

The Layered Architecture and Accessibility Relations of Text-World Theory and *Inception*

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Introduction

This paper explores the structure of Text-World Theory (Gavins 2007; Werth 1999) and the film *Inception* (Nolan 2010), which both contain a layered architecture of worlds, as well as comparable accessibility relations between these worlds. This constitutes the first stylistic analysis of Nolan's critically-acclaimed film and the first application of Text-World Theory to a screenplay (Nolan and Nolan 2010). In Section 1, I begin by outlining the principles of Text-World Theory, doing so in relation to the first two pages from the screenplay of *Inception* (appendix i). In this way, it is demonstrated how the model aids the close linguistic analysis of texts and succinctly captures the layered nature of discourse. Based on the properties of dramatic texts, I propose a modification to how Text-World Theory deals with embedded dialogue in general, and illustrate this proposal using the screenplay's dialogue. In order to capture the layered nature of the film's narrative, however, it is necessary to move from the micro-level textual analysis that Text-World Theory provides to a more macro-level perspective. In Section 2, I outline the layers of the fictional world of the film, from the film's real world, to the various embedded dream worlds, and to 'limbo', providing a diagram to explain the complex narrative structure. The terms PUSH and POP, originally used in Deictic Shift Theory (Galbraith 1995) to refer to deictic shifts, are employed here to describe the vertical movement between the ontological layers of the film's narrative. Maintaining a macro-level perspective on the film's structure, Section 3, then, uses Ryan's model of fictional worlds (1991a; 1991b) to account for how Nolan bends the rules of compatibility between each layer of the film, from its reality through to its dream worlds. In this way, the complex rules that hold between each ontological layer in the narrative are explained. While Ryan's fictional worlds model captures these succinctly, it is suggested that Text-

World Theory may prove useful for future research into viewer-responses (Section 4) toward Nolan's intriguing text.

1.0 Text-World Theory

Drawing from work in Text Linguistics and Cognitive Linguistics, Werth (1995; 1999) devised Text World Theory in order to describe the mental representation of discourse that language users generate when participating in discourse. The central tenet of the model is that users co-construct a 'world' using the text, as well as any knowledge and experience they may bring to that text, and furthermore, that the resulting text-world is continually updated with incremental information as the discourse proceeds. He described the framework as a Cognitive Discourse Grammar (p.50-60/1999), entailing a commitment to the consideration of the cognitive processes that language users undergo when dealing with discourse and, furthermore, to studying whole texts alongside the contexts in which they are produced and received. In attempting to account for textual features, as well as the myriad of factors that contribute to top-down processing (such as individual experiential features, physical contextual factors, and cultural knowledge), Text World Theory is an ambitious framework, which – by Werth's own admission – tries to house “all the furniture of all the heavens and the earth” (1999, p.17). Since the post-humous publication of Werth's (1999) monograph on Text-World Theory, several scholars have sought to test Werth's claims that the model can be applied to any text-type, testing it on poetry (Semino 1997; Semino 2010), drama (Cruikshank and Lahey 2010), advertising (Hidalgo Downing 2003), tabloid journalism and football commentary (Gavins 2007), as well as the narrative fiction genre the framework was mostly based on. Although these applications have contributed to the development of the framework into the twenty-first century, Gavins' (2005; 2007) refinements to Text-World Theory constitute the most significant contribution to the workings of the model itself, specifically in relation to the way it deals with modality. In this paper, I propose a further modification to the way in which the Text-World Theory deals with directly represented discourse, motivated by the

analysis of the *Inception* screenplay. Firstly, though, a brief description of how the initial text-world is constructed is necessary.

The space in which the language event takes place is called the *discourse world*, and the interactants the *discourse participants*. The discourse medium has bearing on the discourse world; face-to-face conversations share temporal and spatial coordinates, telephone conversations share temporal, if not spatial coordinates, and written or pre-recorded audiovisual media differ in time and space. When temporal and/or spatial coordinates are not shared by all discourse participants, this is known as a *split discourse world*. Each and every discourse participants brings a fresh set of experiences and knowledge to the discourse world, which helps account for multi-various interpretations of texts. In relation to the extract from the screenplay of *Inception*, my interpretation of it is shaped by the individual experience and knowledge stores I bring to the text, as well as the situational factors of the split discourse world: my spatio-temporal location, the head-cold I am experiencing, and the drilling next-door. Every reader of the text will produce a text-world shaped by their discourse world experience.

The text-world is defined by the deictic and referential information provided from the outset of the discourse, which lays down the spatio-temporal coordinates of the text-world and the entities therein (Werth 1999, pp.180-209). Linguistic reference to space, time, enactors and objects come together to form our mental representation of the discourse. Temporal expressions locate the text-world in a particular time zone; note that the *Inception* screenplay (appendix i) simply notes that it is “DAWN”, without specifying a cardinal time. Temporal deictic features, such as tense and temporal adverbs, anchor the text-world in relation to the discourse world. In the screenplay, the use of present tense (“The waves toss a bearded man...”) renders the text-world concurrent with the discourse world. This is standard in dramatic texts, where stage directions usually take the present tense, closing the temporal distance between discourse world and the text-world. The inhabitants of the text-world, in Text World Theory termed ‘enactors’ (a term Gavins [2007] borrows from Emmott [1992]) are, in the opening paragraph of the *Inception* screenplay, the bearded man and the little blonde boy and girl. The

writer of the stage directions, in this case Christopher Nolan, is a member of the discourse world and has a narrative presence in the text-world, making him both a discourse participant and an enactor.

Although there is no specific reference to the scene's location in the first paragraph, reference to objects that can be found there – surf, waves, sand, sandcastle – may activate the reader's schematic knowledge of beaches, which serves to flesh out the text-world spatially. The scriptwriter uses iconicism (Enkvist 2009) by introducing the objects in the text-world in the order in which they are perceived by the protagonist (and, incidentally, the viewer of the film). In the second paragraph, the initial beach schema is maintained with reference to the cliff, a geographical feature often found at the sea; but, other referential information related to location and person complicate matters: the Japanese Security Guard wielding a gun, his colleague standing by a jeep and the Japanese castle on the cliff. Each of these entities and objects may activate schematic knowledge about security and defence, probably in a Japanese setting.

Before the dialogue begins, the stage directions have provided the key referential information to build the initial text-world. The text-world diagram captures this information in the schematic representation below (Figure 1). The basic discourse world features are listed, although, as mentioned above, these will differ for every reader that approaches the text and so are labelled 'indeterminate'. The text-world level includes the key referential information imparted in the first two paragraphs of the screenplay.

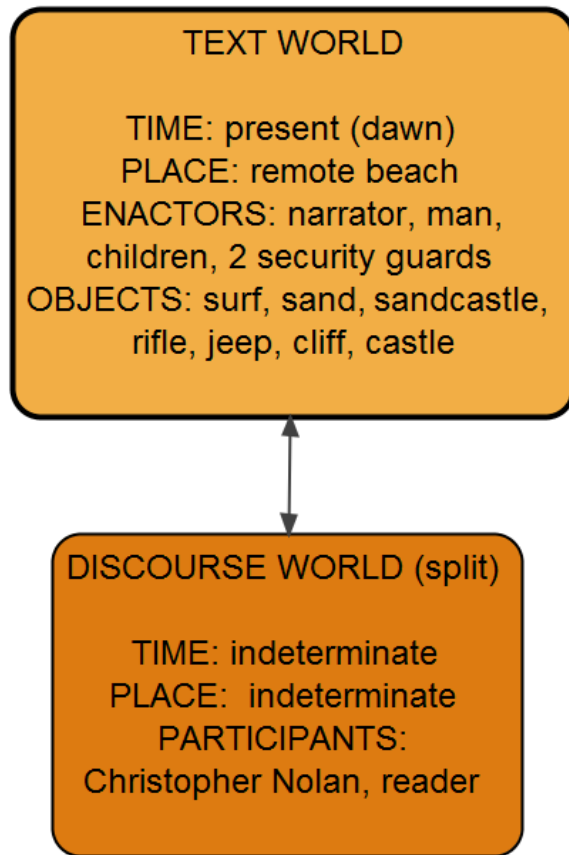


Figure 1. *The Discourse World and Text-world*

Moving beyond the first two paragraphs of the screenplay, the stage directions baldly mark the change of space and passing of time: “INT.[erior] ELEGANT DINING ROOM, JAPANESE CASTLE – LATER”. Text-world Theory describes changes to the spatio-temporal coordinates as a ‘world-switch’. These can be spatial, temporal, or both, as in the current example, where the action has moved from an exterior to interior location and time has passed, expressed by the temporal adverb *later*. Figure 2, below, shows how this can be captured in the text-world diagram.

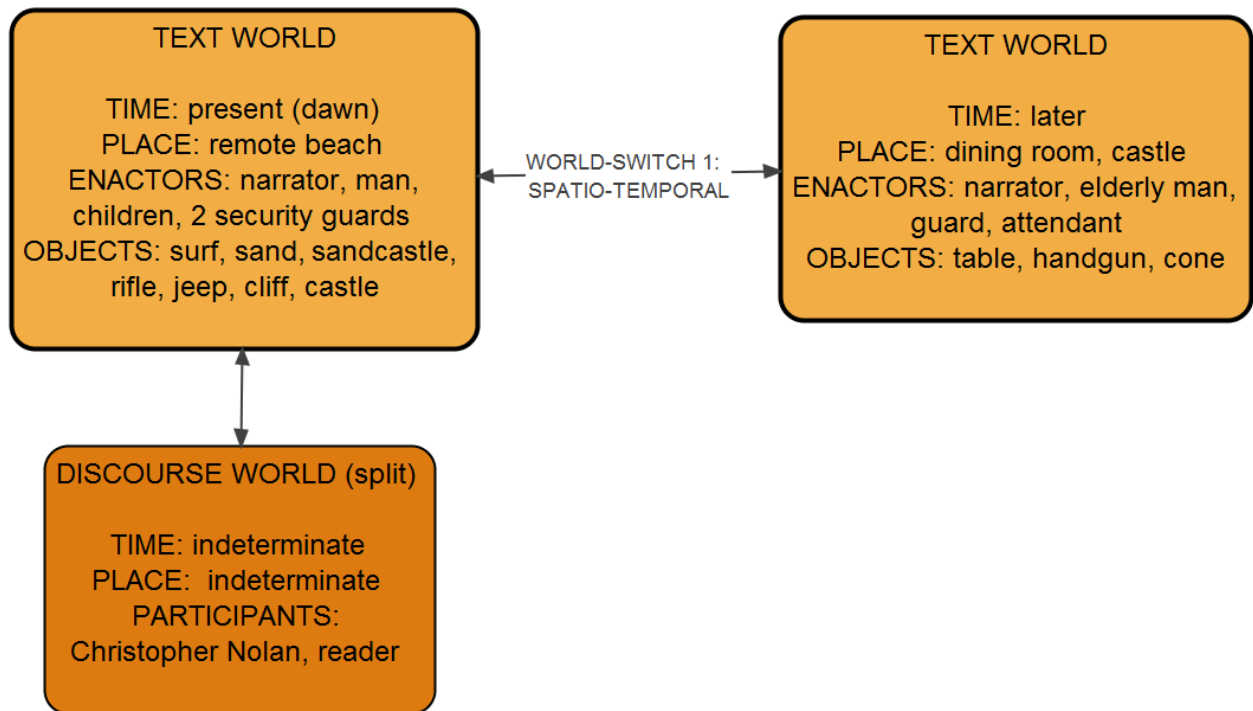


Figure 2. *World-switch*

Despite the switch in spatio-temporal coordinates, the resulting world-switch is not a departure from the text-world level; it is simply a continuation of the text-world in a different spatio-temporal location, with a new set of parameters. This includes a revised set of enactors, amongst whom we now have an elderly Japanese man seated at a dining table. However, not all textual information is stored at the text-world level, as the remainder of this section explains.

Once the referential information is established by the stage directions, the dialogue begins. I would argue that Text-World Theory – as it stands – does not satisfactorily account for directly represented discourse. Werth, who largely used narrative prose as the basis for developing the model, suggested that embedded dialogue represented a temporal world-switch, entailing a shift from the past tense narrative, to present tense dialogue, as in the following example from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Cut Glass Bowl* demonstrates:

‘My dear,’ said the curious Mrs Roger Fairboalt, ‘I love your house. I think it’s quite artistic.’
 ‘I’m so glad,’ said the beautiful Mrs Harold Piper... (2008)

However, while a temporal world switch in Direct Speech may be the case in typical narrative texts, it does not account for the use of represented discourse in drama, as Cruikshank and Lahey (2010) explain and our *Inception* screenplay demonstrates. Nor indeed, it may be added, does it account for present tense narratives or formulaic jokes (of the kind, “A man walks into a bar and says...”). In all these text-types there is no temporal switch between the first-hand discourse and the represented discourse. Gavins suggests that the switch is a personal one, where “each time an enactor speaks, a world-switch transports readers of the text to that enactor’s *origo* for as long as the speech is ongoing” (Gavins 2007, p.50). Similarly, Cruikshank and Lahey understand dramatic dialogue as “a *perceptual* shift from the *origo* of the play-text’s controlling voice to the deictic centre of the play’s characters” (2010, p.70, author’s italics). Thus, these text-world theorists acknowledge that directly represented discourse is not always a temporal shift, and suggest that it is essentially an individual personal deictic shift, and therefore generates a personal world-switch.

However, I believe this approach to represented discourse is not yet satisfactory- it infers that every time a character speaks a personal world-switch is generated. Text-World Theory holds that the text-world is *co*-created by all discourse participants and that individual contributions (spoken, cognitive, or otherwise) come together to create a *jointly* negotiated text-world. Moreover, a central tenet of Text-World Theory is that each level is subject to the same rule: “sub-worlds consist of the very same elements in the very same kind of patterns as text-worlds” (Werth 1999, p.353). Therefore, the enactors’ discourse must be subject to the same rules as the participants’ discourse. As such, I suggest that character dialogue generates a character text-world, which exists on a separate layer, and may be envisaged as embedded within the originating text-world. It may be helpful to think of this as a Russian Doll effect, as Figure 3 demonstrates.

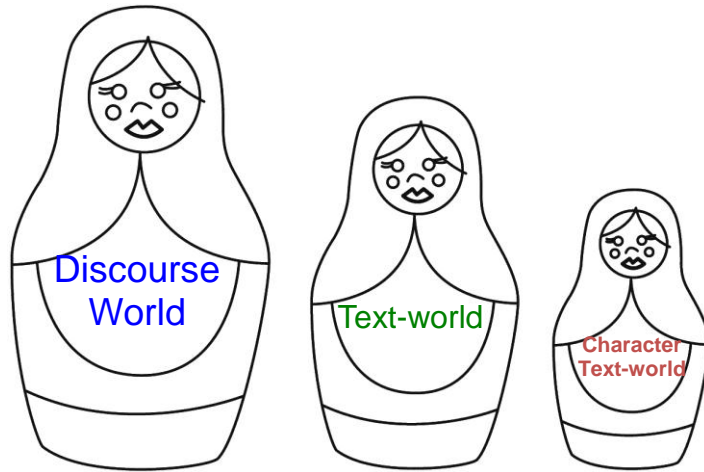


Figure 3. *The Russian Doll Effect: Embedded Discourse*

Using this modification to the system of worlds in Text-World Theory, the character dialogue in the screenplay of *Inception* can be diagrammed in the following way, adding to our earlier text-world diagrams:

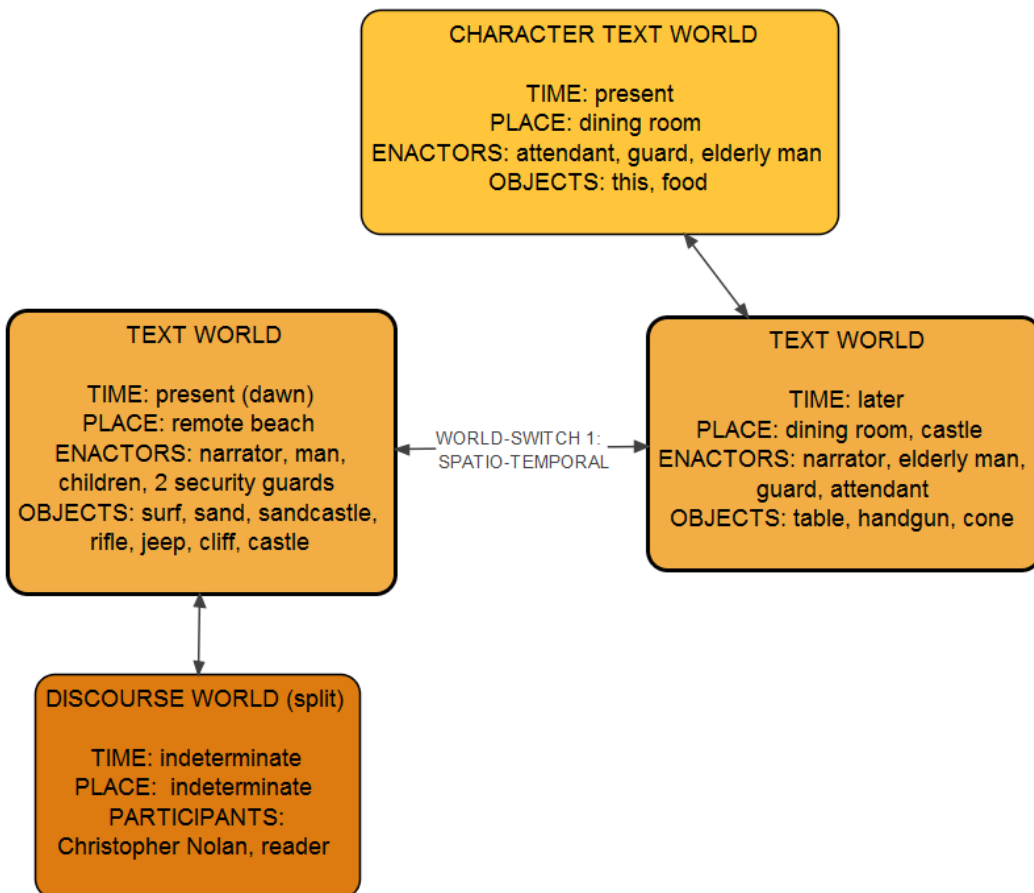


Figure 4. *The Character text-world*

Not only does this modification improve how Text-World Theory copes with dramatic texts, but it is a solution that can account for all instances of directly represented discourse embedded in the text-world, whatever the discourse type. Note that, in the extract, Cobb’s dialogue from an earlier scene in the form of a voiceover (“What’s the most resilient parasite?”) triggers Saito’s memory about past events and induces a flashback. Thus, the character text-world level contributes to the formation of a temporal world-switch at the text-world level (see Figure 5, below). This demonstrates how although the levels of Text-World Theory are discrete, the principle text-world is shaped by the information we gain from all levels.

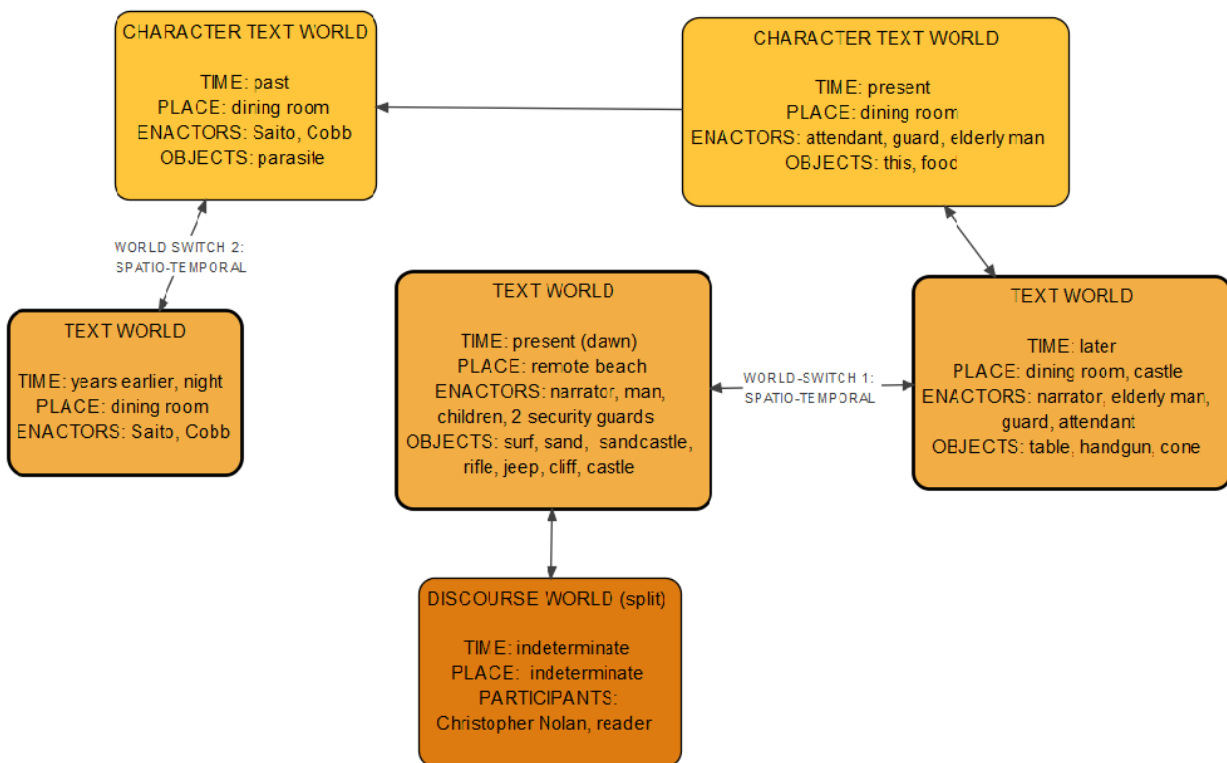


Figure 5. *The Character text-world and World-Switch*

There are also other means of departing from the text-world level. According to Gavins’ revisions to Text-World Theory, the use of modal expressions generates a modal world, which can be bouloamic, deontic or epistemic. This is because, respectively, the wishes, obligations or beliefs expressed in such propositions are not yet realized and are called into question through the use of modality; as such, they cannot be verified nor directly incremented into the text-world. There is no

clear example of such a modalized proposition in our extract of *Inception*'s screenplay, but one weak example that can serve for illustrative purposes. When the Elderly Japanese Man says, "I know what *this* is", his use of epistemic lexical verb *know* calls into question the veracity of the propositional content (which is simply 'what this is'). It may be argued that this verb is more evidential than epistemic (c.f. Cornillie 2007; Kärkkäinen 2007), but this is not the place to get into an epistemological discussion. Rather, the example serves to illustrate how a modal world can be generated from the text-world (Figure 5, below) and, furthermore, that as with all things modal, these are not always clear-cut.

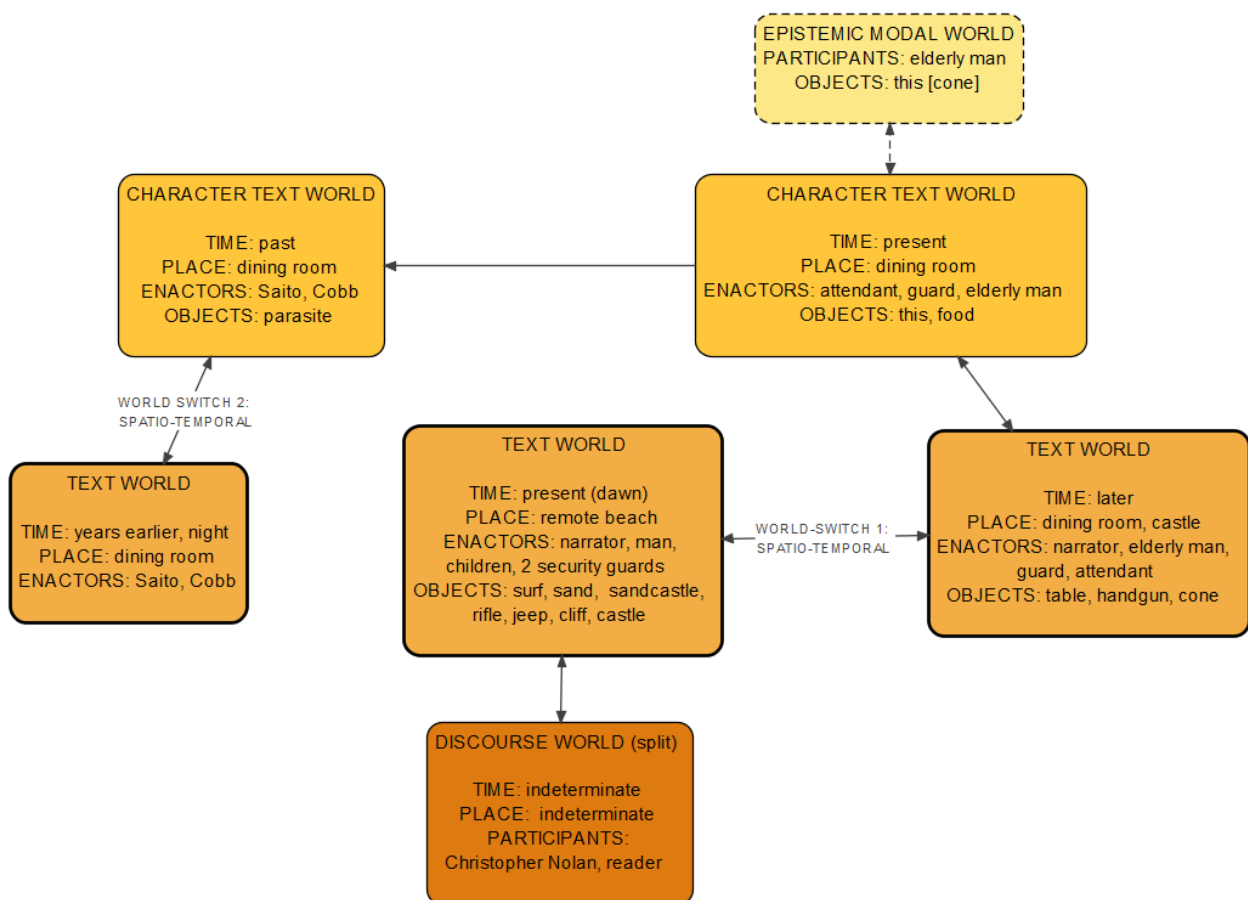


Figure 5. *Modal world*

2. Inception

Leaving Text-World Theory aside for a moment, I shall now describe the layered architecture of the fictional world of *Inception*. To be clear, this is not a text-world analysis of the film, but rather a breakdown of the ontological layers of the film, which, as we shall see, are similar to the layers in Text-World Theory that have just been described. It must also be pointed out that in this section and the next, although I deal with the film narrative in its entirety, I do not attend to the audiovisual aspects specifically, as they are beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, the focus is on the narrative structure of the film as a whole.

Inception is based on the premise that, using a machine, Cobb and his sidekick Arthur can access the dreams of others by co-dreaming and building the dream world together, thus having some influence over the outcome. They are hired by a Japanese businessman, Saito, to share the dreams of a rival businessman's son, Fischer, and plant the idea to break-up his father's empire, thus leaving Saito free from competition. This act of corporate espionage is the inception that gives the film its title. However, to avoid detection from Fischer in the dream world, Cobb, Arthur and their crew have to enter several levels deeper into the collective sub-consciousness; that is, a dream-within-a-dream-within-a-dream, leading Flourey to point out "the Russian doll structure of the film" (2011, p.233), correlating with my assessment of Text-World Theory. In order to achieve the inception, one character at a time 'hosts' a dream, as the others enter a deeper dream level. The levels of *Inception* can be diagrammed as follows:



Figure 6. *The layers of 'Inception'*

In the 'real world' of *Inception*, all of the characters are on the business class section of a long-haul flight, and once the target, Fischer, has been sedated, they hook up the machine and enter a joint dream world. Yusuf is the host of the first dream world, a city scene with torrential rain. He admits the rain was not part of the design, but he drank too much water before entering the dream- so the feeling permeates into the dreamscape, revealing some degree of physical accessibility between the layers. Fischer's sub-conscious is apparently aware that it is being hijacked, and sends hitmen after the inception artists to remove them. The passing of time in the dream is slower than it is in the 'real world' level of *Inception*, where 5 minutes of 'real time' is one hour of 'dream time'; this gets exponentially slower for every subsequent dream level.

While Yusuf stays in his dream to host it, the others hook themselves up to the machine to go one level deeper, entering Arthur's dream, located in a hotel. At this level, the car chase and gunshots in Yusuf's dream produce tremors in the hotel, showing how there is accessibility between the dream

levels in the film. When Yusuf eventually drives the van containing all the dreamers off a bridge, the feeling of weightlessness is translated to the hotel dream level. Again, the host (this time Arthur) stays at this dream level, while the remaining characters enter Eames' dream, a snowy mountain fortress. At this level, Fischer and Saito die from gunshot wounds, and, having died in a dream state, enter limbo, the ultimate level of *Inception*. Cobb and Ariadne follow them to rescue them.

The film then shows how the characters 'ride the kicks' back up each dream level to awake in the airplane. Although it is not clear how (or if) they leave limbo, the snowy mountain fortress is exploded, the hotel elevator provides a jolt, and the van lands in a river, with each 'kick' successively sending the dreamers to a more conscious plane, until they wake on the airplane (see Figure 6, above). The process of entering and leaving embedded dreams can be likened to the PUSHes and POPs of Deictic Shift Theory (Galbraith 1995). The dreamers enter successively deeper ontological planes, like readers do with texts when their attention moves from the discourse world into a remote text-world, which constitutes a PUSH. Conversely, the 'kicks' that the *Inception* characters make back up and out of the embedded dream worlds are comparable to how readers return to a more basic ontological plane when they put down a text, a move called a POP. In assessing Deictic Shift Theory's account of viewpoint, McIntyre (2006, pp.108-11) pointed out that the terms PUSH/POP are unsatisfactory in describing deictic shifts, as they imply a hierarchical or vertical movement between worlds. His assessment corresponds with Text-World Theory's architectural structure, where deictic world-switches do not constitute a further layer but simply a horizontal alternation within the same plane (see Figure 2).

Nevertheless, I would suggest that - while the terms PUSH and POP may not be suitable for switches in deictic coordinates as the deictic shift theorists intended - they may be useful to describe the vertical layers of successively more remote ontological worlds that make-up a text such as *Inception*. In such texts, each embedded world is further remote from reality and less verifiable; it is this ontological remoteness that makes the deeper dream levels of *Inception*, including limbo, successively and more dangerously distant from reality, in temporal, physical and psychological ways. Likewise, the layers

beyond the initial text-world in any discourse, including modal worlds and the character text-worlds that I proposed earlier, are further from the world at the centre of the system and so their contents are less secure; if much of the propositional content is held there, that system is destabilized.

3. Accessibility Relations

In philosophy, possible worlds theory accounts for how a proposition that is untrue in the real world, may hold true in a *possible* world (Lewis 1973; Rescher 1979). Possible worlds theory can help explain the ontological status of fiction to a certain degree, in that it accounts for how fiction is (usually) untrue in the real world, but creates a possible world in which its own internal logic holds. Nevertheless, possible worlds theory does not account for the ways in which fictional worlds can relate to the real world of readers or viewers; for example, how is it that a work of fiction, if it is merely a possibility, can make us cry, laugh or reevaluate the real world? Ryan's (Ryan 1991a; Ryan 1991b) influential model of fictional worlds goes beyond simply accepting there are alternative possible worlds, to describe how fictional texts create worlds that differ from the real world in systematic ways, forming 'accessibility relations' between the two. According to Ryan, when reading a fictional text, the reader momentarily suspends consciousness of the Actual World (AW) to consider the Text Actual World (TAW), which is the world at the centre of the systems of worlds that make up the universe of a text. According to Ryan:

we can through certain mental acts depart from this world, select another world as actual, and create through further mental acts a network of alternative possible worlds around the new center. This recentering occurs in dreams as well as in children's games of make-believe, and it constitutes the fundamental gesture of narrative fiction (1991a, p.554)

It is clear that Ryan's theory of fictional worlds, in recognising the capacity for a text to create a system of worlds, has much in common with Text-World Theory. Where they differ is in Text-World Theory's use of *linguistic* criteria as world-builders and triggers of switches, which makes it more a more

effective tool in the close stylistic study of a text, as has been demonstrated briefly in Section 1 and in many other applications of the model (Cruikshank and Lahey 2010; Gavins 2000; Gavins 2003; Hidalgo Downing 2003; Semino 2010; Werth 1999). Nonetheless, where Ryan's model can provide unique insight is in describing how the characteristics of the Actual World (AW), the world at the centre of the textual universe (TAW), and the text's various other worlds (TAPWs), correspond or differ. In this way, it can support the close analysis that Text-World Theory affords by offering a more macro-level account of the relations between each layer in the architecture of a text, as other scholars in Stylistics have demonstrated (Hidalgo Downing 2000; Vassilopoulou 2008). Ryan provides a taxonomy of nine 'accessibility relations', which chart the ways in which fictional worlds can differ from the real world, and, furthermore how the alternative worlds within fiction differ from their central world. As Ryan explains:

“Since a text projects a complete universe, not just an isolated planet, two domains of transworld relations should be distinguished: (1) the transuniverse domain of the relations linking AW to TAW, and (2) the intrauniverse domain of the relations linking TAW to its own alternatives (TAPWs).” (Ryan 1991b, p.32)

I have identified six of Ryan's accessibility relations as relevant to the way in which the film *Inception* differs from our real world (Ryan's number 1, above) and, in turn, to the way in which the dream worlds differ from the real world in the film *Inception* (Ryan's number 2, above). These six accessibility relations are charted in Table 1 below. The first column depicts the kinds of characteristics that pertain to our real world (the Actual World), the second column shows whether these hold in relation to the real world of *Inception* (the Text Actual World) and the third portrays whether the dream worlds in *Inception* (the TAPWs) are accessible from the real world of *Inception* (TAW).

Our Real World	Inception's Real World	Inception's Dream Worlds	Reason
A. properties of objects	✓	✗	The architect doesn't always get the object details right e.g. totem
B. inventory of objects	✗	✗	Real World has no dream machine; the dreamers invent from imagination
C. members	✓	✗	Mal exists in a dreams, not in Inception's Real World
D. time	✓	✗	Inception's time-zone is identifiable to Real World, but its dreams are slower
E. natural laws	✗	✗	The ability to share dreams and the suspension of gravity is not natural in Real World
G. logic	✓	✓	contradictory truths are presented as possibilities, but not both true at once

Table 1. *Accessibility Relations*¹

According to Ryan (1991b, p.51), the principle of minimal departure states that - unless it suggests otherwise - we conceive of the world that a text represents as similar to our own . Therefore, unless an accessibility relation is broken, readers and viewers assume the world of the text shares the characteristics of the real world. In relation to accessibility relation A, the objects that exist in the TAW of *Inception* have the same properties as those objects that exist in our AW. However, because the dream worlds are furnished by an architect, the properties of objects in the TAPWs of *Inception* are not always the same as those in the TAW. For this reason, the characters carry a 'totem', an object whose tactile and physical properties are known only by its owner, so as to be able to tell the difference between a dream and reality. When he realizes that his carpet – otherwise familiar – is made from nylon and not wool, Saito recognizes that he is in a shared dream where the architect has failed to replicate the properties of an object that is familiar to him in reality.

¹ I have not included Ryan's accessibility relations F, H and I, as they are not particularly relevant to the fictional world of *Inception*.

This accessibility relation is only slightly different to accessibility relation B, which holds between the *inventory* of objects across worlds. The TAW of *Inception* has a dream-sharing machine, a non-existent object in the AW and, as such, our real world and the film are incompatible in terms of the inventory of objects. A key principle of shared dreaming in the film is that one should always invent the dream world from imagination, not from memory. Even if the characters do not always adhere to this, the fact is that many of the dream world objects are invented. Consequently, there are objects that exist in the TAPWs, such as the vault in the snowy mountain fortress, that do not exist in the TAW, creating an incompatibility between the dream worlds and the real world of the *Inception* with regards to accessibility relation B.

Accessibility relation C states that the “TAW is accessible from AW if TAW’s inventory includes all the members of the AW, as well as some native members” (Ryan 1991b, p.32). The film *Inception* is indeed populated with members that reflect our own human race, including identifiable nationalities and sociological traits such as age and gender. Of course, the characters of the film do not exist in the AW but they constitute native members, which Ryan exempts from the rule. The character of Mal, however, is dead in the TAW of *Inception* and exists only in Cobb’s dreams, meaning the TAPWs are incompatible with the TAW with regards to members.

Time passes in the TAW of *Inception* in a way that is identifiable with the AW, meaning that with regard to accessibility relation D, which assesses chronological compatibility, the film and our real world are compatible. However, a central tenet of the dream worlds of *Inception* is that five minutes of time in the TAW equates to one hour in the dream, or the TAPW, and this gets exponentially slower with every successive TAPW. Therefore, there is no temporal compatibility between the dream worlds.

Accessibility relation E is concerned with the cross-world compatibility of the natural laws of physics. For a start, the TAW differs from the AW in the sense that the *Inception* characters can share dreams, a physical possibility not available to us in the AW. This is of course related to the incompatibility of objects, where the *Inception* characters have access to the dream-sharing machine that does not exist in our world. In all other physical respects, however, the TAW of *Inception* is identifiable

with our AW and, according to the principle of minimal departure, we assume it to be so. The physical laws that hold true in our AW and in the TAW of *Inception* are broken at the dream levels, where the surface of the earth is turned on its head at the architect's will (the famous Paris scene featuring Ariadne), and the laws of gravity are momentarily suspended. The latter phenomenon occurs when the van containing the first-level dreamers falls from a bridge and the feeling of weightlessness that the dreamers experience is carried through into the second-level hotel dream, where because of the temporal incompatibility, the feeling lasts twelve times longer. Thus, the rules of accessibility between the worlds interact to produce unusual effects, alien to our AW, and the subject of much debate among the film's viewers. Auxier notes (2011) that some have criticized the 'physics' of *Inception* for being 'selective', in that only some phenomena (such as water and music) permeate the layers between the dreams.

4. Viewer-Response to the World of *Inception*

Amongst the abundance of online discussion surrounding *Inception* and its internal logic, many commentators try to unpick these complex interwoven accessibility relations and their instantiations in the plot (Nolan Fans 2012; see, for example Understanding *Inception* 2010). While some of the manifestations of the accessibility relations may be inconsistently portrayed – and part of some viewers' pleasure is in trying to identify those inconsistencies – it is very difficult to find examples of how *Inception* might have inconsistent logic. As far as I can tell, there is no world in the universe of worlds that make up *Inception*, that presents two alternative truths at once. To do so would be to break the rules of non-contradiction and extended middle, as is commonplace in absurd or postmodern texts, where impossibility is part of their fiction. Therefore, accessibility relation G, which charts whether the TAW and the TAPWs have the same logic as the AW, is compatible between our world and the worlds of *Inception* (see Table 1). By respecting the laws of logic across the fictional worlds, Christopher Nolan earns the viewers' trust that – even when so many other familiar laws are broken – there is some knowable internal logic to the film.

However as was mentioned in Section 2, if the majority of the propositional content is held at a remove from the world at the centre of the system, the entire text is destabilized. Because much of the film takes place at the TAPW-level, we must rely on the ontologically remote dream worlds to build a representation of the TAW at the centre of the system. Considering the complex accessibility relations between the AW and the TAW, and the TAW and the various TAPWs, this is not an easy task, leading to what Ryan calls an “unknowable center” (1991b, p.40). As a result, the TAW may “fail to solidify” (Martínez-Bonati 1981, p.115) for many viewers, which no doubt goes some way to explain the vast amount of online discussions surrounding the film, where viewers search and propose answers to the ambiguities of the film. Such is the unreliability of the world at the centre of the *Inception*, that one philosopher has suggested that the majority of the film’s action is a dream, experienced by a sleeping Cobb on the airplane (Floury 2011), and many other theories pertaining to the ontological status of the narrative layers of *Inception* circulate the web. On the one hand, some viewers seem to relish the demand on cognitive processing that *Inception*’s complex ontological architecture and accessibility relations entail. On the other hand, by creating so many embedded worlds with such complex compatibility relations between them, Nolan runs the risk of confusing, and perhaps frustrating his viewers.

As well as frustration at the complexity of the film’s architecture, viewers may experience a lack of belief or empathy in the film’s characters and a resulting unwillingness to make the leaps from their own reality to that of the text-world. In Text-World Theory terms, Gavins describes the ‘resistance’ discourse participants may have in building a text-world and explains that, “the extent to which participants in the discourse-world accept the content of a given text-world and choose to immerse themselves in it is becoming an expanding area of research within the field of Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive Poetics...” and goes on to call for further work of this kind using Text-World Theory (2007, p.170). It seems that while Ryan’s model of fictional worlds proves useful in capturing the ways in which the layers of the film are compatible or different from one another, Text-World Theory would better serve in investigating viewer-response to the film. As Whiteley (2011) has shown, because of

Text-World Theory's attention to the discourse world factors, including cognition and context, it can better account for the reception of texts. Having outlined the complex ontological architecture of *Inception*, I propose that further research into viewer-responses to the challenges the narrative poses would be fruitful, and that Text-World Theory would be the ideal framework to do so.

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated the similar layered architecture that holds between the narrative of the film *Inception*, and the structure of Text-World Theory. Text-World Theory was used to explain how, plot aside, the screenplay text itself is made up of textual layers. As well as the world-switches and modal worlds, I suggested that embedded dialogue also constitutes a departure from the initial text-world, in creating what I termed a Character text-world. This modification adheres with Text-World Theory's principle that each layer is subject to the same rules, by bringing the treatment of character dialogue in line with participant dialogue. However, where Text-World Theory is subject to the same rules on each layer, *Inception* was shown to have a myriad of different accessibility between its fictional layers. In order to capture this, Ryan's model of fictional worlds was employed, supplementing Text-World Theory's micro-level analysis with a macro-level perspective of the film's narrative. It was shown that the accessibility relations are not always compatible between our reality and *Inception's*, and between the world at the centre of *Inception* and the dream levels. This goes some way to explaining the ambiguity of the film's plot and the demand on the viewer's cognitive process, which, it was argued, result in the strong audience response to the text, whether it be intrigue in or resistance to the text-world of *Inception*. This would make an interesting avenue for further research and Text-World Theory is ideally equipped to deal with the reception of the text at the discourse world level. Indeed, although Ryan's model of fictional worlds is crucial for assessing compatibility between the layers of fiction, Werth's model, with its wider applicability, linguistic rigor and appreciation of context in the production and reception of discourse, continues to be an indispensable apparatus in the stylistician's toolkit.

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Appendix i

INCEPTION By Christopher Nolan SHOOTING SCRIPT²

FADE IN:

DAWN. CRASHING SURF.

The waves TOSS a BEARDED MAN onto wet sand. He lies there.

A CHILD'S SHOUT makes him LIFT his head to see: a LITTLE BLONDE BOY crouching, back towards us, watching the tide eat a SANDCASTLE. A LITTLE BLONDE GIRL joins the boy. The Bearded Man tries to call them, but they RUN OFF, FACES UNSEEN. He COLLAPSES.

The barrel of a rifle ROLLS the Bearded Man onto his back. A JAPANESE SECURITY GUARD looks down at him, then calls up the beach to a colleague leaning against a JEEP. Behind them is a cliff, and on top of that, a JAPANESE CASTLE.

INT. ELEGANT DINING ROOM, JAPANESE CASTLE - LATER

The Security Guard waits as an ATTENDANT speaks to an ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN sitting at the dining table, back to us.

ATTENDANT

(in Japanese)

He was delirious. But he asked for

you by name. And...

(to the Security Guard)

Show him.

² Nolan, Christopher (2010) *Inception: Shooting Script*. San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions.

SECURITY GUARD

(in Japanese)

He was carrying nothing but this...

He puts a HANDGUN on the table. The Elderly Man keeps eating.

SECURITY GUARD

...and this.

The Security Guard places a SMALL PEWTER CONE alongside the gun. The Elderly Man STOPS eating. Picks up the cone.

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

(in Japanese)

Bring him here. And some food.

INT. SAME - MOMENTS LATER

The Elderly Man watches the Bearded Man WOLF down his food. He SLIDES the handgun down the table towards him.

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

(in English)

Are you here to kill me?

The Bearded Man glances up at him, then back to his food.

The Elderly Japanese Man picks up the cone between thumb and forefinger.

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

I know what *this* is.

He SPINS it onto a table- it CIRCLES gracefully across the polished ebony... a SPINNING TOP.

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

I've seen one before. Many, many
years ago...

The Elderly Japanese Man STARES at the top mesmerized.

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

It belonged to a man I met in a
half-remembered dream...

MOVE IN on the GRACEFULLY SPINNING TOP...

ELDERLY JAPANESE MAN

A man possessed of some radical
notions...

The Elderly Japanese Man STARES, remembering...

COBB (V.O.)

What's the most resilient parasite?

CUT TO:

INT. SAME ELEGANT DINING ROOM - NIGHT (YEARS EARLIER)

The speaker, COBB, is 35, handsome, tailored. A young Japanese man, SATTO, eats as he listens.