possession, consent) involves attending to each “in terms of” something. The terms create meanings, relations, and the other structures that enable their thought. As such, a symbol is a mode of attention sustained through structures of meaning and materialities with its environment.

By charting the structures of these processes, we uncover the symbolic dimension of attention connecting the material and the mental. Understanding these dynamics of symbols offers strategies for moving through the din of the symbolic atmosphere immersively exerting upon thought and action. Burke’s dramattistic hope of his time is also ours: by understanding how symbols enact and maintain social structure, savvy symbolic action may act back on the structure, spreading the linguistic lines of force, and redressing the kind of human it created.

Thus the dramattistic perspective on attention highlights how environments are dramatic and contain dynamics along which attention forms. The conjunctions between attention and symbols place them both within perpetual tensions of evolution, revolution, and resistance. Since a symbol is a composite of relations and services, a change in one part also effects change to what it does. Attention not only responds to symbolic dynamics but comprises a part of them. Writing depends upon a relatively stable pairing of a symbol with an attention if there is to be shared meaning.

Attention dramatism refers to the inextricability of attention from meaning and that the drama that contextualizes it drives its development. Dramatism is a hermeneutic for making sense of language as action and what a symbol does. Language facilitates the creation of an attention (e.g. grammatical categories, punctuation) to facilitate outcomes in other people. It is through communication processes that we may link, through the forays of dramatism, language types to attention types. Meaning and attention are forged through human interplay and the symbols it produces. As attention is formed and directed by dramatic deployments of meaning, dramatism views attention as symbolic action and symbolically-structured motion. It offers recovery from oversimplified accounts of meaning and attention that reduce rather than articulate their relations.

### **2.2.2.3 Dramatic Ecology of Attention**

The three dimensions of attention will be guided along the communication orientation of McLuhan's ecology and Burke's dramatism. "Attention dramatism" and "attention ecology" will be guiding terms for applying McLuhan's ecology and Burke's dramatism to attention. Both are dialectical and dialogical approaches that weave interconnections through desperate pluralities. They look at relations *between, around, and through* things, especially regarding their changes. McLuhan and Burke have developed their ecology and dramatism to account for constitutive parts of the human. Their approaches are sensitive to their fluid evolution and proportionality in order to keep a careful eye against imbalances that affect human well-being. Both thinkers dream of creating a remade human and remade society through communicative means. Though they do not presume to know what that exactly is, they each provide a method, a way toward, such remakings.

Ecology and dramatism highlight different but complementary aspects of attention. Ecology is a paradigm that understands attention through environmental processes, accenting human life within orders of systems. Dramatism is a paradigm that understands attention through processes of symbolically-enabled actions, accenting human life within orders of drama. Ecology focuses on the grounds of interaction and how we acclimate to our “home.” Dramatism focuses on interaction and what we do in our “home.” Ecology studies the composition of situations as they impinge on actions. Dramatism studies the composition of actions as they impinge on situations.

Each paradigm spans the three dimensions of attention in different ways. Material, symbol, and intention can be understood ecologically, as three kinds of environments that each shape attention. For example, the ecological aspects of a word include how the material of its expression changes it, how its meaning is formed through a culture’s symbols, and how intentional acts of attention mobilize such environmental structures. Ecology focuses the three dimensions upon recurring parts of situations that normalize across the parts of life. It names sources of stasis exerting upon our attentional habits.

In complementary fashion, material, symbol, and intention can be understood dramatically, through their transformations into socialized modes of action. For example, a dramatic approach to a word observes how the word materializes a linguistic entity to use in the world, how it symbolizes a pattern of experience into language, and how intentional acts of attention are mobilizations of these socialized structures (e.g. waving goodbye).

Thus an earthquake is ecological while the social response, policy changes, public discourse, fighting over scarce resources, and fear of one’s neighbors are dramatic. The advent of writing is ecological, what people write is dramatic. The ubiquity of a technology is

ecological, people's chosen manner of using it is dramatic. These relative emphases highlight different parts of the same events. Together, they round each other out.

By maintaining ecology's and dramatism's characteristic ways of reading attention phenomena, I put the two paradigms into juxtaposition to investigate their interrelations. By hybridizing them as "dramatic ecology," I bring their vocabularies of system and action into alignment, which provides a fuller picture of the complex relations and interactions between them. The two paradigms are presented relatively independently before I combine them. The reason for this approach is to maintain a stereoscopic use of each lens, establishing each independently before they are brought together. Each lens, to continue the metaphor, is half of dramatic ecology's "binocular" way of focusing upon attention three-dimensionally.

Dramatic ecology is one means of focusing the panoptic three-dimensions of attention discourse. The three dimensions can be focused by other paradigms. For example, psychopharmacology links attention's bio-chemical processes (e.g. intoxication) to phenomena of matter, meaning, and mind. Materially, the senses are dulled and body chemicals are varied. Symbolically, one's codes of meaning are changed. Intentionally, attentional control is reduced. Other paradigms such as cognitive science, performing arts, religious practices, and others likewise focus the three dimensions upon different ends. Dramatic ecology focuses the three dimensions upon communicational matters of media and rhetoric. It depicts the ways attention is formed in and through various means of communication.

A dramatic ecological analysis of this page you are reading would draw upon the two conceptions of perspective *as they play out here in particular media and rhetoric*. Your attention to this document is formed by how my dissertation-styled "word-perspectives" accord with dissertation-styled "paper-perspective." The two observable figures are shaped to the

immediacies of context in a situation called “dissertation.” Relating the particulars of symbol to the particulars of material in their context generates attention strategies. The example above breaches impersonality, referring to *you* in the second person to look *at the paper*, which changes your attention and your mode of participation with my words about this dissertation’s attention situation. Relating the particularities of media and rhetoric *generates* the starting material for attention analysis and strategy.

Further, my observable “figures” of words and media form your attention by their relations with their larger “grounds,” i.e., their continuities with systems that make them what they are: the experience of paper media changes depending on alternative media available; for rhetoric, my words relate to a constellation of contextual discourses and their public status. Should this dissertation be read in 10 years, the same paper and ink will occupy a different media and rhetorical environment, forming attention differently. Attention is formed by the presences of ecology and dramatism as well as their absences; both are unique to the situatedness of social action in technological form.

Thus, dramatic ecology as method is the procedure of applying each of dramatism and ecology deductively in order to enmesh them inductively. They coalesce by their cross-relations and how circumstance inflects the “figures and grounds” of attention. This theoretical procedure is what this document performs, and in turn, it supplies a method for the attention situation heuristic. Where dramatic ecology provides a way of approaching attention vocabularies, the attention situation provides a way of applying them. The attention situation offers a heuristic for reading how the three dimensions of attention converge in particular instances.

### 2.2.3 The Attention Situation

Dramatic ecology focuses the history of attention upon the communicative processes of rhetoric and media. However focused, this still represents an infinite horizon of topics and concerns impinging upon how attention is formed between public and private phenomena. This project preserves this adaptability and generativity. It also offers a way of drawing from this expanse to apply it to specific situations.

I approach attention's broad concerns through the coalescing idea of the attention situation. It mimics "the rhetorical situation" line of scholarship in speech communication pursued by Lloyd Bitzer, Richard Vatz, Scott Consigny, Barbara Biesecker, and many others. The rhetorical situation names contexts in which rhetoric occurs. People have considered many characteristics of situations and their result upon the creation of rhetoric.

This scholarship's various debates can be classed together as a collective inventory of considerations that scaffold common ways situations affect rhetorical action. Bitzer focuses on exigence, audience, constraint. Consigny focuses on applying rhetoric's devices to prior discourse. For any situational structure in question, the art of rhetoric concerns the fittedness of action to situation. Any structure of situation can be foregrounded to explore some aspects of rhetoric. This kind of theory does not model any one set of structures or relations so much as offer a framework to continually think about them.

In the same vein, "the attention situation" theorizes relations between attention and situation. Attention, like rhetoric, responds to situation, remedies problems, operates by artful strategy, and is crafted by individuals. Attention has a naturally rhetorical character, as both attention and rhetoric respond to contingency, particularity, and propriety. They both involve ways of coaxing audience's minds to go one way or another. We might say that rhetorical

thought has focused on influencing opinion and action while attentional thought has focused on influencing consciousness and state of mind. The two co-occur and are parts of the other. Richard Lanham's *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* surveys media and intellectual history to argue that attention has always been the domain of rhetoric.

The attention situation's resemblance to the rhetorical situation highlights this socialized, rhetorical concept of attention and its homologous dynamics to that of rhetorical discourse. Rhetoric and attention are learned uses of language and mind. They both operate kairotically, shaped by social circumstance. Both develop refinements by art of adaption to goal through constraint. The analytical utility of their situational heuristic lies in a generalized conception of relations that can be increasingly refined the more is known about them. No known work provides such a theory of generalized attention relations suited to adapt the more is known about the situation.

Thus the attention situation is a heuristic theory for discovering, in any given situation, the available means of attention. It delineates the structures that attention operates in and through. Such structures disclose the forms and forces that act upon attention. Dramatic ecology, and the contents of the upcoming chapters, provide equipment for "probing" situations (as McLuhan calls it) and for "sizing up" situations (as Burke calls it) (CB 53, PLF 5-6). Their concepts are heuristic, enabling the discovery of structures though what their concepts reveal in situations.

Where exigence, audience, and constraints are Bitzer's selection of structures to the rhetorical situation, the attention situation can be pursued through interchangeable structures more closely suited to attention phenomena. This dissertation seeks to clarify the *general*

framework of the attention situation *before it selects its guiding structures*. Primary emphasis is on supplying a guiding, generalized theory of attention that enables the accounting of a situation's particular unforeknown structures.

This dissertation demonstrates how dramatic ecology is one such guiding scheme of structures that can be used to explore the attention situation's three dimensions. As Bitzer's exigence, audience, and constraints do, dramatic ecology makes some process-structures comprehensible by virtue of each paradigm's selected metaphor of analysis. Their vocabularies prepare arrival at certain kinds of observations and relations.

While dramatic ecology can be pursued as general theory (as McLuhan, Burke, and I above do), dramatic ecology can also be realized situationally. Ecology theorizes material, symbolic, and intentional processes *as they manifest in particular, concrete situations* that people move, think, and act through. The ecosystem metaphor leads its vocabulary toward observations of attention's immediate environment, that is, how the three dimensions materialize situationally (e.g. this dissertation's paper media and contextualizing disciplinarity). Dramatism theorizes material, symbolic, intentional processes *as they manifest through structures of meaning enveloping a particular act*. Symbolic action can continue, efface, or circumvent regularizations of the symbolic situation (e.g. neologism). The drama metaphor leads its vocabulary toward observing the struggle to *strategize attention*, that is, how a situation's three dimensions can be marshalled in the service of pursuing goals (e.g. performatively disrupting an attention convention of dissertation style).

Ecology's environments and dramatism's strategies of meaning envisage processes that undergird attention and action. Taken together, they provide a way of separating out, organizing, and reuniting parts of attention's complex, messy formation. Detailing these processes enables



strategic interventions to the sources that form attention. The finer their delineation (in any paradigm), the finer control can be enacted in attentional activity.

A very simple situation can have a richly complex attentional locale, for example, a rhetoric instructor's first minutes during the first day of class. Ecology highlights how the three dimensions converge into an ecoregion. Materially, orality drives the course by the dynamics of spoken sound (synchronous, ephemeral, one-at-a-time) mixed with availabilities from texts (asynchronous, enduring, all-at-once) and handwriting on the chalkboard (semi-synchronous, semi-ephemeral, some-at-once). Symbolically: all interchange occurs under social roles, institutional expectations, state laws, each conditioning the ways people act. Intentionally: the students enter the room with prior trainings that enable them to attend to curriculum (disciplinary concepts) and motivate their interest (mandatory to keep their scholarship). Each of the three dimensions detail parts of a situation's fixed underpinnings that determine some its basic attentional dynamics. These are the eco-systemic ways that the three dimensions manifest.

There are also dramatic ways that the three dimensions manifest. The rhetoric teacher, having "probed" the situation to "size up" the attentional possibilities, can note the methods and designs in the structures of the eco-locale. Materially, the chairs are locked in fixed position to force bodies toward the teacher and chalkboard. Symbolically: the language of "teacher and student" hypostatizes a division between the two in role, authority, and ability. Intentionally: the lecture-test format fosters students to attend for what will be on the test. Each of the dimensions contain structures that shape *how* ecology is pursued. The patterns of "how things usually go" embody prior strategies for navigating related ecoregions. For example, the chairs facing the chalkboard is strategic to facilitating the embodied aspects of attending to a visual source. The materialities of sitting have been fit to procedures of looking, writing, and test taking. As such,

they are *strategies materialized* and embedded into the composition of the situation. Solutions to past drama ecologize into the fabric of situation.

The dramatic ecology's paradigm is always linked with action, and here specifically, with *the available means of attentional action*. Having identified the dramatic and ecological structures of the three dimensions, the rhetoric teacher can richly deliberate upon how to act in direct relation to them. The teacher's actions are inevitably situated within these structures, whether he/she is aware of them. Yet as noted above, recognizing attention changes attention. Charting how material matters are structured by drama-strategic form equips people to think about attention and do it better. It endows them with facility to access attentional modes not immediately facilitated by situation. This kind of situational sensibility allows the teacher to accord with the situation in order to transcend it. Its structures must be matched before they can be modified or countered.

For example, by the material dimension: if the teacher recognizes disengagement (specifically, the lack of comprehension when copying down written notes) the teacher may respond by prohibiting writing for certain activities and only permitting dialog. Regarding the symbolic dimension: if the teacher recognizes that the designations of "teacher and student" are hindering student engagement (specifically, not taking ownership of their learning), the teacher may respond by designating the students as "the teacher" and "the grader." This can be taken further, designating an object as a "silent" teacher.

For the intentional dimension: if the teacher recognizes disengagement by the very habit of passively waiting for learning, the teacher may respond by doing nothing besides planning a stimulus and waiting silently until students respond. Strategically depriving the habit of

passivity will often soon have them talking to each other and coordinating action.<sup>7</sup> Each example highlights how structures in the dimensions can be met with corresponding structures in attentional action. They devise artifice upon the very structures of the breakdown, which is difficult to do without charting the attention situation to find it.

The body chapters ahead discuss how each dimension looks when further animated by dramatic ecology's concepts. They provide many additional heuristics for assessing the attention situation and its designs. Particularly regarding communicative situations, dramatic ecology's concepts are stable enough for wide applicability yet adaptable enough for circumstantial utility. Throughout the chapters and in conclusion sections, techniques of action are discussed for responding to situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Each of these situationally-strategic actions have been test-driven in my courses; the results were marvelously vivid and mostly effective.

### 3.0 THE MATERIAL DIMENSION OF ATTENTION

*The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.*

- Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903)

*...the ways in which we intently listen to, look at, or concentrate on anything have a deeply historical character. ...Western modernity since the nineteenth century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for "paying attention,"... That our lives are so thoroughly a patchwork of disconnected states is not a "natural" condition but rather the product of a dense and powerful remaking of human subjectivity in the West over the last 150 years. Nor is it insignificant now at the end of the twentieth century that one of the ways an immense social crisis of subjective dis-integration is metaphorically diagnosed is as a deficiency of "attention."*

- Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (1999)

When we think of the material of attention, we likely think of the brain and the body's sensing organs enveloped in an environment. Seen this way, attention is awareness of objects and awareness through objects. More bio-chemicals course through our veins and access neural networks, determining our attentive state: adrenaline, edgy; oxytocin emotional; adderall, focused ("National Institute of Mental Health"). These are some materials that make attention and our understanding of attention. The manners and modes of attending can be modified by altering these materials. This psycho-pharmacological paradigm affects all three dimensions of attention.

In contrast, the above epigraphs from Simmel in 1903 and Crary in 1999 note aspects in the social realm that also shape attention by material. Urbanization, technologization, and reigning paradigms in the sciences are material processes that confer subjectivities and form people's attentive capacities. Simmel reads the industrialized metropolis as the social grounds of attention formation. Crary looks at how ideas of attention in the sciences guided the development of attention technologies that isolate and direct people in increasingly controlled ways.

What are attention's materialities outside the body? What is their role in the formation of attention? What kinds of material relations arise from their arrangements and how do such relations affect attention? These questions will guide this excursus on the material dimension of attention.

Scholars have conceived various materialities involved in attention for communication. Michael Calvin McGee has proffered a "materialist's conception of rhetoric" where rhetorical exchange is endemic to social processes. Linguistic structures, such as the ideograph (e.g. "justice," "freedom," "the people"), derive their meaning socially, which links attention structures to material. Bakhtin theorizes meaning as a process of historical utterances, rooting our attention to language into a succession of prior discourse. Bourdieu theorizes communication's valence as cultural capital, which outlines a dimension of attention working by communication's materialization of symbolic power. Beller views attention through its capacity for labor power and the technologies that exploit it. Such cases outline how communication is subtended by social materialities (social processes, prior discourse, cultural capital). Immaterialities (such as meaning and process) become object-like to the degree 1) they recur and resist their own changing and 2) they effect material outcomes. The materialization of

immaterial matters complicates the theory of attention since it proliferates the materials involved in the formation of attention beyond the stable simplicity of the human body.

The vocabulary of dramatic ecology describes particularly rhetorical and mediational materialities of attention for communication. McLuhan's ecology and Burke's dramatism account for techno-social materialities omitted from the bio-psychological or information processing approaches to attention. For both McLuhan and Burke, the material of attention is indeed physical (e.g. the eye or a text) and also extends to the non-physical materials (such as Simmel's and Crary's social processes). These include intangible entities instrumental to attention's bio-chemical network, such as light and language, which socialize upon use (e.g. meaningful light, meaningful language). McLuhan and Burke draw from disparate sources far beyond the body, light, and language that materially affect attention.

Their paradigms conceive attention with social materiality that vividly contextualizes how our bio-chemical mechanisms buzz to the wranglings of human drama, social pullings, and technological change. McLuhan emphasizes how *non-symbolic physicalities* (e.g. paper) shape the environment and a consciousness attuned to it. Burke emphasizes how *non-physical symbolicities* (e.g. words) shape the symbolic environment and the kinds of action available within it. Both realms provide complementary materials through which attention operates.

Dramatic ecology's approach to materiality thus concerns the preexisting resources that enable particular acts of attention: the givens, the grounds, and the unalterables that attention operates by, the constituent and enduring components that acts of attention are made from. McLuhan's materiality begins with technology—machinery's physical form and corporeal relations that redistribute the work of the body, changing what the body is and does. Burke's materiality begins within the sociology of symbols. The natural environment, social structure,

and “second nature” beset upon corporeality and create a field of symbolic possibility, the parameters of which determine what can be symbolized.

Attention is made from these material matters as they are expressed through the environment, technology, and the body. Any particular moment of attention operates within pre-structurings of material. Attention itself operates as a socialized capacity, enabled by these very materials and their pre-structurings. Sheer contact, proximity, and exposure can bring a material into the attention processes, independent of the agencies of symbols and intention. Thus it is often not the choices of the individual but rather the ecological arrangement that contextualizes and constitutes the material aspects of attention. We find ourselves within such material ecologies, conformed to it unknowingly. McLuhan’s concepts will assist a dramatic ecological concept of attention and its material aspects of environment, relations, and psychic conditions.

### **3.1 MATERIAL ECOLOGY**

Dramatic ecology focuses on the ways that the material dimension of attention intersects with issues of communication, among them how natural and created environments engage the body with sense-patterns. Their materials’ properties and arrangement create a dynamic ecosystem that determines what individuals can know and do. Attention forms accordingly within their structures. Attention’s sensitive responsiveness to context invites people to understand the forces of its shaping.

Attention is principally determined by arrangements of material and the effects created by its resulting relationships with the human body. Attention always occurs through a material context. At minimum, the body and media provide the basic equipment through which we think

and act. Particular material forms yield accompanying attentional forms. For example, learning to drive fosters “car-shaped” attention that heeds uniquely automotive concerns such as differentiating engine sounds, adjusting to the pedal’s sensitivities, and anticipating the actions of other drivers. More apropos to media ecology is how learning to drive a manual transmission car fosters a “stick-shift-shaped” attention. The transmission demands that people cultivate specialized forms of attention for auditory cues, tactile feedback, and any alerting smells. The driver becomes part of the car’s feedback loop, sensing and supplying the actions circulating throughout a mechanical microcosm. The car extends the sensory reach of the body in the form of the car, feeling the ground as the shocks and frame do. Exposure to driving a manual transmission fosters car-mindedness, which enables coordinated adaptation to what may arise from the terrain, wearing parts, and other drivers.

McLuhan’s approach to ecology offers us ways of studying how technological environments attune us by structuring forms of consciousness, bodily patterns, and their emergent relations. These living, ongoing processes are moments in the larger dialectics of technological history and of ways of sensing. Each has their own historical arc, yet the two are interrelated. An ecological approach to technology highlights the dynamic interplay between body and material, human and media, in mutual creation. This section details these formulations, specifying the material aspects of attention ecology.

The available modes of attention, for McLuhan, are coterminous with the environment. Each is rooted in the other and thus to describe one is to invoke the other. For example, our commonplace for attention—“to focus”—is the principal metaphor for attention befitting high-visibility settings. When in pitch darkness, one might naturally shift his or her terms for instructing attention to “listen closely” since “looking closely” is physically impossible. We



might expect to “concentrate” on listening, a term of mental metaphor, rather than to “focus” on listening. The ears do not focus like the eyes do. Ears receive: *Did you catch my words? Why can't you get it in your head?*

This example illustrates the physicality embedded in our terms for attention. Linguistic metaphors for attending have overtones of not only a kind of attention but also the kind of bodily activity a kind of attention requires. These recurrent phrases befit the corporeal experience of a situational engagement, expressing certain features of bodily instruction involved in engaging an object or pursuing a goal. We “eye” the person liked, and “cold shoulder” the one disliked. We “nose” into people’s information as they tell us to “butt out.” We might “get into” a text, even as much of it is “over our head.” Such phrases hint at the bodily activations involved in different kinds of attentive activities. Embodiment is the most immanent materiality of attention. It pervades our language and our ways of experiencing. The body is one site of perceiving other’s attention, read through cultural matrices of signs. At any moment, we may “read a person” for their attentional state. Just as a baseball coach re-postures his team by calling out to “look alive!,” the linguistic and physical signs of attentional form imbricate the body and situation.

Terms for attention contain a cornucopia of material embodied relations. “Pay attention” highlights the sense’s one-at-a-time selectivity and the resulting cost/benefit tradeoffs of allocation choices. “Stay on it” and “hold on” capture the physical effort associated with attentional duration, sustained amidst compelling alternatives. “Are you following me?” and “did I lose you” indicate the interpersonal relations materialized when sharing similar attentions: a leader and follower emerge from forging a route, in “straight talk” or “beating around the bush,” that results in a sense of cohesion (“ya, we’re together”), aimlessness (“I don’t see where you’re going”) or isolation (“I’m lost”). “Consider it again like this...” highlights the

interpretative aspects inherent in the act of attending. Language also expresses forms of attending by synthetic, conventional categories: “I can hear the jazz in Debussy if I ignore the French in it.” As this example illustrates, language not only expresses the embodied relations in perception, but language *materializes* relations as well, imposing them as forms of attention: to hear an influencing element *in* something, to “hear the French” in something. Chapter 4 and 5 elaborate on the imposition of symbols into material relations. Regardless of any given term’s specific historical derivation, such terms dialectically enjoin bodies, minds, and objects. A term’s relations are made and found within their material enactments.

In light of these relations, terms for attention construct specifications to the act of attention. They craft a spatial, temporal, and conceptual approach to attention that directs its deployment. “Hear the jazz but ignore the French” invokes a genre-guided, associative grouping to select from the possible alternative hearings. The more specialized the specification, the more specialized the term, such as *to imagine, ignore, or simplify*. Less defined specifications to attention pass as generalized terms: *attend, mind, hear, get*. Terms’ physical specifications may be transposed away from their befitting environment, such as, “I don’t *see* what you are *saying*.” Regardless of any particular symbolizing of attention, our terms reflect attention’s fundamental responsiveness to environment. Language and its material relations recall preserved modes of attention and make new ones. It names a choreography of senses, bodily activations, and manners of deployment—often in relation to a part the environment.<sup>8</sup>

The shared relations between objects, bodies, language, and perception form the materialities of attention. McLuhan’s ecology and Burke’s dramatism offer insights on the

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<sup>8</sup> Burke argues that every word preserves of a way of attending that would not be possible without language’s attention-specifying capabilities. Every word contains a manner of attention through which denotation and signification occur. Implicit in a word is “hey look at that in this way” in order establish its object for connoting, coloring, predicating, etc. This is detailed next chapter under Burke’s semantic and poetic forms of attention.

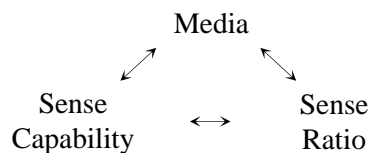
*situational basis* prior to and formative of these material elements. Their linkages make each a means to recover the underlying material situation that gives rise to situations as we commonly take them. As all human activity involves negotiating the senses with environment, we are mostly unaware of these material forces until they begin to change. For McLuhan and Burke, savvy percepts enable savvy concepts that allow us to apprehend, as if with specialized forceps, the invisible machinery of our apparent attention. When cognitivists and empiricists map brain structures and functions, they separate attention from situation, the very source of attention quality, character, purpose, and motive. The pervasive variegations of situation bring together the outer and the inner in many different ways.

Considering how McLuhan's thought allows us to consider not only how technology influences meaning, but how it lends material form to our attention, his dictum "the medium is the message" might better be "the medium is the dressage," the French term for "training" and "drill." Dressage connotes "breaking in" a horse to a specialized environment. The horse is relocated to a new, unnatural environment where gates, lines, and the rider influence the horse to trot in meticulous styles for show. Absorbing these material influences acclimates the horse, changing its disposition, purpose, and relations to its environment and itself. Judges rate the horse by the same observations that McLuhan makes of media environments: "The acceptance of the bit, with submissiveness/throughness (*Durchlässigkeit*) [permeability, interchangeability] without any tension or resistance. The horse thus gives the impression of doing, of its own accord, what is required. Confident and attentive, submitting generously to the control of the rider, remaining absolutely straight in any movement on a straight line and bending accordingly when moving on curved lines" (*United States Equestrian Federation Rulebook* 838). The horse experiences the material effects of its media (the rider's behaviors, the gates and lines), which

cultivate into the horse behaviors and forms of attention fitted to these sources. With people, repeated media exposure habituates a new naturalness matched to the constructed environment. Ease and grace come from submitting to media's material demands. These, too, permeate our confidence and attentiveness when we ingratiate "our riders," which set the straight lines and bends for us to pursue as if by our own accord.

McLuhan's concept of "the environment" ecologizes the material terrain, construing it as a set of processes of human dressage. While Burke locates the human within a symbolic environment, McLuhan locates the human within a sensory environment enveloping the sensorium. As concerns the formation of attention, for McLuhan, the world is not external, but rather equivalent, to the immediate technological context. But rather than cataloging particular technologies and effects, McLuhan's environment abstracts anthropocentric ecological principles that particular materials articulate, inflect, and reportion. Thus any specific technology can be examined as an instantiation of McLuhan's eco-processes, which can illuminate the relational dynamics that enable relational observation, providing a means of inquiry and a preliminary framework for analysis.

For interrogating the attention situation, McLuhan's eco-principles map within a heuristic framework of three co-evolving enjoinders: media, the body's sense capabilities, and sense ratios. Each affects the other and shifts interrelatedly. These symbionts materialize the various proto-attentive structures underlying the formation of attention. Their qualities comprise the available means of attention.



**Figure 1.** McLuhan's Material Environment

Elaborating on McLuhan's eco-principles within this three-part environment discloses several processes that create proto-attentive structures.

### 3.1.1 Media

The first term, media, broadly encompasses material impingement upon the body. Objects have inherencies that compel how people engage them. The telephone isolates the ear; binoculars, the eye. Technology's form and material inevitably engage some senses more than others, forming a bundle of activations upon exposure. Media of the natural environment no less compel predictable modalities: air (the sonic medium) is felt but not seen, light (the visual medium) is seen not felt<sup>9</sup>, gravity (the proprioceptive medium) is felt but neither seen nor heard. These material properties determine underlying forms of material engagement and of attentional modality.

Highlighting these relational inclinations, McLuhan verbifies the definition (not necessarily the grammar) of the word "media," animating its active ecological force. Media are not fixed objects but dynamic agents that mediate processes. Television televises, radio radiates, screens screen. Even rain rains, lest it be something else: floating water. The book's material properties guide the sense-procedure called "reading a book," stilling the body into fixed position to concentrate the eyes along fixed sequences. Conflating object and process makes "media" into "that which occurs as a result of the material." Thus, media mediate. What counts as

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<sup>9</sup> The visible band of the natural light is unfelt, the warmth felt is invisible bands of radiation, which is why we don't feel florescent light

“media” extends beyond traditional communication media to include materials of any sort and the results they usher in.

Highlighting this extended definition of media, McLuhan deems the electric light bulb a content-less medium that “is pure information.” It need not transmit symbols (as with a pulsing flashlight) in order to mediate human relations and enable actions formerly unavailable, such as “brain surgery or night baseball” (UM 8). In McLuhanesque style, the terministic plurality performs his ecological perspective: the light bulb is pure in-formation of processes and its communication is that with which it communes. Meaning and content are secondary to examining how any material change “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (UM 9).

As with the light bulb, automobile, or book, media are agents of transformation to sense-processes. In ecological terms, media are biotic, living, and evolving, along with humans. Media and humans are both objects conceived as nodes. Introducing any new media alters the complex of relations between populations, practices, and other media. The whole ecosystem adapts as each exerts upon the other. This systems-dialectical sense of media highlights the mutual transformation of mediators and the mediated. It behooves us, as it did McLuhan, to constructively resist analytical rigidity since media “are not easy to classify nor do they stay in place at all. They are fast moving entities, like electronic particles that are non-visual anyway” (“The summer way”). The fluid evolution of media processes pertains as much to communicating via telephone as to commuting via automobile. Both are material arrangements that transform social and psychic life. Understanding attention via media ecological terms means that media, humans, and attention are understood in complementarity.

Media are dramatic ecology's entry point to studying the environment. As McLuhan does, we can "close read" technologies' formal features as a basis of discovering their hard effects, which provide stable entry points to unstable and indeterminate processes. McLuhan's broad terms "media" and "effects" explore how individual technologies bring idiosyncratic intercedings. His range suits the range of material attention responds to. These include: natural resources (food, alcohol, raw materials), tools (the wheel, gun powder, zipper, bicycles, elevator), conceptual objects (numbers, names, periodic table), orienting objects (clocks, mirror, compass, roads), transportation (automobiles, boats, airplanes, railroads), social formations (money, clothing, housing, the city, high-rises), energy regimes (electricity, steam power, human biology) and most iconically, the mass communication technologies of spoken language, kinds of alphabets, writing, print, telegraph, radio, electronic circuitry, film, the phonograph, and television. The range of "media" his framework welcomes suits a far-reaching theory of attention and its materiality.

McLuhan provides a process vocabulary for how material patterns have material effects. Material effects most observably include the body's physicalities and sense-abilities. But even a non-physical technology, such as the alphabet, can have material effects considering McLuhan's axiom that "the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception" (UM 18). The alphabet, for example, translates sound to symbol, which transforms words from an aural to visual-aural pursuit. An intangible technology materially configures a group of senses. The proportions of relatively active and inactive senses initiate upon contact between materialities.

As the uses of the senses alter our sense capabilities, so too does attention. The senses form the material basis of attention. A particular sense environment will structure attention's

materialities. For example, television audiences do not sustain a heightened attention to smell from the medium's audio-visual salience. We enjoy quiet, or at least consistency, when focusing our eyes into a book. The patterns of activated sense ratios are consistent by use of the medium, often without our choice. Repetition permits automation, acclimating us into mental equilibrium with material circumstance. To describe sense ratios is to implicate the environment. Sense ratios are both environmental and attentional in the sense that they shape the world with great consistency. To the degree that we oblige our environment with its befitting forms of attention, we achieve the ease, grace, and confidence of the attentive dressage horse, moving as its environment dictates, in concord with the material forces bearing upon it.

People are least aware of media's sense-configuration when they are well acclimated to their environment, acting within it with naturalness, confidence, and attentiveness. People are most aware of dressage training during technological change when the environment seems unnatural and difficult. When people's attentional trainings do not accord with media environments, they notice. The processes of attention formation are exposed and people become situationally aware of their dressage mismatching the environment exerting upon them.

During such times, attention adjusts to the material relations of a new medium and its combinations with other media. McLuhan's vocabulary suits "the total environmental situation" inclusive of "not only the 'content' but also the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates" (UM 11). We must read the material effects of individual technologies as well as those of groups of media and their hybrid effects.

Forms of attention can fit an environment, matching its contours like a glove fits a hand, though we often overlook the subtly mounting misfittings between our habitual attention and the present situation. McLuhan showed the pervasiveness of the fact that the way we think about



media often lags behind its lived effects. Technologies are first understood through the concepts of established media. Around them circulates forms of attention that are slow to change when media change. He writes, “We approach the new with the psychological conditioning and sensory responses of the old. This clash naturally occurs in transitional periods” (MM 94-95). The attentions formed from a fixed sense ratio remain as forms of attention brought to new media. Remaining unaware of our own attentional forms robs us of the possibility to realize that many of our conclusions are misled, namely, that we are short on attention and that there is something lacking within us. Issues of attention, when reduced to quantity, curtail their own solutions. Scrutinizing the qualities of attention revives the conversation and reminds us that no one is lacking attention but that they are lacking *a kind of* attention. Dramatic ecology and the attention situation expose the gaps between people’s attention and a situation’s materially demands.

McLuhan warned of this recurrent blindspot when he wrote that “we look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backward into the future” (MM 75). The rise of radio, television, the web, and most communication technologies are initially blamed for fostering illiteracy. Such claims ignore the literacies required to use each and implicitly favors one media-specific skill over new media literacy. A non-book will fail book-centric standards. The assumptions and cultural structure around a medium get carried over to the new medium for which it is not suited or understood. For example, people don’t attend to the material effects and instead only consider the surface content. “The ‘content’ of a medium,” McLuhan writes, “is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as ‘content.’” The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form

is not related to its program content. The “content” of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech” (UM 17-18).

The modern proliferation of media compounds the lag between how we think about media and how media work us over. The resulting effect is situational misrecognition, which is symptomatic of McLuhan’s axiom that present media’s materialities are approached with the ways of thinking developed from prior media. The gaps between material circumstances and our understanding of them keep the material dimension of attention occluded. *Knowing* the environment is a means of substituting its live perception. Hasty explanations of current mass attention issues occur outmoded terms. The mismatch between active materialities and outmoded ways of understanding them is common during media shifts that create a “civil war [that] affects us in the depth of our psychic lives... The interplay among media is only another name for this civil war that rages in our society and our psyches alike... The crossings or hybridizations of the media release great new force and energy as by fission or fusion” (UM 48). Not recognizing the forces released in media “fusion or fission” has brought a quiet war between the mediascape and the acquired ways of sensing. The other civil war might be the hasty attribution and impoverished language with which we try to understand ourselves.

Civil war or not, we diminish our abilities to attend when naïve to the media-centric forms of attention that we do and can toggle between. Approaching a medium with attention ill-suited to it yields lacks, e.g. misrecognition, passivity, effort, a sense of individual attention deficit. The remedy lies in observing the type, not degree, of attention. Failing to consider attentional quality blinds us to what is already happening at the level of the senses. McLuhan notes the difficulty of this adjustment when social structures conserve the ways of the old. When a new mass medium arrives, the culture built up around the established medium reigns upon the

new: “The youth of today are not permitted to approach the traditional heritage of mankind through the door of technological awareness. This only possible door for them is slammed in their faces by a rear-view mirror society (MM 100).

Since media are “‘make-happen’ agents, but not ‘make-aware’ agents” (UM 48), McLuhan accents the need to recognize symbiotic relations with media. Material effects that occur upon contact will not be easily observed through the prior ways of sensing. Conceiving the ecological media processes helps detect what is happening to and through the body. People can march forward rather than backward into the future, looking through the windshield rather than the rear-view mirror.

We have sketched out the first wave of McLuhan’s material effects about how media influence the ways of sensing. Populations are historically unaware of these effects and our time is no exception. Why is this? And if people are media-blind, how can they learn to attend to these proto-forces? What makes sensing these effects difficult is that media also reshape the body’s very capacities for sensing. By understanding media’s double effects on sense-capacity and sense-ratio, we learn of the media processes upon attention so that we may observe their exertions upon us. Media affect our sense capabilities, which affect sense ratios.

### **3.1.2 Sense Capability**

Media environments supply the materials that the body enters into relations with, transforming how the senses’ engage the environment. The forms of engagement include activations and enjoynments as well as deactivations and separations. Such material processes media assist in structuring our functional ability to sense the environment. Thus media are complicit in structuring what gets attended and by which characteristic mode. Inversely, the configuration

also entails what cannot be attended to by limitation of the senses. The role of media in attention is not merely to arrange the world for perception but to furnish the individual with requisite capabilities for perceiving the world.

Media's effect of sense capability arises from the bidirectional relationships between the body and media. The human, for McLuhan, is a technology among technologies. The body is interdependent systems of media in fluid relations with media external to it. The human body is initial grounds of its technological modifications. Reading the functional body like a text, McLuhan "philologically" pursues media, tracing its diachronic developments like a language. He writes, "The etymology of all human technologies is to be found in the body itself" (GV 34). The individual body comprises the initial media that orients people to themselves and to their world.

In a general sense, a change to the body welcomes its change with media, which together modifies the "total environmental situation." The ear hears but when pierced, it can mount objects and spawn a class of media for ear-hanging. The skin feels but its unfeeling subdermis enables tattoos, turning the tactile organ into a visual medium. In both cases, a sense organ is modified by media (piercing material and ink), which transforms it into a basis for new media (earrings and tattoos) and invokes new sense ratios. Where ears were formerly receptacles for sound, they are now sources of sound (jangly earrings), sight (jewelry) and smell (as piercings commonly host odiferous bacteria). These transformations also occur through bodily truncations. To the blind, fingers become tactile eyes. These transformations relate the physical fixities of the body to the adaptations of its use. Corporeal form and function interact within the distributions of the body as people remake and truncate the body, changing what each part is and

how we think about and with it. Amidst these dialectics, each body part acquires its need, meaning, and mode of awareness unique to it.

Altering a sense organ also alters its production of sensation. Glasses, for example, are material formed to the face and eye in order to transform the experience of sight. As they dirty, vision hazes. McLuhan goes further to note how media-body pairings co-produce raw sensations as well as secondary senses. For example, “Each of our senses makes its own space” (MFC 48). The ear makes “acoustic space” upon the features of sound. The eye makes “visual space” upon the features of light. As the eyes weaken with age, the functional visual space reduces to a more immediate radius. Glasses change this spatial radius. Binoculars hyperbolize the space of vision, exemplifying distance and strict linearity. We can see the sun but we cannot see around corners. We can hear around corners but cannot hear our own heartbeat. Media alters the ways that “all of our senses create spaces peculiar of themselves” (GV 22). Any medium’s bodily engagement creates a conceptual field of possibilities within the dynamic of the field. McLuhan calls these the grounds upon which figures are made by technology and action. He conceives that “all of these spaces are indivisible and immeasurable” while particular technologies and action can divide and measure themselves (GV 22). The enjoinder with a medium creates this *sense of* a field of possibility directly from the sense organ itself. Its spatial parameters become axiomatic to the physicalities of the media-sense pairing. In addition to the spatial parameters, each sense also creates its own temporality: “to the blind, all things are sudden” (UM 48).

Each kind of space that a sense creates has its own field dynamics and corresponding attentional field. The way each sense orders sensation creates qualitative field properties, such as time, order, plurality, duration, speed, motion, range, positionality, directionality, continuity,

form, immersion, participation, pattern, and others. Charting these features of the senses discloses the material basis for each sense's possible ways of engaging and relating.

For example, the ear and the eye respectively create acoustic space and visual space. The eye's anatomy and physiology impose constraints and inclinations that create its distinct visual space. He writes, "...the eye creates a space where there can only be one thing at a time. The eye acts as a machine—like a camera. Light focused on the back of the eye ensures that two objects will not occupy the same place at the same time... (GV 38). Given this anatomical fixity, "the visual mode, of itself, in isolation, engenders a space which is uniform, and continuous and connected. ...sight has the unique power to separate or to capture *single aspects* of space in brief moments of time. The other senses cannot duplicate this feat" (TVP 10). Vision is the piecemeal ordering of a field by the partial nature of the eye. The space it creates is hypotactic. It necessarily subordinates the unseen to the seen and the unfocused to the focused.<sup>10</sup> The visual field forms in relation to the eye that orders it. The visual field does not come all at once, in whole, identically into each person's eye. The auditory field, however, does.

The eye creates space by hypotaxis while the ear by parataxis. The properties of McLuhan's "acoustic space" emerge from the ear imposing its form upon the world. The ear does not mechanically separate sound into parts as the eye does to the visual field, thus leaving all sounds to occupy the same space at the same time. He writes, "The ear favors no particular 'point of view.' We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us. We say, 'Music shall fill the air.' We never say, 'Music shall fill a particular segment of the air.' We hear sounds from everywhere, without ever having to focus. Sounds come from 'above,' from 'below,' from in 'front' of us, from 'behind' us, from our 'right,' from our 'left.' We can't shut out sound automatically. We simply are not equipped with earlids. Where a visual space is an organized

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<sup>10</sup> where "focus" refers to optical focus, not the metaphor of attentional focus.

continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships” (MM 111, underline in original).

These dynamics undergird the spaces created by the eye, by the ear and the other senses. These two sense-shaped spaces “may be seen as incommensurable, like history and eternity, yet, at the same time, as complementary, like art and science or biculturalism” (GV 45). They are what McLuhan calls the invisible grounds to what can be observed through the senses. Visual and acoustic space operate by different materialities (light upon extant objects vs. momentary motion in a medium) and with differing emergent properties (space, time, etc.). These sense-created fields are the material basis for attention.

The eye and ear illustrate how each sense’s field pre-structures attention. We attend through our senses and in the forms that the senses take. The manner of their configuration betrays the manner in which we attend through them. Each sense’s field and corresponding dynamics are the material basis of a characteristic mode of attention. For example, visuality’s inherent pointillism creates forms of visual attention on that basis. Focalized attention centers on one point to the exclusion of all others. Scanning attention surveys the field in vigilance for an intended point. Tracking attention follows one point through the field (“Theories of Vigilance”). Psychology details its specialized taxonomy of visual attention phenomena such as saccadic suppression, attentional blindness, attentional blink, change blindness, and so on. All such visual attentions are closely linked to the workings of the vision system, the space it creates, and its field dynamics.

Regarding hearing, its inherent all-at-once immersiveness creates corresponding forms of auditory attention on this structural basis. Since there is no required physical counterpart to most hearing, auditory attention is more covertly cognitive and experientially described. This

difference is illustrated by the distinction between hearing and listening. Hearing is the passive reception of sound while listening implies intent, duration, or expectation (“listening for”). Selective listening chooses a source to the suppression of simultaneous sources (e.g. cocktail party conversation). Deep listening deploys an intent to “hear more” auditory resolution with finer discriminations (e.g. evaluating auditions for a first chair violinist) (Pashler 95-97). Different kinds of listening vary the deployment of the ear’s fixed structures.

Understanding these material formations of attention equips us to explore how they function interrelatedly. Schematizing the materialities of each sense provides a starting point for analyzing how they relate to situated environments. McLuhan writes that “no sense can function in isolation. Only as sight relates to touch, or kinesthesia, or sound, can the eye see” (MFC 48). He quotes the old phrase “speak that I may see you” (MM 118). Any aesthesia—kin-, syn-, an—combines senses by what is commonly called “making sense,” or “sense-making.” Most any form of “making sense involves ‘unified sensibility’ or synesthesia” (MFC 49). When one sense’s field dynamics bleed into another’s, synesthesia can be an interaction, combination, or remaking of each sense. Sense ratios involve how altering one sense alters the total sense structure. Synesthesia involves how altering one sense alters the dynamics of the other senses.

Attention absorbs such modes of sense-interaction and in turn becomes an agent of synesthesia. Synesthesia is always present in degrees. Attention is the dial. The senses’ discreteness varies in part by how much we attend synesthetically. For example, onomatopoeia mouths the ear. Attention can attenuate the ear, reducing the onomatopoeia from a word. “Whisper” is often used as a technical descriptive term, even though it performs its own wispy airstream.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, synesthetic attention enables us to onomatopoeticize any word by

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<sup>11</sup> Try saying “whisper” with your hand on your throat. It can be whispered as “wspr” without vibration from the larynx. It is onomatopoetic when attending to it as such.



listening “into” words seen on page: curdled, trampoline, rang, bounce, bob, drop, seizure, cloth, While these words do not whip-smack with sound, we can recover, even create, aural associations hearable in the word. So too with the cross-sensations of punctuation, which tonalize dead ink, giving words new rhythm. Even. Silent. Rhythms... ForOurEyes. Onomatopoeia and punctuation’s visual musicality illustrate the vast possibilities made by the synesthetic mode of attention. These examples come from just the visual writing space before your eyes here. Other material situations contain different raw sensation for attention to syn-aestheticize. In those cases too, any one sense has available to it the overtones, carryovers, and recreations of the lesser involved senses.

Synesthesia and attention’s sense-making illustrate how McLuhan makes the human body the conceptual center for the fluid interrelationships between the shape of the senses and the shape of experience. Attention is comprised of the senses’ material features, their combinations with environment, and their synesthetic effects. These comprise the stuff attention is made up of. McLuhan refers to this as the “field” and “grounds” that undergird the available forms of attention. They are created at the nexus where sense capability meets media and the resulting sense patterns. Materiality moderates between sense potential and sense use. Media exerts influence on both. McLuhan’s analyses of media patterns correlate to sense patterns that guide the senses and configure the body.

Just as prescription sunglasses change the eye’s use, technology brings functional changes to the body’s use, role, and context. In this way, the body is the “etymology” of human technologies, as “they are, as it were, prosthetic devices, mutations, metaphors of the body or its parts” (GV 34). McLuhan’s body-centeredness conceives technologies as “extensions of the mechanisms of human perception; they are imitators of the modes of human apprehension and

judgment” (EIC 180). This prosthesis perspective on media sees a sandal extending the sole of the foot, the camera extending the eye beyond the body, and electronic circuitry extending the instant feedback loop of the nervous system.

These extensions concoct the embodied means for sense-making. They alter the composite of physical mechanisms attention operates through, giving attention its interior structure (Merleau-Ponty 233). A blind person walking with a “seeing stick” extends their hand to feel the environment as they walk. As Merleau-Ponty writes, such a stick comes “to be transplanted into them, or conversely to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body” (166). The available means of attention are materially altered by the walking stick’s action to carry vibration for feel, prod at surroundings with reach, and resound upon objects with timbre changes. The stick’s incorporation to the sensorium illustrates McLuhan’s media-composed body and its psycho-physical mergings.

McLuhan writes of a quadriplegic whose loss of limb-function requires manipulating the environment via mouth: he must blow pulse codes into a tube that signals commands to a computer that call the nurse, change the bed position, and alter the lights (GV 34). The ends are sought by new means for the man: rather than spinal nerves triggering the arm, the pulse codes become the signal for a computer to execute a physical signal for someone else’s neurology and limbs to do the task. The schematic circuitry of the quadriplegic’s neuro-physiology has functionally shifted from inner to outer. His lungs direct others’ limbs. The input/output is the same—desire/event. But the mediation has changed. His condition has truncated his body’s media and thus sense capabilities. Adopting new material means to the same ends requires psychic incorporation of the pulse tube, computer, codes, and so on. In a sense, he comes to “embody” the pulse tube as a prosthesis extending his signaling system.

McLuhan here exemplifies how a material change alters the entire psychic system, quantitatively and qualitatively, regards the capabilities of sensing the environment. And additionally, any psychic reconfiguration alters—quantitatively and qualitatively—the relations among material embodiments. Prosthetic media enjoins, extends, or replaces the body’s media. Equilibrium ensues.

### **3.1.3 Sense Ratios**

The interactions between media and sense capability yield the sense ratios, the immediate sense activations that attention operates through. Talking on the telephone heightens the ear and subordinates the other senses. Telephone use orients the sensorium to the technology and the dynamics of its fields. When using the telephone, the ear is the primary mode through which all others operate. Visuality is constructed through the ear, such as how one forms a stable image of the person from their voice. Physical space is sensed through the room’s echo of a voice (e.g. that distinct bathroom echo). The telephone exemplifies media’s configuring of sense ratios and the new modes of perception that result.

The concept of sense ratios bridges material effects and psychic effects. The material effects of the telephone occur through its relations with the body. They co-operate into a telephone-equipped body with sense capabilities for the global, instantaneous environment that the telephone creates. The sense ratios structured by the technological form do not necessarily replicate onto the individual but rather present a materially-constrained situation the body enters into and explores. The ear-guided eye forges new modes of perception and attention suited to the situation the phone creates. Likewise for any medium, “the new sense ratios set up at once by the technological dilation of eye or ear present men with a surprising new world, which

evokes a vigorous new ‘closure,’ or novel pattern of interplay, among all of the senses together” (GG 22-23).

While there are instantaneous effects of a technology in creating sense ratios, such as the telephone’s salience of the ear, there are also prolonged effects of sense ratios. They are initially experienced as shock, a momentous reconfiguration in the material basis of attention. Soon after, “...the initial shock gradually dissipates as the entire community absorbs the new habit of perception into all of its areas of work and association. But the real revolution is in this later and prolonged phase of ‘adjustment’ of all personal and social life to the new model of perception set up by the new technology” (GG 23).

The “revolution” from this adjustment lies in sense ratios’ subtler secondary effects. After the initial shock of ratio change, “the personal and social consequences of any medium... result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (UM 7). The “scale, pace or pattern” is often what a medium changes: “The railways did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road in human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure” (UM 8). These bodily effects from the physicalities of media have ample implications and secondary effects. This includes changes in scale, speed, organization, association, continuity as well as reversal and revival.

We may expect the quadriplegic’s attention to differ as a result of his changes, both in *what* and *how* he attends. His ear for breath, his tactile sensitivity to air pressure, and his regular awareness of these things are requisite for their use. The scale of breath becomes large, indirectly able to control other people’s limbs. The scale of direct manipulation shrinks to the

radius of breath and the location of the computer that reads it. The speed of task completion is slowed while the scope is widened.

These material configurations are “metaphors” for experience itself. It is always the case “That our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us...” (UM 21). Any particular arrangement of the senses, media, and “our personal energies” is a necessary metaphor (etymologically “carrying over”) of the world. He writes, “just as a metaphor transforms and transmits experience, so do the media” (UM 59). Particular kinds of experience result from how “All media are active metaphor in their power to translate experience into new forms” (UM 57). For McLuhan, “metaphor” is material, as with media, and immaterial, as with language (addressed in the next chapter). By conceiving media as metaphor to material and immaterial experience, McLuhan suggests that media are “translators of our nature and of our own natures into amplified and specialized forms” (UM 56). Media structure patterns of sensation.

As media concoct what is present for attention, media’s material relations with the body also involve processes that structure inattention. McLuhan details these material processes as Narcissius narcosis—a sensory numbing—and as auto-amputation—a functional reduction of use. Both processes redistribute sense ratios and determine what is not attended. These forms of inattention make possible other forms of attention. Throughout his works, McLuhan references particular kinds of media-made inattention that result from “narcotic” numbing and “amputative” unuse: “automaticity,” “mindlessness,” “somnambulation,” “anesthesia,” “hypnosis,” “blindness,” sensory “bias”, and other inattentional states. The processes that create any state of

inattention determine that which become present and absent, heightened and attenuated, for attending.

McLuhan recounts how these processes operate immediately upon contact, often beneath the level of awareness. A given technology inculcates its characteristic form of inattention through material relationships at work while we attend to its content. Our technological “outerings” require parallel “innerings” as physical extension demands sensory reduction. When the body is extended through technology, the necessary sensory adaptations change the patterns of attention and inattention. Fixing upon a gripping scene in a film, we don’t notice the popcorn falling out of our hand. There are sensory limits to what can be perceived in a given moment. McLuhan cites the audiocassette, a device that unleashes sufficient noise that it alone numbs the body for surgical work (UM 44). When technology alters sense ratios, some sensation diminishes as others heighten. Thus, quantitative changes to sensation often involve qualitative changes that result in a reorganization of our sensations more broadly.

McLuhan outlines this in a general scheme. Environmental burdens overload a sensory organ to its limits, pain and fatigue ensue, a technology reduces the burden by displacing the body’s work onto a material prostheses (like a shovel for the hand) and displacing the body’s perceptiveness onto a sense-extension (like a surveillance camera for a guard’s eye). Technology functionally amputates the body part it originally extended: when the shovel improves into a tractor, the hand is only used to control, not exert. Sense-extensions robustness to increase perception functionally numbs the organ they originally extended: when the camera improves into a surveillance system, the guard needs only the most sedentary passive vigilance to scan the premises for changes. The tractor and the surveillance camera illustrate McLuhan’s functional reduction of bodily use and sensing, which in turn create individual habits and

collective cultures of people sharing patterns of bodily non-use. These patterns of obsolescence and exformation<sup>12</sup> illustrate the dialectics between bodies and material that establish what becomes delivered to or suppressed from attending.

McLuhan's sensory narcosis and physical amputation are common but not inevitable. These physical aspects of technology operate inconspicuously and prevalently, often escaping notice. They illustrate "the bias and blindness induced in any society by its pre-existent technology" (UM 304). McLuhan provides a history of technology's influence on inattention to argue that "the universal ignoring of the psychic action of technology bespeaks some inherent function, some essential numbing of consciousness" (UM 304). The amputative numbing from technological incorporation is a widespread force that need not take a pre-determined shape. McLuhan, often assailed as a media determinist, writes that "Media determinism, the imposition willy-nilly of new cultural grounds by the action of new technologies, is only possible when the users are well-adjusted, i.e., sound asleep" (GV 11). Much like the well-trained dressage horse, attending to content suffices for participation. No need to attend to the form or to a reflexive self. McLuhan writes how readily people slip into a waking "trance," "somnambulism," and reduced consciousness:

we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about [electric technology's] encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed. It is, however, no time to suggest strategies when the threat has not even been acknowledged to exist. I am in the position of Louis Pasteur telling doctors that their greatest enemy was quite invisible, and quite unrecognized by them. Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological

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<sup>12</sup> A term for the discarded cognitive information carried across our neural networks but that never enters into awareness.

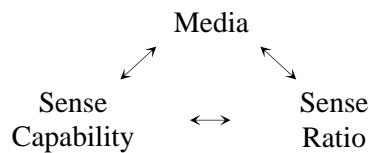
idiot. For the “content” of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as “content.” The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. The “content” of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech. (UM 17-18)

In this way, “The ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (UM 9). McLuhan’s axiomatic problem of media studies is that people do not readily notice the form—the action of the physical medium—and this form undergirds the overt content. Media determinism, for McLuhan, occurs at the level of the body and senses unless attention itself intervenes. The formation of sense ratios and their patterned inattention occur when there is no reflexive attention to mediating physical processes. For media effects generally, “There is no inevitability, however, where this is willingness to pay attention” (GV 12). Attention can countermand media’s determinations. For example, McLuhan cites games as a disruption of the “zombie trance of automation” that “enable us to stand aside from the material pressure of routine and convention, observing and questioning” (UM 238). How attention moderates the material formation of attention is explored further in Chapter 5.

In the context of this dissertation, analysis of dramatic ecology and its attention situation is another remedy to mis- and non-recognition of the material processes upon attention. By tracing out the formal structures of the senses and how they pair with that of media, we learn of the sensory modes synthesized between the two. We also learn about the capabilities of the technologically-linked body for sensing the very environment that a technology creates.



Attention will readily occur through the sense activations and perceptual modes available within a media situation. And it will simultaneously be tempered against the exclusions and “narcotizings” actively asserted by media processes. In these ways, experience is translated into specialized forms in which attentional modes are forged. Attention is ecologically produced through the tandem production of the senses and of media. Their interplay fluidly affect the others (hence the bidirectional arrows in Figure 2):



**Figure 2.** McLuhan’s Material Environment

Media, sense capability, and sense ratios together comprise the material framework of attention ecology. Each is related to the other and conditions the other in dynamic interdependence. Each is a point of entry that addresses one part of the material ecology that leads to another.

### **3.1.4 Environment**

McLuhan’s environment conceives the material-psychic co-production of sense by the conjunctive processes of media, sense capability, and sense ratios. Concerning the formation of attention, these material bases are the environment. McLuhan writes, “media are not bridges between man and nature: they are nature” (EIC 208). Complementarily, “the most human thing about us is our technology” (“Man and the future of organizations” 19). McLuhan weaves technological environments into the very fabric of humanness, arguing for their inseparability.

For example, “The reader is the content of any poem or of the language he employs, and in order to use any of these forms, he must put them on” (“Roles, Masks, and Performances” 520) and “The user of the electric light—or a hammer, or a language, or a book—is the content. As such, there is a total metamorphosis of the user by the interface. It is the metamorphosis that I consider the message” (*Letters of Marshall McLuhan* 397).

In this way, the environment—comprised of things—”is process, not container” (CB 30). The terrain of objects exerts material relations and mental accommodations that people respond to variously. The character of their material urgings and the character of human responses together create the environment of attention. McLuhan anticipates the humanistic perspective of ecology, highlighting the interrelations that define and shape networks of symbionts. Turning away from the dualisms of outer and inner, McLuhan claims that “Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The groundrules, pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception” (MM 68). They emerge directly from how a technology alters its material ecology: “To say that any technology or extension of man creates a new environment is a much better way of saying that the medium is the message. This environment is always ‘invisible’ and its content is always the old technology. The old technology is altered considerably by the enveloping action of the new technology” (CB 31). Technological change alters the sum of environmental processes, which can be detected only through careful observation of effects.

Environmentally configured sense ratios are the material that experience is made of. McLuhan writes that “Rationality or consciousness is itself a ratio or proportion among the sensuous components of experience, and is not something added to such sense experience.... Consciousness, complex and subtle, can be impaired or ended by a mere stepping-up or

dimming-down of any one sense intensity, which is the procedure in hypnosis. And the intensification of one sense by a new medium can hypnotize an entire community” (UM 112). Sense experience, in configured proportions, makes up the realm of that which can be attended. A particular sense configuration thus pre-structures attention by inclusion, exclusion, groupings, and proportions.<sup>13</sup> The ubiquity of changing sense ratios suggests that people live in varieties of hypnosis, depending on the relative salience of one sense. The general character of consciousness is set by the type of hypnoses and hyper-noses made from sense activation.

Since ubiquitous media invoke ubiquitous sense ratios, McLuhan cautions to continually watch sense ratios’ immediate effects. He links sense ratios to the philosophic idea of *sensus communis*, the communal ways of sensing. He writes, “*Senus communis* [sic] in Cicero’s time meant that all the senses, such as seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touch, were translated equally into each other. It was the Latin definition of man in a healthy natural state, when physical and psychic energy were constant and distributed in a balanced way to all sense areas” (GV 37). McLuhan favors interchange and availability of the senses and cautions that some sense ratios are overspecialized and ill fitted to their circumstances, creating problems of misrecognition, suppression, passivity, and noninvolvement. His read of media history concludes that “...in any cultural arrangement, trouble always occurs when only one sense is subjected to a barrage of energy and received more stimulus than all others” (GV 37).

As the materials of attention change, so must our concepts. Concepts are often outmoded to old environments and ill-suited to current environments. McLuhan suggests two reasons why the environment and its imperceptible underlying field dynamics are regularly overlooked. First is because the environment omnipervades study, leaving no perspective outside it: “The present is always invisible because it is environmental. No environment is perceptible, simply because it

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<sup>13</sup> Heightened consciousness is associated with heightened senses: hearing more, seeing more, etc.

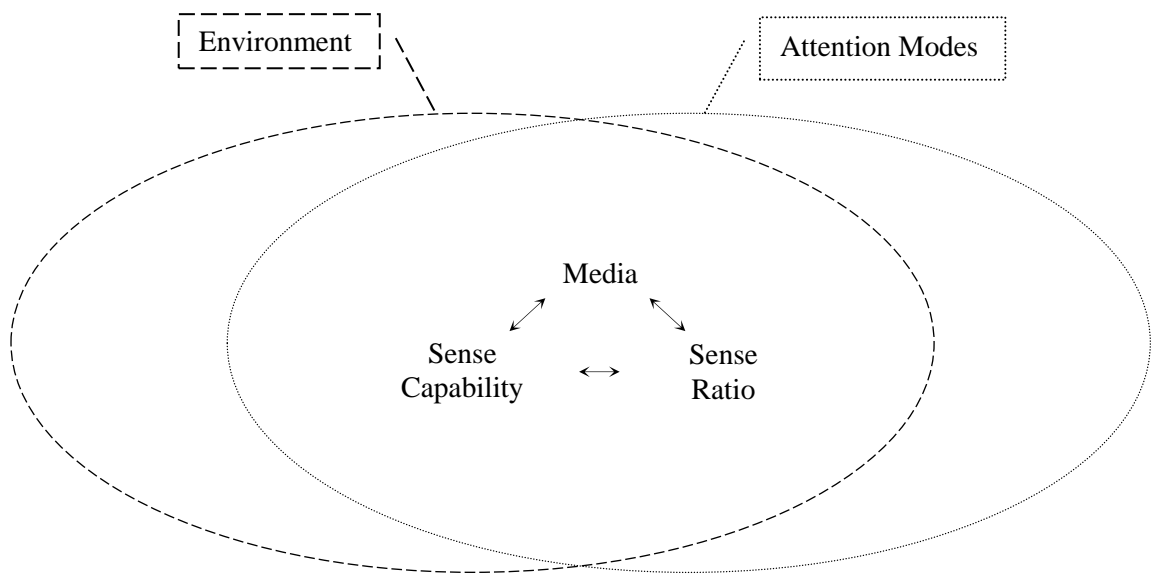
saturates the whole field of attention” (“Understanding Canada” 114). The second reason is due simply to lack of interrogating the paradigm of analysis deployed in more imminently “useful” questions: “The hidden ground of all perception, choice, and preference, the ground which underlays the world of precise and quantifiable scientific study is pushed aside or dissolved” (GV 22).

A feature of an attention situation as I am discussing it throughout this dissertation is the perennial mismatch between attention and its conception—the difference between how we attend and how we think we attend. For example, we speak of students needing to “focus” when honing a single mental beam is not often the mode of engagement for active student learning. This tension between the material and conceptual underlies McLuhan’s perspective on media writ large: there are tensions between how people think about media and media actually engage people. He writes, “Nobody yet knows the language inherent in the new technological culture; we are all deaf-blind mutes in terms of the new situation. Our most impressive words and through betray us by referring to the previously existent, not to the present” (EIC 208). We adjust to the environment long before we figure out its effects. The upcoming chapters on the symbolic and intentional dimensions of attention explore how this mismatch can be remedied.

Another feature of the attention situation is the relation of environment to attentional mode. The material effects of environmental processes are characteristic of attentional effects but not quite determinative. The environment is shorthand for the forms of attention endemic to them. Accordingly, terms for the environment are shorthand for constituents to the formation of attention. For example, a noisy environment fosters an attention related to it, which can be duplicate (“noisy attention”), inverse (quieted attention), or another responding form. The particular attentions are made from environmental processes, with material, symbolic, and

intentional mediations.

Figure 3 models many shared elements between environmental processes and attentional processes. Media as environments are bases for attention formation while media also influence sense capability and sense ratio, which become normalized into the environment. Habitual ways of sensing are environmental to other people and create cultures of attending that are instilled and shared among people.



**Figure 3.** McLuhan's Material Environment and Attentional Modes

This framework assists in finding the available means of attention for any situation. It suggests that detailing the environment—especially the media and sense relationships—provides material grounds of attentional form and structure. Some environmental elements may not be part of the attentional situation, such as superfluous or unknown elements. Some attentional elements are always outside the environment, such as negation, imagination, and forms carried over from other environments. Special kinds of meaning can enter into the material relations and

redirect their effects (discussed in Chapter 4) as well as construct “anti-environments” that expose the processes of environments. The role of will and mental volition to countermand material processes are discussed in Chapter 5, as well as the ability of the individual to remake their immediate environment through attention technique.

Regarding the materiality of dramatic ecology, McLuhan provides vocabulary for the ecological processes converging upon any particular situation. The component elements of media, sense capability, and sense ratio each comprise the material situation and each drive processes of configuring the senses. Any arrangement of technology, the sensorium, and the environment modify the entire system. This ecological approach to the materiality of attention stresses how “cultural ecology has a reasonably stable base in the human sensorium, and that any extension of the sensorium by technological dilation has a quite appreciable effect in setting up new ratios or proportions among all the senses” (GG 35). McLuhan’s technological underpinnings to “cultural ecology” leave off where Burke begins: in the details of culture. Dramatism looks at the ways that, within technological ecologies, culture plays a determining role in the materialities of attention.

### **3.2 MATERIAL DRAMATISM**

Like McLuhan’s, Burke’s materiality originates in the physicalities of the body, technology, and natural environment. Burke’s dramatism adds his extensive surveying of intangibles that function materially. Various non-physical recurrences have material effects, a staying power, and a pervasive presence. Burke’s chief example of this is the symbol materialized in language as well as in image, custom, convention, gesture, music, and so forth. These entities form

socially and circulate, enduring as immaterial objects. In so functioning, they effect (and affect) things outside of themselves, such as bodies and actions.

Regarding dramatic ecology, Burke extends McLuhan's focus on the physical environment, emphasizing the continuous interrelations of physical and symbolic environment. Burke's concept of materiality concerns the ways that symbols become environmental and the ways that the symbolic environment permeates individuals' symbolic action. He studies symbols to study society by mapping their mutual entrenchments and interrelations. Burke expounds on the processes by which symbols become environmental and foster proclivities towards attending in one manner or another. Noting humans' exceptional capacities to re-make and re-symbolize their environment, Burke's materiality names the countervailing forces that limit, direct, and bind symbol use. Bodies and symbols must cope with both physical and symbolic environments. Attention, by its nature as both embodied and symbolic, also must cope with its environment.

There are many forms of symbolic material. Culture, decorum, idioms, grammar, and etymology are symbolic structures that are object-like in their regularization and ubiquity, which people are born into and socialized by. Much work across the disciplines charts the vast array of entrenched forms that pervasively shape attention. For example, force choice grammar requires speakers to attend to gender to use "his" or "her" possession. Cultural concepts of time require attending to a symbolic spatial reference frame of forward/backward but also of up/down in Chinese (Boroditsky 4-5). Prosaic metaphors saturate the most basic expression, regularizing talk about arguments in terms of war, rather than dance, which in turn actually structures symbolic arguments in a war-like way (Lakoff and Johnson 4). In many ubiquitous symbolic forms, we find assorted structures that force attention to function along the structure of the

symbol. Participating in them materializes abstract meanings into a working social reality, which reifies their particular attention-directions into the symbolic environment.

It is well documented how such instruments of expression affect attention habits. The more pervasive the symbol, the more materially it functions. The absence of a particular symbol does not necessarily preclude its related form of attention. But the ubiquity of a particular symbol entails a corresponding form of attention necessarily activated for the symbol's comprehension (e.g. shared reference frame of time moving up/down) and for its use (e.g. force choice grammar requiring gender assessment). The difficulty of changing these examples testifies to their material endurance. American English's gendered pronoun problems are easily solved with a gender-neutral pronoun, such as the German "es." The difficulty lies not in creating a symbolic solution to a situational problem; it lies in the material resilience against a new symbol entering the pronoun space. It is the *relations* between people and symbols that prevent the adoption of new symbols, not anything inherent to symbols or pronouns. The lived relations propagate the material nature of symbols and their attentional aftermath. In this way, the materiality of symbols is found through their *dramatic aspects*—through their uses and abuses, profits, and perils—operative in tandem with their form and structure. This could very well be called the ecology of symbols, and it functions so. But Burke's ecology recognizes that ecologies of symbols materialize through social processes and the volition of individuals. Where McLuhan's theories approach the human via material, Burke approaches material via the human.

For the purposes of this project's breadth and reach, this section does not taxonomize the many symbolic structures that materially structure attention. Rather, it sketches Burke's higher-order categories that help to theorize the general processes of symbolic materialization and their relation to attention. Any particular symbolic form can be understood within this dramatic



hermeneutic. The analytical strategy of the attention situation is to provide a framework for understanding the means by which particular forms of attention arise. This eases the necessity of memorizing attention structures and fosters the ability to discover and forge yet-to-be-codified forms. For this reason, Burke's concepts explored here are simple and vast. Their abstractness permits generous and generative application while still directing analysis to unforeknown particularities of attentional form. His concepts for dramatic ecology include orientation, form, and motive, each with their characteristic impingements upon attention. These symbolic materialities pre-structure attention in many ways. Their operations work in conjunction with "recalcitrance," Burke's key concept for the ways the environment conditions various symbolic materialities.

### **3.2.1 Recalcitrance**

Recalcitrance marks the ways that symbols (and thus their resulting effects on attention) are checked by material and social forces. It is simply the "revisions made necessary by the nature of the world itself" (PC 257). This "world" involves McLuhan's natural and technological environment but also much more: the permanencies of human biology and neurology, our enduring "social relationships, political exigencies, economic procedures," and the extant body of related symbols (facts, competing perspectives, etc.) (PC 258). This "world," as it were, pushes back on symbols, exerting itself upon symbols' concordance with the world and urging us to revise ourselves accordingly. As examples, Burke offers "oceans are clocks" and "Milton was an Eskimo." These symbolic constructions discord with various other symbolic material of history and nomenclature. While grammar permits oceans to be clocks, the dramatism illustrates its tensions with the material environment: "to complete these statements, to socialize them by

corroborative data, the recalcitrance of your material discovered *en route* may eventually compel you to revise” them into: “oceans have periodic movements” and “Milton was a Nordic” (PC 258). Recalcitrance mediates between what *can be* thought and what *is* commonly thought.

Myriad forms of recalcitrance operate with varying orders of demand upon symbolic activity. The claim to Milton’s nationality, for example, highlights a historical recalcitrance concerning the grouping of facts. The above claim about oceans highlights definitional recalcitrance. Both the historical and definitional orders of recalcitrance condition their reference to things through a realm of prior symbols. The more that a symbol accords with such various orders of recalcitrance, the more the symbol becomes material of a public nature, thus “transferring it from the private architecture of a poem into the public architecture of a social order” (PC 258). Forms of recalcitrance commonly come from realms of the political, economic, social, cultural, epochal, technological, corporeal, cosmological, and so on. For example, the accusation “he is not American” illustrates the converging orders of recalcitrance from the legal, the political, and the genealogical, each urging different kinds of revisions. In this sense, “the universe ‘yields’ to our point of view by disclosing the different orders of recalcitrance which arise when the universe is considered from this point of view” (PC 257).

Examining forms of recalcitrance reveals how they are not merely given, random, or indeterminate. On the contrary, they are established by motivated actions and secured by strategies. Political recalcitrance visibly embodies the strategies, for example, militating against “*un-Americanism*” and compelling behaviors associated with a “true American.” Responses need not oblige recalcitrant structures to cope with their demands. Surveying its contours and strategies proliferates the available modes of engagement. We may adjust “the private architecture” of symbolic action *strategically with* “the public architecture of a social order.” A

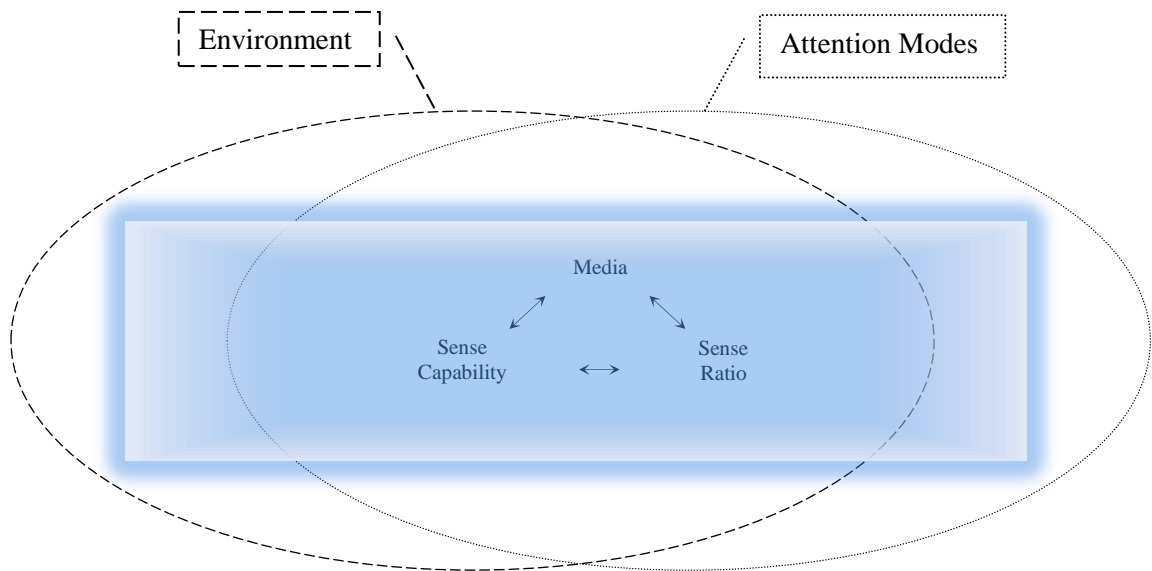
socially revised statement, for example, “is an attitude rephrased in accordance with the strategy of revision made necessary by the recalcitrance of the materials employed for embodying this attitude” (PC 255).

Three questions help us to survey recalcitrance in an attention situation: what is “calcified”? What does it demand? How has it become material? The answers disclose the motives and strategies worked into the symbolic environment. Responses to recalcitrance span the gamut of human motives. We may cope, attack, withdraw, charm, or attempt to fit most any will into a social maneuver. Whatever the strategy, Burke understands the human as embedded in interchanges with recalcitrances of social makings, which spring from and back into responses to drama. Such “shifts of strategy, as shaped to take this recalcitrance into account, are objective,” and materialized in counterproduction to the prior strategies objectified through symbolic material (PC 257). Restrategizing is a characteristic of Burke’s dramatic materialism. Drama creates and results from recalcitrance, as it ushers a succession of embodied responses, enacted attitudes, and counterstrategies.

Recalcitrance is the calcification of immaterial processes into material forces. Its pressuring upon the symbolic environment and upon individuals is the fundamental material condition of dramatic ecosystems. Where McLuhan’s ecology describes body-shaped consciousness, Burke’s describes consciousness-shaped embodiment. McLuhan highlights that technologies forge how people are used; Burke, that people forge how technologies are used. The environment—symbolic and physical—is a materialization of strategies, purposes, and prior endeavors reified.

Figure 4 depicts the place of symbols in the material environment. The eco-material relates to the drama of meanings. The ecological co-development of media, sense capability, and

sense ratio are calcifications of prior drama. The material environment they create bears the marks of symbolic motivations, social relations, and strategies. Attention occurs within symbolically-constituted materialities in the environment. Since not all media is symbolically constituted, the relationship between the symbolic and the physical is visualized in Figure 4 by a hazy cloud of possibility and partiality. Media, for example, can affect sense ratios with and without symbolic influence (e.g. the electric light). Symbols always occur through a medium. The role of symbols is additive to the effects of raw material; they are not wholly formative sense ratios or attention. The hazy cloud locates Burke’s field of symbolic activity that can variously redirect the course of McLuhan’s physical relations.



**Figure 4.** McLuhan’s and Burke’s Material Environment and Attentional Modes

The recalcitrance of symbols is dramatic material for attention. A human ecology’s dynamism emerges from where recalcitrance is met with human will, creativity, and ingenuity. These “tectonic” forces to symbolic life create corollary structures that more directly shape

attention, such as a strategic way to approach environmental material. Some corollary structures of symbolic material are what Burke calls orientation, form, and motive. Each is a different kind of accretion developing out of the diversity of human strivings that are materialized, adapted to recalcitrance, and can become environmental. Orientation, form, and motive are embodied and symbolized, functioning to store past experience durably and malleably through future recalcitrance-response cycles.

### **3.2.2 Orientation**

The chief recalcitrance that affects attention is orientation. Burke defines it as “a sense of relationships, developed by the contingencies of experience.” This acquired sense “largely involves matters of expectancy and [it also] affects our choice of means with reference to the future” (PC 18). Adapted from the German *weltanschauung* and from “worldview,” orientation results from a living organism acquiring its way of being in the world through contact with the environment. Orientation involves things and their relations stabilizing upon repetition, orienting, as it were, what is seen into what is scene. It is the nexus whereby experience stores itself tendentially and bridges the physical and non-physical materialities. Prior to a given attentive act, one brings their orientation into contact with a situation, attending to it in ways inclined by the stores of past attention.

Burke’s case of a trout biting a hook exemplifies orientation and his perspective that all living things interpret signs. His representative anecdote imagines a trout developing an ability to distinguish between items to eat and items not to eat. It has come to live long enough upon its ability to distinguish food from non-food. Its biting requires judgments of what, when, and how

to bite. The trout eventually bites food but that is also attached to a fishing hook, and then gets away with a torn jaw. This experience imposes between food and non-food. The baited food is food-like yet uneatable, pleasure-associated yet painful and the bait hook patterns with a distinct sequence of events. The trout now alters its appraisals accordingly. Between food and non-food, it has been introduced to “jaw-hurting food,” an additional form for “what to watch for and what to watch out for.” This thought experiment illustrates Burke’s approach to the naturalization of symbols in the physical environment and the naturalization of ways of interpreting them. Patterns of environment correspond to patterns of differentiation in the perceiver. This correspondence is Burke’s fundamental linkage between the material of the environment and its matching forms of attention to navigate it.

This pragmatic approach to attention and orientation carefully blackboxes psychological questions of agency, consciousness, and representational memory. Pragmatically, Burke merely notes a pre-symbolic “sense” ability and builds upon it functional theories, such as orientation as a context for meaning making and patterns of attention. He explains that “In [the trout’s] altered response... he manifests the changed behavior that goes with a new meaning, he has a more educated way of reading the signs. It does not matter how conscious or unconscious one chooses to imagine this critical step—we only note here the outward manifestation of a revised judgment” (PC 5). Burke suggests that humans’ natural condition is a permanent embedding into orders of signs and the necessity to interpret. The impact of orientational differences heightens in situations involving a choice of actions, meanings that change, and judgments that must be revised. In this sense, “all living things are critics,” where they reckon meaning between changes in an environment. This, Burke argues, is a natural process where the interpreter

develops mental forms parallel to environmental forms, which form their own material: things, relations, expectations.

As a key term, orientation is an arranging in regard to something else. A building is “oriented,” etymologically, when it is made to face the orient (“orientation”). The building is given the characteristic of being oriented when aligned to what’s outside it. A spatial relation between things is said to be inhering in the movable object, lest it be misoriented, or in the case of a person, disoriented. To speak of a person’s orientation is to verbalize their ongoing relations as if they are living inside them. People orient to their symbolic environment from the contingencies of symbolic experience, which “largely involves matters of expectancy” and impinges on “choice of means.”

Orientation undergoes continual development as it functions as a lived basis for thought, action, and attention. Where the trout comes to discriminate food vs. baited food, one can imagine a bee’s distinction between a flower and a Venus fly trap or any of the ways each animal may learn to judge its own variety of deceptive food, endangerments, responses, and so on. Burke’s representative anecdote also illustrates the variety and fineness of discriminations that go into these orientations. The very same trout “is a critic” of danger signs, health signs, and hydrologic signs. It would seem natural that salmon, bees, or even a different trout, would live amid different signs and would develop different critical responses. Burke’s use of literary terminology as a lens to animal behavior provides a way of viewing environments as texts—etymologically, as weavings—of signs. Different environ-texts have differing signs from the character of the events imposed on their inhabitants. Different inhabitants develop different orientations of interpretation depending on their amassed exposures and interactions. Swap a wild trout and a pet trout to the others’ environment and each will suffer by their environmental

illiteracy. A being's literacy, whatever its form, is the orientation undergirding the acquired ways of knowing and moving with the world.

These demonstrative thought experiments simplify the complexity of human orientation's dialectics between organism and environment. The human capacity for symbols greatly expands the orientational material of more than just the natural environment. Humans have more things to interpret and more ways of interpreting. Burke notes, "We are the only species with criticism of criticism. Not only may we interpret the character of events, we may also interpret our interpretations" (PC 6). Orientational materials comprise the vast interpretations of things, relations, expectations, and choices of means to pursue in a situation.

Attention is shaped by how context meets text through discrete deployments of meanings. Orientation houses our ways of attending by its dual role as a store of intelligible forms and as mediator between text, context, and response. An orientation of a feral child, for example, illustratively evacuates the presumed orientational elements found more commonly: modes of production, social stratifications, cultural identifications, personal history, situational training, and so on. These orientational elements impact reading practices and affect judgment of even the most basic texts. Burke writes that "we can only say that a given objective event derives its character for us from past experiences having to do with like or related events... It takes on character, meaning, significance in accordance with the contexts in which we experience it" (7).

With the orientation of this dissertation, dramatic ecology provides equipment for analyzing how an "objective event derives its character for us from past experiences having to do with like or related events" (PC 7). We see out of circumstances what we bring into them. Orientation and its materiality illustrate how granular and decisive moments get their character from larger processes forged through long streams of time. Orientation is the lens brought into



reading an environ-text and yet it is necessarily embedded into the lived relations of the individual viewer, some of which are personal, some shared, some enduring, and some changing. This orientation is not equivalent to any particular symbolic configuration or attentive capability but rather is the meta-structure that enables it. Orienting processes are facilitated by symbols that become materialized as they circulate as natural and fixed, thereby prestructuring the sense for experience, action, and attention.

Burke details two forms of orientational material: form and motive. Each contributes to the shaping of attention form, particularly with regard to material dramatism. Ever careful not to reduce the complexity of such matters, Burke focuses on how the messiness of our physical and symbolic becomes orchestrated. He examines the structures that structure structure. Form and motive are meta-structures clarifying the affinities between orientation and symbolic action. They concern the formation of humanly-made intangible objects and the forms of attention corresponding to them.

### **3.2.3 Form**

Orientation provides us a conception of the mediating material between stimulus and response, or in McLuhan's terms, environment and consciousness. Burke stresses the role of orientation in guiding responses to environment and that the material buildup of symbolic inclinations rescripts the relations underlying attention and meaning. Form and motive are symbolic means of orchestrating and reifying orientation. As they settle into orientation, they form the material basis that makes up symbolic attention and that shapes its qualities.

Component in orientation are things and relations, as well as forms, which Burke defines as "an arousing and fulfillment of desires" (CS 124). This definition pertains to representation,

as “a work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence” (CS 124). Representations are sequenced intelligibly by relating parallel sequences of experience itself, which are stored in orientation. The fish hook, for example, is a physical form in conjunction with the sequence of events it patterns with. Thus the trout orients aversively to the hook’s endangering pain while the fisherman orients instrumentally to the hook’s necessity in fishing. The hook’s objective structure acquires its character, meaning, and attentional patterns by its relations with orientation. Form concerns how relations, associations, and oppositions are repeated and are arranged in sequence.

Methodologically, Burke circumvents the philosophic fixation on form’s origins and focuses pragmatically on what can be done with form. He notes, “though forms need not be prior to experience, they are certainly prior to the world of art exemplifying them. Psychology and philosophy may decide whether they are innate or resultant; so far as the world of art [i.e. communication] is concerned they simply *are*: when one turns to the production or enjoyment of a work of art, a formal equipment is already present and the effects of art are involved in its utilization” (141). This formal equipment is the non-determinative inclinations acquired in orientation. Effects arise from the interplay of forms in communication against forms in orientation. This approach avoids the pitfalls of reducing communication to sociology and of overlooking the inventive potential of the communicator.

How items are configured between an expressed form and orientation create attentional form. They create two kinds of attention structures, which Burke calls the psychologies of information and form. The psychology of information is a mode of effect from something itself (e.g. a fact). The psychology of form is a mode of effect that is relational and works by building desire and appetite to be satisfied within a progression of elements (e.g. a plot point in a novel’s

narrative arc). The psychology of form requires attending to a sequence where any of its parts urge toward another. The same object can be cast into either of the two “psychologies,” depending on the construction of its expression and orientation. Any given expressive element (e.g. a historical character) or subelement (e.g. the historical character saying “farewell cruel world”) can be constructed to be attended to as interesting-in-its-own-right (e.g. a historically accurate transcript of speech) or attended to as part of a sequence to be completed (e.g. the dramatic event that *follows from* these words). The psychology of information makes *objects for* attention, and in a psychology of form draws people into a *path of* attention. The difference is a matter of emphasis, since each contains some of the other. The distinction highlights how any given element is put into a form with varying ratios of attention to information and form.

A ratio of formal/information attention is brought upon various forms that inhere in the presentation of any subject matter. Anything with coherence or meaning will have an arrangement of parts to make it intelligible. The necessary sequencing that underlies meaning derives its character by its relationship with “parallel processes which characterize experience outside art” (143). We environmentally experience varieties of sequence and register them in orientation’s formal equipment: “the accelerated motions of a falling body, the cycle of a storm, the gradations of a sunrise, the stages of a cholera epidemic, the ripening of crops” (141). The symbol, Burke’s term for representation *writ large*, is “the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience” and “the artist, through experiencing intensively or extensively a certain pattern, becomes as it were an expert, a specialist, in this pattern (154). The forms of experience stored in orientation are the material basis for interpreting forms of communication. Each communicative act “re-embodies the formal principles in a different subject-matter” and thus form “is a way of experiencing” (143) imposable upon any object of attention.

This concept of form pertains to any domain or kind of communication. Burke writes about how music bears repetition much more than prose text. Without any note meaning anything informationally, music exemplifies a composition driven by gratifying sequences of appetites within the psychology of form. Works formed to a psychology of information, such as a dictionary, are less gratifying upon repetition without the fulfillments of syntactic structures. The dictionary can be given a psychology of form, however, by sequencing randomly chosen words into sentences.

Beyond form's application to particular music and dictionaries, most all representation is metaphor, a carrying over from the sense domain to the symbolic domain. Language itself "is a way of experiencing" through symbolic material that enables the reformation of objects and their recasting into new forms. An apple becomes sequenced with doctors, school teachers, and worms. The linguistic malleability of "apple" ripens it for reuse in any newly constructed form. As such, it has a corresponding attentional pattern materialized in orientation and a basis for further attention effects from its symbolic interventions.

These two psychologies of information and form contribute to a hermeneutic of attention, highlighting how attention makes its objects and how attention moves through objects. Emphasizing the informational aspects makes things for attention, which are increasingly bordered, complete, contained, and do not direct where attention moves thereafter. The sequenced, formal aspects highlight the signpost quality of attention that makes objects incomplete in itself because permeable with other objects, urging attention down a pathway of ordered sequence. This might conveniently analogize to the semantic (informational) and the syntactic (formal) qualities shared in any given word. As with a large knife on the kitchen table,

attention engages it with parallel forms of what is (a weapon or a utensil) and what it sequences with (a murder or dinner scene).

These two “psychologies” visit upon infinite types of expressive form, each with parallel attentional forms. Of the endless particular structures of arousal and fulfillment, Burke details five basic categories of form common to communication. Each configures a different kind of formal structure that fosters a parallel form in audience attention.

The first two are *progressive forms*. Syllogistic progression moves deductively like a murder mystery or mathematical proof where “given certain conditions, certain things must follow” (CS 124). The corresponding form of attention is congruent to the logic involved. Knowing the premises allows anticipatory inference where “the arrows of our desires are turned in a certain direction” (CS 124). Qualitative progression works similarly but by readiness rather than necessity. It develops as “the presence of one quality prepares us for the introduction of another” specifically regarding being “put into a state of mind which another state of mind can appropriately follow” (CS 124). The remaining three categories of form are not progressive and have different structural relations to its syntax.

*Repetitive form* involves “the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises” and “the restatement of a theme by new details.” It is “basic to any work of art, or to any other kind of orientation” for the necessary repetitions to create pattern from sequence (CS 125). Any particular grouping (the fish hook despite different bait) arises from repetitive form. The amassing of differing details affirms a principle underneath them. Its corresponding mode of attention is much less inductive and preparatory for sequence and more identificatory of a sustained unification throughout the range of details. Repetitive form, “applies to all manner of orientation, for we can continue to discuss a subject only taking up in turn various aspects of

it.... One talks about a thing by talking about something else.” For example, “we establish direction by co-ordinates, we establish a curve by three points, and thereupon can so place other points that they will be intercepted by this curve.” (CS 141)

*Conventional form* establishes sequences of expectations set by arbitrary convention such as a symphony, sonnet, or limerick. In these cases, “form appeals as form” rather than an emergent logic from its parts. Burke notes conventional form’s difference from the other three forms by its early activation through foreknowledge prior to reading the text. The mode of attention corresponds to whatever entailments are held through convention (e.g. a key change in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, a rhyme scheme). Thus conventional form’s arousals and fulfillments operate less in increments of the text and more across the whole text, determinable upon reaching its end. To the degree any other form becomes well known, “Any form can become conventional and be sought for itself.” (CS 126-127)

*Minor or incidental forms* are smaller, component forms within larger forms, such as metaphor, paradox, reversal, contraction, series, chiasmus, etc. Each form has its own characteristic structure of desire and fulfillment, and own characteristic structure of attention. Minor forms “are based upon our modes of understanding anything; they are implicit in the processes of abstraction and generalization by which we think” (CS 142).

Attentional and interpretive effects arise from the formal decisions against the background for formal expectations. An example is the conventional form of a murder mystery told through the minor form of reverse-chronology (such as the film *Memento* [“Nolan”]). The genre of the text establishes expectations of clues progressively converging on a solution but now with inverted event structures to fulfill mystery-solving logic. The syllogistic progressions of mounting motives into actions traverse events through the storyteller’s time-shifting attention,

which invokes in the audience abductive instead of deductive logic. One such formal decision to reverse chronology creates many changes in the attention situation of the communication, such as attention being directed to the storyteller's resequencing motives and implications for shifting the story's time. Many more formal structures collide with orientational structures of the audience, genre, and narrative to create a multiplicity of traceable attentional effects.

Such interplay of forms illustrate the generation of attentional forms that are not imitative of environment. While many forms are rooted in environmental experience—natural and technologic—they also provide conceptual forms of symbolic conception that are not found in the environment. For example, learning the minor form of paradox enables attention to observe and create paradox. The symbol fossilizes a moment of experiencing (i.e. the experience of paradox, “contrary opinion”) and abstracts a general paradoxical-izing pattern impossible elsewhere. It enables the seeing of paradoxicality, the sequence of which is activated before it finds fulfillment. Burke stresses this as the inclinational aspect of orientation: “a capacity to function in a certain way is not merely something which lies on a shelf until used... A capacity to function in a certain way is an obligation so to function (CS 155). The more one ingrains a given pattern of experience and its related symbolic form, the more we may expect that person to attend through that mode. Forms and their inclinations accrue into orientation the more they are used, strategically and effectively. The symbol and its oriented forms connect to orientation by strategically mediating both experience and representation. Burke writes that “the symbol appeals either as the orienting of a situation or as the adjustment to a situation, or as both” (CS 156). The strategy finds appeal by 1) the symbol construing a situation attuned to the forms of understanding in a given orientation and 2) the symbol adjusting *the person via orientation* to a situation. Forms orient a situation by sequencing meanings into a single symbol while they can

adjust orientation to suit a situation. Symbols are formed to mediate orientation and situation in order to service each's recalcitrance.

Thus far we have established how orientation includes things, relations, and forms, as they comprise patterns of experience. Each provides vocabulary for describing how symbolic structures materialize in oriented mental counterparts that structure attention. The interaction between symbolic form and attentional form is a dramatic aspect of ecology and any situations of communication. While individuals choose some of their attention, they are ever subject to various materializations circulating in socialized symbols and forms. Everything attended must be selected and sequenced as things and forms. The drama of attention materiality is the negotiation the symbols situationally materialized and the orientation brought into their contact.

#### **3.2.4 Motives**

The symbol is “a verbal parallel to a pattern of experience” with form oriented into both “experience” and “its verbal parallel.” Symbols and their forms shape attention to *the what and how of experience*. Motives are a class of symbol that, like form, accrues with orientation and structures ways of attending to human action. They attribute to an action what someone is doing and why they are doing it. It shapes attention to the *whys* and *oughts* of action. Motives are necessarily linguistic and socialized by the language of a group. A terminology of motives orients a person “not only as regards what he should and should not do, but also as regards the reasons for his acts” (PC 20).

In putting an account of motives into language, “we characterize a situation with reference to our general scheme of meanings, [and] it is clear how motives, as shorthand words for situations, are assigned with reference to our orientation in general” (PC 31). Burke writes



that the phrase “a man glanced back in suspicion” (PC 31) positions suspicion as the man’s motivation, invoking “a complex set of signs, meaning, or stimuli not wholly in consonance with one another... danger signs, reassurance-signs, social-signs” such that the word “suspicious” functions as shorthand for a situation itself. Orientation provides the equipment for linking suspicion to its context in such a way that we already know the basic *form* (the arousing and fulfillment of expectations) of the man’s experience and *form* of the communication accounting for it (expectations for representing the event).

Motives are materializations for the socialized/oriented attentions to the why and ought of action. They pervade attention even in absence of their expression. For example, “she looked upward.” The three words in isolation create a palpable absence and a tension over why she looked up. As account, narrative, or statement, it *feels* incomplete. Regarding human action, we cannot know much of what an act is without knowing something of why it occurred. *She looked upward ...in suspicion, or ...to stretch, or ...into divine light, or ...for the ophthalmologist.* Each symbolically enables attention to different “whys” through enthymematically invoking orientation. When inferring the necessary *whys* of action’s *whats*, different orientations will route attention through different implicit inferences. The imperative to “do the right thing” highlights how the phrase—or any symbol—only makes sense in reference to orientation.

Naturally, the languages of motives are socialized by the verbalizations of a group. Burke is careful to conceive motive pragmatically and outside its realist or nominalist notions. Rather than assert that motives exist prior to language or only in language, Burke (and this inquiry into attention) need only concern how actions and accounts of actions influence each other. He writes, “To discover in oneself the motives accepted by one’s group is much the same thing as to use the language of one’s group” (PC 20-21). Whether the account of motive comes

from magic, divinity, neuroscience, free will, and so forth, any “vocabulary of motives current among one’s group is about as self-deceptive as giving the area of a field in the accepted terms of measurement. One is simply interpreting with the only vocabulary he knows” (PC 21). In doing so, “one is stating his orientation,” and living, thinking, deciding by the terms by which he understands, justifies, and directs his actions (PC 21). The particular expectations that motives arouse depend on a group’s orientation. How motives direct attention to the *whys* and *oughts* of action in turn make orientation observable in language.

Also materialized in a vocabulary of motives is the connection of what *ought* to be done and a way of achieving it within the social-symbolic environment. Glancing back in suspicion implies that the looking services the danger signs, reassurance-signs, and social-signs coded in orientation. It also links suspicion to a mode of attending to the signs in a manner oriented to related situations.

It is through the use of motives that we learn how “an orientation is a schema of serviceability” to the symbolic environment (PC 21). A vocabulary of motives orients people in a given environment to available actions, most commonly about pleasure, service/disservice, benefit/danger, and praiseworthy/blameworthy (PC 21, 22). “Every orientation,” Burke writes, “involves a pleasure principle, but not as something opposed to a reality principle. We characterize the signs of experience mainly with reference to pleasant and unpleasant expectancies” as they are linked to programs of action to service those expectancies (PC 21). To look out of suspicion is to act serviceably to remedying an unpleasantness. We may say someone was motivated by suspicion without need to assert the reality of suspicion, the suspicious groundings in mind, or any empirical recourse. Burke’s position is functional: we live by the story that suspicion motivated the looking, we find the story fidelitous to the pattern of

experience, and we act and think by this level of accounting for action. To say the man looked over his shoulder auspiciously is to shift the location of motive, alter the implied situation, and direct attention differently into what is left unstated.

Motives, like form, are a part of orientation that name patterns of attention to action that are materialized in symbols. Motives express parts of orientation's mapping of human actions through implicit narratives of why people act the way they do. These maps of human action "...are not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions of what reality is" (PC 35). Since orientation stores the means to functioning in such interpretive frameworks, what gets deemed "reality is what things will do to us or for us" in a given terminology (PC 22). Thus one's vocabulary of motives will form attention to action along the maps in orientation, and it will also imply that the maps assist our navigating the symbolic environment.

Since motives are interpretation, they are subject to debate and rhetorical treatment. The choice of interpretation and its impingement on orientation is a rhetorical issue, of matching symbol to orientation for a desired effect. Burke writes, "any explanation is an attempt at socialization, and socialization is a strategy; hence in science as in introspection, the assigning of motives is a matter of *appeal*—and the distinction between a Pharisaic account of one's motives and a scientific motivation of one's argument may involve merely a difference in the scope of the orientation within which the tactics of appeal are framed" (PC 24-25). Motives are believable or unbelievable in reference to the implicit codes of a group's knowledge of shorthand situations. The attention brought to a motive is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence to the motive but rather a richer interaction of decoding the unsaid (looking over a shoulder suspiciously or

auspiciously) and contextualizing it with orientation's schema of serviceability for the same situation.

Further, "a motive is not some fixed thing, like a table, which one can go and look at. It is a term of interpretation, and being such it will naturally take its place within the framework of our Weltanschauung [worldview] as a whole" (PC 25). Through the process of communication, we discover orientational differences and can respond to them. One may choose alternatives, invent adjustments, and readapt to changes in environment.

Dramatic ecology concerns how materializations of symbols coalesce into schema of services for the symbolic environment (e.g. propriety). Such symbolized schema may even service the technological ecology (e.g. media literacy). In both cases, the symbolic form and motives necessarily direct attention to oriented conclusions. Different orientation forms attention to different observations. The *dramatic* material of an attention situation thus involves the *differences* between orientations and ensuing attentions. The ongoing changes in ecology become absorbed into orientation through re-orientation.

### **3.2.5 Re-Orientation**

Differences in orientation create the drama of attention situations and communication generally. When people talk, their orientation is materialized in symbol. Michael Calvin McGee created the concept of the ideograph to note words that derive most of their meaning from orientation ("The 'Ideograph'"). Words such as "justice" and "freedom" mean what their orientation supplies into the word. Most all words are comprehensible in reference to orientation, at least for their connotation, association, and social uses.

The concordance of orientations between people is a paramount issue for an attention situations' dramatic materiality. Differences in orientation between communicants will form attention to differently in response to the same words. Orientational differences structure communication before the moment of utterance. This is part of the materiality of symbols: "Action requires programs—programs require vocabulary. To act wisely, in concert, we must use many words. If we use the wrong words, words that divide up the field inadequately, we obey false cues. We must name the friendly or unfriendly functions and relationships in such a way that we are able to do something about them. In naming them, we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in the attitudes there are the cues of behavior" (ATH 4).

Communication, or any concerted action, works by "words that divide up the field" in such a way to "obey cues," "form our characters," and guide behavior. This occurs through orientation's entrenched symbols that are recalcitrant to change. Any communicative attention situation presents the problem of orientational concordance, for example, in what is meant by guiding notions of "best," "favorable," "fair," what "ought" to be done, and each of their opposites. Orientational discordances can be responded to by recognizing orientational issues, changing orientations, or modifying parts of orientation.

The prospect of changing orientation poses an issue at the juncture between orientation's recalcitrance and its continually evolving nature. Re-orientation occurs when symbols divide up the field and form characters and actions in ways unbecoming of intended programs of action. When "the conditions of living have undergone radical changes since the time when the scheme of duties and virtues was crystalized, the serviceability of the orientation may be impaired. Our duties may not serve their purposes so well as they once did. Thus we may no longer be sure of

our duties, with the result that we may cease to be sure of our motives. We may then be more open to a new theory of motivations than we should be at a time when the ideas of duty were more accurately adjusted to the situation” (PC 21). Such adjustments usually occur in times of conflict and change (PC 30), which is a hallmark of contemporary times. 21<sup>st</sup> century life, if not modernity, has been characterized by a perpetual state of conflict and change, constant perceptual revolution, and rapid re-orienting (Crary 13, 48; Beller 39, 44; Berman 19-21). Since this dissertation responds to needs called forth from discourses of technological, cultural, and communicative changes, the three-dimensional meta-framework of attention is intended to guide continual thinking about attention through such changes. Dramatic ecology’s vocabulary is most readily visible during shifts of re-orienting.

We may observe changes to orientation by their instantiation in the accounts of sequenced events. This comprises how “some things happen *in spite of* others, some *because of* others, and some *regardless of* others (35). Shifts of orientation result from the re-grouping of how things occur *because of*, *in spite of*, and *regardless of* each other. Burke aptly summarizes how orientational change is linked with language change and attentional change:

Such shifts of interpretation make for totally different pictures of reality, since they focus the attention upon different orders of relationship. We learn to single out certain relationships in accordance with the particular linguistic texture into which we are born, though we may privately manipulate this linguistic texture to formulate still other relationships. When we do so, we invent new terms, or apply our old vocabulary in new ways, attempting to socialize our position by so manipulating the linguistic equipment of our group that our particular additions or alterations can be shown to fit into the old texture. We try to point out new relationships as meaningful—we interpret situations

differently; in the subjective sphere, we invent new accounts of motive. Since both the old and the new motives are linguistically constructed, and since language is a *communicative* medium, [this matter takes] us from orientation, through motivation, to communication. (PC 36)

The linguistic texture forms by the physical, symbolic, and social environment, and creates long-term forms of attention endemic to it. Burke writes, “given any pronounced social structure, there will be a ‘psychosis’ corresponding to it. That is, there will be a particular recipe of stressings and understressings peculiar to the given institutional structure. And the tendency of the culture will be to see everything in terms of this particular recipe of emphases” (GOM 113).

Examples include William James’ term “interest,” Dewey’s term “occupational psychosis”, and Veblen’s term “trained incapacity.” Each characterizes a developed feature of orientation’s under- and over-attendings that arise from “How a society’s way of life affect its modes of thinking” (PC 3). These forms of “*pronounced character* of the mind” (PC 40) result from how “a tribe’s ways of gaining sustenance promote certain specific patterns of thought which, since thought is an aspect of action, assist the tribe in its productive and distributive operations” (PC 38). Burke notes the overstressing of a competitive instinct in capitalist cultures and the shared purpose in communist cultures (PC 40). He postulates the “psychoses” of his time, the United States mid-twentieth century, to include pre-occupations with money (PC 40), technology (PC 44), and competition (PC 41) and their sprawl “into other aspects of tribal culture.” These orientational elements canalize attention to certain objects (e.g. money) by particular relations (e.g. individual competition). Because these orientations affect the

individual's attention, "this condition affects the nature of communication, both scientific and artistic" (PC 3).

Orientation's sedimentations and proclivities comprise a way of being and way of attending in the world. The concept helps trace out the long-term, cultural ways of attending that cross-cuts situations and intersects each with the accruals from the past. It also pertains to momentous and individualistic ways of attends that inflect orientation situationally, adapting some part of it for dramatic interchange. Dramatism's vocabulary for the accrual and carrying of symbolic materializations illuminates the orientatedness by which we attend to of things, relations, form, motive, interest, psychosis, and incapacities.

### **3.3 CONCLUSION: THE MATERIAL DIMENSION IN DRAMATIC ECOLOGY**

This chapter has advanced the heuristic of the attention situation in order to create a communication-centered way of conceiving attention's relation to material situation. I introduced several notions of materiality as a dimension to attention. By myriad ways outlined, they form cross-situational processes whose outcomes constitute attentional form. I have focused the material dimension of attention upon the paradigms of dramatic ecology to outline attention's inextricability with material aspects of communication. Drawing from the concepts of McLuhan's materialities of ecology and Burke's materialities of dramatism, dramatic ecology can bring them into complementarity, enabling us to generate situated insights about attention processes.

McLuhan's ecology traces how a particular material's dynamics create corresponding forms in attention. Burke's dramatism traces immaterial processes that calcify meaning



structures into the environment, which also create processes that attention operates by. Both perspectives on attention's materiality take as their starting point a broadly inherited material realm ("objects and the symbolic environment"). The perspectives show how the two realms work as mechanisms when tailored to humans ("technology and language"). These materialities can store and maintain within individuals (through "sense relations and orientation") at different sites in the human ("senses and meaning"). Both paradigms examine different but related materialities *through which* we act and think.

Dramatic ecology, together, provides a stereoscopic lens to the ways these materialities configure sensation, thought, and action. The dramatic ecology paradigm invites analysis to how ecological matters and dramatic matters interrelate in a given situation. Any aspect of material ecology touches most any aspect of material dramatism. For example, sense ratios interact with forms of orientation (recalcitrance, form, motive). The aforementioned example of the trout's orientation to food vs. non-food vs. jaw-hurting food occurs within the visual ecology of the fish. Were it to see above the water, its orientation toward baited hooks would simply incorporate the fisherman holding the food on a string. The trout's bio-environmental limitations of its vision (and all other senses) function as the ecological situation of its attention patterns. The recurrent dramas of fishing (e.g. suspense, uncertainty, death for dinner) *play out the parameters* of the situation (including the fisherman's technique exploiting the fish's situated abilities).

To generate more situational insights, we can variably pair concepts from eco-material with drama-material. Most any combination will be pregnant with analytical suggestivity. For example, how do motives (drama-material) relate to media (eco-material)? Sought in the abstract outside of a situation, dramatic ecology offers several theoretical responses: a medium extends a body part into salience and demands a motive to use it in a given way (e.g. "on the

telephone, she listened closely”). In the same manner, a medium narcotizes another body part into disuse and can foster a compensatory motives (e.g. “on the telephone, she painted a word-picture of the culprit). Motives (dramatic-material) are implicitly situational and situation is constituted by media. A dramatic-ecological definition of motives expands upon Burke to *the linguistic account of the general narratives of why people act the way they do when involved with media’s material effects*. Motives implicitly codify an ecology through its associated actions.

The heuristic use of this vocabulary encourages common features of attention formation be sought before they are situationally revealed. Dramatic ecology offers preparatory assistance to theories of attention by collecting common features of attention formation from our theorists’ case studies. This play of generative concepts enables us to ask finer questions that probe the material aspects of attention. For example, what part of an orientation will obsolesce in a given technological environment? Dramatic ecology offers heuristic assistance to situational analysis by generating guiding terms to discover how assemblages of materialities cross-relate to shape attentional patterns, such as with the above trout and telephone examples.

This discussion of dramatic ecology’s material concerns will be similarly conducted for the other two dimensions of attention. As each dimension affects the other in a complex of entwinements, each dimension establishes analytical starting points into attention’s complex formation. When any dimension or its concepts are pursued far enough, they each pass through some of the others. This chapter has noted the tendency of eco-materials such as media to underlyingly configure themselves into the fabric of drama-materials such as (motives and forms that incorporate media effects). The next chapters will explore other situation-specific elements of the symbolic dimensions and counter-situational elements of the intentional dimension.

#### 4.0 THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION OF ATTENTION

*What is culture? The formation of attention.*

- Simone Weil, *Ecrits de Londres*

*How truly language must be regarded as a hindrance to thought, though the necessary instrument of it... Let us then inquire whether economy of the recipient's attention is not the secret of effect...*

- Herbert Spencer, *The Philosophy of Style*

*Our opinions, gently nudged by circumstance, revise themselves under the cover of inattention. ...And graver still, we are sometimes only minimally aware of just which new beliefs we have adopted.*

- Nicholson Baker, *Changes of Mind*

When we think of symbols and attention, we often imagine vessels transporting meaning and delivering themselves into attention. George Lakoff's phrase "Don't think of an elephant" illustrates the difficulty—perhaps the paradox—of not attending to present symbols. The word "elephant" forces some attention to the very thing we are instructed not to think of (3). We think of symbols as an attention-activating device that operates upon us before we get our chance to operate upon the symbol. This sense that symbols can be force fed into us pervades modern life. It happens all around us, despite our wishes against it and our training of attention to deflect

unwanted symbols from insertion. The iconic Times Square barrage of advertisements, a cocktail party's ambient conversations, the omnipresence of recorded music merely begin to exemplify the immersiveness of symbols and our proneness to attending to them. Each setting illustrates the various agencies that symbols can assert upon attention.

The quotations opening this chapter gesture toward this variety of agencies. Weil views the whole of culture as a collection of agencies that shape attention generally (160). Spencer locates the origins of all symbolic effects in symbols' duality of obstructing some thoughts to enable others (4). Baker notes the autonomy of our ideas to change without our control, consent, or awareness (4).

What is the nature of symbols and their agencies on us? What are their roles in the formation of attention? What kinds of environments and actions do symbols create and how do they shape attention? These questions will guide this excursus on the symbolic dimension of attention.

Entire schools of thought have conceived various ways that symbols affect attention for communication. Philosophy of language theorizes language's referential functions (Kripke, Quine, Stainton). Semanticists measure and quantify reference and ambiguity (Hiakawa, Labov). Linguistics, particularly its pragmatics and discourse analysis subfields, chart different structures of linguistic classification by how they function in communicative transaction (Jakobson, Dubois, Johnson). Speech act theory explores symbols' performative abilities to initiate events outside language (Austin, Searle). Critical theorists in the Marxian tradition study how symbols function in power relations (Foucault, Butler). Psychoanalysis in the Freudian legacy conceives symbols in active relation to subconscious processes nebulously accessible to direct examination (Adler, Jung). Sociologists such as the symbolic interactionists, focus on how

symbols facilitate particular interactions and sustain communities (Mead, Garfinkel). In media studies, the Columbia school of administrative media research studies how symbols disseminate through mass media to shape public opinion (Lazersfeld), while the Chicago School (Laswell) studies symbols' instrumentality in mass psychology so that they can be mobilized as political interventions, such as propaganda. Humanistic psychology understands symbols within processes individuals pursue to form their personal identity and fortify it against symbolic attacks that seek to change it (Rogers, Maslow). Poets in various schools, such as the Russian formalists, attempt to maximize aesthesis by arts' use of symbols to recover the sense experience dulled over time (Shklovsky). Far from a synopsis on the matter, this list samples a range of ways that symbols effect the world through agencies beyond meaning alone. Symbols do many things in many ways and affect attention just as variously.

Another such paradigm for symbolic effects is the dramatic ecology I am developing here. It understands symbolic effects as outcomes of larger processes in which symbols function. The paradigm acknowledges commonsense "meanings" that we attend to, such as semantic reference, syntactical structure, and cultural associations. It understands such forms of meaning within other kinds of meanings and other kinds of symbolic functions. Ecology conceives each symbol as an architecting agency to the wider processes in the environment and to people's full-sensory experience. It provides a vocabulary to investigate a symbol's functionality by virtue of its relations with its immediate environment. Dramatism conceives each symbol as a mode of action enabled by a symbol system. It provides a vocabulary to investigate a symbol's functionality by virtue of its place in the shared orientation of a culture.

McLuhan and Burke supply concepts that highlight symbols' dramatic-ecological processes and how they affect attention upon contact. I discuss them from the standpoint of the

symbolic dimension while illustrating their cooperation with the material dimension. Their conception of symbolic effects are fundamentally bound with their material aspects. I open my discussions with each paradigm's underlying process binding the symbolic dimensions with counterparts in the material dimensions. Ecology "metaphorizes" the sense processes in the environment. Dramatism "perspectivizes" social materializations in orientation.

The ecological and dramatistic approaches to symbols have historical precedents. Ecology and drama have been part of communication thought since antiquity. For example, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* suggests an ecological sense of symbols by their material effects on the body: "Speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works" (Sprague 52). Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* contain a dramatic conception of communication. They theorize how aspects of drama pervade many public address. Giving a speech demands requires the drama of the orator to effect a mindframe into his/her audience: "Making the audience attentive is a feature common to all parts of a speech... These remedies are sought everywhere, not just when beginning" (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1415b). These historical precursors lend support to the ecological and dramatic paradigms as helpful theories for approaching a situation through communication.

Where the material dimension outlines cross-situational materialities, this formulation of the symbolic dimension focuses upon symbols' effects as they manifest in particular situations. The material dimension highlights the attention effects of particular symbols' omnipresence in our lives. The symbolic dimension highlights the attention effects of particular symbols' instances of occurrence in a situation.

## 4.1 SYMBOLIC ECOLOGY

McLuhan's environment is material and sensuous but it also accounts for the ways that the symbolic environment is articulated in particular designs. Where material attention ecology outlines the fundamental structures of any symbolic environment, symbolic attention ecology looks to its particular forms. Rather than cataloging all the particular forms of metaphor, this section provides a higher-order framework for analyzing any particular instance of symbolic attention. The general metaphoric character of material ecology is McLuhan's method of analysis for attention. The ways one material domain "carries over to" another material domain creates the synthetic, symbolic dimension of attention. The symbolic realm is constituted by this active, live process carried through concatenations of expressive means. Explored in this section of symbolic attention ecology are language, anti-environments, and attention clichés and archetypes.

McLuhan provides a language that converts things into processes, which describe the experiential in time-bound terms. Attention operates through material and symbolic processes in such temporal dynamics.

### 4.1.1 Metaphorizing the Material

Symbols, seen ecologically, are a special part of the environment, one in which the symbol and environment maintain continuous, fluid interchange. The materiality of drama, addressed in the last chapter, names the ways that symbols materialize through social processes where drama drives the need for refined symbols. Such symbols, seen dramatically, operate in necessary

relation to the part of the society and culture that spawned it. Relatedly, the symbolic dimension of ecology names the ways that the environment extends into symbols. Such symbols, seen ecologically, operate in necessary relation to the part of the environment that spawned it. Attention's responsiveness to symbols can be seen ecologically through a symbol's relations to the environment.

McLuhan's notion of metaphor clarifies the fluidity between material and symbolic aspects of ecology. Media are metaphor of experience and thus attention by virtue of their material configuration of sensation. It is always the case "That our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us..." (UM 21). Any particular arrangement of the senses, media, and "our personal energies" is simply a necessary metaphor of the world. He writes, "just as a metaphor transforms and transmits experience, so do the media" (UM 59). Particular kinds of experience result from how "all media are active metaphor in their power to translate experience into new forms" (UM 57). For McLuhan, "metaphor" is material (as with media) and immaterial (as with language). By conceiving media as metaphor of material and immaterial experience, McLuhan suggests that media are "translators of our nature and of our own natures into amplified and specialized forms" (UM 56).

The metaphorical function that McLuhan connects with the translation of experience operates fluidly between meaning and matter. Language echoes mediated sensations; making sense of experience is linguistically guided. Invoking *sensus communis*' interchangeability of the senses, McLuhan uses the example, "I'll take a rain-check on that." In this example, "We translate a social invitation into a sporting event, stepping up the conventional regret to an image of spontaneous disappointment: 'Your invitation is not just one of those casual gestures that I



must brush off. It makes me feel all the frustration of an interrupted ball game that I can't get with it” (UM 59). McLuhan details symbolic metaphor to illustrate its equivalence with his idea of media metaphor: “As in all metaphors, there are complex ratios among four parts: ‘Your invitation is to ordinary invitations as ball games are to conventional social life.’ It is in this way that by seeing one set of relations through another set that we store and amplify experience in such forms as money. For money is also a metaphor. And all media as extensions of ourselves serve to provide new transforming vision and awareness” (UM 59-60). Metaphor names a general process of carrying-over, but McLuhan widens it to include cross-media transpositions.

McLuhan's four parts of metaphor only begin to suggest how much of the environment—its media, functions, relations, and sensations—are metaphorized by symbols. When one person says they will “take a rain check” they are metaphorizing many things. The rain check's delaying function makes it redeemable later, its symbolization of commitment to fans carries over into a symbol for commitment to the addressee, and its media as a ticket carries over as an enduring entity that exists until used. The amalgamated sense experience of a rain ticket transports through metaphor. Those who have never been issued a paper rain ticket will experience the sensations of the metaphor differently.

The metaphorizing *of* many things occurs *through* many things. “Taking a rain check” is a sense experience at an ecological junction that metaphorizes into language and arrives at different eco-regions different from baseball and rainy weather. We can imagine metaphorizing rain checks by assorted physicalities, words, images, sounds, gestures, or most any communicative means. We may consider how many ecological elements mobilize through such imaginings as a political rain-check issued from a head of state to the public, the freedom for any person to both issue and redeem rain-checks for any interaction, a sun check issued for a rain-

based activity, a rain check on accepting rain checks. These examples suggest the broad range of eco-materials mobilized through symbols.

Symbols, ecologically defined, are the transportation of eco-materials and thus their transformation. Eco-materials are held in language or other media as agents for creating sense experiences. Past sense experiences can be symbolized and uptaken into metaphorizings. The rain check in contemporary usage has metaphorized far away from baseball, paper tickets, and rainy weather, but has mobilized those elements through many transformations through many media. Any such symbol exists already embedded in a series of metaphorizings. The saying, “what’s in a name?,” exemplifies this. What *is* “in” a name is the sum of metaphorizings accrued upon it: histories, associations, social designations, attitudes, allegories, and so forth. A name mobilizes eco-material but also becomes ecological by, for example, what a name *does* within the processes of an environment, such as the social ranking of social titles, assumptions made about surnames, class associations with names, and so on.

Since attention operates through symbols and meanings, the ecological perspective towards symbols stresses their ecological roles. Symbols extend parts of the environment through time and spacing, realizing them in novel situations. Symbols are a mechanism for porting an eco-material out of its physical, literal home and recreating it elsewhere. Symbols transform what it ports into new media, new functions, and new sense experiences. Far more than an instrument of reference or depiction, symbols are agents of ecology itself, assembling and arranging the material environment. This especially involves the body, its immediate situation, and the relations between the two, as the upcoming subsections explore. Ecology’s symbolic dimension concerns how symbols actively construct parts of material ecology.

While attention responds to these metaphorizings in material and symbol, attention itself can be understood as metaphor, a carrying over process. The attention given to something changes the resulting experience of it. A realist notion of attention and the world conceive each as pre-constituted and the attention as the selected passage from outer to inner. But seen through the ecological construction of experience, attention is just another ecologizing mechanism comprising the immediate environment. Attention *is* the environment, for example, when people gather around a street performer. Attention *is part of* the environment, for example, when an author makes language choices for his/her imagined audience. And attention *determines* the environment in the many ways that we choose how we will consider something and relate to it. A college lecture hall is an empty container for hosting knowledge transmission, but when the lecturer incorporates the room into the knowledge transmission, the environment is attended to as part of the knowledge.

Symbols, in this way, assist in designing environments into situations for attention. Continuing the above examples, the street performer deploys symbols to realize the eco-materials of stage, audience, purchasing behavior, and spatial boundaries, among others. The author writes strategically in aim to transport readers' sense experiences to times, places, and visions outside their actual act of starting at a paper. Through various means, we metaphorize the environment for various ends. To further outline the ecological perspective to symbols and attention, I will outline language's special properties on the body and attention, then common arrangements of symbols, and finally, strategic interventions of symbols.

### 4.1.2 Language

Of the various symbols that localize and modify the wider ecology, language is a special class for its pervasiveness, extensiveness, and characteristic properties for attention. Language reaches into the wider ecology to conscribe it locally. The language present in a given situation, thus establishes a situation constructed from a hodgepodge of ecological materialities. In this sense, language is environmental as a medium and the use of particular symbols is an active agency in constructing the immediate environment.

McLuhan writes that “Every language creates an all-pervasive hidden environment of services. And words themselves are metaphors... that transform meaning by translating one form of being into another” (MFC 48). While the last chapter discussed how language is a material common across situations, this section discusses language’s ecological functions and its effects upon attention. Each word metaphorizes a combinations of meanings, materialities, relations, and functions. Beyond carrying these over to the immediate situation, language actively creates two parts of the environment: sense experience and symbolized experiences.

One of language’s ecological functions is the material construction of the senses, which adjusts the means of experience. Language can adjust the senses in part because language is a full sense phenomenon, regardless of its medium. McLuhan describes language to be “not programs but environments which are hidden from the young learner, and to which, like fish to water, he relates synesthetically, using all his faculties at once” (MFC 50). This obtains for language in general and language in particular since the two are continually “a living organism in constant motion” (EIC 208). The ecological functions of a word accrue by their use in particular situations. The word, “now,” for example constructs a temporal frame in relation to an ecology’s time markers. “Now” can create a period of variable duration and proximity. It depends not

only on ideational meaning, but upon the material ecology it is used against. “Now” written in a mailed letter plays symbols against ecology for a different “now” than the word deployed in conversation. “Now” used across texting ambiguates its temporal frame since the technology introduces uncertain time of reception. The symbol “now” means “right when you get this text” because the ecology of texting creates a temporal fabric that symbols can cut and rearrange. Symbols intervene in ecological processes to remake ecological processes quite independent of the denotation, connotation, and traditional theories of meaning.

Part of the eco-material that particular symbols can invoke and stitch are the materialities of past experiences. Symbols are a “storehouse of communally achieved work, skill, and experience” (UM 136). This occurs in several ways. Language preserves past sensation (e.g. saying “the firecracker: bang”) and can reactivate some sensation related to the stimulus (e.g. the aural experience of “bang,” the instantaneity, the uncertainty of who lit it, etc.). In transporting this sense experience beyond its moment of occurrence, the words recreate it. The word creates a related but entirely different sense ratio and sense experience than its signified. The materiality of the word “boom” is altogether different than that of the loud sound. Language creates the symbol at the intersection of present media (the ink on this paper) and past media (the firecracker), both of which merge their sense experiences into the symbol. Written words “boom,” “bang,” and “bonk” exemplify how “Language, like currency, acts as a store of perception and as a transmitter of the perceptions and experience of one person or of one generation to another. As both a translator and storehouse of experience, language is, in addition, a reducer and a distorter of experience” (UM 139-140).

While symbols in language configure the ecological materialities related to the sense experience, language also retrieves *symbolized* experiences. Language is “a kind of information

retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed” (UM 57). Symbols can bring ecology’s material and symbols into a situation. In doing so, they transpose past experience into the form of symbols. The symbolic form is a particular kind of metaphor that facilitates the mobilization of any eco-material. It is because of this “translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols [that] the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant” (UM 57). The coalescing of the sensuous and *symbolized* elements of ecology comprise the ecological situation attention operates within. The symbol’s ability to remake the attention’s enveloping environment makes the human “able to let go of his [sic] environment in order to grasp it in a new way” (UM 57).

Where most technologies for McLuhan are specialized extensions, language is the general extension of the human *par excellence*. It extends thought bundled synesthetically with other senses and extensions, which creates the most extensive “and most complex artifact, every word of which extends or involves all of his sensory life” (CA 55). All other extensions “are specialized and fragmentary” (CA 56), to which language facilitates depending on the particularities of the extension and its environment. Where language takes effect upon its articulation, our symbols used in a situation are “stuttering extensions of our live senses,” where their relative use results “in varying ratios and wavelengths...” of sense ratios and sense capabilities (UM 130).

Thus language, by its very impositions to sensation, changes experience in the individual and the terms that make his/her situation. The ecological structures it architects upon utterance comprise attention’s situation but also attention’s metaphysics: its environment but also its ultimate ecology beyond the immediate situation. This sense of attention’s metaphysics invokes the synthesized world of meaning and sensation that ultimately guides attention through

situations. No two situations are identical for attention by reference to the ecological continuities of a body, of purpose, and of language's unique convergence of metaphors upon a time-bound situation.

Language and its situational metaphysics for attention are greatly varied. McLuhan notes this, writing that "The patterns of the senses that are extended in the various languages of men are as varied as styles of dress and art." And as a result, they create a "mother tongue [that] teaches its users a way of seeing and feeling the world, and of acting in the world, that is quite unique" (UM 80). Language's ability to establish the environment and its services accounts for why "The greatest propaganda in the world is the mother tongue, that what we learn as children, and which we learn unconsciously, that shapes our perceptions in life" (Probes 264). It structures the field of the senses and mind with an "invisible architecture" (Probes 76).

Language's operations upon ecological processes change the environment attention works in and acclimates to. The ecological approach to the symbolic dimension of attention is discussed here through the particularities of language but can be equally explored in the symbols of image, music, gesture, and any medium of signification. Entire disciplines (such as art history, linguistics, musicology, anthropology, etc.) trace the implicit means by which this occurs. Listing each kind of symbol and its interactions with the environment would be illuminating for the symbolic resources in attention situations. A more expedient theory, however, generalizes common symbolic resources into the ecology of attention. McLuhan offers the cliché and archetype as two ecological concepts to attention independent of the means of symbolization.

### 4.1.3 Attention Clichés and Archetypes

With symbols understood by their function in the wider ecology, McLuhan's concepts of cliché and archetype exemplify two kinds of general eco-functions that are separate from any particular material or meaning. They isolate purely symbolic operations enacted through an environment. Their operations upon the environment in turn condition attention through their conditioning of the immediate environment.

McLuhan bundles configurations of sense ratios into categories of "cliché" and "archetype" as types of "stock responses" to recurring situations' forms of inattention. He writes that "anything that can be observed about the behavior of linguistic cliché or archetype can be found plentifully in the nonlinguistic world" (CA 20). McLuhan expands the two literary terms, basing their definitions upon common sense patterns rather than upon hackneyed symbols. Cliché and archetype are the perceptible "content" or "effect" of underlying sense configurations vesting the environment's hidden grounds. What makes a cliché or archetype is not what something is but rather how it functions for attention.

Clichés are McLuhan's name for repeated forms of perception induced by an arrangement of both symbol and material. He relocates the cliché, moving it from a feature of an object to an effect in the individual. He also adds the material dimension to the definition, making the cliché a repeated meaning *in repeated material*. He writes, "our perceptions themselves are clichés patterned by the many hidden environmental structures of culture... cliché is not necessarily verbal, and that it is also an active, structuring, probing feature of our awareness" (CA 54, 55). Etymologically, the term comes from printmaking where it referred to the crafting of the die: "to strike melted lead in order to obtain a cast" (CA 54). The cliché forges that which would be reproduced in a material. Any material, such as that discussed in the



last chapter, is clichéd by its casting material into a common form. McLuhan's wordplay envisages this concept as the cliché-ing of audience: "The boy returned home with a cliché on his face... [since] the dictionary defines cliché as a 'worn-out expression'" (CA 54).

Clichéd arrangements of symbol and material create clichéd patterns of perception. This combination functions to stabilize into the ecology a pattern of sensation. As such, the sense pattern is the basic unit of attention in the ecological paradigm that is metaphorized through our *arrangement* of technologies and symbols. The sense pattern is what symbols transport and transform. In this ecological approach, the sense pattern is the symbol of the senses. Rather than pair signifier and signified, ecology pairs perceiver and perceived. This sense-symbol is an ecological construction of attention.

All communication technologies are cliché for their recurring form of perception. So too are most words. The effect of cliché on attention depends on the sense-symbol's relation to the wider ecology: "Initially any cliché is a breakthrough into a new dimension of experience" (CA 58). However, the effect of the same perceiver/perceived symbol changes with repetition. Cliché's initial sense-activations diminish until the sense pattern occurs at a waking level of sleep. Cliché, generally, is a moment of perceptual daydream: attention follows the same symbolized pattern but with diminishing sensory awareness.

The dialectics of symbol and material leave residua in our language and modes of attending that remain as "sensory extensions of deep human significance even when they have lost their functional survival value." McLuhan cites examples of clichés involving the use of dogs in hunting to illustrate this dialectical origin of clichés and how "verbal residues from man's primordial technologies illustrate the way in which cliché develops" (CA 56). These include: "a bone of contention," "his bark is worse than bite," "love me, love my dog," "to throw

off the scent.” All of these sayings are formerly practical insights that have detached from their context as pre-phrased generalizations. McLuhan colorfully explains how clichés arise from dramatic ecologies of media use:

Any extension of man’s sensory life such as the dog, or the motor car, imprints numerous clichés on any language, extending its range of probe. All media of communications are clichés serving to enlarge man’s scope of action, his patterns of association and awareness. These media create environments that numb our powers of attention by sheer pervasiveness. The limits of our awareness of these forms do not limit their action upon our sensibilities. Just as the rim-spin of the planet arranges the components of high- and low-pressure areas, so the environments created by linguistic and other extensions of our powers are constantly creating new climates of thought and feeling. Since the resulting symbolic systems are numerous, they are in perpetual interplay, creating a kind of sound-light show on an ever-increasing scale. (CA 57)

Apparent in his explanation are the synesthetic “climates of thought and feeling” that result from environmental clichés’ numbing of attention. To the degree that symbols detach from their multi-sensory origin (e.g. “a bone of contention”), they become cliché and anesthetic. They operate without insight to the situation or a sensory jolt of activation. The symbolic cliché of this sort is relevant to an environment that is not that of its user. For example, the valediction “sincerely” means “without wax,” which was once a functional mark of authenticity to not seal the envelope of the message. The cliché, with wax seals now obsolete, invokes no sensory extension to technology or the body beyond an affect or attitude at best. At worst, its conventionality proliferates its use to the most bureaucratic or hostile insincerities, which would not be possible were the phrase remade to reveal its actual environment: “and with the formal

conventions of antiquated letter writing, I bid you adieu out of convention that does not suit email but resonates with the earnest tone of the luddite elites who oversee us.” A probing farewell, to say the least, for its turning attention to the tensions between the immediate forum and its clichés from yore.

Clichés shroud people in a pall of anesthesia that masks their immediate environment: “These hidden symbolic systems are completely phony, or resonating pseudo-events of our own manufacture...” (CA 57). They make the environment, first as a breakthrough of the senses, then as breakdown. Clichés are parts of the symbolic environment that are obsolete to the material environment’s developments.

Additionally, cliché “performs multiple functions from release of emotion to retrieval of other clichés from both the conscious and unconscious life” (CA 55). As a recurrent form of perception that was once vivid or insightful, clichés signal a fossilized mode of attending that is out of accord with the current environment. Their symbolic form as sensory activation contradicts their sensory effect of numbing. Clichés thus carry a tension and dialectical progression from insight to non-sight: “The simplest definition of cliché is a “probe” (in any of the multitudinous areas of human awareness) which promises information but very often provides mere retrieval of old clichés” (CA 55). This sinkhole of clichés urges a recasting of the material into a breakthrough back from non-sight to insight. This dialectical cycle of perception operates through clichés that cross cut technologies (material processes) and meaning (symbolic processes). As such, cliché offers attention analysis a functional concept that emphasizes common patterns of attention resulting from the intermixings of material and symbolic processes.

Complementary with his concept of cliché, archetypes are another way of tracking

attention shaped by media. McLuhan defines the archetype (roughly meaning “first-pattern”) akin to Jung’s definition as “living entities, which cause the praeformation [sic] of thought” (CA 22). They are containers, physical and conceptual, that house clichés. They are conceptual fields of attention within which meaning and clichés arise. Considering media as bodily extensions, “a cliché is a unit extension of man, an archetype is a quoted extension, medium, technology, or environment” (CA 21). McLuhan offers as examples, “a flagpole flying a flag, a cathedral adorned by a stained glass window, pipeline carrying oil, cartoon with a caption, story with an engraved illustration, advertisement of a perfume with a sachet of perfume, electric circuit feeding an electric log fire, ship with a figurehead, a mold and its casting” (CA 21). Each of these formations is a specialized retrieval system for a class of clichés. These examples of archetypes “stress the normal tendency of a cliché to cross-quote from one technology to another” (CA 21).

The archetype and cliché are hermeneutic concepts for the symbolic dimension of attention. They conceptualize two *kinds of* relationships among symbolic meaning that guide paths of attention. The flag as archetype is “a retrieved awareness or consciousness” as a field of expected and probable meanings unique to the cluster of concepts contained in flags (CA 21). Just as attention parallels material form (e.g. car-shaped attention), it also parallels symbolic form (e.g. flag-shaped attention). An affordance of the symbolic dimension of attention is a symbol’s relations to other symbols. The configuration of these symbolic relations pre-structure attentional forms. The flag operates by its reliability as a container for clichéd meanings. An unknown flag raised on a flagpole deprives the signification of clichéd flags and reveals the flagpole as a medium. It has an idiosyncratic meaning system, pairing particular flags with their relative height, relative to a larger context (e.g. wartime, boating). Without any particular flag,

the flagpole retrieves a flagpole consciousness brought into the attention of a flag. Flagpole consciousness is a form of awareness clichéd from the material medium in tandem with its symbolic system. Together, its accompanying form of attention can detach from proximal flagpoles and become a form of attention taken into any matter. In Pittsburgh especially, a curbside chair can be attended to as a flag claiming possession of a parking space. Viewed as cliché, a chair leads attention to heed its stylistic typification, its market value, and its place within a ritual for sitting. As archetype, a chair leads attention to heed the range of its common uses, the people who would sit on it, and the locations it would reside. Visible tattoos function like flags when the body's skin functions as archetype for retrieving clichés.

The archetype itself can be cliché. Bringing flagpole-attention onto a chair or body turns them into “a retrieved cliché—an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché” (CA 21). The archetype need not be cliché, for example, when attending to something archetypically (e.g. human expletives as animal sounds) or configuring something into a cliché retriever (e.g. trash arranged as art). A novel communication medium is initially archetype and not cliché. It retrieves clichés of prior media through the not-yet clichéd orchestration of material and the senses. Once that technology becomes obsolete (e.g. a telegraph), it reverses to cliché without archetype.

Cliché and archetype thus give a timely character to the formation of attention. The tendency for something to function as cliché or archetype will pattern attention accordingly. A situation can emphasize one over the other. One may bring cliché or archetypal attention into something. Conversely, a media, symbols, and context can shape the cliché/archetypal modes of attention. The attention situation's symbolic dimension is the meeting of these symbolic forms in mind, media, and meaning.

Cliché and archetypes have two kinds of attentional effects: “The conventional idea of

cliché as anesthetic should be contrasted to that archetype as inducing somnambulism” (CA 15). Clichés repeat patterns of sense perception which numb perception and automate attention through that pattern. Like passing through a toll booth or reading a table of contents, attention to the pattern of sensation *as a pattern of sensation* minimizes quickly, enabling us to function through that pattern without having to attend to it. Thus we can read the chapters without heeding the toll-payment process or how a table of contents relates to the contents. The ability to not feel and not even notice repeated patterns of perception is not inherently good or bad, advantageous or disadvantageous. The anesthesia that accompanies automation is natural for attention, and it enables some abilities while disengaging others. Mapping the automation’s sense-numbing is essential for attention strategies.

The attentional effects of archetypes involve degrees of aesthesis but also degrees of wakefulness. Their retrieval of cliché systems can be overtly aesthetic (e.g. a poem retrieving the senses) or covertly anesthetic (e.g. a flag retrieving other nation’s flags), depending on the clichéness of the archetype. But the archetype itself, as rampant retrieval, brings additional symbols into attention without notice. This particular tendency of archetypes siphons entire domains into the matter attended. The flag of the United States can siphon the textile industry or the phobia of the number 13, ushering a rush of pre-structured clichés to accompany it. McLuhan characterizes the mounting of retrieved patterns of sensation as dreamlike. Attention has a daydream quality to it. The automations of attention accompany invocations of perceptual residua. The simple act of reading a text attends to the surface of the page, grazing across ink shapes as words, in an attempt to attend beyond the words, into realms of meaning. In the mere word “human,” we depart from the word into that which is attended, allowing ourselves to attend to multiple archetypal retrievals approaching our attention like a fluid dream sequence: human as

biota, as fallen angel, as a conscious vegetable, the iconic homo sapiens, the sound of a griping caveman, the smell of body odor, an emblem of folly. We may choose which archetypal system to read the human by, retrieving systems of pattern perceptions. But at the same time, the word itself sends us into somnambulant paths of prior attentions.

Cliché and archetype, as concepts, highlight the attention processes that accompany symbolic form. Language, image, sound, and other signifying media metaphorize experience with decreasing salience upon repetition. Cliché is anesthetic for its sensory deactivation and for how it fossilizes a part of an obsolete ecology. Archetype is sleep, a dreamlike motion of symbols unaware of itself as source to a class of clichés. The pair offers a means of tracing symbol's shaping on attention interdependently with material technological sources. Their observable features are signposts of routinized paths of attention, indicating the well-established patterns of attending through symbolic phenomena.

Charting the effects of cliché and archetypal forms also enables their modification for different attentional effects. McLuhan writes of the cliché originating as probe and dulling thereafter. Modifying a cliché can revive it into new meanings and attentions. He comments that "Textbook cliché ('as green as grass,' 'quick as a fox') may at any moment be sharpened into probe, e.g., "far-away pastures look green," "the grass is always greener on the other fellow," or "crazy like a fox" (CA 15). Each revival engenders its own attention structure through the way that its old metaphor meets a new realm to probe. "Crazy like a fox" redoubles the "crazy like a" cliché with "like a fox" and makes a hybrid synthesis of fox-styled crazy or a fox-amount of crazy. The context of the cliché adds attention bases of meaning: "crazy like a fox" as title of politician Vicente Fox's daring initiate vs. "crazy like a fox" as caution for a malingering manipulator. Since McLuhan's penning, this sharpened cliché has become a dulled

cliché, awaiting reactivation by modification as it recedes from probe to a part of the environment.

Clichés and archetypes exemplify how processes reinvigorate the environment to reveal the environment. Strategically sharpening clichés into probes can “contrive situations that will dislocate the mind into awareness” (CA 63). This is what McLuhan calls art, which helps reveal attention situations in order to discover their attentional resources. Its material is the environment and the formations of dressage. Art arranges clichéd materials so that they break, collide, and tear the routines of automated sensation and renew wakefulness to the processes of sensation and meaning. The means by which art reveals the environment is via anti-environments.

#### **4.1.4 Anti-Environment**

Like clichés and archetypes, anti-environments are a class of operations that configure material and symbol with a different effects upon attention. Anti-environments, also called counter-environments, are fine-tuned probes that play use cliché and archetype to create the effect of revealing the hidden environment. They work by reusing clichés and archetypes provocatively against the environment by violating the norms of media dressage. As a result, counter-environments render invisible processes of environment visible. They can expose the invisible attention routines by instantiating them in the breach and revealing the covert aspects of the environment. Bringing the invisible eco-processes into perceptibility discloses the patterns of perception that have become clichéd into inattention.

Disrupting the conventions of the medium is axiomatic to anti-environments. They can be pursued many different ways. For text, this might include breaks in the line or order of the



linear sentence. Breaking is inventing. Creative typography, for example, recovers the auditory dimension that the visuality of the page suppresses. The particular structures revealed through an anti-environment depend on which ecological processes are altered. They usually involve bringing things together that don't belong together or introducing change where there was fixity.

The clock, for example, offers a rich example of a medium constructed to create temporal environment. The iconic clock—standard circle with an hour and minute hand ticking—links mechanical features to a temporal environment: time is cyclical through 12 equal divisions. The sense of temporality is sequential, incremental, and stepwise with each tick-tock as the smallest unit of time. The device does not force this temporal sense upon us, rather, it facilitates a way of attending to time through the device's properties.

The clock has been made into various anti-environments, each modification exposing something hidden in the regularized environment of the “normal” clock. The word-clock replaces the circle of digits with a grid of words. These words consist of numbers and relations. The grid, always visible, lights up select words to express a different sense of temporality:

**it is** half ten  
**quarter** twenty  
five minutes **to**  
past one **three**  
two four five  
six seven eight  
nine ten eleven  
twelve o'clock

**Figure 5.** Anti-Environmental Clock: Words and Relations

The word-clock instantiates numerical relations rather than express an absolute numerical value. It eliminates the fine resolution of sequenced seconds and its cyclical visuality. Instead, it forces an iterative top-down reading of its surface where a sentential logic connects the illumined words. A spate of other clock designs counter-environmentalize the iconic clock. They involve gravity to relink time back to nature, rotating spirals to express infinite progression, growth of

body hair to mark time since an event, and many others. These counter-clocks retrieve the cliché and modify it into probes. They play our habituated pattern of clock-shaped attention against itself, revealing the systematically unattended parts of the cliché.

Anti-environments are indispensable for assessing attention situations. Not only may we spot them and reap their insights, but we may construct them in order to better discover a situation's available means of attention. This does not have to mean rethinking a mechanical device. As discussed above in 4.1.2 on McLuhan's concept of language, words are environments. For example, saying "welcome" invokes the surrounding ecology into attention: who is doing the welcome (someone on behalf of an institution?), what is it they are being welcomed into (a house? marriage?), how long are they welcomed (a guestly visit?), and so forth. The customary greeting is clichéd into inattention by its environmental pervasiveness. We can explore what is occurring during a welcome by inventing counter-environments to it. Suppose the arriving guests says "welcome" to the host. The host says "welcome to what? This is my house." The guest says "welcome to hosting my crazy family." This inversion reveals a hidden aspect of the saying welcome—that welcoming is a complimentary act. Like hugging, it requires two parties. The finer aspects of a welcome come into attention now: one may issue a welcome unilaterally but can only perform the welcome in mutuality. The relations invoked and the elements of the wider ecology come into perceptibility the more that environments meet counter-environments.

In this vein, most any word, phrase, idiom, and unit of signification is an environment that can be anti-environmentalized. They create modified alternatives that guide attention to the parts of the ecology that are otherwise unattended and unexpressed. The practical aspects of this dissertation require some treatment of how one may apply the various attention theories in order

to discover their own attention situation. Anti-environments are particularly actionable concepts in dramatic ecology that assist in the situated theorizing that the attention situation facilitates. To create the probing counter-environments, it helps to know various strategies to constructing them. The remainder of this section will collect McLuhan's ideas on the general means of anti-environmental thinking that guide toward a situation's available means of making them.

Changes in speed reveal patterns not readily observable in the environment (UM 16, MFC 29, GV 19). In visual media, instant replay's temporal resolution opens up a world of unattended events that were originally missed. Speeding up the same footage makes long-term patterns visible, connecting events too temporally separated to notice as a pattern. Changes in speed outside visual media have altogether different attentional effects. Changing the speed of communication (e.g. dialog or computer networks) changes behavior, mood, purpose, and so on. In any medium, changes in speed remake clichés into probes.

Repetition also reveals patterns of sensation that are otherwise overlooked. Anything continuously re-presented changes the manner of attention even as the object remains the same. Andy Warhol's repetitions foreground the commodification process implicit in a single image of circulated art. Rapidly repeating a word (called semantic satiation by psychologists) defamiliarizes the word into a novel, alien perception. Repetition of attention itself upon an object (which in medical pathology can be classified as fixation, obsession, vigilance, or trauma) is a distinct manner of attention repetition that can de-environmentalize any object. McLuhan writes, "Repetition of any visual pattern or modular form creates a mosaic with nonvisual effects, as the single photographic point of view becomes a multiple, iconic re-presentation. History becomes 'mythic' through time-compression and juxtaposition of events as past, present, and future merge in electric *newness*" (MFC 29).

Juxtaposition and random pairings challenge any of the clichéd sense-patterns that guide attention. McLuhan performs this in *The Medium is the Massage*. He de-environmentalizes with the resources of textualism (images, words, linear book conventions, physical reading conventions) and creates an anti-book. A page written in mirror image requires the reader to hold it up to the mirror and see themselves reading, inserting their face into the visual field of the text. The cliché of reading is rended and juxtaposed with the invisible accessory to textualism: the reader and their eyes. Nonsense pairing of image and caption adjoin the prose paragraphs. During a passage about media reshaping social logic, a picture of a ringed hand is captioned, “30 million toy trucks were bought in the U.S. in 1966” (9). Their resistance to a thematic unity or attentional continuity cause a momentary breakdown of anesthetic somnambulism. The mismatched symbols are reread, with repeated attention and with different attentions. McLuhan calls this a “collide-oscope,” where symbols and material are thrown together in order to scope out what effects ensue and what of the environment gets revealed.

Some broader sources of anti-environmentalism issue from delinquency and anti-social behavior. McLuhan notes, “whoever sharpens our perception tends to be antisocial; rarely ‘well adjusted,’ he cannot go along with currents and trends. A strange bond often exists among antisocial types in their power to see environments as they really are” (MM 88). Those who do not perform the dressage matched with the environment attend through a different social-symbolic schema to the environment. A child’s attention is similarly un-socialized, enabling effortless and accidental creations that socialized adult would not have thought of.

Additionally, naivety creates a kind of attention that is un-environmentalized, unsocialized, and rife with patterns that bring systematic inattention back to others. McLuhan quotes Oppenheimer’s notice that “There are children playing in the street who could solve some

of my top problems in physics, because they have modes of sensory perception that I lost long ago” (MM 93). The “loss” of sense perception is not physiological or embodied so much as attentional and habitual. Learning the dressage makes the environment invisible. Babies and beginners exemplify the immediacy of sensation and untamed imaginations that interact with the environment before becoming homogenized. Any form of naivety creates a perspective counter to the situation as socialized symbols would define it. Those socialized can perceive the situation, those naïve can perceive the hidden environment.

A related source of counter-situational attention is amateurism. Different from delinquency and naivety, the display of dressage mid-development reveals the struggles, imperfections, and gaps between the environment and its pre-socialized behavior. Even in communication (especially music, dance, imagery), “Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental” (MM 93). Consider an open mic event or football in how “Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment.” The virtuoso lets the audience experience the pure song or the pure sport. By contrast, “Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the groundrules of society.” In the amateur we see a person struggling with dressage. The context for amateurs is marked accordingly, such as an open mic or the pick-up game where “The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and to specialize, to accept uncritically the groundrules of the environment. The groundrules provided by the mass response of his colleagues serve as a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly [sic] and unaware. The ‘expert’ is the man who stays put” (MM 93).

Games and gamification keep the object the same but change the approach to the object, opening it up to novel attentions. They are a miniature version of the environment altered for

appeal and new roles. Games simulate situations that “involve the sensory life of a society in a mocking and fictitious way” (WP 168). The simulated environment is unmoored from the environment’s fixities. That the game can “simulate one situation by means of another one, to turn the whole working environment into a small model, is a means of perception and control...” of the environment (WP 168-169). The game becomes “a sort of capsule or live paradigm of any society” (WP 169). Its element of “play throws stress on process rather than product, giving the audience the chance of being a maker rather than a mere consumer” (WP 173). The roles prescribed upon people can position them as cliché or archetype. McLuhan notes of sport that the audience participates in the game “as the environmental cliché” while “the players enact the metaphorical archetype of the wider situation,” just as professionalism showcases pure dressage of the environment (WP 169). Games are the social extensions of human eco-drama (UM 235).

Humor is another anti-environmental strategy to refresh the environment without having to alter it. McLuhan writes, “Humor as a system of communications and as a probe of our environment—of what’s really going on—affords us our most appealing anti-environmental tool. It does not deal in theory, but in immediate experience, and is often the best guide to changing perceptions” (MM 92). The pun brings two domains into immediate juxtaposition, compressing meaning into one hybridization. “The medium is the message” exemplifies this mass-age, mass age, message triplicate, which violates the expectation of singular meaning and traps attention within the multiple perspectives refracting through a single phrase. The pun routes multiple metaphors through the same symbol. Its conspicuousness *as a pun* invites attention into its layers of interacting meaning.

Jokes, too, are anti-environmental. Cloaked by their pleasurable effect, they cut up the routine sequences of attention to rearrange environmental elements into novel combinations.

Jokes “are stabs or probes into the cultural matrix that plagues [us]” (CA 132). The penetrating effect of humor matches laughter to insight. The levity permits attention to aversive matters. Since jokes are made of the environment to show the environment, “anyone can determine an area of social irritation and disturbance by simply checking the areas from which jokes are currently emerging” (CA 132-133). McLuhan often plays the role of joke-er to anti-environmental effect. The clown, trickster, or fool “is a probe.... the clown attacks power. He tests the tolerances for us all. He tells us where the new boundaries are on the changing frontiers of the Establishment. The clown is merciless, without conscience, yet he gets our sympathy because he is a scapegoat” (CIOB 288).

These are some means to de-environmentalize and to create anti-environments. They defamiliarize and alter the environment in order to reintroduce it. They largely retain most of the attention structures learned through dressage. The strategic modifications steer controllably into a disruption of the dressage that reveals the dressage. This renders an element of alienation upon the familiar, susceptible to new forms of attention.

Anti-environments and their generative strategies are important deautomators, bringing awareness back to how “Our perception of times and spaces is *learned*. The same culture will impose the mode of making both time and space on all of its members” (TVP 10). And yet, the environment is semi-perceptible, with effects, percepts, and sensation as the sensible outcomes of larger ecological processes. The role of symbols, seen ecologically, is to render parts of the invisible. McLuhan exemplifies this general idea with an anti-environment of his own, imagining man in space. The environment exerts materially upon him but he does not have a well-suited set of symbols with which to experience, conceive, and act in that environment. The space pioneer “has no means of *imagining* the nature of his own experience in space. Until

artists have provided him with adequate forms to express what he feels in space, he will not know the meaning of the experience” (TVP 30).

Thus anti-environments help detect our environment but are also a necessarily step in continually rendering the environment. Not using counter-environments brings dangers of not detecting environmental processes. Without rendering the environment detectable, we use outmoded anti-environments of diminishing utility. McLuhan writes that “such Anti-Environmental [sic] means of perception must consistently be renewed in order to be efficacious... In an age of accelerated change, the need to perceive the environment becomes urgent. Acceleration also makes such perception of the environment more possible” (MFC 24-25). The range of developments due to today’s pervasive multimedia networked technologies exemplify how the environmental changes are “forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted” (MM 8). Without counter-situations to instantiate the environment, the old environment gets direct attention through anti-environments that no longer probe to expose the environment. Incorporated into the environment, it then acts as a control on the new environment as a mask of the old (MFC 13). When anti-environments no longer grab people’s attention to jolt awareness of environmental processes, they become incorporated as part of the environment.

As attention discourses develop across the disciplines and deploy across applications, we may consider the whole of the “arts and sciences as acting in the role of Anti-Environments that enable us to perceive the environment. In a business civilization, we have long considered liberal study as providing necessary means of orientation and perception” (MFC 13). The arts and sciences are media processes (e.g. texts and chemicals) forged with symbolic processes in the social environment. They provide materials so contrived (e.g. novels and lab experiments) to



probe and express aspects of experience a given environment. As our environment develops technologically, print-based humanities and Newtonian physics function less as orientation to perceive the environment and more as relics of past attentions to past environments.

Another helpful anti-environment for probing attention situations is the paradigm of dramatic ecology, developed throughout this dissertation. Each provides a symbolic means to a proliferation of means of attention. McLuhan exemplifies how ecology can be used as an anti-environment by postulating a shift from nature to ecology came when “For the first time the natural world was completely enclosed in a man-made container. At the moment that the earth went inside this new artifact, Nature ended and Ecology was born” (“Sputnik” 49). Stratospherically enabled communications capability was a material shift in the environment with conditions that urged shifts in symbolization and the means of attention. He writes, “When processes moved up to electric speeds, it became obvious that ‘everything *causes everything*.’ For every cause there are many effects, just as every effect has many causes; this becomes apparent to those existing in an electric environment of information. Those existing as the content of a man-made environment never cease adjusting it to their own behavior, just as they adjust behavior to their environment” (TT 145). The ecological mode of thought is a set of symbols assistive to attending to these material changes, which are otherwise not directly observable or conceptualized. The anti-environmental use of ecology provides symbolic means to attend to material relations. More specifically, it symbolizes a situation of a fundamentally non-symbolic constitution. Together the counter-situation in tandem with the situation enable a mode of attention, one that fosters “the simultaneous awareness of the interplay of the total field of processes” (TT 233) while maintaining “equilibrium among the components of [the] environment in order to ensure survival” (“Sputnik” 49). “Ecology,” “dramatism,” and “the

attention situation” are similar kinds of anti-environments for their broad symbolization of the technologic, relational, and attentional parts of the environment. As such, they can probe environments heuristically and generate schemas of serviceability.

Anti-environments and these examples gesture toward the general ecological aspects of the symbolic dimension of attention, which involve metaphorizing experience into the image of its mediations. It involves classes of symbols in cliché and archetype, which retrieve symbolic material in groupings. The symbolic dimension adjusts the overall wakefulness to the operations occurring in the material dimension. The symbolic can artfully reveal the inconspicuous effects on attention’s shaping, grouping, and pathways. By these means of remetaphorizing the material with anti-environmental qualities, individuals become capacitated to attend to the dialectics of material and symbol as the underlying formations of attention. Tracing out the strategies of environmental awareness assists the study of attention by observing and creating relations between situations and anti-situations and equips the analyst to pursue anti-environmental modes of analysis.

Attention is shaped environmentally but we often conceive attention in terms obsolete to the present environment. Anti-environmental styled attentions—to symbols and technologies—can reveal the underlying workings to the ecological influences on symbolic attention. They provide a symbolic means to perceiving the hidden environment and a reification of environment for direct attention, which helps to observe in any given situation the available means of attention.

It is through these artful symbolic technologies that we may attend to the sources of attention itself. Without them, we lose the reflexive distance that symbols afford and enable individuals from thoughtlessly following the physicalities of attention. To the degree we do not

symbolize the environment to make it attendable, we resign our attentive abilities to our dressage automations. McLuhan's theories of the material aspects of attention take effect by default unless specialized forms of attention are developed as prophylaxis: "media determinism, the imposition willy-nilly of new cultural grounds by the action of new technologies, is only possible when the users are well-adjusted, i.e., sound asleep" (GV 11). For all the force the environment exerts upon individuals, "There is no inevitability, however, where this is a willingness to pay attention" (GV 12).

Burke's dramatism offers additional ways to further account for the symbol means of attention. Dramatism is a generative source of anti-environments, specifically to the human relations of the environments. Its resources to analyze attention similarly illustrate the formative agency of symbols upon individuals and that it too is only possible when "users are well-adjusted, i.e., sound asleep."

## **4.2 SYMBOLIC DRAMATISM**

McLuhan details the ways that symbols metaphorize ecological structures and create environments through symbols. Clichés, archetypes, and anti-environments reveal these environmental sense-configurations, which pre-structure and shape acts of attention. Through the central constructing process of metaphorizing, symbols construct and articulate the ecology of a situation.

Complementarily, dramatism looks at how symbols construct and articulate actions unique to a cultural situation. Dramatism provides vocabulary for the processes by which symbols create socialized modes of action. This kind of symbolically-endowed action occurs by

invoking the symbols acquired from a wider culture. Actions such as a wink or a *faux-pas* do not exist in the natural or technological environment. They get constructed through the drama played out in such environments where people create actions through symbols. In absence of an orientation and its meanings, a wink is just an eye twitch and a *faux-pas* is an undifferentiated event.

Dramatism, like ecology, stresses its applicability to any act of attention. Symbols suffuse the ecological environment pervasively and combine with it. The resulting symbolic environment endows the ecology additional features that symbols create. We attend to things' meanings and what can be done with them. The symbolic dimension of attention is developed in tandem with the acclimation to the symbolic environment. Dramatic events among people stimulate the need for new symbols and new symbol uses.

As circumstances of material change and symbolic discord press upon people, dramatism reveals resources available for revising the environment through its symbols, which remakes its relations, and changes how humans think and act. Ecology's central mode of creating the environment is through metaphorizing and dramatism's is through perspective. The process of perspectivizing constructs symbolic actions. As the basic architectonic, it extends into structures of increasing breadth. I explain its application to language in subsection 4.2.2, its application to meaning in 4.2.3, and its application to entire discourses in 4.2.4. Each configures different aspects of attention through symbolic phenomena that occur in particular deployments of symbols. By mapping symbol's dramatic structures on attention, these modes of perspectivizing reveals processes that structure attentional effects.

### 4.2.1 Perspectivizing the Material

In dramatism, orientation is the sense of relations acquired from recurring contingencies in experience. Burke's example of the trout developing an orientation to food, non-food, and baited food recounts the symbolic aspect of orientation. Even without a means of representation (e.g. language, image), the pairing of past item with present item, and the pairing of the same item with response, creates an elemental symbolism common to animals that respond to environment and revise judgment accordingly.

Human's characteristic use of language greatly extends and complicates the ways we sense relations. We put into symbols endless orders of differentiation and categorization and store them in orientation. How language crafts the symbols of orientation then becomes part of the oriented way of attending. Symbols' variability to encapsulate relations and experiences opens up new possibilities for how the environment is understood. Dramatism, by stressing social discord's pressure to revise orientation, posits language as the transformer of the symbolic formations that comprise orientation. The wedding of language with experiences in the world makes language a part of the *oriented* world. The great variety of ways that humans symbolize and *can symbolize* a baited fishhook illustrates a profusion of symbolic possibilities. Language, in naming these relations, changes these relations. Language casts a parallel to contingent experience and then divorce from the originating source so that the oriented symbol can be a way of seeing another situation. We can see bait all over, in things and in situations. In this way, language *perspectivizes*. Its use necessitates an oriented way of attending to that which we speak about. We cannot speak of something without invoking our orientation. Any object or relation can be variously remade in symbols, changing the symbolic lens we attend through. Any particular symbol that enables the oriented way of attending is what Burke calls perspective.

Since it is based upon one scheme of symbols or another, “every perspective requires a metaphor, implicit or explicit, for its organizational base... and [any perspective] cannot skirt this necessity” (PLF 152). What he means by metaphor is wider than linguistic metaphor alone. He details how “metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or thatness of a this” (GOM 503). “This” and “that” can be more than linguistic substitutions. He refers to “any thing, pattern, situation, structure, nature, person, object, act, role, process, event” to stand for either the “this” and “that” (GOM 503). Burke’s concept of perspective bespeaks the general metaphoricity between two elements at play. He writes, “the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical” (GOM 504). This means that we may, for example, see an event in terms of a process, or a thing in terms of a situation, or an object in terms of an act. Per-specting “in terms of” can be outwardly linguistic but it need not be: one may see a person in terms of an object, which can be outwardly expressed through images or sculptures. In either case, this non-linguistic metaphoricity evidences how Burke’s “seeing in terms of” occurs at the attentional level prior to any particular medium of expression. The “seeing in terms of” is a way of attending that needs no outward expression at all, but whose expression embodies a particular perspectival attention. With this characteristically broad domain of tenor and vehicle, Burke notes this general metaphoricity inherent to conception and communication. Generally speaking, “to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A” (GOM 504).

Language itself is a perspectival metaphor of sorts, as one “looks through” symbols to see the world and sees the world as the symbols construe it. But further than the word itself is the

underlying metaphor required for its meaning. A perspective taken on *man*, to use Burke's example, is the sum picture of piecemeal relations involved in its oriented conception. In his chapter "Perspective as Metaphor," Burke writes, "As the documents of science pile up, are we not coming to see that the whole works of scientific research, even entire *schools*, are hardly more than the patient repetition, in all its ramifications, of a fertile metaphor? Thus we have, at different eras in history, considered man as the son of God, as an animal, as a political or economic brick, as a machine, each such metaphor, and a hundred others, serving as the cue for an unending line of data and generalizations" (PC 95). Just as the eye inevitably sees a man from a given perspective, so too does language reveal hints of the underlying suggestion of what metaphor we use to conceive man. The linguistic metaphor sets the "terms of," quite literally, that we see through. The particular symbols invoked in orientation or in a situation infuse symbolic constructions into the very act of attention itself. We see our symbols as the world around us: we see a police, not men metaphorized as police.

Perspective infuses symbols throughout attention as its operant metaphor creates the "architecture of thought" (ATH 314). This architecture creates relations and symbolic entities not inherent to the natural environment. Specific to the dramatics of attention, the symbolic perspective specifically "refers to a relationship less purely technical... [but rather] moral or esthetic" (ATH 311). Various perspectives taken on bait will not so much alter attention to *what* it is but rather what *about it is noteworthy to an orientation*. The trout could perspectivize bait as danger, pain, or aversion. Humans can perspectivize bait further as sport, deception, skill, leisure, tradition and so on. The selection of perspective's metaphor will determine where symbols elaborate upon the object of attention. Where the socially inert object of bait can be

variously perspectivized, socialized and dramatic matters compound the moral and aesthetic relationships we see in something when attending through perspective.

By inflecting our attention to the world with orientation, our attention then evidences the symbols operating in a perspective. Perspectives are hermeneutic to revealing orientation's operant symbols. Any account of a referent includes a way of seeing it—a *what* as well as a *how* to the *what*. While perspectives guide how we attend to an object, perspectives are rarely self-evident and are often obfuscated. Burke offers a way of revealing symbols' embedded perspective and how they are operating. Burke's method of perspective by incongruity dissects a perspective and its component meanings. He explains, "a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to another category" (ATH 308). This is done "...by taking a word usually applied to one setting and transferring its use to another setting. It is a 'perspective by incongruity' since [it is] violating the 'properties' of the word in its previous linkages" (PC 90).

Dramatism's fundamental mechanism for mobilizing our orientation to the symbolic environment is perspective, as it plays out in our use of language and in our language-infused attention to the world. The per-specting of "that which we look through" is necessarily conditioned by symbols and the environment we navigate is as symbolic as it is physical. The moral, aesthetic, and relational aspects of attention only exist in our oriented attention to them. This reveals a site of intervention if we wish to alter them. The process of "perspective attention" exists at the junction between orientation (and dramatic pressures for re-orientation) and our deployment of the symbols in discrete acts of attention. Our choice of perspective, whether we choose it or it is chosen for us, constitutes an underlying operation in the symbolic dimensions of attention.



The language and metaphor that drive perspective is not merely symbolic connective tissue linking symbol to referent. Rather, language is a suite of dramatic actions. This is to say that words, sentences, and discourses *do* things. They do many kinds of things that respond to the many kinds of social needs arising from life in the symbolic environment. The dramatic functions of language complicate the perspectives they create and proliferate their forms. These same dramatic functions, outlined in the next section, drive the perspectivizing function of symbols and also operate directly upon other people in a situation who participate in the same symbol system.

#### **4.2.2 Language**

Perspective is a symbolic mode of attention taken into something, shaping how we attend and how a mode of attention differently configures its object. Language facilitates the perspectival aspect of attention. Where ecology highlights language's technological functions of activating sense ratios and retrieving clichés, dramatism highlights language's perspectival recreation of its object. There are several ways in which language carries with it a multitude of operations that influence attention without awareness. Language is attentional by its ever-present influencing of what, how, and why to attend. Burke's theory of language outlines intrinsic operations of language that influence attention beyond denotation, connotation, and its overt referential functions. I briefly discuss the ways dramatism understands language as action.

Language is a mode of action. Burke's dramatisitic approach sees communication as linguistic action, rather than transmission. This approach asks "what is one doing with and through language?" and "what is language doing to us?" This entails the modes of attention required in and for communicating.

Language is hortatory. It creates timely exclamations, rooted in language's essential function for animalistic outbursts and pointed urgings: "look out!" or "move!" Burke recovers this hortatory nature residing within even the most advanced and subtle language. The interest for neutral, non-hortatory language would be no less a form of exhortation to a conduct of a calmer, passive, or distanced conduct. This hortatory dimension to language carries through aspects of attention, namely, the urging of what, how, and how urgently to attend next.

Language is attitudinal. Alongside its meaning, language also conveys what the speaker thinks of the meaning: "we lost *again*!?" Its stresses and moods induce proclivities toward programs of action, implicitly saying "we better not lose again, so improve!" Burke argues that attempts toward neutral, semantically precise language are a special kind attitude pursued for specific purposes. Since every expression has an attitudinal valence, Burke invokes attitude as a continuous dimension to communication that entails a corresponding attention to language's embedded attitudes, independent of the particularities of the speaker.

Human language is based on the negative, the symbolic expression of "not" and "do not." Where nature simply belies what is, symbols offer the special ability to negate and build systems upon negation. This entails attention along a learned collection of opposites in order to think by what is not. The ability to attend to this implicit negativity is inherent in communication and in attending to the unarticulated absences that justify what is present.

Language is ethical. It necessarily inclines some ways over others, through which purpose and ethos are inevitably disclosed. Burke explores "the ways in which, through language, we express our characters, whether or not we intend to do so" (LSA 29). Quoting Coleridge, Burke writes, "Every man's language has, first, its *individualities*; secondly, the common properties of the *class* to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of *universal*

use” (LSA 29). As mentioned in orientation’s ethicizing tendency of attention, people have the tendency to find external counterparts to their inner. These parts of language speak for us and of us. They accompany basic linguistic expression and form an often-tacit aspect of attention.

Language is moralizing. The amalgam of language being attitudinal, hortatory and ethical yokes a moral framework. Language is entrenched in evaluation. An implied “should” inheres. Any utterance urges evaluation of its referent (“*they* are here”). Language taken as fundamentally moral means that making a nonmoral statement is a kind of moral statement, one of non-involvement, tacitness. “The cat is on the mat” attempts a special kind of abeyance of the fundamentally partisan nature of language. “The cat is on the mat... and shouldn’t be” relieves the pressure created by the vacuum of moral deferral. To express an event—mundane or historic—in nonmoral language, Burke writes, does not impinge on Burke’s perspective that all human action, including symbol use, involves ethical matters inescapably, by the nature of language and the inescapabilities of human interaction.

Each of these dramatistic elements to language—action, exhortation, attitude, negation, ethicizing, and moralizing—suggest a mode of attentional effect common to the symbolic dimension of attention. The example sentence, “I don’t care anymore,” impinges upon attention along each of the six dramatistic modes of language. As action, it terminates the actions linked to caring. As exhortation, it intervenes a pattern of caring and urges others to respond to the change. As attitude, it eulogizes in a mood that incipiently resigns. As negation, it opposes something while avoiding espousing something else. As ethicizing, it feeds an ethos of the speaker against the context of the statement. As moralizing, it hints at what should be done by others. In a single sentence, attention is nudged along these six valences that tinge a single verbal gesture. Any one of these dramatistic aspects of language impinges upon attention. Their

implications are symbolic and are attended to as such. Their effects are material. Responses to the symbolic implications are real and durable.

These dramatistic valences are found in any symbolic act, e.g. image, sound, text. Burke's utility for attention lies in his typification of some common means to the symbolic shaping of attention. His focus on language includes these dramatistic valences upon a word, a terminology, a sentence, a scheme, a pentadic way of placement, and most any symbolic units.

The prevalence of these dramatistic impingements foreclose the possibility of linguistic neutrality. Language and symbols are never neutral, given their development via orientation and perspective dialectic to their social environment. Terminologies are a kind of dramatic language attempting neutralization of emotion, attitude, and subjectivities while never completely doing so. Such attempts efface their attentional impingements from conspicuousness, cloaked under an apparent objectivity. But this becomes a special form of dramatistic valence, e.g. of attitude and of action. Attention is still effected by the dramatistic implications of the non-moral stance, the mere observation, and the attempt to speak without acting. Semblances of linguistic neutrality merely obscure from attention their weightings and colorings that Burke advises we recover in symbolic systems.

Viewing language as an assertive force in shaping human affairs, Burke sees even the most objective terminologies operating within larger and often slower forms of human drama that pressure for linguistic neutrality. By recovering language's dramatic origins and dramatic uses within lived life, Burke shows the workings of language that often go unnoticed in moments of deployment. Burke's dramatism and concept of orientation both conceive language as a co-development of the symbolic world, crafted by and for the motives particular to its social realm. With a watchful cautionary eye, his work explores what is occurring in language beyond surface

meaning, apart from intent, and outside awareness. Burke notes how various historically-accrued language inherencies interact with the context of their use. This context brings symbolic valences to bear on “situation,” “orientation,” “perspective,” and into a spectrum of meaning types, which Burke figures as scientific and dramatic meaning.

### **4.2.3 Semantic and Poetic Meaning, Scientific and Dramatic Use**

Burke’s basic way that symbols direct attention and create meaning lies in his distinction between the scientific and the dramatic uses of language. The scientific use quintessentially names. This language defines, describes, and locates, providing the information of what, where, who, when. This is the linguistic equivalent of a postal system’s addressing method. By providing the name, address, and location, “you can effectively isolate one man among two billion... in whatever areas the postal organization prevails, the brief formula generally serves to isolate the desired individual” (PLF 140). The scientific use provides a kind of meaning Burke calls semantic meaning, a stabilizing of word to thing.

Situations that need semantic meaning have engendered entire thought systems based on the “the semantic ideal.” Burke writes that this idea holds “the aim to evolve a vocabulary that gives the name and address of every event in the universe” (PLF 141). Symbolic logic symbolizes language into the semantic ideal, translating natural language solely into its logical content and accounting for every propositional element and its relation to others (LSA 45). It empties the dramatic texture of language except its logical content. The design of the symbolic system is to screen out all varieties of meaning in order to disambiguate the propositional meanings only. Reading past its logical expressions becomes speculative since the symbols hide

their dramatic motivations, leaving a reader to only imagine upon the logical content. An example such as symbolic logic attests to the utility of stabilizing meaning in symbols, assigning clear, distinct names and addresses to everything. But this language does not encompass all the meaning to that which it locates and describes. Much meaning remains unexpressed through the scientific, leaving its real symbolic action present yet obscured for attention. The remaining meaning is expressed by dramatistic usage.

The dramatistic use quintessentially acts. This language, while still informational, *does* things to people, emphasizing in the audience a sense of what to do, how to do it, and why. Through assorted forms, its “essential function” is to convey attitude, which includes what one thinks of the information via “expressions of complaint, fear, gratitude, and such” (LSA 44). This includes the hortatory uses of language such as commands and requests (“watch out!” and “you are hereby summoned”). The dramatic uses of language show it as “an instrument developed through its use in the social processes of cooperation and competition” (LSA 44).

The dramatistic use works by a kind of meaning Burke calls poetic meaning. Its purest form, the poetic ideal, is the opposite of the semantic ideal. It opens up language, adapting linguistic resources to fulfill the necessities and whims across human experience. This language involves figures, tropes, implication, indirectness, strategic ambiguity, perspective by incongruity, indeterminacy, and so on. The poetic ideal “culminates in the kinds of speculation that find their handiest material in stories, plays, poems, the rhetoric of oratory and advertising, mythologies, theologies, and philosophies after the classic model” (LSA 45).

Poetic meaning, Burke writes, “might take many courses, roughly summed up in these three sentences: “Faugh! A chair!” “Ho, ho! A chair!” and “Might I call your attention to yon chair?”” (PLF 143). These encapsulate the main ways that poetic meaning inflects information

with attitude. The chair, informationally unremarkable, mobilizes *the direction of* attitude. The dramatic substance of the utterances is their tenor, a state in the speaker rather than the object it involves. The attitude directed at the chair implicates a set of relations and narratives between speaker, chair, and situation. Attention thus moves differently depending on the attitude inflected upon the information.

The “Faugh!” and “Ho, ho!” foreground the drama active in the utterance, which establishes form in audience attention (i.e. the arousing and fulfilling of expectations). The attitudinal valence urges attention to structure in the form of narrative: why is that person *like this* to that chair? What is this attitude’s origin, its present, and its potential fulfillment? The social drama that is expressed symbolically requires a parallel attention form in order to understand it. The situation that is created by symbols requires a corresponding kind of symbolic-decoding mirrored in attentional form. What is this event *in-media-res*? Once attention takes its form, it inclines toward filling in the narrative, selecting and organizing its parts to account for the attitude.

An account implied by expressed attitude urges attention to move into three directions at once: past, present, future. “Faugh!/Ho! A chair!” directs to the past. Since attitude is the outcome at the forefront of some causal sequence, its expression is a cipher until contextualized. It urges attentional forensics, a mode of attention that constructs narrative from past fragments. At the same time, “Faugh!/Ho! A chair!” directs to the present. Since attitude is a timely state in the speaker, its expression is incomplete and invites a closer look at the state. It urges attentional therapy, a mode of attention that tends to a person’s state without having to understand or intervene. This kind of attention has material outcomes different from that of constructing past narratives to the attitude’s origin. Lastly, “Faugh!/Ho! A chair!” directs to the future. Since

attitude, Burke writes, is inclinational, it contains an “implicit program of action” (PLF 143). Such programs are live and effectual, independent of their behavioral fulfillment. Its expression urges attentional simulation, a mode of attention that invokes sense modalities and infers future events.

These forays into the past, present, and future are realms constituted by symbols and thus have symbolically styled attention dynamics. Past narratives, accounts of state, and simulated actions together converge upon a single moment of attention that *symbolically construes* them. Regardless of any particular construal, the attention situation links particular symbolic forms to particular attentional forms. The dramatic perspective focuses on the socialized aspects of language and their accompanying the forms of attention invoked by reflex and required in order to participate. These social and temporal aspects of attention are constituted and accessible by symbols, which make them multitudinous and variable. Symbolic attention, such as that of attitude, is thus highly rhetorical. The symbols of rhetoric and interpretation find their counterparts in the micro-acts of attention. The very forms of attention too are rhetorically set, as both symbol and audience exert forces to determine what kind of attention deploys. In any given case, a kind of attention obtains by any of many competing alternatives. It occurs within the urgency to respond. It results by the appeals made by symbols within people’s symbolic orientation and relevant schemas of serviceability.

The example of attitude illustrates how any dramatic feature enacts distinct forms of attention related to orientation. The more salient the dramatic valence, the more that dramatic forms of attention are invoked, which operate by the logic and structure of social forms.



Thus, the attitude of “Might I call yon attention to?” is a dramatistic stance of a neutral attitude. It pursues the semantic ideal by attempting a mere attention-directing action. It outwardly minimizes emotion and attitude, leaving no layers of meaning beyond reference. This kind of retrieval of “objective” meaning is still a situated act and no-less of a dramatic stance in the world. Semantic meaning fulfills the will to avoid the ineluctable dramas that information and action are embedded in. By obscuring from attention the immediate drama of the chair’s relations, a new program of relations and configuration of attention can be pursued. If the chair can be attended to de-situated from its immediate situation, it can become symbolically remade. The context is never fully erased but rather strategically ignored in protracted abeyance. Burke argues this is special form of poetic meaning achieved by carefully developed systems of concerted symbols that carefully—poetically—excise real and material valences. To talk only with semantic meaning about war, pornography, or the apocalypse is to exercise the distancing, or de-stancing, ability of symbols.

Burke animates how semantic meaning functions as “an attenuated form of poetry” with its own dramatic and attentional effects. An address system linking word to thing, it denotes “imagery” while suppressing connotation. Its outward form directs attention to definition, referent, identification, and its border. At the same time, it effaces its dramatic embeddedness. This, in effect, takes refuge without naming what it evades. For example, “the chair” can bring to attention “the electric chair” without its tie-ups with death penalty politics or bring to attention “the committee chair” without revealing the speakers attitude toward the person. It is by semantic meaning that, “speech can, and repeatedly does, neutralize, where the occasion requires,” (PLF 166) affording passage through symbol’s dramatistic entanglements. In the din of social drama, Burke suggests semantic meaning is a “secular prayer... exemplifying a form of

consolational dance, all in the tone of perfect peacefulness.” Its ability to sustain denotative images through swathes of scientistically-honed symbols effects attention into “its own modes of hypnosis”: distance, inaction, impartiality, facticity, safety, non-participation, panopticism, empiricity, etc. Burke also suggests semantic meaning as a strategy for renewing orientation to suit changes in an environment. Semantic meaning affords respite from the dramatic bearings on attention, allowing “preparation” and “discipline” for re-orientation. This kind of meaning allows people an escape from being enshrouded in the poetic meanings throughout their orientation. People can use semantic meaning “as a stage, a kind of purgatorial disembodiment helpful for transition from an old poetic vocabulary whose weightings are all askew to a new poetic vocabulary whose weightings will be better fitted to the situations it would encompass” (PLF 167). Of the various uses of semantic meaning, Burke warns of its dangers “only when it is considered as an ideal in itself, rather than as a preparation for new and more accurate weighting, that one need turn against it” (PLF 167).

The agency of symbols encompasses their agency to structure attention and to motivate attention. The mixtures of semantic and poetic meanings effect various attentions, often covertly. The choreography is less entreating than suggested by Burke’s “Might I call yon attention to?” Between the semantic and poetic ideals, symbols are attentionally insertive. The “don’t think of a white elephant” phenomena suggests that drama-free semantic ideal, by virtue of symbolic agency, still affects a sly attitude of “Attend-to-this-now...”. Language is never neutral at the attentional level. Its effects and attention structure form without notice. Semantic meaning tends to beget more of itself, continuing its dramatic trance and special genre of poetry. Quantities of poetic meaning invoke orders of dramatic action.

The adaptation of semantic and poetic meaning to occasion has been rhetoric's domain: the capacity to align meanings, attentional effects, and situational action. The mere injunction upon one's or another's attention is an inherently dramatistic act that realizes motives and creates action. Intervening upon attention is a social act, regardless of the particular attitude. Enacting it effects socialization, which impels attention's quiet drama: what we are pressed to attend to and in what way. The repetitions of the most attitudinally-neutral attention-directions are among the most inconspicuous sources of symbolic orientation.

We should note that the semantic and the poetic are not opposites and are not exclusive to each other. The question of their historical evolution notwithstanding, Burke conceives the poetic to subsume the semantic. He places primacy on the poetic as the larger and more generative language use that develops into forms suited to social needs. The semantic tendency's controlled refinement exemplifies a special kind of poetic meaning and attests to the potential variability of poetic meaning when specialized.

Burke explains the two tendencies as different kinds of meanings that can be isolated for demonstrative examples. Yet both kinds of meaning often co-exist in various proportions. For example, the statement "it is very cold outside" has a grammatical form for naming and ascribing properties. Its semantic meaning names and describes. In a smaller way, it also has dramatistic meaning glossed as "be careful about going outside" or perhaps a more situated "you're car probably won't start today." Scientific language acts, depending on context. Conversely, semantic meaning can accompany dramatistic language. The exhortation "duck!" accrues its dramatistic urgency to act only by its tacit scientific implication that there is an imminent event meriting ducking. The importance of the scientific within the dramatistic is demonstrated by the impotence of yelling "tsumani!" in the desert.

We may trace out the scientific and the dramatic aspects of language to the extent that both simultaneously “direct our attention to quite different kinds of observation” (LSA 44). “The scientific approach,” Burke writes, “builds the edifice of language with primary stress upon a proposition such as ‘it is, or it is not’” (LSA 44). Defining “what is” largely involves other claims of “what is.” The detailed precision in definition necessitates the semantic tendency of language and its corresponding kind of *definitional* attention: *this is a citizen* (“what is”) *because she has the requisite properties* (because also “what is”). This definitional kind of attention, in Burkean terms, is a *perspective* taken into matters with the predetermination of using the definitional *form* to select and organize definition out of observed content. This definitional form of attention can be classed as a *literal* attention for its aim to seek out things as they are by the logics of what is. In keeping with Burke’s terms, we may say that the literal attention used for definitional thinking is the counterpart to the scientific uses of language: scientific attention as a way of apprehending the world through the categories of what is.

The ‘dramatic’ approach puts the primary stress upon such hortatory expressions as ‘thou *shalt*, or thou *shalt not*’” (LSA 44). Forming these imperative urgings to act involves a complex motivational calculus and a rhetorical crafting to audience contingencies. This calls for the widest uses of language and an interpretive boundlessness achieved through the poetic tendency of language. The poetic use requires a corresponding kind of *figurative* attention to understand adaptations of language. Rhetorically adjusting language to suit those urged to act also requires a kind of *motivational* attention to the logics a culture understands motivated action by. Since all motivational accounts are perspectival and metaphorical, merely thinking about them involves a figurative kind of attention. In keeping with Burke’s terms, we may say that the figurative attention used for motivated thinking and for poetic language is the counterpart to the

dramatistic uses of language: dramatistic attention as a way of apprehending the world through the categories of how people act.

Burke exemplifies the scientific and dramatistic modes of attention with the example sentence “New York City is in Iowa” (PLF 144). This sentence as well as “Des Moines is in Iowa” readily invites semantic attention. This kind of attention would meet the sentence with the form of attention it calls for, namely, correctness. Unless we uncritically take this as true, we evaluate it in order to comprehend it. Reading the sentence by the form of attention it welcomes entails a process of identifying the specified locations in the universe and checking if their purported relationship correlates with other purportments of their relationship (such as in maps and almanacs). Attended to scientifically, this sentence is incorrect. More importantly, the sentence is attended to by a schema of either correct or incorrect. Variations in its construction would signal other forms of attention to read it by: *Did you know New York is now in Iowa?* or *Iowa has a New York City too*. Stated as is, the sentence’s incorrectness signals that it should not be read with semantic attention. The incorrectness calls for a different kind of attention outside of the correct/incorrect forms.

Reading the sentence with figurative attention opens up realms of meaning not expressible by the scientific and semantic ideal. If read metonymically, the sentence might express how culturally iconic New York City is in Iowa too. Burke writes it with a metaphorical openness, asking, “has one ever stood, for instance, in some little outlying town, on the edge of the wilderness, and watched a train go by? Has one perhaps suddenly felt that the train, and its tracks, were a kind of arm of the city, reaching out across the continent, quite as though it were simply Broadway itself extended? It is in such a sense that New York City can be found all over the country” (PLF 144). Read with a different attention, “New York City is in Iowa,” provides

accessible and substantive meanings. The contextualizing information of feeling the train as arms of the city helps establish the kind of attention we should give to the otherwise incorrect sentence. But even without such context, one may choose the kind of attention given to the sentence.

This example suggests how language is implicated in a variety of attentions that drastically alter what is communicated and what is experienced. Part of what language is doing dramatically, i.e. as actions done upon us, is a continual signaling of what kind of attention we should use to participate in symbolic exchange. This urging might be incidental and openly interpretive (“hey”) or it might be more rigidly forced upon the audience (“this sentence is false”). For any level of audience choice in their attention, the particular modes of attention often operate out of awareness. Burke stresses the importance of attending to attention to note the dynamics, effects, and risks involved. He writes that “one would miss very important meanings, meaning that have much to do with the conduct of our inhabitants, were he to proceed here by the either-or kind of text. ‘New York City is in Iowa’ is ‘poetically’ true. As a metaphor, it provides valid insight. To have it ruled out, by strict semantic authority, would have been vandalism” (PLF 144).

Scientific discourses also have their implicit dramatic elements. The above example “it is very cold outside” has dramatic force despite having scientific form. It tells what is but functions to urge caution, interrupt a procedure, and imply a program of behavior. Discourses of “what is” take on similar suggestions of action when used in a context of motivated communication. Burke focused on the presence of the dramatic inhering in “the necessarily *suavive* nature of even the most unemotional scientific nomenclatures” (LSA 45). His concept of

the terministic screen deconstructs the workings of the scientific to reveal the dramatic effects, especially when an *is* implies an *ought*.

Burke generalizes some general attentional patterns to the scientific/dramatic uses of semantic/poetic meaning. The semantic ideal “would attempt to *get a description* by the *elimination of attitude*. The poetic ideal would attempt to *attain a full moral act* by attaining a perspective *atop all the conflicts of attitude* (PLF 148). “The semantic ideal envisions a vocabulary that *avoids* drama. The poetic ideal envisions a vocabulary that *goes through* drama” (PLF 149). The semantic ideal pursues “a vocabulary that does not *judge*, but *describes* or *places... to name how things are*, regardless of what you *want* them to be (PLF 151).

Burke suggests that both of the two language uses can medicate, each a remedy for different needs. The poetic is aesthetic. It charts human action vividly by the fullest composite of images and “maximum profusion of weightings.” It aids perception, activating the senses and including the “emotionality in the perception.” The semantic is anesthetic. It facilitates perception without feeling by neutralizing attitudes and “emotional predisposition.” In effect, the semantic is analgesic, an agent toward painlessness. (PLF 150)

Noting the dramatic effects to both semantic and poetic meaning recovers language’s inextricable tie-ups with humanity. Even the most distanced, neutral, depersonalized language fulfills immediate dramatic purposes. There is language that makes motivated strivings into concerted actions. The style of this language makes for styles of action and thus styles of meaning.

So too for the implications for recovering attention as a deeply dramatic aspect of humanity. We not only attend to words for reception; rather, attention is bound up with attitude, going through drama, desire, judgment, and the basic workings of our humanity. Burke’s poetic

ideal of arriving at “a full moral act by attaining a perspective atop all the conflict of attitude” entails a mode of attention. Burke’s multi-perspectivism includes an ethical mode of attention that heeds the partializing tendencies of language, coalesces them (typified through “perspective by incongruity”), and seeks a fuller mode of attention more “rounded out” than the symbols themselves. To attend to matters only as the symbol systems would guide is malformative, running risk of their necessary exclusions and distortions, and truncating the necessary work individuals must do to use symbols more than be “used by symbols.” Since people operate by concurrent mixes of scientific, dramatic, and other kinds of meaning, Burke would have us cultivating habits of attention to communication that recover the fullest and widest range of meanings to equip us for the modern vagaries and destructive potential of our chatter “at the edge of an abyss” (PC 272). This mode of attention is requisite for the kind of human Burke envisions for his project of a better society *ad bellum purificandum*.

Thus, Burke cautions against overreliance on the excesses of semantic meaning and its literal mode of attention. The semantic ideal makes the dynamic static and the open closed. It treats matters as “the *perfection* of trends which we find here in their aggravatedly *imperfect* state” (PLF 164). Its incisively formulated style has “the tone of perfect peacefulness.” Seen from the lens of dramatism as “a refuge from something, that would not permit even the mere mention of that from which it was a refuge, [semantic meaning] becomes itself an attenuated form of poetry, with its own modes of hypnosis” (PLF 167). Burke cautions against this hypnotic refuge because “even at its best, when isolated from the total texture of language, it is insufficient and promotes the upbuilding of a fallacious equipment” (PLF 164). Excising attitudes and emotionality removes communication’s tie-ups with values and conduct, which together represent things abstracted from the actual lived circumstances. Where this may be



useful in some settings, “It fosters, sometimes explicitly, sometimes by implication, the notion that one may comprehensively discuss human and social events in a nonmoral vocabulary, and that perception itself is a nonmoral act. It is the moral impulse that motivates perception, giving it both intensity and direction, suggesting *what to look for* and *what to look out for*” (PLF 164).

We make choices from our attentional trainings of “*what to look for* and *what to look out for*” (PLF 164). It is the task of individuals and philosophers alike to attend past the narrowing of perspectives and to “seek neutralization at moments, for given purposes, and not as a blanket program for vocabulary” (PLF 165). Burke’s program suggests that literal attention should include dramatic forms of attention driven by poetic meaning. When accomplished, “The poetic vocabulary... will take us into-and-out-of (the complete play with its exhilaration at the close). When incomplete, it will take us into, and seek to leave us there....” This attention involves us more than that of semantic vocabularies, which “unintentionally cheat us, by keeping us without, providing a kind of quietus in advance, never even giving the dramatic opposition a chance” (PLF 167). While Burke cautions against the semantic ideal’s perfecting of the imperfect, he notes the semantic’s usefulness as attentional training of “what to look for.” Viewing semantic meaning as a “stage, a kind of purgatorial disembodiment” allows one to observe how terms were suited to past uses. This approach places the semantic within the poetic, conceiving it as a vestige of past action. One may attend to its truncations as dramatically advantageous and thus betraying insight about poetic adjustment. One would attend to the semantic as “helpful for transition from an old poetic vocabulary whose weightings are all askew to a new poetic vocabulary whose weightings will be better fitted to the situations it would encompass.” Thus regarding the semantic for attention: “Its worth does not reside in its

“usefulness” and promise (though that is certainly a part of it) but in its *style* as morals, as petition, in the *quality* of the petition, not in the *success* of the petition. (PLF 167)

This broad understanding of the attentions associated with these kinds of use and meaning illustrates the dramatic alignment of attention, symbol, and situation. The three’s interconnectedness allows strategies for each to be pursued through the other. Heretofore, the symbolic dimension of attention has been theorized with examples of discrete speech acts at the size of a sentence, which quickly demonstrate symbolic strategies of situated attention. However, for a mode of attention to extend beyond the length of the sentence involves different strategies of the symbolic dimension to attention. Burke theorizes how a mode of attention can sustain through an entire discourse by symbolic strategies to the material terrain. His concept of the terministic screen coalesces the attentional principles of perspective, language, dramatic use, and poetic meaning, creating a discourse entity defined by its attentional effects.

#### **4.2.4 Terministic Screens**

How it is that symbols narrow the attention, control meaning, and generally “keep us without” motivates the concept of the terministic screens, which investigates the attentional effects of sets of symbols. It reveals the affordances and omissions occurring in terminologies and their dramatic use. The terministic screen maintains the linguistic shaping of attention as a mode of action. It highlights some things while obscuring others, helping to locate attentional agency between people and symbol systems in the activations of particular kinds of attention.

A terminology stabilizes a mode of attention through a set of terms that share one underlying perspective. Perspective, discussed earlier in this chapter, arises from metaphor, which interprets one thing in terms of another (e.g. astronomy to interpret planetary observations,

evolution to interpret bone structure). Dramatism's conception of language as action likewise views terminology as action. To terminologize a discourse is to fashion a set of terms by one perspective and to sustain the perspective's mode of attention. Since we can choose our terms, the selection of the symbols is an act. The attentional effects of a terminology are symbols' action.

The metaphor that fixes a perspective throughout a terminology forms a larger narrative. This narrative motivates the way a terminology metaphorizes. Burke explores how "the behaviorist uses his experiments with the conditioned reflex as the anecdote about which to form his vocabulary for the discussion of human motives" (GOM 59). This example illustrates a realm of observed behaviors reduced by metaphor to the linguistic metaphor of "the conditioned reflex," which exists in an elided narrative about how behavior patterns by situational repetitions and an automated responsiveness. For any terminology, Burke argues, this metaphor binds a set of terms to a shared narrative: The anecdote "contains *in nuce* the terminological structure that is evolved in conformity with it... . . . a terminology is a 'conclusion' that follows from the selection of a given anecdote... Thus the anecdote is in a sense a summation, containing implicitly what the system that is developed from it contains explicitly" (GOM 60).

A terminology and narrative "possess a systematically interrelated structure" and reify a mode of attention through a perspective (GOM 60). This is a mode of action that presumes a narrative in order to facilitate interpreting. Burke's aforementioned trout and bird examples evidence revised judgment where no terminology assists with conceptualization. The animals' available modes of attention are animalistic, situational, and locked away from communicability. Thus they are individualistic, unable to be shared through symbolic transfer. The intervening of symbols expands the modes of attention by proliferating the possible perspectives in endless

metaphors and narratives held by terminologies. Functionally, a “terminology is a dictionary, a lexicon for charting a vastly complex and hitherto largely uncharted field. You can’t refute a dictionary. The only profitable answer to a dictionary is another one” (PLF 272). A terminology stabilizes observation by stabilizing attention through an alignment of symbol’s attentional effects (i.e. kind of meaning, dramatic aspects of language).

Terminologies coordinate the many attentional effects of symbolicity, shaping attention in characteristically symbolic ways. Burke writes, “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (LSA 45). Burke thematizes language’s necessary selection (etymologically: *a gathering apart*), reflection (*a bending again*), and distortion (*a twisting away*) in a metaphor of visuality. Considered from Burke’s perspective of linguistic viewing lenses, the terministic “screen” is a medium for mental display. As with light, a screen of meaning selects and reflects representations by “screening out” others. Burke explains this analogously with various photographs of the same object captured through different color filters. He writes, “Here something so ‘factual’ as a photograph revealed notable distinctions in texture, and even in form, depending upon which color filter was used for the documentary description of the event being recorded” (LSA 45). Seeing occurs through a lens and no one lens singularly captures everything (in part because seeing itself does not capture everything about the object). We choose one way of seeing to highlight what other lenses cannot access. Screening out all but one color can reveal what full-color obscures. Burke sees no way around this: “We *must* use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen” (LSA 50).

The partial nature of any terminology means that “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing—a focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B” (PC 49). This obtains in language and ideas as it does in visually seeing. This tenet of exclusivity is the material situation of Burke’s ethics of multi-perspecticality. Seeing X means not seeing Y and seeing X in one way means not seeing it in another. Where this is visually true for physical attention (as in seeing a color-filter photograph), this idea has its attentional counter in ideational attention (as in communicating). For Burke, what and how we attend is a largely a one-at-a-time phenomenon, the mental lens for accessing meanings. The ethical imperative is that we toggle between lenses to amass perspectives for the fullest account. Terms’ duality to both display and filter is expressed in his choice word “screen.” Terministic screens focalize attention by a controlled revealing and concealing.

Terministic screens’ mundanely ubiquitous selections, reflections, and distortions systematically direct what and how we attend. Burke provides consequences from this, such as that “The nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another” (LSA 46). At one level this is “painfully obvious,” as “a textbook on physics, for instance, turns the attention in a different direction from a textbook on law or psychology” (LSA 45). In such a case, words are reporting mostly semantic meanings of what is and minimizing dramatic meanings. However, richer senses of directing attention occur in more interpretation-laden acts involving dramatic elements and poetic meaning. For example, Burke discusses a man reporting his dream to three dream interpreters of different schools. The Freudian, Jungian, and Adlerian offer a different understanding of a reported dream: “In each case, we might say, the ‘same’ dream will be subjected to a different color filter, with corresponding differences in the nature of the event as

perceived, recorded, and interpreted” (LSA 46). The terms used change what to look for and what to look out for, as each perspective into the dream has its own orientation (a developed system of meaning based on repeat contingencies).

Detailing these three terministic screens used to make sense of a dream illustrates how each interprets dramatic meaning by its own perspective. The Freudian’s terminology screens the dreamer’s unfulfilled wishes and repressed sexual instincts. It generates observations of the sublimations of the unconscious’ latent content; meanwhile, it screens out elements of biochemical neurology, divine providence, and socio-political influences. The Jungian’s terminology screens the dreamer’s archetypal associations to their personal situation. It generates observations of expressing the dreamer’s mental complexes; meanwhile, it screens out neurology and theology. The Jungian scheme of meaning guides attention away from the meanings of the dream and instead toward the preoccupations of the dreamer. The Adlerian terminology screens the dreamer’s strivings to overcome inferiority by their preparations for control and power of their social realm. It generates observations of preventions for waking life; meanwhile, it screens out the Freudian unconscious interpretations and Jungian internalized archetypes. The Adlerian scheme of meanings guides attention to workable solutions to the dreamer’s unfulfilled motivations. This terministic screen brings one narrative as hermeneutic to another, continuing its own narrative upon that which it screens.

Each terministic scheme directs what to attend to, how to attend, and why to attend. The tendencies of attention emerge in response to the terministic screen employed. Among the many subtle differences, for example, is the attention created through Freudian terminology shaped for intra-psychic conflict and for seeking reconciliation of meanings within the Freudian scheme of mind. This contrasts with the attention of Adlerian terminology shaped for interpersonal conflict

and for seeking actionable plans within imminent circumstances. Each kind of attention selects and configures its own world out of the field of meanings and pre-structures the questions, issues, contiguities, purpose, limits and horizons of its viewpoint. The example, representative of interpretation generally, illustrates that "...any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another. Within that field there can be different screens, each with its ways of directing the attention and shaping the range of observations implicit in the given terminology" (LSA 50).

Terministic screens enable and incline observations that are pre-contained in their terms. Burke writes that "many of the 'observations' are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made" (LSA 46). For example, mythic terminologies of dream interpretation contrast with the Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian, highlighting what a dream "tells" rather than "means," thus leading to observations of destiny (etymologically: *to set apart, appoint, establish*). Mystical terminologies of reception (divine, cosmic, natural, spiritual, etc.) observe clairvoyance (*clear-seeing*) and prescience (*pre-knowing*). Neurobiological terminologies of electro-chemical mechanisms address what dreams *are* rather than what they mean, leading to observations about correlations of body activity with reported experiences. Each terminology's nomenclature pre-packages 1) a narrative and its accompany mode of attention, and 2) a corresponding hermeneutic to its narrative reflected throughout the terminology's meanings.

Burke cautions that "much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (LSA 46). His "simplest illustration of this point is to be got by contrasting secular and theological terminologies of motives" (LSA 46). Theological terminologies place "God" as the key term of origin and first

action, out of which “many implications ‘necessarily’ follow.” A secular terminology such as “A naturalistic, Darwinian terminology flatly omits the term, with a corresponding set of implications...” However such a secular terminology “introduces the term ‘God’ not outright as with the bible, but by beginning with a term that *ambiguously* contains such implication, then he gradually makes these implications explicitly” (LSA 46). Such “god terms” consist here of “natural selection,” as well as “freedom,” “necessity,” “history,” “science,” “justice,” “duty,” “money” and other such terms functioning in the way that “god” functions in theological discourse (GOM 351). A terministic screen’s “god term” traces itself throughout the whole discourse, configuring the shape of its parts by salience to its paramount position in the terminology and by the particular image of its subject matter. For any terministic screen’s take, “Each brand of imagery contains in germ its own ‘logic’” growing out of its central terms (PLF 148). Identifying a terminology’s god term, the pre-eminent term among all others, assists in identifying, analyzing, and altering terministic screens and their effects on attention.

A screen’s covert image and logic is formed by how it constructs continuity and discontinuity among its constituents. Terministic screens function as lenses to meaning in that their terms pre-supply the forms and relations of “what to look for.” Naming these forms and relations prefigures them as entities and fossilizes a mode of attention into language. This creates a “meaning-unit” selected and reflected from a field of otherwise undifferentiated experience. Thus a term like “behavior” can call together an infinite set of instances under one term, never losing criteria for inclusion. This is a way of availing others to a mode of attention, inducing a shared way of seeing “behavior” through the domain of meaning it maps to. Such a word, when conveyed in its characteristic sense, facilitates people attending as others have attended before.



Meaning and attention are prefigured by a term's relationship to other terms within a terministic screen. A term's role in the terministic image and logic of the screen sources the term's contiguity with other terms. For example, "behavior" in Freud's terminology is continuous with subconscious and discontinuous with political institutions; "behavior" in Marx's terminology is continuous with political institutions and discontinuous with subconscious. The contiguities among terms shape their meaning and direct their programs of use. To attend to Marxian "behavior" is to be guided by the terminology toward institutional linkages to people's actions. Burke's "god-terms" pervade a terminology's continuities. He writes, "insofar as an entire structure is infused by a single generating principle, this principle will be tautologically or repetitively implicit in all its parts" (LSA 55). Thus these attention lenses can be swapped, as Burke writes "that Freudianism could 'explain' Marxists psychologically and that Marxism could 'explain' Freudians sociologically" (PC 221).

A terministic screen is defined by the logic of its god term and continuities. Any perspective it sustains excludes other perspectives inherently since "All terminologies must implicitly or explicitly embody choices between the principle of continuity and the principle of discontinuity" (LSA 50). The particular lines of continuity define a terminology's domain and subject. These lines make compositions and divisions. Burke writes, "there are two kinds of terms: terms that put things together and terms that take things apart" (LSA 49). Since attention flows along these continuities of meaning, any observation "must necessarily be stated within the resources and embarrassments of man-made terminologies" (LSA 50).

Perhaps Burke's clearest illustration involves how configurations of continuity and discontinuity appear as differences of *degree* and *kind*. His example merits reproduction for its colorful attentional analysis performed through his dramatistic ("logological") screen:

Darwin sees only a difference of degree between man and other animals. But the theologian sees a difference in kind. That is, where Darwin views man as *continuous* with other animals, the theologian would stress the principle of *discontinuity* in this regard. But the theologian's screen also posits a certain kind of *continuity* between man and God that is not ascribed to the relation between God and other animals.

The logological screen finds itself in a peculiar position here. It holds that, even on the purely secular level, Darwin overstated his case. And as a consequence, in his stress upon the principle of *continuity* between man and the other animals, he unduly slighted the evidence for *discontinuity* here. For he assumed that the principle of discontinuity between man and other animals was necessarily identical with a theological view of man.

Such need not be the case at all. Darwin says astonishingly little about man's special aptitudes as a symbol user. His terministic screen so stressed the principle of continuity here that he could view the principle of discontinuity only as a case of human self-flattery. Yet, logology would point out: We can distinguish man from other animals without necessarily being over-haughty. For what other animals have yellow journalism, corrupt politics, pornography, stock market manipulators, plans for waging thermonuclear, chemical, and bacteriological war? I think we can consider ourselves different in kind from other animals, without necessarily being overproud of our distinction. We don't need theology, but merely the evidence of our characteristic sociopolitical disorders, to make it apparent that man, the typically symbol-using animal is alas! something special. (LSA 50)

The logic of Darwinian terminology readily admits Burke's additions of human specialness—humans' well-developed symbol use is not a contradiction to Darwin's tenets. Rather, Burke's issue with the Darwinian screen is its removal of such matters from attention. Like a color lens, Darwin's terms make particular observations possible as much by enhancing observation as by mitigating observation. This example of a terminology to name relations uses semantic and poetic meaning to narrativize human drama. The terministic screens of theology and Darwinism both envisage the invisible differently, grouping symbolic entities into different accounts. The terms marshal additional terms paradigmatic to the screen, propelling attention along the parameters of the underlying narrative.

The terms we use for intangibles are especially formative of what it is we are attending to. Among these are relations and narratives, discussed above, as well as mental states and sociopolitical relationships. They are necessary "fictions" of terministic screens as "we must express such concepts by the use of terms borrowed from the realm of the physical" (LSA 46). Moral terminologies draw from physical metaphors including "right" from straight lines and "wrong" from that which is twisted and crooked.

Burke's passage also exemplifies how to circumvent these attentional drifts by attending to symbols through a larger meta-screen. His choice of terministic screen is dramatism, a terminology for studying human relations through their counterpart of language. This screen narrativizes the human choosing symbols to act as its anecdote. Its god term is drama, which is continuous with symbols, action, socialization, motive, and poetry. This terministic screen renders bio-chemistry and institutional histories discontinuous in order to make continuous the linkages between symbols, action, and drama. As a result, the dramatistic screen enables

observation of language as action when the choice of making language is enacted in the extant fabric of culture and grammar. Thus dramatic screed admits examination of what Darwin and the theologian are doing—knowingly or not—through their acts of using a terminology. They are, among many symbolic acts, inflecting and deflecting attention symbolic strategies.

Where degree/kind in the above example reveals degrees of continuity, it also illustrates how readily obscurative a continuity can be to matters of difference. These principles of continuity/discontinuity can be expressed variously, as degree/kind, whole/part, correlation/causation, intentional/unintentional, purposeful/purposeless, meaningful/meaningless, and so on. The exact type of continuity will be paradigmatic to the screen and it will establish a terminology's mode of relations among its terms. Its "germ" will form as an oppositional pair with the god term, e.g. god/godless, god/devil, god/not god, godly/godless. As Burke's dramatic commentary illustrates, any number of resulting entailments will extend from generative core of a terminology and its architecture through relations and their continuities.

These examples illustrate how each terministic screen betrays its own mode of attention. A term is a special kind of symbol that invokes the entire perspective of its source terminology. Non-exclusive symbols take on meanings exclusive to its terminology's matrix of meanings (e.g. "behavior" vs. Freudian "behavior" vs. Marxian "behavior"). We may choose to access a manner of attention by choosing a terministic screen as a perspective into a field of observation. The bulwark of attentions from the Freudian screen can mobilize upon observing, suggestively remaking the "home run" and "foul ball" in the perspective of its terms.

Most well established symbols invoke one or several simultaneous terminologies, or clusters of related symbols that co-create its meaning. The implied cluster that a symbol is understood within structures makes for different symbolic actions. Their different dramatic

effects induce attention to dramatistic forms of attention unique to the poetic and dramatistic figures. The structures of meaning, particularly dramatistic meaning, have corresponding forms of attention that activate to access the symbols.

### **4.3 CONCLUSION: THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION IN DRAMATIC ECOLOGY**

This chapter has advanced the heuristic of the attention situation into structures that I propose in order to create a communication-centered way of conceiving attention's relation to situation. I introduced several notions of symbolicity as a dimension to attention. By myriad ways outlined, they form situation-specific processes whose outcomes constitute attentional form. I have focused the symbolic dimension of attention through the paradigms of dramatic ecology to outline attention's inextricability with symbolic aspects of communication. Drawing from the concepts of McLuhan's symbolicities of ecology and Burke's symbolicities of dramatism, dramatic ecology can bring them into complementarity, enabling us to generate situated insights about attention processes.

McLuhan's ecology conceives symbols as agents to refashion the larger ecology into an immediate situation. Burke's dramatism outlines structures of meaning and their direct impingements on discrete moments of attention. Both perspectives on attention's symbolicity take as their starting point what symbols can do when immediately present ("metaphorize and perspectivize"). The perspectives show how the two realms work as mechanisms tailored to humans ("language and language"). These two symbolicities can invoke an attention in individuals (through "attention archetypes and dramatistic meaning") through various symbolic

means (“anti-environments and terministic screens”). Both paradigms examine different but related symbolicities *through which* we act and think.

Dramatic ecology, together, provides a stereoscopic lens to the ways these symbolicities configure attention, thought, and action. The dramatic ecology paradigm invites analysis to how ecological symbols and dramatistic symbols interrelate in a given situation. Any aspect of symbolic ecology touches most any aspect of symbolic dramatism. For example, anti-environments can be devised through a situation’s available aspects of poetic meaning and dramatistic uses. In the aforementioned example of the flagpole, ecology depicts cliché-ing of the environment and its archetypal function to retrieve other clichés. Taking this technology of invisible services, dramatism can poetically deploy the flagpole’s attentional mechanism as an anti-environment that pursues a symbolic action. The clichéd use of a flag to stake land and claim ownership can be reversed by pitching a flag of all the non-owners of the land. A dramatistic act could be made through a flag that salutes its people or through a flag of all the world’s flags burning. These examples anti-environmentalize the flag dramatistically, that is, by socialized forms. They are poetic for their figurative (not just literal) attentions and they are dramatistic for how they act upon people through social (not just ecological) relations.

To generate more situational insights, we can variably pair concepts from eco-symbols with drama-symbols. Most any combination will be pregnant with analytical suggestivity. For example, how does the ecological conception of language relate to the dramatistic conception of language? Sought in the abstract outside of a situation, dramatic ecology offers several theoretical responses. For example, to say that “rain check” makes people think of a rain check is merely one facet of the numerous attention operations that the word initiates. The word “rain check” localizes a larger ecology of sensory transpositions (e.g. a verbal metaphor of the paper

rain check), and it simultaneously effects a dramatistic action that is only endowed through a larger symbol system (a promise of a later admission and a container for storing this act). Neither exist alone in nature. They are created through dialectics of meaning, medium, and function.

This helps us specify communication-centered ways that the symbolic dimension can be understood with the material dimension in a communication situation. For example, in letter writing, layers of meaning arise from the attention structures created between the material and symbol dimensions. The kinds of meaning imputed to penning handwritten letters result from shared symbolic understandings of a material context (time, effort, cost, postal inconveniences) and the context (ritual, compulsory vs. voluntary). Primary attentional features are those inherent in the present material and symbols of the situation: the medium involves the permanency of ink, the time taking to write each word, the choice of paper, spacio-temporal separation between writer and reader. The materialities of symbols include language and its conventions around the occasion, formalities, and letterwriting. These primary features of situation structure attention in many ways, some more covert than others. Many noticeable ingredients to attention will be the direct correlates of the primary features, such as a single author from a prior time anticipating a singular reader in a context.

But in this situation are many more subtle and textured facets of attention in the *meanings* and *effects* that are made possible by inconspicuous secondary attention structures arising from the interdependence of the two dimensions. For example, emotion and sentimentality in letterwriting is a function of material-symbolic interplay, e.g. to write on an expensive card amidst penury, to write a long letter when time when time is scarce, to write private matters and set it loose unto paper's unforeseen audiences, to write a confession in the enduring indelibility of

script, and so on. These aspects of letterwriting's material-symbolic interplay form the situation that attention parallels. Each of these material-symbolic acts listed create secondary attention structures of emotionality: the first is questionable; the second, charitable; the third, forthcoming; the fourth, noble. Sentiment is created our understandings of implicit attention structures in a situation.

Should the reader not know or share the author's situation, the letter is read with different attentions than that of its composition. The difference in *understood situation* yields differences in kinds of meanings available. Each party has an attention hermeneutic to understand themselves, their communicative act, and their communication's anticipated effects. Letter writing exemplifies a communicative practice predicated on shared attention hermeneutics that allow richly compressed meanings into a small space. Cryptography is a hyperbolically shared attention situation. Dreams are hyperbolically differentiated attention situations. In this way, structures of attention and our shared experience of them are the foundation of communication. They make communication possible. Our control and creations in communication from our implicit theories of attention's relations to situation.

The heuristic use of this vocabulary encourages common features of attention formation be sought before they are situationally revealed. Dramatic ecology offers preparatory assistance to theories of attention by collecting common features of attention formation from our theorists' case studies. This play of generative concepts enables us to ask finer questions that probe the symbolic aspects of attention. For example, what sense patterns are metaphorized in a terminology's perspective? How does the scientific use of semantic meaning relate to the environment it names? Dramatic ecology offers heuristic assistance to situational analysis by



generating guiding terms to discover how assemblages of symbolicities manifest immanently to shape attentional patterns, such as with the above flagpole and rain check examples.

This discussion of dramatic ecology's symbolic concerns will be similarly conducted for the remaining dimension of attention. As each dimension affects the other in a complex of entwinements, each dimension establishes analytical starting points into attention's complex formation. When any dimension or its concepts are pursued far enough, they each pass through some of the others. This chapter has noted the tendency of symbol's ecological functions to weave through the fabric of their social functions. The next chapter will explore other counter-situational elements of the intentional dimension.

## 5.0 THE INTENTIONAL DIMENSION OF ATTENTION

*Millions of items... are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no interest for me. My experience is what I agree to attend to... each of us literally chooses, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit.*

-William James, *Principles of Psychology*

*The entire acquired nexus of psychic life ...transforms and shapes those perceptions, representations, and states on which the attention is directly focused, and which thus engage our consciousness most strongly.... Thus there is a constant interaction between the self and the milieu of external reality in which the self is placed, and our life consists of the interaction.*

- Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet*

*For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destiny and so becomes one who listens and hears, and not one who is simply constrained to obey.*

- Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

When we think of the intentional aspect of attention, we likely think of a general notion about how we can choose how to direct our awareness. This seems obvious and unremarkable and yet deeply mysterious and ineffable. We talk about intention usually as particular instances of behaviors, such as ignoring something, focusing, intervening on a habit, daydreaming, searching for the right word, and countless other mental feats. Each of these same behaviors could occur with the sense that they befall upon us (e.g. “oops I started daydreaming” “sorry, I didn’t mean to ignore you”). In most any mental behavior, it is the *sense* that we are steering our experience

through a multitude of perceptual alternatives that lends it its intentionality. We communicate this sense of intentionality in language that is especially metaphorical (e.g. “I was not here but I’m back now,” “I can’t follow you”) or vague (e.g. “I meant to”). They draw from socialized representation of embodied actions in order to express the *experience* of intentionality through a narrative.

The quotations opening this chapter gesture toward a range of ways intention relates to attention. James calls intention an “agreement” between an individual and his or her immediate situation. Our interest-guided intentionalities thus separate people by the differently constructed mental environments of their own crafting. Dilthey conceives intentionality as each of the acquired ways that self and world “interact.” Each enjoining nexus differently shapes the attentions that comprise our life (208). Heidegger complicates the idea of intentionality, positing it as an early stage in a process of perception. Intention involves putting oneself into a receptive state directed toward something that is not yet immanent. A process of “pre-destining” puts attention into a receptive state, akin to listening for something before hearing it. Cultivating practices of intentionality across the senses “frees” the individual from subservience to perceptual patterns (25).

Pertaining to the attention situation, what agencies do individuals have on their attention? How can they act through the labyrinthine structures of material and symbol? Phenomenology provides a vocabulary that conceptualizes the intentionality of attention as the convergence of inner and outer. It posits experience as a dynamic field and interrogates the configurative character of experience and its internal structure. These configurations proliferate when considering contexts of a body, others, speech, social structure, and existence. As a result, the dimension of intentionality is large and particularly elusive without direct objects of analysis.

For thematic focus, I restrict the discussion of intention in this dissertation to the forms of intentionality directly extending from the concepts explored in dramatic ecology. I explore the basic idea of self-willed self-directedness of attention as it is expressed in both paradigms.

Ecology and dramatism offer two hermeneutics for interpreting attention situations and for generating attentional resources fitted to them. They are not prescriptions for specific modes of attention as panacea. Rather, they are generative principles to find available means of attention, which will differ kairotically and in relationship to the attention situation. The material and symbolic dimensions explored through ecology and dramatism have laid out assorted structures and distributed processes that are part of attentional processes itself. Each of the dramatic-ecological concepts presented in this project do not merely meet the individual's attention but comprises part of pervasive systems that comprise attention itself, traversing individual and situation. Merely recognizing these distributed processes changes attention, as awareness of their workings changes their effects, effacing the sense of naturalness, fixity, and immutability. Beyond the attentional shift in recognizing dramatic-ecological structures in process, there is a more detailed approach to intentionality in dramatic ecology. Dramatic-ecological structures, by their nature as attention's counterparts, are the very source of intentional intervention. The design of the structure or process discloses the blueprints of its alteration. In the way that a medium configures senses, recognition of its ecological and dramatisitic process avails the individual to intervention.

This chapter focuses on a select aspect of the intentional dimension dedicated to strategic modes of response to ecological and dramatic structures. Among the many intentional aspects of attention, this approach outlines the situational aspect of intention. It takes a material and

symbolic situation as its starting point. The structures and processes immediately present comprise the intentional means to accessing the situation.

Other scholars have approached intentionality through similar kinds of “situational intentionality.” Decision theorists attempt a science of situated intentionality (Audi, Weirich). A part of phenomenology addresses intention through the co-structuring of experience between self and other. In critical theory, Guy Debord’s detournement extends an intentionality into communication. Detournement “is the flexible language of anti-ideology” (Debord 208) and a technique for continuously subverting established relations on their present terms. The artful intercession reworks symbolic and material structures to fit an intention for continuous deferral to the authority of symbols and for “maintaining one’s *distance* from whatever has been perverted into an official truth” (206). Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* sees intentionality as the enabling faculty for reappropriating attention from its socializations. His tactic is to maintain an intentional vigilance of “the terrain imposed on it” so that attention can “make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of proprietary powers” (37). The individual gains more modes of attention by first setting intention upon attention’s disciplinary structures so that they can be used to “compose a network of an antidiscipline” (xv).

In this chapter, I stay within the ecology and dramatism paradigms and discuss how each contains conceptions of the individual’s agencies through their intentionality in parallel forms to dramatic-ecological counterparts in the other dimensions. I outline a hermeneutic method for detecting the means of intentionality in each paradigm. I discuss two of McLuhan’s concepts that demonstrate one way of applying the ecological hermeneutic as a way of discovering a situation’s means of intention (sense-making and rational detachment). I offer a homologous

example for dramatism exemplifying a way of applying the dramatistic hermeneutic for intention (resymbolization and re-orientation). Lastly, I discuss a schematic from each paradigm (McLuhan's tetrad and Burke's pentad) and discuss how it can be deployed as a mode of attention that enlarges the possibilities of the intentional role in attention.

## 5.1 INTENTIONAL ECOLOGY

McLuhan's ecology seeks to identify media determinisms so that we may reclaim the control they exert. The ecological perspective surveys materiality and symbolicity to prepare people for their encounters with them. A training in perception that capacitates a handling of the terrain remedies the totalizing effects of the environment. Prior to the skills of attention that match the environment, there must first be a will, a probe, an interest for reflexivity. In doing so, "There is no inevitability, however, where this is a willingness to pay attention" (GV 12). A willingness impels the discovery of means to these ends. Otherwise, we fulfill McLuhan's provision that "media determinism, the imposition willy-nilly of new cultural grounds by the action of new technologies, is only possible when the users are well-adjusted, i.e., sound asleep" (GV 11).

McLuhan warns of common problems underlying attention: misrecognition and passivity. Misrecognizing our attention situation occurs because of discrepancies between material conditions and their mental counterparts and McLuhan's work is predicated largely on the chronic mischaracterization of material relations. The terms of analysis carried over from past situations remain the basis to examine the present: "We actually live mythically and integrally,

as it were, but we continue to think in the old, fragmented space and time patterns of the pre-electric age” (UM 4).

The second problem patterns with the first. Detachment and passivity result from the distance created between material processes and meaning processes. McLuhan argues that our era of literacy has not recognized itself as being in a literate mode of attention but that reflexive understanding can bring hope for “wholeness, empathy, and depth of awareness” (UM 5). For any era, detailing the fluid dynamics of environment and attention equip for “heightened human awareness” and “individual consciousness” along with their paucities (UM 5). Without recognition of the symbolic and intentional linkages with the material, we are left with an impoverished account of the sources of attention formation. McLuhan writes, “If these ‘mass media’ should serve only to weaken or corrupt previously achieved levels of verbal and pictorial culture, it won’t be because there’s anything inherently wrong with them. It will be because we’ve failed to master them as new languages in time to assimilate them to our total cultural heritage” (EIC 2).

The third problem is that the two converge upon the individual. People mischaracterize and become numb to the environment, but also to themselves. McLuhan quotes William Blake’s characterization of how “men have become what they have beheld” (UM 46). Using a technology requires a parallel internal form, as explored in the previous two chapters. For attention: “If Perceptive Organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary: If Perceptive Organs close, their Objects seem to close also” (UM 46). The means of self-understanding are products of material symbolic configurations that provide self-conception. Technology and most all encounter with the environment put “us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to [our] images of ourselves” (UM 46).

Attention is a likely element of any solution to these concerns since they are matters about attention and the material-symbolic constitution of the human. The ecological perspective on attention offers resources to aid these and other issues of being in the world. Mischaracterization and passivity include ecological matters and can be remedied by the ecological capabilities of the individual. Understanding the media ecology of a historical moment enables participation in the otherwise subjectifying elements of the material and symbolic environment.

However, it is only by the application of media ecology to individual attention that mischaracterization and passivity are solved. It does not involve *knowing information about* the environment so much as *exerting processes upon* the environment. The ecological perspective can be variously mobilized. It can be put to use by different parts of attention, yielding different actions and results.

A catalog of examples would be illustrative and a theory would be productive. This chapter will do some of both. Prior chapters have discussed how material and symbolic ecologies impinge on the formation of attention, highlighting the agency of such externalities. This chapter discusses how the attention wrought upon such externalities can alter their agencies. This is especially important in the dialectics of attention itself. The attentions honed by externally-informed forces have the capacity to counter them.

Prior chapters have outlined McLuhan's historically incorporative forms of attention, technologized inattention, total field attention, and invisible attentional grounds. This chapter theorizes the role of the individual in these matters. Particular interest is given to the ways the individual assists in the creation of attentional modes available by material-symbolic situation.



Organizing the discussion are concepts of McLuhan's situationally interpretive method and the guiding ideas of integral awareness and tetradic attention.

### **5.1.1 The Ecological Hermeneutic - Interpretive Method**

McLuhan's method for discovering a situation's available means of attention implicitly inheres in his theories of media and effects. Ecologically-minded forms of attention heed media as a way of studying sense relations (compared to the dramatically-minded attentions that heed human relations through symbols). This involves identifying ecological processes impinging upon attention to countermand them at their level. Identifying effects occurs phenomenologically by first-person subjection and by self-conscious reflexivity of the fact that the individual is part of the ecology. In this way, the account is primarily aesthetic. It concerns constructing ways of experiencing the senses. The constructive aspect places primacy upon the ability to alter processes of perception. McLuhan's theories aim to alter sense experience didactically, teaching how to self-consciously configure sense experience amidst the overwhelming pressure to have it configured by media and symbols. Any particular aesthetic (e.g. psychoanalytical, romanticism) can function hermeneutically, affecting the ways perception and experience are experienced. It can also function productively, as a value principle guiding the composition of parts. The aesthetics of attention thus concern the composition of attention and the interpretation of attention.

In this aesthetic of attention, the role of the individual is dialectical, moving between subject and object of attention processes. Prior chapters have noted the implicit role of the individual as co-creator of ecology. McLuhan notes his own understanding of the role of the

individual: “When we say “the medium is the message,” we suppress the fact that the user or audience or cognitive agent is both the “content” and maker of the experience, in order to highlight the effects of the medium or the hidden environment or ground of the experience” (MFC 51). In recovering the details of the “cognitive agent’s” role, we note the tensions and opportunities that exist between the inner and outer forces. Prior chapters discuss the individual as object to material and symbolic agencies. Amidst this, individuals are subject in their capacities to construct their attention despite that which is materially and symbolically determined. The mode of attention taken into a situation is active and productive of the attentions that meet with material and symbol.

Attention is formed by a distribution of agencies across all three dimensions of material, symbol, and intention. The intentional dimension has a special variable character. Its makeup is that of material and symbol but is not fully formed by them. Its social orientation and extensive domain is facilitated by the symbolic dimension. But how it is that these accrue are mobilized in discrete moments is not fully determined by material and symbol. Individuals can choose their attention. The human, with extensive material and symbolic constitution, wields vast indeterminate, indefinite possible acts of attention. The history of the humanities is testament to the variety of attentions.

Any conventional category (e.g. “I can hear the jazz in Debussy if I ignore the French in it”) attests to the infinitude of attentional modes creatable between the dual roles of subject and object. Every word in this example bespeaks of an attentional mode operating between the communicants and the object in reference. The word “I” delimits the scope of domain to the speaker, excising “you,” “we,” “everybody,” or an arbitrary grouping such as “any American.” “Can” is a modal term of potential ability, which expands the act of attention from the actual to

the possible there-and-then. “Hear” is a sense ratio of salient hearing that isolates the ear from the total sensorium (compared to the unified “I feel, sense, or discern”). “The jazz” is the most complex attention in the sentence so far. It implicitly selects a domain of reference assumed to be shared with others (e.g. that which is called jazz), abstracts sense patterns that go under any of various names (e.g. “dissonance,” “swing”) and conveys those private sensations by one word “jazz.” The determiner “the” functions to claim attention to one element in isolation from others (“I can hear the woodwinds” instead of it simply designating a formal title “I can hear the room”). Peculiar to this “the” is that the medium of sound is not *physically* discernable as parts but rather as an all at once sensation that cannot be backwards separated in the air. To “hear the jazz” is to attend through the symbolic dimension of music compared to “hearing the room” through the material dimension.

Likewise with every ensuing word. “In” names the material by the symbolic, metaphorizing a container relationship between sense patterns (e.g. musical observations) “in” a symbolic entity (e.g. the works of a composer, by metonymy). “If” is another modal term, this time for contingent activation. It indicates the necessity for a complex attention operation of selective suppression (“ignore the French in it”) in order to perceptually access the jazz that the French obstructs. Analysis of the attention represented in this example could be taken much further, elaborating the entities, relations, and attentional modes both represented and performed by the language.

Of note is the assemblage of attentional ingredients concocted into one unified act of attention, which can then be expressed linguistically for others to reproduce. The materials of this attention act are largely pre-supplied and constituted by socialization in a shared language. Learning a language is learning a set of pre-composed possible attentions. Each word is a set of

attentions (“help,” “eww,” “David,” “the”) codified by assorted practices such as grammatical categorization (“help” as *either* thing *or* as action), accrued meanings (“help is for wimps”), cultural association (the Beatles), phonetic texture (for poets’ meter or for singers holding back spitting the *p* in their microphone), law (the speaker’s culpability for inciting public panic in a movie theater), and so forth. There are numerous means by which a mode of attention is maintained through a single word. This is the material of the intentional dimension of attention, which can be deployed differently from how it was learned.

The amassing of prior attentions through the socialization of language is merely illustrative for all things and learnings that likewise function as transmittable stores of attentional modes. These commonly include objects (e.g. flags as separate from laundry on a clothesline even though they are materially similar, binoculars as single-point vision contrasted with glasses as full-field vision), substances (gold as valuable despite its material abundance, blood as gore by its symbolic link to violence), and most entities in the material realm. Symbols divide up sense experience into subsets of sensation and group them as entities for attention: “music” as sound rather than the motion that produces it, “art” as object not the process it resides in. Symbols are like the naming practices for people, they carve out an identity by reference to a grouping: David son of Jon son of Nathan, David of California, David named after someone else. The choice of naming need not change the object in order to change the attention required for naming the object. Similarly, the names of patterns become the basis for observation (e.g. frequency, symmetry). Their formation determines what can be observed and communicated: e.g. attending to the contrast or incongruence depends upon a choice basis of comparison and congruence.

The ecological perspective to the intentional dimension of attention locates individuals making attention acts within such material and symbolic ecologies. The world, for attention, is a

terrain mapped by the modes of attention inherited from yesteryear. Objects created by implicit and routine attention operations (e.g. “hearing the jazz,” “ignoring the French,” “minding your own business”) transform the environment into the social attentional environment, in which a proliferation of affinities compete for activation to those who can attend it (those who have heard jazz, Debussy and share the implicit machinery to hear each in the other).

Any socialization is attention socialization, in part for its orienting of perception and in part for sharing among others the same codes of activation. When people share the parts of the same attention orientation they share experience conditioned by the same shapings and share a language to talk about it. Experts in a craft (e.g. jazz musicians) can attend to it by more forms (hearing the jazz in Debussy) but also exchange in the *linguistic counterparts of attention* that facilitate the development in the craft.

McLuhan emphasizes how media establish attentional modes so pervasively and effortless as to not meet with recognition for the intentional dimension to uptake. Attention forms to the medium it uses, e.g. “car-shaped attention,” “seeing stick.” They impose configurations of sense ratios and relationships directly to sense patterns, for example the silence of reading and writing. Yet these direct primary configurations (outlined in the prior chapters) also accrue indirect, secondary configurations. The standardizing of reading written language instills swathes of perceptual modes to practices within reading. McLuhan writes, “A basic aspect of any literate audience is its profound acceptance of a passive consumer role in the presence of book or film” (GG 38). Such secondary constituents arise out of the primary configurations and also shape attentional modes. They include relational patterns such as involvement, detachment, distance, whole/part, continuity/discontinuity. These relations shape the sense of attention’s size, limit, speed, direction (like a hug), duration, grouping, division, and

the overall attentional state. Intentional aspects of attention assist in the composition of these elements and include selection, effort, and imagination.

These orders of primary and secondary configurations arise from the ways that intentional aspects of attention meet the material and symbolic situation. The configurational elements that constitute a mode of attention bundle together through compositional processes shared across the individual and situation. While people are object as recipients and products of ecology, the intentional dimension foregrounds them as simultaneously subject because of their creative and inventional capabilities to remake attention ecology. The inventory of inherited attentional operations can be used by a range of intentional presence: it can be reproduced without awareness but also be repurposed and remade to construct timely, situated modes of attention.

For example, a variety of material and symbolic attention operations adhere in hearing a genre in a composer's compositions as to illustrate the range of possible attentions creatable and invokable by individuals, their synthetic qualities, their attentional capacities, and the wealth of implicit attentional instruments we continually participate in propagating to maintain it all. We can go further, crossing material modes: "I can *draw* the jazz in Debussy that I hear when I ignore the French in it." And further by symbolic extension: "I can draw the jazz in Debussy that I hear when I ignore the French *history* in it." Likewise, the same compound form can be deployed upon other subject matter: "I can heed X in Y if Z." The interplay of material attentional operations and symbolic attentional operations endure great syntactical capacity, allowing the choices of object, relation, and modality to be mixed and matched into one compound mode of attention.

Such an attentional act is only possible when the attention operations of symbol and materials are met with the methods of attentional composition: substitution of established modes, compound modes, probes—indeterminate modes opened up by suspending the modes. Choosing among pre-formed attentions occurs ubiquitously in second to second attention. A rapid succession of attention occupies any few seconds.

What I call substitution is the replacement of one attentional constituent (primary or secondary) for another. This entails breaking automation and inserting a pre-formed ingredient in place of another. The word *dog*, for example, can have its attentional ingredient of grammatical category substituted: the dog, to dog, ah, dog!, ab-so-dog-lutely. The change in gramaticalization forces attention (in the symbolic dimension) to group the same phonemes d-o-g with different referents (an animal or the act of following badgeringly) and different sentential functions (subject, verb, object). Genre, for example, is an attentional ingredient whose codes invoke expectations and assumptions. Stories, images, musical works and so on can have their attention ingredients of genre substituted for another: Jack and Jill going up the hill rethought as a crime forensics case study, Mona Lisa reread as pop art, Bach's fugues as Morse coded awaiting translation.

Concurrent to selection is compounding attentions, the hybridizing of pre-formed attentions. The resulting attention is not contained in any of its parts but rather in the synthesis of their relations as a group (e.g. ignoring the French to hear the jazz). This can be linguistically exemplified through the compound attention expressed by the differences between *I eat*, *I can eat*, *I must eat*, *I might eat*. The modal operators (*can*, *must*, *might*) modify *I eat* to differently compose an attention to different programs of ability, obligation, and likelihood. Such compounding of attention occurs through any medium because of the mix of attention

ingredients active and the techniques to deploy them as attention controls. In cinema, the modal operators include panning, framing, focalizing (GG 36-38). In music: contrast of loudness, timbre, timing and so forth. Every medium has its means of compounding material and symbolic materials into attention ingredients not accessible through its constituent parts alone.

Another method of attentional composition illustrated throughout the prior chapters is the suspension of attentional elements to create strategic deprivations. The absence of an attention ingredient can create effects. McLuhan's probes, sharpened clichés, the collide-o-scope method, and anti-environments are means to interrupting routinized attentions through the material dimension. Burke's perspective by incongruity, poetic meaning and dramatic uses of language are means of breaking apart attention structures through the symbolic dimension. In both dimensions, methods of randomness and indeterminacy quintessentially break attention automatisms and open them up to the intentional maneuvers.

The intentional moves of substitution, compounding, and deprivation exemplify how attention is configured at the junctures between the intentional dimension and the other two dimensions. The dual role of individuals as subject and object of attention mitigates the determinacies of material and symbolic agencies. Recognizing the attention controls in situations makes them available for intentional modification. When not recognized, they take effect upon attention. Commonplace recognition of an attention structure makes it environmental and orientational, even if not activated situationally. Attending to a stimulus in its attentional context of ingredients, structures, and bundles gives individuals a critical awareness for attention itself. It also aids in the production of communication, controlling a medium, and anticipating audience attention.



McLuhan and Burke provide further resources for identifying attention ingredients and controls, in the material and symbolic dimension, organizing their multiplicity, and remaking them in the individual dimension's operations upon those attentional elements.

### **5.1.2 Sense-Making**

McLuhan offers a few ideas that enrich and extend access to discovering a situation's available means of attention. Connecting the intentional dimension to a situation's material and symbolic processes is what he calls sense-making. This refers to the parts of the intentional dimension active in the creation of attentional form, which encompasses materialities, symbolicities, and mind. The material and symbolic dimensions develop through processes that people have some influence in. He writes, "No 'objective' dialectics of Nature or of science as visually explainable can stand up to a resonant interface with the existential. For 'testing the truth' is not merely matching by congruence or classification; it is making sense out of the totality of experience—a process of pattern recognition that requires not only concepts but active perception by all the senses" (MFC 41). This role of the individual is vital to the natural processes of media and to intervening in their determinisms.

The engagement with archetypes, anti-environments, and sharpening clichés are examples of sense-making. They hinge on the individual will to reveal the environment by an intentional endeavor; merely heeding media as media widens the scope of the attendable. McLuhan's "studies of media as environments that alter patterns on perception and sensibility are intended to develop awareness of the process by which 'new things' come to be regarded as 'facts.' These 'new facts' concern the message or effects of new media as hidden environments. These effects are not the 'content' of the media" (MFC 50). These facts are how the "senses

specialize via the channels of dominant technologies” (MFC 50). Attending to media as live agents that create the environment transforms attention from products of media to processes of media. The overall process of media and attention is what McLuhan calls sense-making.

McLuhan conceives this broad concept of sense-making in general terms of figures and grounds, terms he borrows from Gestalt psychology, widening their scope “to take in the whole of perception and consciousness” (GV 5). For McLuhan, a figure and ground no longer refer to salient entities in a visual field and instead function as metaphors for multi-sensory attention (GV 22-23). The terms’ relationship remains the same: “figures rise out of and recede back into ground, which is configurational and comprises all other (available) figures at once. For example, at a lecture attention will shift from the speaker’s words to his gestures, to the hum of the lighting or street sounds, or to the feel of the chair or a memory or association or smell, each new figure alternately displacing the others into ground” (GV 5).

According to McLuhan, “A figure is an area of special psychic attention” such as the speaker’s words or a memory associated with the feel of a chair (GV 21). McLuhan’s listing of a situation’s figures ventriloquizes how analysis of attention is commonly “concentrated on the figure and its encounter with other figures, rather than the figure in relation to the ground, or total situation” (GV 21). The speaker’s words or gestures become available as potential figures by virtue of grounds’ material/symbolic pre-constitutions and a corresponding sense-making process.

McLuhan generalizes an axiom across the three dimensions of attention that “all cultural situations are composed of an area of attention (figure) and a much larger area of inattention (ground). The two are in a continual state of abrasive interplay with an outline or boundary or interval between them that serves to define both simultaneously.” (GV 5). The ground consists

of not simply unattended figures but that which gives rise to possible figures. This entails the whole of the material and symbolic dimension of attention as they form the environmental processes and create “The common sensorium... [that] contains all potential figures in sensuous latency at once” (GV 5). An environment is a particular arrangement of grounds that underlie “all perception, choice and preference” (GV 22). The “ground provides the structure of or style of awareness; the way of seeing or the terms on which a figure is perceived” (GV 5). Sense-making draws from grounds’ pre-formations and proclivities of figures.

Historically, McLuhan argues, “...ground comes first... figures arrive later. ...The ground of any technology is both the situation that gives rise to it as well as the whole environment (medium) of services and disservices that the technology brings with it. These are the side effects, and they impose themselves haphazardly as a new form of culture” (GV 6). The sum total of environmental services enable the range and character of possible figures. McLuhan’s example of figures at a lecture illustrates the grounds of a situation of converging technologies: orality (words, gestures), electricity (lights’ hum), and sequestered live assembly (street sounds). The last figures arise from the grounds of the individual’s intentionally-directed sense-making (the feel of the chair or a memory or association or smell).

The intentional dimension of attention emphasizes the role of individuals to alter sensation in the eco-relations of environmental processes. While the ground “is configurational and comprises all other (available) figures at once,” there is not total duplication of ground upon the individual’s making of figures. Rather, “Between the artifact and the personal or societal response there is an interval of play as between the wheel and the axle. This interval constitutes the figure-ground gestalt of interaction and transformation” (GV 20).

McLuhan's sense-making rejects notions of matching inner and outer, and "tosses aside the idea of matching in favor of interface and metamorphosis" (Theories of Communication 197). Sense-making is *poesis* ("poetry") more so than *mimesis* ("mimicry") of the world. A portion of both attention and its situation are created by the individual. The material and symbolic dimensions may arrive well-formed to a responding individual can enter into the composition of forms, relations, and assemblages. The interfacing of these elements transforms them into a conglomeration beyond what is contained in their parts.

It is through this sense-making that individuals can apply the analytical tools of media theory to engage the material dimension of attention (e.g. sense ratios) and the symbolic dimension (e.g. clichés). Merely recognizing the material relations change the symbolic dimension of attention. For example, recognizing a text as technologized orality recovers the speaking author into a reader's attention. Conversely, recognizing an orator as technologized by a ghostwriter recovers the absent author into a listener's attention. The process is interwoven. Symbols articulate material relations, which together extend the symbolic understanding of a situation (the ghost writer is dictating while the orator is performing). The symbolically illuminated material situation enlarges the basis of what can be attended, which itself is a material extension of a situation. The Colbert Report's "The Word," offers an mass media example where an oration is given in counterpoint with words displayed on screen as a complimenting voice to the orator. Much like a ventriloquist and dummy routine, the two voices come from one hidden source. Knowing this, the audience can follow the various positions the two voices take to each other: the antagonisms, the contradictions, the scripted ironies and misunderstandings, etc. In this scenario, the audience attends to two separated voices constructed from a single course, which enables possibilities beyond a single orator. The

technological materialities shape the situation. The particular awareness an audience has of the material situation allows changes to what is materially available as grounds and communication.

A change in one dimension affects the attention from another. Heeding the material relations in an address opens a field of attention possibilities in the symbolic. This is the substance of art, especially the communicative arts, which seek to exploit the capacities of a medium for audience effects or to alter the medium. The attention that engages symbols is itself material. This is the substance that criticism engages: an object along with how it is attended together are the subject of commentary.

Sense-making uptakes the material and symbolic dimensions as tools of analysis and as means of transforming a situation. A shift in attention itself can be material and symbolic. One may begin with media formalism to note the inherent properties of a technology and its relations formed with environment and the body. While this starting point does not directly service all concerns of attention, it offers a stable methodological point of reference. It especially befits inquiry into the formation of attention, which itself is a material adaptation (e.g. phantom limbs) along with a symbolic adaptation (e.g. a chosen hermeneutic) and intentional adaptation (e.g. choice of thought).

Once the ecological materialities are assessed (e.g. media sense capability sense ratio), they can be assessed for their relations as a basis for significations (metaphoricity of material, language, clichés, archetype, anti-environment). In moving from raw materialities to the material relations of symbolization, the hidden environment becomes available for attention. It can be engaged, its parts subjected to new attentions. The anti-environmental strategies probe a situation by collecting effects. Two aspects of intentional attention determine how many means of attention result from this method. The thoroughness of the assessment will result from the

range of different kinds of probes and strategies. The wider the variety, the fuller the account of the situation. Second is perceptual acuity, the fineness with which effects are detected.

Sense-making across the dimensions requires intentional attention and openness of the senses: a reflexive deferral, or attempted deferral, of the clichéd patterns of sensation; sensing the body sensing; listening not to the music but to our ears hearing it. Having a self-conscious inventory of attentional modes facilitates the ability to switch attentions and locate them. Attending to attention is central to McLuhan's method. The readying of oneself for these detections is a substantive act, largely involving an active will to overcome attention habits.

Proscriptions to watch television with the sound off or to read only the left pages of a book suggest ways of arranging material as strategies facilitative of attentional discovery. They interrupt the dressage by changing the area. Such altered grounds create situations that alter attentional retraining. Laryngitis, wearing an eye patch, and physical disablements modify the grounds as one relearns the body. Such techno-corporeal modifications introduce new attention but also inculcate the skills for changing attentions fluidly. Watching television on mute or reading only the left-side pages of a book are examples of exercising the ability to construct media relations (e.g. of sight-sound, and prose text flow). This aids in the problems of misrecognition and passivity by contriving exploratory means to reviving participation and creation.

The intentional dimension of attention concerns the making of sensation at the nexus of material and symbolic forces. Most attention moves from figure to figure since grounds are easily overlooked. Seeking the grounds in an approach to attention facilitates sense making. Since ground and the hidden environment are perceptible through anti-environments, the changing environment besets a continual prerogative: "The task of confronting contemporary

man is to live with the hidden ground of his activities as familiarly as our predecessors lived...” (GV 26).

The material and symbolic dimensions have provided ways of rendering attentional processes perceptible. The intentional dimension has its own strategies that “serve as guides to insight and to comprehension through re-cognition of the dynamic structures that occur in all processes. In replaying such patterns we are not taking any sides but many sides, also the inside” (MFC 57). Rational detachment and integral awareness are McLuhan’s intentionally-guided remedies to the material-symbolic agencies on attention.

### **5.1.3 Rational Detachment and Integral Awareness**

Despite the aesthetic method of locating formal cause in the individual, one’s attention is best served when incorporating the environment into the formation of attention. McLuhan outlines the problem: “One can have numerous classifications that do not correspond to one’s actual experience. We are often smothered in images of ourselves and of others that do not correspond to ‘presences.’ The Western world has built up a vast apparatus of classifications as a means of controlling and harmonizing experience. These have tended to be colossal systems of concepts which prevent us from direct encounter with ourselves and our world” (MFC 53). The bases from which attention is formed is deployed from prior situations rather than the immediate one. Habit and numbness prevent drawing upon the present situation for the material and symbolic “presences.” As a result, “We are all of us persons of divided and subdivided sensibility through failure to recognize the multiple languages with which our world speaks to us” (EM 39). Speed compounds this problem: “The very success we enjoy in specializing and separating functions in

order to have speed-up, however, is at the same time the cause of inattention and unawareness of the situation” (UM 92).

Rational detachment is McLuhan’s first solution directed towards what I am calling the intentional dimension of attention. Rational detachment is a form of attention individuals can deploy in a situation in order to attempt a decoupling of dressage with environment and to apprehend the eminent features of the situation. It involves an attitude (detachment) and a stance (rational).

McLuhan’s method is summed up in his allegory of Poe’s “The Descent into the Maelstrom,” in which McLuhan likens individuals to boatmen in a torrential mediascape akin to Poe’s mariner in a turbulent sea. The analogous situations betray a strategic method of ironic immersion: entering headlong into the storm with perceptive acuity and a cooperative participation. Rather than resisting, the mariner prevented his ship from being overtaken by alertly “...understanding the action of the whirlpool” (MM 150). The solution is a distinct manner of attention against overwhelming forces. The boatman was able to create “amusement born of rational detachment of his own situation” as he fixed upon the patterns of the storm and enjoyed their discovery (MM 150). McLuhan writes, “It was this amusement born of his rational detachment as a spectator of his own situation that gave him the thread which led him out of the Labyrinth” (MB v). The engulfed mariner amused<sup>14</sup> himself by an anti-environmental approach. While in his environment, he probed it by, for example “speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam.”

The “rational” part of rational detachment, as discussed in the material aspects of attention ecology, refers to ratio-nality as a product of sense ratios. The rational person is one

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<sup>14</sup> from amusement, etymologically, “a pleasurable occupation of the attention” (“amusement, n.”)



whose sense ratios befit the situation's dressage patterns. McLuhan's method of rational detachment involves detaching oneself from the sense configurations urged by a situation and playing with various alternative sense ratios to generate sense-making.

The amusement of rational detachment is what McLuhan performs: an anti-environmental approach to being in the environment. It involves co-operating with the environment as a participant while probing for its hidden grounds, which requires some attentional training and skill. It involves a sense of fluid provisionality, play, and imagination. Such an anticipatory vigilance to situation enables the discerning of patterns before they complete. Like the mariner, one deploys an inventory of attentional forms developed from related situations (velocities, seas, whirlpools) in a momentous interplay with the situation that is transpiring. Rational detachment is adaptive and can be pursued by different orientations.

When sense-making occurs with rational detachment, individuals operate with the attentions suited to the environment rather than the dressage patterns of prior environments. McLuhan writes, "only on those terms, standing aside from any structure of medium, that its principles and lines of force can be discerned. For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus [Narcosis] trance. But the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact..." (UM 15).

Rational detachment is facilitated by aforementioned methods of attention clichés, archetypes, and anti-environment. They introduce play, humor, reinvention, and collide-oscope as horizons of possible forms of intentional attention. The intentional shirking of one's attentional patterns fulfills McLuhan's virtue that "...things have to be approached on their own terms if any understanding is to be attained" (MFC 51). This kind of attention through any

maelstrom assists to “program a strategy of evasion and survival” (Understanding Me 285). Individuals can “save themselves” by similarly “co-operating with the action of the ‘storm’ itself” (MB 75). The more that rational detachment is informed by the dressage patterns of media, the more “these confusions and disruptions could be programmed and synchronized” (UM 92). McLuhan’s work serves as an amusing rational detachment from the media he communicates through, e.g. book, LP record, CD-ROM, and “From the analysis of that action, it is hoped, many individual strategies may suggest themselves” (MB v).

McLuhan’s second solution to passive misrecognition is his conception of integral awareness. Where rational detachment provides an exit from the environment’s dressage patterns, integral awareness offers a way back in with greater flexibility, range, and awareness. Drawing upon the idea of *sensus communis* and synesthesia, integral awareness embodies the ideal of reacting and interacting via all the senses in well-cultivated interplay.

The dressage patterns inculcated by environments reshape the sensorium via material and symbol, readily inducing attention into a succession of clichés and somnambulism. Rational detachment from a set of specialized attentions risks being replaced with another set of specialized attentions, never integrating sensation back into the whole and the whole person. Various matters require a fullness of attention and those without integral attention remain “fragmented and specialized. Having no unified vision of the whole, they are helpless” (UM 183).

Integral attention heeds particular media’s effects and integrates them throughout the environment. One must mind the syntheses of co-present media into one conglomerate environment while maintaining a readiness for their changeability. The mutability of the environment should be met with the mutability of attention. A self-conscious creator of anti-

environments, for example, will operate with integral attention, heeding the ecology of relating objects in order to adaptively remake it. The malleability it affords can reapproach the environment “when we want to get our bearings in our own culture, and have need to stand aside from the bias and pressure exerted by any technical form of human expression” (UM 13). It also remedies the natural tendency to “confront [a] new situation with an enormous backlog of outdated mental and psychological responses” (MM 63).

McLuhan cites poets and artists exercising integral awareness against forms of widespread attentional fragmentation. In an illustrative passage, he writes:

Newton, in an age of clocks, managed to present the physical universe in the image of a clock. But poets like Blake were far ahead of Newton in their response to the challenge of the clock. Blake spoke of the need to be delivered “from single vision and Newton’s sleep,” knowing very well that Newton’s response to the challenge of the new mechanism was itself merely a mechanical repetition of the challenge. Blake saw Newton and Locke and others as hypnotized Narcissus types quite unable to meet the challenge of mechanism. ...Blake’s counterstrategy for his age was to meet mechanism with organic myth. Today, deep in the electric age, organic myth is itself a simple and automatic response capable of mathematical formulation and expression, without any of the imaginative perception of Blake about it. Had he encountered the electric age, Blake would not have met its challenge with a mere repetition of electric form. For myth is the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period. Myth is contraction or implosion of any process, and the instant speed of electricity confers the

mythic dimension on ordinary industrial and social action today. We live mythically but continue to think fragmentarily and on single planes.

Blake's integral awareness draws upon the synesthetic—considerate of the whole person in mind, body and state—in order to escape the attentional grounds that Newton's figures were reproducing. Secondly, McLuhan notes that a continued integral awareness would engender a different counterstrategy were Blake to respond to the grounds of another situation. Moving from mechanism to myth and myth to anti-myth illustrates that integral awareness seeks techniques to circumnavigate figures of attentional dressage endemic to environment and to modify their grounds.

This follows the ideal of *sensus communis*: “The Greeks had the notion of a consensus or a faculty of ‘common sense’ that translated each sense into each other sense, and conferred consciousness on man” (UM 108). At the same time, “Our mechanical technologies for extending and separating the functions of our physical beings have brought us near to a state of disintegration by putting us out of touch with ourselves” (UM 108). Every age carries these tensions and ideals to ease them. One such ideal, “Synesthesia, or unified sense and imaginative life, had long seemed an unattainable dream to Western poets, painters, and artists in general. They had looked with sorrow and dismay on the fragmented and impoverished imaginative life of Western literate man in the eighteenth century and later. Such was the message of Blake and Pater, Yeats and D. H. Lawrence, and a host of other great figures” (UM 315).

In the age of electric speeds, media can converge, change, and span time and space quick enough to break any one particular grounds of attention, such as Newton's clock. As Jonathan Crary points out, the constant revolutionizing of the means of perception has become the norm,

with perceptual change in flux and never quite settled (33). An attention situation's grounds can be greatly varied and requires integral awareness if people are to analyze and respond to it befittingly: "when such [technologies] intrude, they alter the syntax of society. There is no *ceteris paribus* in the world of media and technology. Every extension or acceleration effects new configurations in the over-all situation at once" (UM 184). Rational detachment paired with integral awareness creates spaces for the intentional aspects of attention, especially during changes in environment.

Achieving integral awareness is secured by "total field attention." This means encountering an environment with all the senses and with attention to both figures and grounds. This mode of attention keeps awareness of the total field of the senses enmeshed with the total field of the environment. The forms of engagement (figures, clichés, dressage patterns) are apprehended in tandem with their negation (suppression, narcosis) and their alternatives (anti-environments, sense-making strategies). This entails a situational antidote that counter-strategizes how to revive attention in the face of this rapidly changing sense rations and attentional bundlings.

The three dimensions of attention illuminate the constituents of the environmental field and their recognition enables strategies to be formed. The strategies draw upon the ideal of *sensus communis* and synesthesia in order to reunite the modes of specialized and fragmented attention. McLuhan claims "The ancient saying, 'Speak that I may see thee,' was a popular way of citing this integral and inclusive quality of the spoken word" (CA 21). McLuhan sums up his cross-sensory examples of attentional form in his account of the sense of touch as the contiguity of sensation across specialized modes: "More and more it has occurred to people that the sense of touch is necessary to integral existence... In our conscious inner lives the interplay among our

senses is what constitutes the sense of touch. Perhaps *touch* is not just skin contact with *things*, but the very life of things in the *mind*?" (UM 108). The entire field of the senses has an interval of play between environment and dressage, and between the senses. When this play is enabled by sense-making, the sensorium is available for synesthetic possibilities. Without recognizing both figure and ground through integral awareness to the total field, available means of attention will be overlooked.

Integral awareness locates the total sensorium as a reference frame for situationally activated attentional elements. It also allows individuals to transcend the immediate forces of situation by activating additional possible or absent sensations. Cubism exemplifies integral awareness by reinstating the total field that painting on a two-dimensional canvass suppresses. McLuhan frames cubism as the apotheosis of integral awareness: "Instead of the specialized illusion of the third dimension on canvas, cubism sets up an interplay of planes and contradiction or dramatic conflict of patterns, lights, textures. ...Cubism, by giving the inside and outside, the top, bottom, back, and front and the rest, in two dimensions, drops the illusion of perspective in favor of instant sensory awareness of the whole" (UM 13). By breaking the conventions of image reproduction and all semblance to visual verity, cubism embodies the attempt to reproduce, like a probe against cliché, instant total awareness. The principle of "allatonceness" across the senses reduces the visual monopoly and brings the senses into interplay. The cubist approach to any environment (e.g. sculpture, text) facilitates sensuous interplay for its deprivation of a somnambulant access. Before a cubist painting, our sense ratios are live and in flux since the cubist approach violates stable linearity and sequence for a situation "of the structure and of configuration" (UM 13).

Like the cubist's integral awareness, any situation, be it immediately proximal or widely historical, can be similarly approached with integral awareness to what is absent. While cubist art facilitates integral awareness, the same attention used for it can be applied elsewhere. McLuhan reads the front page of the *New York Times* from the perspective of cubist integrality. The newspaper is also a canvass of discontinuous structures blasting a configurational allatonceness of the whole world in a 24-hour period. Its material is less visual and more symbolic than Picasso, but of the same technique. Conventional attentions lead through discussions on journalistic integrity, sensationalism, or partisanship as figures without grounds, just as attention to Picasso might with artistic virtuosity and historicity. Integral awareness to the total field would encompass the grounds: "To the alerted eye, the front page of a newspaper is a superficial chaos which can lead the mind to attend to cosmic harmonies of a very high order" (MB 4). To its readers, the surface of the news page does not resemble the world, it activates an integral sense for the world via "the huge technical panorama which they never raise their eyes to examine" (MB 4).



**Figure 6.** Newspaper for Cubist's Integral Awareness  
(From *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*)

Sense-making via rational detachment and integral awareness are ways through the process of attention formation. Their techniques and strategies are to be reckoned situationally and adaptively. Especially with changes in technology, “The method of our time is to use not a single but multiple models for exploration” involving “the technique of the suspended judgment” and “the technique of invention” (MM 69). McLuhan role models vigilance on the material-symbolic processes that form attention via techniques of integral awareness. More important than his conclusions is his method for finding the right questions by scrutinizing a medium’s effects. These questions involve: what is this object, seen from the standpoint of media history or of the body? How does it work with and change a body part? What results from its use, directly and indirectly, overtly and covertly? What psychic processes does it change? What basic human activity (i.e. looking, touching, moving) does it force, suppress, enable, or transform? His methods include play, juxtaposition, pushing to the limits, violating the conventions, alteration, and constantly changing points of view and hermeneutics—a method of chaos read carefully. McLuhan’s *The Medium is the Massage* sets all of the senses in anti-environmental play in aim of activating integral awareness to the situation of book reading.

These same attentional aims can be fulfilled outside the textual environments that McLuhan operates within. A formalization of a general approach to integral sense-making lies in his tetrad.

#### **5.1.4 Tetradic Attention**

One expression of rational detachment and integral awareness is McLuhan’s tetrad, a method for interfacing media analysis with human attention. It facilitates integral awareness by probing a



situation for its figures and grounds of attention. As such they “are an instrument for revealing and predicting the dynamics of innovations and new situations” (GV 18).

All of the material and symbolic dimensions of attention are includable in this intentional mode of seeing. The tetrad is inherently linguistic, drawing upon the symbolic dimensions, and inherently situational, drawing upon the material dimensions. How the individual completes the tetrad changes his/her attention.

Thus, the tetrad is not *descriptive* of the natural world, in fact “The tetrad is only applicable to human artefacts, and not, for example, to birds’ nests or spiders’ webs” (LM 127). Rather, each part is *interpretive* of technologized situations. It functions as a hermeneutic for situational grounds for attentional figures. It is a probe launched into situations to help discover the interface between material-symbolic structures and the sense-making individual.

Since the tetrad, like attention, is interpretive, any two people’s tetradic attention will yield some variation to the perceived grounds *that they are attending by* in their situation. By creating a mental instantiation of the hidden environment, the tetrad constructs a mode of attention that accounts for itself and its possibilities. Tetradic attention can be brought into any technological situation to widen possibilities from figures to figure-ground relationships. Instead of McLuhan’s lecture example listing words, gestures, and smells of chairs as figures, the available means of attention broadens to include the underlying processes that allow such figures to stand out from particular grounds.

The tetrad offers a way of attending to the means of attentional production from within a situation as it occurs. Thus “in presenting the perceptual patterns of the tetrad form, the object is to draw attention to situations that are still in process, situations that are structuring new perception and shaping new environments, even while they are structuring old ones, so that it

might be said that structures of media dynamics are inseparable from performance. The effort is always to draw attention to the laws of composition as well as to the factors of regulation and interplay” (GV 28). Grounds are the continually-changing means by which figures are attended and a “ground cannot be dealt with conceptually or abstractly: it is ceaselessly changing, dynamic, discontinuous and heterogeneous, a mosaic of intervals and contours” (LM 63). It requires a form of instantiation tangible through anti-environments or attentionally through tetradic attention to figure-ground processes.

McLuhan writes, “As an exploratory probe, tetrads do not rest on a theory but a set of questions; they rely on empirical observation and are thus testable. When applied to new technologies or artifacts, they afford the user predictive power; in this sense as well they may be viewed as a scientific instrument. Once again, insofar as the tetrads are a means of focusing awareness of hidden or unobserved qualities in our culture and its technologies, they act phenomenologically” (GV 6). The four questions probe a technologic situation to direct attention to the phenomenological grounds often omitted from the casual account of figures-minus-grounds. As a phenomenological hermeneutic to a situation, it reveals shifting grounds not about the world but about how “the mind of man is structurally active in all human artefacts and hypotheses” (LM 120).

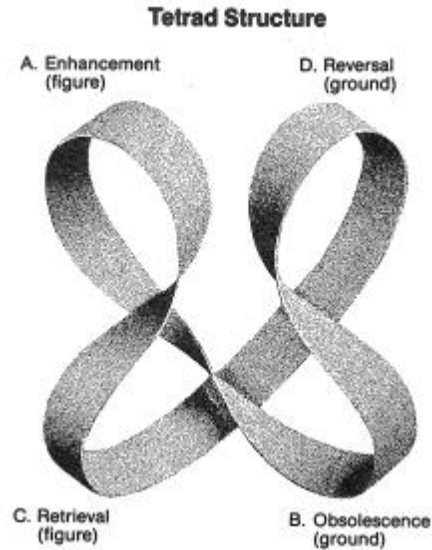
The four probes, as questions, ask the individual to seek what a media situation enhances, obsolesces, retrieves, and reverts to. Tracing out particular technologies in fluid relations tetradically makes sense of their material-symbolic structure. They are elaborated in *Laws of Media* (brackets added):

- What does the artefact [sic] enhance or intensify or make possible or accelerate? This can be asked concerning a wastebasket, a painting, a steamroller, or a zipper, as well as about

a proposition in Euclid or a law of physics. It can be asked about any word or phrase in any language.

- If some aspect of a situation is enlarged or enhanced, simultaneously the old condition or unenhanced situation is displaced thereby. What is pushed aside or obsolesced by the new ‘organ’[technology as bodily extension]?
- What recurrence or retrieval of earlier actions and services is brought into play simultaneously by the new form? What older, previously obsolesced ground is brought back and inheres in the new form?
- When pushed to the limits of its potential (another complementary action), the new form will tend to reverse what had been its original characteristics. What is the reversal potential of the new form? (LM 98-99)

Important for attention are the relations these questions share as two sets of figures and grounds in shared relations. The two figures are directly *perceptible* (what is enhanced and what is retrieved) but are only *comprehensible* via the two grounds (what is obsolesced and what is). Remedying the tendency to only note figures of attention, the tetrad reveals figures and grounds simultaneously and inextricability (GV 4). Figure 12 visualizes the manifold relations that come to the fore as each probe, like a sequence in a rubber band, conforms to each of the other three probes.



**Figure 7.** McLuhan's Tetrad: Two Figures, Two Grounds in Integral Relation  
(From *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*)

Thus the tetrad offers a phenomenological account of sense-making via the structures emergent from media situations. McLuhan writes that “The tetrad, taken as a whole, is a manifestation of human thinking processes,” being made of and making kinds of attention dressaged to a technology (GV 6). It facilitates an ecological awareness of what is absent (obsolesces), what is changing (reversal), what is continuing (retrieval), and what is emerging (enhancement). The four modalities are present as predicates upon a situation. Just as *I eat* modalizes with *I can, might, should eat*, so does a situation modalize by its absences, reversions, continuities, and emergences. Tetradic attention bundles these four modalities, bringing intention to reveal more of environmental processes than material and symbolic alone.

When attending in this manner, “the perceptual patterns of the tetrad form belong properly to grammar” of psycho-social patterns that attention composes. It forms an “etymology and exegesis” of the environment, manifesting its historical accrument and also its momentous elaboration. As etymology, it foregrounds for attention the implicit sense of the material and symbolic processes of dressage. As exegesis, “the artefact is seen to be not neutral or passive,

but an active logos or utterance of the human mind or body that transforms the user and his ground” (LM 99).

The intentionality to bringing tetradic attention into sense-making supplements the situation’s attentional grounds from which subsequent figures are formed. As mediator between situation and attention, it translates situation to transform attention. Any situational hermeneutic that alters attention translates situation to transform attention beyond the materialities alone.

As regards the formation of attention, the cognitive agent is both figure and ground of the situation. McLuhan writes, “The tetrad not only reveals the configurational character of time, but also that the artifact (or founding idea) is always the product of the user’s mentality. The tetrad includes the ground of the user, as utterer; and paradoxically, includes the user as ground” (GV 10). Tetradic attention composes a way of heeding the ecology of attentionally formative structures. It facilitates varying the accounts of attentional situation, setting up what can be attended to.

This highlights how attentional form arises not by processes of matching but of making. The four parts present in a situation form resonant intervals, not by a transportation of effect (LM 123). Too often attention is conceived as a process forged “in terms of the matching rather than the making process, in terms of logic and dialectic instead of poesis, in terms of (descriptive) concepts instead of percepts. To do so, it is necessary to ignore ground and to create a dialectic of polar figures, to reduce proportion to mere equalities (which robs them of resonance), and to interpolate a ‘logical structure’ of language” (LM 122).

The tetrad’s modalities bring into awareness its ratios, complementaries, and “interfaces” so that they can be availed for attending to what is possible. Rendering the hidden grounds comprehensible expands the available means of making figures. As Blake did to Newtonian’s

mechanicity, detecting grounds enables counterstrategies. With these resources available, individuals can attend to a situation more by its own terms and less by pre-formed attentions of prior situations. In this way, tetrads illustrates any number of techniques that “restore poesis and the making process to the study of artefacts.” (LM 227)

The tetrad’s example of a systematic approach to situation enjoins the intentional dimension to the material and symbolic. The play between situation and response it offers is the locus of individuals’ perceptual agency vis-à-vis the agencies of material and symbol. When the intentional dimension engages the figures and grounds in the other dimensions, it has the capability of diverting the technological determinisms of somnambulant users and widens the possibility of remaking attention within their presences.

The ecological perspective to intentional attention illuminates the social and external elements that intention composes and remakes. The intender participates in the circulation of attentional grounds with situational opportunities to access, instantiate, and alter them.

Burke extends this theme of the role of intentional attention at the nexus of the material and symbolic structures. His dramatism emphasizes the options intentional attention has in configuring symbols with human relations.

## **5.2 INTENTIONAL DRAMATISM**

In the prior two chapters, the dramatistic perspective has been applied to the material dimension of attention, revealing the social accruments that are the basis for attention formation. It has also been applied to the symbolic dimension, showing the social in the symbolic and the symbolic’s meaning structures that variously impinge on attention. Tracing out these agencies

upon attention is among the first and most powerful means to assessing an attention situation. Once these material and symbolic externalities are assessed, there are techniques the individual can do to engage them on their terms and modify the situation. While analysis discloses its own strategies particular to situation, dramatism also offers some general techniques for becoming attuned to one's attention situation.

### **5.2.1 The Dramatistic Hermeneutic - Interpretive Method**

Burke's method is dramatism, the study of human relationships approached through language. Language makes many such relations, propagates them, and evolves them. Language is also a means of attending to relations outside itself. Language invokes terministic screens, types of dramatistic meaning, and perspective, which together render what can be attended to through symbols.

The attentional effects of symbolic structures is what Burke devotes much of his work to exposing. They play into discrete acts as well as the metabiologic process of human self-fashioning and of motivating schemes of attitudes and actions.

Burke's method of assessing a situation's symbolic agencies rests upon his self-cognizantly crafted dramatistic screen, a terministic screen to account for terministic screens. The maximally general screen aims to encompass all other terministic screens in order to adequately address how recurring terminologies create modes of attention that correspond to patterns of meaning, action, and constitution. He writes, "the dramatistic screen does possess the philosophic character adapted to the discussion of man in general, as distinct from the kinds of insight afforded by the application of special scientific terminologies" (LSA 53).

Dramatism's ability to accumulate all perspectives for the fullest synthesis possible creates a characteristic mode of attention not available in specialized discourses. Burke finds the sciences and the modern Western disciplines too narrow for the necessarily generalist nature of the full human. He reasons that the human must be explored with a terministic screen that envelopes all the terministic screens, lest our attention be ill-equipped for the pursuit:

“to the extent that all scientific terminologies, by their very role in specialized disciplines, are designed to focus attention upon on or another particular field of observation, would it not be technically impossible for any such specialized terminology to supply an adequate definition for the discussion of *man in general*? Each might serve to throw light upon one or another aspect of human motives. But the definition of man in general would be formally possible only to a *philosophic* terminology of motives (insofar as philosophy is the proper field for thoughts on man in general). Any definition of man in terms of specialized scientific nomenclatures would necessarily be “over-socialized” or “over-poeticized” and so on, depending upon which specialized terministic screen was being stretched to cover not just its own special field but a more comprehensive area. Or, if we try to correct the excesses of *one terminology*, by borrowing from several, what strictly *scientific* cannon... could we adduce as sanction? Would not such an eclectic recipe itself involve a generalized philosophy of some sort?” (LSA 51-52).

The dramatistic screen functions as a meta-screen with the metabiologic philosophy. It is a general vocabulary for linking particular vocabularies to metabiological processes, such as attention and inclination. As such, it offers a comprehensiveness to capture the symbolic



dimension of attention and how it impinges upon the formation of the human and the resulting intentional dimension of attention.

The dramatic screen is crafted to address why and how people act in the way they do by certain means, especially regarding symbols. The faculty of human attention is central to this formulation. The “why and how” come from each of the three dimensions. The intentional aspects of attention are comprised of material and symbol, but emphasizes how individuals play a role in constituting them. Aiding these concerns, dramatism accounts for the role of intention in symbolic action (reorientation) and a systematic way of organizing the infinitude of possible terministic perspectives (pentad).

### **5.2.2 Resymbolization and Reorientation**

Just as McLuhan notes how people commonly approach the material elements of attention with a prior equipment, Burke recognizes the need for continually updating the sensibility to situation. Just as people inculcate material dressage, they also acquire symbolic orientation. Material and symbolic adjustments to people call for people’s adjustment to them, especially when a situation is approached with an outmoded orientation.

Burke’s aforementioned concepts of orientation, ethicizing, and the pathetic fallacy manifest the various ways that individuals develop their inherited and accumulated orientation by their own means. People seek to change circumstances by changing the symbols involved, which means overcoming the recalcitrance built up in the material and symbolic dimensions. The intentional remaking of the symbolic order must occur in ways that strategically engage the

idiosyncrasies at the juncture between past orders' styles and future goal reimagined. Burke writes:

The desire to recharacterize events necessarily requires a new reading of the signs—and though men have ever “looked backwards,” the backward-looking of the “prophets” is coupled with a new principle of interpretation, a new perspective or point of view, whereby the picture of “things as they really are” is reorganized. We found our critical systems upon prophetic reference to the past; and we also attempt to retrace time “geographically” by examining “savage” societies still intact today. Even though our contemporary prophets seldom arrogate to themselves a “lofty eminence” from which to survey the entire course of events, is there not something like a modernization of loftiness in the scientific cult of the impersonal attitude? The basic device of modern secular prophesying is abstraction, which etymologically signifies a “drawing away from.” (PC 180)

Just as McLuhan's method of situational detection prioritizes percepts over concepts, Burke's intentional remaking of situation also eschews abstraction for its tendency to maintain concepts that color percepts. He devises methods of intention that break symbols' bulwarks for maintaining a particular attention. The chapter on the symbolic dimension of attention outlines the workings of attention structures maintained by symbols. Tracing through symbols' attention agencies enables intentional strategies to move “By and through language, beyond language” (SOM 266).

One way Burke organizes the symbolic dimension of attention is into frames of acceptance. They are symbolic structures that admit attention without resistance to related symbols. He writes that “though every historical period is unique as regards its particular set of circumstances and persons, the tenor of men’s policies for confronting such manifold conditions has a synthesizing function” (ATH iii). That tenor is a mode of attention symbolically synthesized from the environment. The symbolic synthesis can be incorporated into orientation as frames of acceptance, defined as “the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man gages the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it” (ATH 5). Darwinian evolution, Hellenic divinity, class struggle, the unconscious, the will to power and so on are examples of symbolic syntheses of the environment that terministically locate the individual and their role in a historical situation. These symbolic “grounds” are the basis from which “figures” of attention are understood. The frames of acceptance have the feature of forming figures and consent. The acceptance frame is symbolic materialization of a strategy to the terrain. Complementary figures continue the strategy. For Darwinian evolution, adaptation to environment; Hellenic divinity, pleasing the fickle deities; and so forth.

Acceptance frames perspectivize and metaphorize the environment, themselves becoming environmental and a basis for subsequent attentions. Figures of attention are pursued or diverted on the basis of their relations to the individual’s frames of acceptance and rejection. Since action involves an implicit program of understanding, people risk operating by the “Wrong words, words that divided up the field inadequately, [and] we obey false cues” to goals and pursuits sought.”

We are behooved to select a narrative and terminology for our acceptance frames that service the material and symbolic situation while servicing the purpose at hand. Burke writes,

“we must name the friendly and unfriendly functions and relationships in such a way that we are able to do something about them. In naming them, we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in in the attitudes there are the cues of behavior” (ATH 4). He notes how reforming an acceptance frame is a substantive act of reforming the grounds that drive subsequent figures: “It is an act for you to attempt changing your attitudes, or the attitudes of others. Our philosophers, poets, and scientists act in the code of names by which they simplify and interpret reality. These names shape our relations with our fellows. They prepare us *for* some functions and *against* others... they suggest how you shall be for or against” (ATH 4).

Burke’s perspective by incongruity is a method for detecting the hidden aspects of the symbolic situation and for ripping them open for remakings. The symbolic analogy to McLuhan’s anti-environments and collide-oscope probes, perspective by incongruity reveals the relations of congruence and the continuities/discontinuities of different terministic groupings. The hidden linkages in symbolic relations come to the fore. Symbolizing our frames of acceptance, subjecting them to perspective by incongruity draws out the implicit workings upon symbolic attention and makes them available as a basis of attention strategy and changing the symbols materialized within orientation.

### **5.2.3 Pentadic Attention**

While frames of acceptance contextualize intentional patterns of attention, Burke’s pentad organizes a systematic way of allotting symbols in order to direct and deflect attention. The pentad ascribes five key terms to read dramatism’s perspective into human affairs. Seeing the world as a series of actors on a stage, Burke identifies situation (the *scene*), events (the *act*), actors (the *agent*), props (*agency*), and narratives that render the events understandable and

motivated (*purpose*). The way dramatism schematizes motive in dramatic terms “offers a system of placement, and should enable us, by the systematic manipulation of the terms, to ‘generate,’ or ‘anticipate’ the various classes of motivational theory” (GOM xxii). As with any perspective, dramatism “reduces the subject synoptically while still permitting us to appreciate its scope and complexity” (GOM xxii). Burke writes that “the dramatist pentad is best designed to bring out strategic moments of motivational theory,” which entails strategic moments of how attention is guided in human affairs (GOM 67).

Dramatism schematizes the ways attention is routed along the emphases of the pentad (GOM 53). Motives are often attributed to one or two of the terms in a given account, which presents for attention a motive structure that backgrounds others. With various pentadic emphases, “one may deflect attention from scenic matters by situating the motive of an act in the agent (as were one to account for wars purely on the basis of a “warlike instinct” in people): or conversely, one may deflect attention from the criticism of personal motives by deriving an act or attitude not from traits of the agent but from the nature of the situation” (GOM 17).

The pentad systematically arranges five sources for motive, each with their own foregrounding of what is available to attend to. For example, a trial attorney for a homicide defendant could plead guilty with a mitigating motive located in any of the five terms:

- Scene: “The situation required my client, a good person, to shoot that person.”
- Act: “*This* instance of killing is not like other instances; in fact, it more resembles assisted suicide than murder.”
- Agent: “My client is clinically insane and diagnosed to be chemically imbalanced toward chronic delusion and aggression.”
- Agency: “The faulty gun went off by accident in the unintended hands of my client.”

- Purpose: “My client, for the greater good of mankind, shot a serial killer on rampage.”

The placement of motive determines the kind of communicative engagement and each’s subsequent attentions. Each placement invokes forms (i.e. expectations) of ensuing actions. Each initiates a sequence of different forms of communication, method of proof, calculation, weighting, cultural register, implication, believability, and so on. Burke’s *grammar* of motives shows how the systematic options of locating motive each result in a profusion of ramifications from the construction of the subject matter and the motives it asserts. The *rhetoric* of motives concerns how such options are directed and tailored toward intended audiences (a matter discussed later in this chapter).

Beyond the five loci of motive, Burke details “ratios,” pairs of pentadic terms, that chain together to highlight how a motive can source in one term and arise in another. For example, the agency-act ratio is illustrated by “wielding that particular gun gives an overwhelming urge to use it and revel in its awesome equalizing power.” The scene-act ratio is seen in “my client shot him just as any other reasonable person would have in that situation.” Any two loci of motives can pair to attribute shared sources to any act. Only through symbols can attention be directed to such matters.

Since one chooses their account of motives, “the ratios may often be interpreted as principles of selectivity rather than as thoroughly causal relationships” (18). A selection of the initial term enables a selection of the secondary term as well as the relative quantity between the two terms. The quantity need not be quantified but can nonetheless be weighted in accordance with each other. The agency (the gun) becomes linked to the act (the shooting) as the preponderant source of motive to the person, the situation, the purpose, and the act.

Where the primary pentadic emphasis guides attention to a locus of motives, the arising ratio reveals more subtle implications about how “one set of scenic conditions will ‘implement’ and ‘amplify’ given ways and temperaments which, in other situations would remain mere potentialities, unplanted seeds” (19). Ratios’ weightings depend on the contexts of their use. Motives, for Burke, are not single-sourced and neither should attention be to such matters. Rather, motives and motivated actions distribute through multiple sources in relative quantities fulfilled by their enabling contexts. So too does Burke invite an according kind of attention to such matters, attending to the entanglements of motivic motion underlying and pervading all human action, and without whose symbolic expression we could not attend to them. The form of the motivic representation invites a corresponding attention to the matter as well as a leading away from other manners of attention.

Further clarifying how perspective and pentadic placement guide attention is perspective’s properties of scope and circumference. Burke continues the visual metaphor for thought (perspective, theory, orientation) to describe a perspective’s domain. Assigning borders inheres in the metaphorical nature of perspective and the ascribing of motive. Burke writes, “in definition, or systematic placement, one must see things ‘in terms of...’ and implicit in the terms chosen, there are “circumferences” of varying scope” (GOM77).

Circumference and scope refer, respectively, to the limits of a perspective and that which it contains. These properties of perspective shape what is explicit for attention, what is deflected from attention, and the kind of ensuing logic called forth from the account. For example in discussing the scene-act ratio, Burke writes, “The choice of circumference for the scene in terms of which a given act is to be located will have a corresponding effect upon the interpretations of

the act itself” (GOM77). By the scene-act or scene-anything ratio, a change in the quality of the scene will affect the quality of the act or corresponding term.

Burke’s example continues, explaining how an understanding of an agent and act depend on the scope and circumference of the scene. We get different sketches even of a given event with a choice of border. We even get “a different kind of definition” of an agent and an act if the perspective is wide enough to include the supernatural, compared to a smaller circumference narrowed to just nature, a historical era, or “the minutely particularized situations of back-stairs gossip” (GOM 77).

Burke writes that “the sharpest instance of the way in which the altering of the scenic scope affects the interpretations of the act is to be found in the shift from teleological to mechanistic philosophies” (GOM 79). What was once the “final cause” from a “prime mover” became the “efficient cause” from a “last mover,” thereby reordering and transforming the motive. That which is excluded from the circumference is not only out of the explicit account but often even out of discourse. To speak of a godly cause in a scientific study is incommensurate enough that each discourse cannot properly respond to the other.

Not only does Burke detail the bordered-nature of perspective, he cautions uncritical acceptance of it. He advises, “Since one must implicitly or explicitly select a circumference... we are properly admonished to be on the look-out for these terministic relationships between the circumference and the “circumfered,” even on occasions that may on the surface seem to be of a purely empirical nature” (GOM 78). The amassing of perspectives provides an amassing of vocabularies of attending to human affairs and “a fully-rounded vocabulary of motives will locate motives under all five aspects of our pentad” (GOM 65).



Circumference and the scope it provides configure the understanding of its elements, but Burke also advises that such accounts should be unmistakably attended to as accounts. Burke's visual metaphor for perspective assists this advisory. If all communication and accounts of motive are necessarily perspectival (i.e. metaphorical, partial, and circumfered), then such accounts are as representations not to be confused with the represented. The symbolic viewing lenses should be closely watched as they affect the nature of our observations and actions made with the lenses. This is especially important for matters not visible without symbolic reference, such as motive and purpose. Burke writes:

In a sense, every circumference, no matter how far-reaching its reference, is a *reduction*. A cosmology, for instance, is a reduction of the world to the dimensions of words; it is the world *in terms of* words. The reductive factor becomes quite obvious when we pause to realize that any terminology of motives reduces the vast complexity of life by reduction to principles, laws, sequences, classifications, correlations, in brief, abstractions or generalizations of one sort or another. Any generalization is necessarily a reduction in that it selects *a group* of things and gives them a property which makes it possible to consider them as a *single entity*. Indeed, any characterization of any sort is a reduction. To give a proper name to one person, or to name a thing, is to recognize some principle of identity or continuity running through the discontinuities that, of themselves, would make the world sheer chaos. To note any order whatever is to 'reduce.' (GOM 96)

The reduction of one element will correspondingly affect the interpretation of other elements. Burke exemplifies this with the reduction of matters to material causes, which changes what result is considered willful action and what is merely the unfolding of circumstances: "...with materialism the circumference of scene is so narrowed as to involve the reduction of

action to motion. That is, whether the materialist happens to believe in the existence of a personal God or not, he will employ a materialist vocabulary of motivation insofar as such as personal principle is omitted from the scope of the circumference” (GOM 131). Depending on what is reduced, we get a different picture of the resulting elements.

Since any account of motives is reductive, the question for Burke is of which reduction and to what effect. Any attempt at a fully-rounded account of motives requires some breadth and a functional wholeness with the chosen vocabulary of motive. Burke details the difficulty involved in a broad account of motives: “...as soon as a philosopher has begun to investigate the possibilities in whatever term he has selected as his *Ausgangspunkt* [starting point], he finds that the term does not merely create other terms in its image. Also, it generates a particular set of problems—and the attempt to solve these problems may lead the philosopher far from his beginnings... he may find himself so caught up in its problems-atop-problems-atop-problems and problems-within-problems-within-problems that he cannot sense the principle of generation behind them” (GOM 130).

With the problem of scope and reduction affecting the constitution of what is depicted, the pentad offers a way of attending to a problem that highlights how its *Ausgangspunkt* shapes the account: “with the pentad as a generating principle, we may extricate ourselves from these intricacies, by discovering the kinds of assertion which the different schools would exemplify... once this approach is established, problems are much less likely to conceal the underlying design of assertion” (GOM 130-131). The pentad helps us attend to how we attend to communication by unconcealing its underlying designs.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION: THE INTENTIONAL DIMENSION IN DRAMATIC ECOLOGY

This chapter has introduced several notions of intentionality as a dimension to attention. By myriad ways outlined, they form situation-specific processes whose outcomes constitute attentional form. I have focused the intentional dimension of attention upon the paradigms of dramatic ecology to outline attention's inextricability with intentional aspects of communication. Drawing from the concepts of McLuhan's intentionalities of ecology and Burke's intentionalities of dramatism, dramatic ecology can bring them into complementarity, enabling us to generate situated insights about attention processes.

McLuhan's ecology conceives intention as the individual's control of their sensorium within the processes of environments. Burke conceives intention as the individual's control of symbols' implicit involkings and actions. Both perspectives on attention's intentionality take as their starting point what the individual can do in the processes of dramatic ecology (re-sensitize and resymbolize). These attentions can modulate the parts of the situation by engaging them in their respective forms (the ecological and dramatisitic hermeneutics). In ecology, all three dimensions can be schematized by McLuhan's tetrad. This demonstrates how the general heuristic of the attention situation can be pursued through dramatic ecology to devise a media-centered heuristic for a situation's attention processes. In dramatism, all three dimensions can be schematized by Burke's pentad. This demonstrates how the general heuristic of the attention situation can be pursued through dramatic ecology to devise a language-centered heuristic for a situation's attention processes. Attending to a situation through these attention schematics changes attention, making it reflexive and enables to engage the dramatic-ecological parts of situation. I call these tetradic attention and pentadic attention. They make explicit the inherent

theorizations implicit in the act of attention, capacitating the individual's situationally-determined abilities.

Dramatic ecology, together, provides a stereoscopic lens to the ways this intentionality is constituted by its continuities with material and symbolic systems inside and outside the individual. The dramatic ecology paradigm invites analysis to how ecological intentionality and dramatisitic intentionality interrelate in a given situation. Any aspect of intentional ecology touches most any aspect of intentional dramatism.

To generate more situational insights, we can variably pair concepts from eco-intentionality with drama-intentionality. Most any combination will be pregnant with analytical suggestivity. For example, how do pentadic shifts relate to sense-making shifts? How do tetradic shifts relate to pentadic allocations of motive? What is the relation between the dramatisitic screen and the ecological screen? Sought in the abstract outside of a situation, dramatic ecology offers several theoretical responses.

The heuristic use of this vocabulary encourages common features of attention formation be sought before they are situationally revealed. Dramatic ecology offers preparatory assistance to theories of attention by collecting common features of attention formation from our theorists' case studies. This play of generative concepts enables us to ask finer questions that probe the intentional aspects of attention. For example, how can the resources of sense-making guide resymbolization toward a goal? How can rational detachment assist in re-orienting efforts? How does the tetrad embed as the "agency" in Burke's pentad? Dramatic ecology offers heuristic assistance to situational analysis by generating guiding terms to discover how which modes of intention-directed attention can take effect through the material-symbolic processes of a situation.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have posited attention as an undertheorized topic with much at stake in how our notions of attention are circumscribed by situation. The theories of the attention situation, the three dimensions, and dramatic ecology equip us to detect attention processes and to enlarge our role in them. The attention situation heuristic takes the lessons from the “rhetorical situation” debates and applies them, not as a fixed model, but as a framework of questions, concerns, and considerations that can be responded to however is useful for a given context. One approach to the attention situation is through my theories of dramatic ecology, attention’s three-dimensions, and Burke and McLuhan’s cornucopia of attention concepts. Together, they capacitate us for discovering a situation’s means of attention, and provide a general hermeneutic for everyday life. Most any scenario can be read as containing dimensions and dramatic ecology in order to help find many entry points of attention analysis.

The most illustrative examples of how attention processes work often come from unusual events and breaches. For example, a young engineer, exhausted from a busy day at the office, hears a faint but unusual noise as her car idles before driving home. In a hurry to leave, she rushes toward the source of the noise deep inside the engine block where all the electronics are buried beyond view. She impetuously starts to feel around for anything loose, broken, or unusual. Here, she encounters a material dimension of tactile attention, in that “searching with her hands” creates a particular media environment. She attends through materials that configure

her sense capabilities. Using a wrench disables her hand from feeling temperature but permits her to feel for objects too hot to touch. She also encounters a symbolic dimension of her attention through the various kinds of meanings oriented to her environment: car sounds mean motion, loose parts mean brokenness, smells mean leaks, and other sense-clichés indicate events occurring with the car. She additionally encounters the intentional dimension when she begins to modify her attention to suit her situation and goal. Her situation has now come to include both the unusual noise and its elusiveness cause. After remaining foiled by its source, she interrupts her hurried reflex procedures and she reassess her attentional mode. She listens to the noise now with rational detachment, availing herself to integral awareness and re-orienting her symbolic meanings. Alas, she stops, listens closely, and realizes her hastiness. The sound was coming from her Bluetooth earpiece picking up interference from the engine. Having it in her ear chronically, she did not realize it. Approaching the engine block increased the noise but could not reveal a tactile, visible, or olfactory source. Her automated attentions for this car situation, and more importantly her sense logic, failed her and led her to modalities incommensurate to her goals. Only when she suspended her unreflective attention habits could she set out to discover the means of attention to *her particular* situation. The addition of a technology changes in many ways the material situation, its system of meanings, and our (mis)orientations.

As this example suggests, people's operant sense of situation guides what and how they attend. Even the simplest scenarios have complex attention situations. There are always multiple "situations" at the same time, and our sense for them plays a role in how they transpire. For example, a dyad of face-to-face conversation can be a situation, named as one cohesive event, such as "an interview." Within this, another situation can refer to any part, such as the time allotted to answer a question or "the chit-chat before the questions." An attention situation

can be brief, such as “that little moment when neither of us knew what to say next.” They can be longer than the event itself, placing it within a larger situation, e.g., “getting a job,” “learning to communicate better,” “the post-recession economy,” and so forth. Once we conceive which situation(s) we want to pursue, we can explicate the situation’s available means of attention and how we can pursue attention goals with them.

We can apply the attention situation heuristic to some of the most traditional loci in communication scholarship. For example, the US president’s State of the Union speech can be understood as many overlapping attention situations. We can map out some of the basic ways that different people form different attentions by their assorted conceptions of situation. Most everyone involved attends to the speech in reference to the formal situation, such as its rituals, expectations, institutional function, and so on. The meaning of the speech’s words are attended to in relationship to the occasion. The speaking president understands himself to be acting within many larger contextual situations, such as his concurrent political battles or establishing his legacy, which motivates his words differently than the motives of the audience. The formal situation obliges the president to speak as an address to the entire citizenry. Meanwhile, each audience member attends to the president’s word through their particular *understanding of* their relation to the speech. A union member, a single issue voter, an opposing party member, or the president’s family attend *through their relations* to the speech. Those who understand themselves as being addressed hear the speech as something that draws them into a continuing situation beyond the speech; those who understand themselves as completely unaddressed occupy a different ongoing situation with the government.

Another attention situation is the dialogic structure of the live audience’s ability to respond. The speech is composed and delivered in accordance with the government officials’

symbolic responses of clapping to each stretch of speech. As this becomes a regular part of the situation, the speechgiver must attend to it as both a rhetorical resource and as a potential threat. The audience, however, can variously attend to it, ranging from a relevant symbolic action, a base spectacle of pandering, a homogenizing practice silencing controversy, and so on.

The technologies of the speech's mass reproduction create another embedded situation. For example, when everyone knows that the occasion will be mass consumed, it changes what is said and how meaning occurs from what is *unsaid*. Those who keep in mind that a speechwriter composed the speech attend to the words differently. One's conception of *who is* speaking will change his or her attention to the speech: e.g. the cabinet is speaking *as* a constructed public persona, the campaign team is speaking *to* their financiers, the party is speaking *despite* the president, or his heart was speaking *for a moment*. The temporal situation of viewing the speech live as it happens creates different attentions than watching it later. For example, one feels themselves participating in a shared togetherness from imagining millions of others doing the same thing. This becomes a rhetorical resource for the speaker, adding potency to collective appeals that will reduce to cliché when attended to asynchronously.

These examples demonstrate the myriad attention situations co-occurring in a mass-mediated address and in most any public communication. The three dimensions and dramatic ecology are reflected in each. Also in each is the method of targeting communication situations by isolating related situations that can be mapped and analyzed. Once selected and probed by attention heuristics, the available means of attention can be seized. The president's rhetorical situation is always an attentional one. He/she must navigate the diffusions of attention situations and render a select few salient. He can spontaneously choose to stop using his teleprompters to create candidness by mechanically severing himself from his ghost writer. Should the president



remove his/her suitcoat, it could be linked with a crescendoing argument to rouse the audience's fighting spirit, it could be linked to theatrics of ethos to show the heat of passion, but it might be attended to as a sign of nervousness or impropriety to the formality of the office. If the president has the goal to make the audience feel involved and informed without actually involving or informing them, he/she can recreate the kind of attention moves shared when people address the already-informed: summary claims, guiding ideas, motivating visions, etc. Endless considerations can be viewed similarly for their relevance to attention structures and how existing aspects of the attention situation can be seized to create an attention-shaping act not inherent to the situation. The rhetorical task is to establish, even control, attention by creatively using the resources present.

The attention situation, like much of rhetorical theory, guides communication practice and analysis by providing tools and examples that are flexibly left open to discretionary use in contingent situations. Attention has long been a central, if however implicit, part of rhetorical theory and throughout the humanities. The theories and resources advanced here—the attention situation, the three-dimensional conception of attention, dramatic ecology, and the various concepts from McLuhan and Burke—have been approached to be universally applicable as generative and guiding ideas. They interrogate every medium and every symbolic system for their potential in attentional shaping, technique, and danger. We may continually refresh our attention abilities by refreshing our attention ideas as the humanities carry forward through changes ahead in society, technology, culture, and consciousness.

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