The House that God Built: Metaphorical Thinking in Alcoholics Anonymous

A. Abby Jones
University of Louisiana at Lafayette[*]

Abstract

This work analyzes the autobiographical narrative of a member of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) from a cognitive standpoint in order to show how the language of the seminal AA text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, creates meaning and shapes perception for its members. By tracking the presence of a major metaphor and its extensions from the text that guides the narrative of the individual AA member, we can see how members are able to assume ownership of the AA ideology, thereby using it to create their personal AA stories and their overall identities as recovering alcoholics. The data from the metaphors in the autobiography are examined using cognitive or cultural models of understanding language that have been passed down by established members of the discourse community (Stockwell, 2002). These cognitive models are then put into the framework of conceptual blending theory to show how the metaphors guide perception (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002).

Keywords: Variable Meaning, Folk Theory, Cognitive Models, Conceptual Blending Theory

1 The Relationship between Text and Reader

Using Norman Holland's (2002) proposition that what we know about a text is only our conception of that text, I am analyzing the relationship between members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and AA's primary text, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (2001). The sections that follow are focused on some of the metaphors from the AA text, and how those metaphors create meaning and shape perception for members of the AA program. By tape recording and transcribing the 60-minute AA autobiography of Michelle C., an AA member who had been sober in the AA program for about 19 months at the time of the interview, I track the metaphors that Michelle has taken from the AA text and used in her personal narrative. Then I explore how she uses those metaphors to interpret meaning in her life presently as well as how she applies them to make sense of her life before she came to AA.

In order to examine this use of metaphorical language, I begin by discussing theories of how we categorize information in our minds and the role that language and

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[*] Questions and comments should be addressed to the author, A. Abby Jones, at alphaaliceabby@cox.net

culture play in that categorization. I then move from theories of language in general to those of metaphorical language, specifically. My goal is to apply these theories to Michelle's story by following the language she uses to show her adoption of the AA ideology and to demonstrate the influence that the new ideology has on her complete worldview. This influence becomes obvious as Michelle's conception of the AA text changes once she starts practicing AA's shared system of ideas and codes for behavior on a regular basis in her own life.

While this individualized process of textual interpretation might seem obvious when we put it on paper, it does put a damper on some traditional theories of how language works. As Holland (2002) points out, our critical minds resist accounting for the variability in meaning that is required by a cognitively-informed approach to the act of reading. He shows the reasons for this almost unconscious resistance in his discussion of some of the traditional theories of language, like "folk theory" in which words are thought of as containers of fixed meanings (Holland 2002:24). Put another way, folk theory depicts a figurative system, where words are external packages that contain the things they represent. One problem, or illusion, here is in our belief that the things that our words represent have a finite semantic content that is the same to all of us. Another problem underlying this finite semantic content is thinking that the content exists outside and independent of our minds. This illusion, however, makes sense when we look at its evolutionary purpose. It comes from our human survival mechanisms, which allow us to connect an object with our reactions to that object, or to join together cause and effect (Fauconnier and Turner 2002:76, Holland 2002). For instance, our minds instantly register a female black widow spider (red hourglass shape on its abdomen) with what we already know about its potential to poison us, so that our minds fuse our fear of the effects of the spider's venom to the spider itself. While our ability to simultaneously fuse the external object with our experience of that object, whether an individual or a collective cultural experience, has served to keep us out of danger and to keep us fed for millions of years (Fauconnier and Turner 2002:76), that ability does create an illusion about perception. Here, what appears to us to be what we are receiving from our sensory perception of an object is actually *our experience* of that object. When that illusion is transferred to our understanding of language as it is in folk theory as described by Holland (2002) it obscures the true account of the interactive relationship between the reader and the text. Rather than simply receiving the same finite semantic content from a text as we read, we are instead actively constructing our own interpretation of the text by fusing the language in the text to the experience our minds connect to that language. This relationship can be clarified by examining how our minds process language and by isolating what we are and are not consciously aware of when we respond to our reading:

> In short, we can hardly escape inferring—no, faster than that, perceiving—text and response as cause and effect, even if doing so is inappropriate. Hence, having projected our inner sensations to form an idea of an object 'out there,' we then 'explain' our inner sensations as being 'effects' caused by that 'object.' We do this even though *that very object is itself our projection from those sensations.* (Holland 2002:29, emphasis original)

Holland's description of our neurological merger of sensory input with our store of personal baggage gives rise to research questions that are more appropriate for interactive reading. Instead of asking "What is the underlying meaning of the content *contained* in the text?" the question shifts to the following: 1) "Why do different readers

have different responses to the same text?" and 2) "How can one reader have different responses to the same text at different times in her life?"

2 The Relationship between the AA Text and the AA Member

In Michelle's story, the shortcomings of folk theory become evident in her account of her previous exposure to the AA text, AA talk, and AA ideology in general. In her story, she talks about how her exposure to the text has affected her differently at different times, both before and then after she became willing to admit that she was an alcoholic and to follow AA's 12-step recovery program. By acknowledging her need to have a sponsor, i.e., an experienced AA member, show her how to "work the steps" (Michelle C. 2009:7) instead of simply *reading* the steps, Michelle is giving evidence of being able to glean different meanings (and, in this case, even different results) from the same text, as she explains here:

> You know, before, I would read those steps...It's ideal that you get a sponsor, and you work the steps with a sponsor, somebody who knows what they're doing. I'd wanted to work the steps so I would read them, and I thought I'd worked them. And then I would go and tell these people this stuff that I had done—that was supposed to be on my fourth step. There's a process for that. We've got to do that in a process. We've got to do one before we can do two, and two before we can do three, and so on and so forth.

The "fourth step" Michelle talks about above is a written moral inventory, which produces the first tangible artifact in the recovery process. Creating the fourth step requires the recovering alcoholic to list all fears and all resentments she has of people, places, and institutions. Next, following an explanation from the sponsor of the printed example in the AA text, she is to list whichever instincts these fears and resentments have aggravated in her (e.g., her self-esteem, her financial security, her ambitions, her personal relationships, or her sex relations) (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:65). While the AA text does provide both a description of how to write a fourth step inventory and gives an actual example of one, the process can overwhelm understanding in newcomers because many have never seen the material before and they are often physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted from chemical withdrawal when they arrive at AA.

Michelle then addresses the need to have a sponsor show her how to "work" the steps in order. In talking about the necessity of having a guide, her emphasis is on the process of working the steps and the importance of that process in her AA recovery. Here are the first four of AA's 12 steps, listed in order (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:59):

(1)   We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
(2)   Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
(3)   Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.* (emphasis original)
(4)   Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Because the three steps that come before the written moral inventory do not require any specific writing and, therefore, do not yield any tangible products, they can be even more confusing than the fourth step inventory. The admission of powerlessness over alcohol, the recognition of unmanageability and insanity, the belief in a Higher Power, and the surrender of one's will and life to that Higher Power are difficult and

complicated propositions. Not only that, working these first three steps requires much more action than is implied in the words used to depict them. The intense actions required in these proposals become clear in Michelle's story when her relationship with the steps changes as a result of working with a sponsor. Again, her role here shifts from a passive, reading role to an active, working role as she is taught how to apply the proposals to her life.

In the section of the AA text that introduces the 12 steps, "How it Works," the wording plainly states that these proposals require action, "If you have decided that you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps" (2001:58). Instead of writing that the alcoholic needs to believe in certain ideas, the authors of the text use the terms "take certain steps," i.e., each one of these proposals requires that the recovering alcoholic act on her new beliefs. So the acceptance of the first three proposals is evidenced in a new way of living, which a newcomer does by taking an active part in the AA fellowship and enacting the AA ideology. But the language in the text seems only to provide clues on how to take this action, and, for Michelle, it is not until her sponsor provides an interpretation of the language, as an experienced member of the AA community, that she is able to move forward.

3 Discourse Communities Create New Meaning

Sponsors and other experienced AA members, by sharing their communal understanding of the program with newcomers, are actually providing new members with novel ways to organize knowledge. In Stockwell's (2002) work on discourse communities and cognition, he discusses how this kind of information sharing amongst members of a specific community (the discourse community) is defined by its members' common uses and understandings of language and texts. The sponsors are providing the new members with new "cognitive models" (2002:33), which the newcomer then uses as a tool for interpreting the language of the community. Stockwell clarifies how our understandings of concepts reside in our cognitive models and not just in the words or codes we use to represent them:

> Cognitive models consist of relations between categories, set up socially, culturally, and on the basis of individual experience, as our means of understanding and negotiating the world and our lives through it. (2002:33)

These new cognitive models, supplied by the more experienced AA members, are pragmatic in nature because they are highly context dependent. How a concept is thought of in one discourse community could be quite different than how it is understood in another. The concept of God in the AA community, for example, is left to the individual to define. The fact that this definition is left to the individual is very much a shared understanding in the community because the program broadly calls for a "spiritual experience" (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:27) to effect recovery. When compared to many Christian communities, for example, the AA God concept does not necessarily include the concept of Jesus Christ as deity: "Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God" (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:46). But the AA concept does not exclude Christ, either: "When,

therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God." Again, the text describes this concept of spirituality as a "willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves" (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:46).

Because these new cognitive models are shared by the AA discourse community, they can be understood as "cultural models" (Stockwell 2002:33). A group's cultural models are both created and governed by that group's norms. In Michelle's case, her eventual adoption of AA's cultural models becomes apparent when she begins the activity of working or *taking* the 12 steps according to the language in the text as interpreted by her sponsor. Michelle's sponsor is teaching her how to be a member of the community as described in AA's 12th step, which suggests that the alcoholic "carry the message to other alcoholics" and "practice" the principles of the 12 steps: "(12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs" (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:60).

When Michelle commits to this process, she learns how to become a member of AA's "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991). Being a member of the community requires a commitment to the domain of shared interests and to practicing beliefs and activities that have been established through sharing and building knowledge together (Lave and Wenger 1991). Some of Michelle's practices and her new understanding of the language come not only from working with her sponsor individually but also from a group of other AA members that she studies the AA text with. In the passage below, she refers to the text as the "Big Book" and describes how she was taught to read the text, first by her sponsor and then in a group setting of other AA members:

> So we went and we got in the Big Book. And we started from the front page, which has nothing on it, and she said, "That's what you know about staying sober. You know nothing." And I did; I knew nothing about staying sober. Because all my life, I was just living on my will, living on my instincts that told me it was ok to drink and do drugs to make myself feel better. Which is not ok. And not everybody does that. That's not something that everybody does. The people I hung around with did. So we went and we read every single word. Page by page, word by word. And when we got to a step, we worked a step; when we got to a prayer, we prayed the prayer. We went through all pages, 1-164. We did it with a Big Book study, we did it with other women. (Michelle C. 2009:9)

Once Michelle learns from the group how to understand the language in a new way, she can begin practicing the principles and the activities of the program in her own life.

Based on the adoption of the community's goals and purposes as one's own (Lave and Wenger 1991), engaging in these practices over time fosters a new identity for the participant in relation to the community. The sense of identity is vital to the learning process in organizations (Wenger 1998) because it helps us know what to focus on, which actions to take, and which actions to avoid. For Michelle, this new identity emerges as she eventually develops a new understanding of her own position in the program and identifies herself as part of the larger AA culture. Her new place in the culture, in turn, allows her to become part of the AA cycle of teaching newcomers how to work the steps based on how she was taught by her sponsor and other experienced AA members. She describes her relationship with a woman she is sponsoring as a part of the AA cycle that comes from AA's 12th step:

> I've been sponsoring her for about a year now, almost a year. I'm not keeping her sober. I

believe that the only thing I have to offer her or anybody else in this program is my experience with Alcoholics Anonymous. I take them though the steps; what they do with it is their business. But like with my sponsor, she took me through the steps. (Michelle C. 2009:9)

The shift in identity is evident in the way Michelle identifies herself as a sponsor who has AA experience to offer the newcomer, as opposed to her view of herself when she had first come to AA and needed to rely on others' experience to be able to understand the AA text and practices.

4 From Folk Theory to Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Even though the illusory nature of the folk theory is obvious in the AA discussion, the stubborn notion persists and so "the human systems responsible for nine-tenths of the work in communicating" (Reddy 1979:188) continue to be overlooked. Over 30 years ago, Michael Reddy (1979:188) pointed out the tendency to talk about language as if it were a container of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Reddy's account of this description, called "the conduit metaphor,"(1979:188) expands the folk theory that Holland (2002) writes about into a more comprehensive model which also includes the roles of the author and the audience. In the conduit metaphor, the author deposits her ideas into her words and then sends them off to the audience by either speaking or writing. The next step is for the audience simply to receive those words, which contain the author's ideas. Thus, words are being used as a conduit by functioning as a vessel for channeling the author's thoughts.

Twenty years after Reddy's (1979) article, researchers within the cognitive linguistic framework have furthered Reddy's concept. In "The 'Conduit Metaphor' Revisited," Joe Grady (1998) suggests that we are actually deriving our descriptions of language from much more general metaphors like "CONSTITUENTS ARE CONTENTS" (211) and "INFORMATION IS CONTENTS" (213). He cites the pervasiveness of these more generalized metaphors in areas outside of communication processes to make his point. Grady's examples show these more generalized metaphors at work in a much larger cultural context, i.e. "The class is *full* of bright students" (211) and "There are seven days *in* a week" (211), to build a strong argument that these broad metaphors are the actual source for our descriptions of communication. These general metaphors then serve as the basis for folk theory metaphors like the following two examples:

(1)   This writer *crams* words *into* sentences which are desperately *packed* and *crowded*.
(2)   She *packs* a tremendous number of ideas *into* each carefully worded statement.   (Grady 1998:211)

Grady (1998) reiterates Reddy's concerns: 1) using the conduit metaphor has a negative effect on the way we think about language and 2) use of the conduit metaphor tells us that we actually believe folk theory despite any evidence to the contrary. Once the metaphor is pointed out, we can easily see its shortcomings. The speaker/writer is not solely responsible for packaging finite semantic content and then sending that content to the reader/listener who passively receives it. Also, it is important to recognize how using these metaphors might shape perception and negatively influence our understanding of the communication process. If we want to be aware of how language actually works, we would need to first be aware that these metaphors are

persistent manifestations of our illusions about language. Locating the common thread between speaking and thinking, Reddy cites the Whorf hypothesis:

> The precise claim being made here is important. It has to do, I think, with one of the ways in which people commonly misunderstand the Whorf hypothesis. I do not claim that we cannot think momentarily in terms of another model of the communication process. I argue, rather, that that thinking will remain brief, isolated, and fragmentary in the face of an entrenched system of opposing attitudes and assumptions. (1979:177)

The Whorf hypothesis, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, was proposed by Anthropologist and Linguist Edward Sapir, from his studies in Native American languages. The theory ultimately espouses the belief that the language we use affects the way understand and negotiate our realities (Whorf 1956). Sapir's student, Benjamin Whorf continued Sapir's work, condensing it into the principle of linguistic relativity, which states that different cultural concepts are represented through different languages (Whorf 1956). Thus, in theory, using different words to describe a concept can contribute to differing cognitive classifications and categorizations of information. In other words, the way we think about a concept is relative to the way our cultures represent that concept linguistically.

Reddy's argument, as stated above, is what makes his discussion of the conduit metaphor so important in any discussion about whether or not speech influences thought. If we use what we say to figure out what we think, then our expressions that so flagrantly show us reverting to the conduit metaphor to describe language all serve as little pieces of evidence that the way we speak does actually influence the way we think. *Speaking* in terms of the conduit metaphor then means *thinking* in terms of the conduit metaphor. If our expressions are reliable proof of our thoughts, then the results are staggeringly in favor of linguistic relativity. Regardless of our confirmed knowledge to the contrary, our reliance on folk theory to describe language is proof of some unrealistic expectations we have placed on language. And even though we know that trying to understand language as a representative system of finite realities is not sensible, we just cannot resist talking about words as if they mean the same things to all of us.

Another way to find proof that words do not represent fixed meanings is to examine scenarios where a reader understands a text in a totally different way at different times in her life. Looking at Michelle's case, we can see how her interpretation of the AA text varies significantly, based on her changing relationship with the material and the AA program. At this point, it is important to make a definite distinction between linguistic expressions and the semantic concepts they represent in order to analyze the phenomenon of Michelle's different construals of the language in the text. Considering only the conceptual material (rather than the language) provides an explanation for the variable meaning. In their work on conceptual metaphor, George Lakoff and Mark Turner refer to the notion of words standing for some literal meaning or fixed semantic substance as "semantic autonomy" (1989:111). As they discuss ways of understanding through metaphor, Lakoff and Turner (1989) point out how the notion of literal meaning obscures how we actually derive meaning based on our own involvement with the text. If semantic autonomy were actually in play here, where the words in the text represented objective realities, then those objective realities should have been apparent to Michelle the first time that she read them.

Addressing issues of variable meaning, Lakoff and Turner (1989) represent how

semantic concepts work in our minds through cognitive models made of "schemas," which they define as "knowledge structured in a skeletal form" (1989:61). In conceptual metaphor theory, schemas represent how information is classified, stored, and recalled in our cognitive structures: "Schemas organize our knowledge. They constitute cognitive models of some aspect of the world, models that we use in comprehending our experience and in reasoning about it" (1989:65). The information in a particular schema corresponds to patterns of inferences related to a concept, and these inferences reside within areas called conceptual domains (1989:3). The conceptual domain represents the entire area of knowledge we have on that concept. Because a domain represents an individual's understanding of a concept, that domain and its resident schemas are activated when the individual accesses the concept. Lakoff and Turner (1989) discuss how our schemas are populated with features or elements, which they call slots. In cases of variable meaning, those slots (and, therefore, schemas) change according to our changing knowledge of a concept (1989:61). For example, if I find out more about a certain concept or if my understanding of that concept is challenged, then the schema for that concept can be reconfigured according to the new information I have acquired. Because schemas are the basic knowledge structures in conceptual metaphor theory, they are cognitive tools that we use for understanding metaphors. In a process called "mapping" (Lakoff and Turner 1989:4) we recruit a schema from one domain (the source) into another domain (the target) so that we can use the pattern of inferences from the source to make new sense of the target (1989:62).

5 From Conceptual Metaphors to Conceptual Blending Theory

Throughout Michelle's story, she repeatedly uses variants of a predestination concept that posits a God (or a Higher Power) having already planned our destinies before we ever fulfill them. Specifically, the AA text casts God in such agentive roles as Director, Employer, Principal, Great Physician, and even Creative Intelligence (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 2001:62, 63, 62, 351, 12, 46, 49, respectively). This list is not exhaustive, but it does include those agency roles that specify an anthropomorphized Higher Power as an agent : "...who is executing the "life plan" of the recovering alcoholic."That recovering alcoholic then moves into the role of the patient, surrendering her agency for sobriety. Appearing throughout the AA text as a recurring theme used to describe the AA way of life, it acts a "megametaphor" which Stockwell (2002:111) defines as a conceptual metaphor that occurs above the sentence level and in varied forms and extensions. An example of one of Michelle's references to "God's plan" surfaces when she shares about finding out that she was pregnant at 16:

> I thought my life was over. But, in hindsight, I know that it was part of God's plan. Absolutely, in the end, I think it pretty much kept me alive. Because that was one of the reasons that I didn't go out drinking every night of the week. Once I had my little girl...Whenever I found out I was pregnant, I stopped drinking and I stopped doing drugs. I had my daughter and then, after I had her, I kind of wanted to stay away from doing the drugs and alcohol.

In this passage, Michelle's conceptualization of a God who has a plan for her life did not occur until she adopted the AA ideology, which was eight years after she found out she was pregnant. So, in this part of her story, she is using the metaphor from the AA text to make sense of events that happened nearly a decade before she came to the

AA program.

Michelle actually makes direct reference to the AA text (again as the "Big Book") several times in her story, using it as the authoritative source for her AA-conceived autobiography. Citing the GOD IS DIRECTOR and PEOPLE ARE ACTORS metaphors from the AA text, she mentions that specific reference in relation to the major romantic relationship in her story:

> So, as the relationship continued on, it just got to be too much. The more that I would try to control him, the more he would revolt. And it talks about that in our Big Book, you know that we try to be nice, and we try to...like the actor and we try to direct the show. And I would try to be nice, and I would bend my morals and do things that I didn't want to do to try to please him and make him love me. (Michelle C. 2009:6)

Above, she uses the concept as a tool for understanding her behavior in that relationship and how she was attempting to control the relationship and "direct the show" herself. In the AA text, the authors are making use of a the highly conventionalized conceptual metaphor, LIFE IS A PLAY, and the text specifies God/Higher Power as the agent, the alcoholic as the patient, and even God's plan or script as the instrument (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1989:20). To better understand the cognitive work of conceptual metaphors and the role of schemas, Stockwell's discussion of cognitive models is again useful:

> They [cognitive models] can consist of image schemas and propositional structure by relating certain elements to others, and they can be enriched or reconfigured by the action of conceptual metaphor or metonymy. (2002:33)

The cognitive models Michelle is using come from the AA text's directions on mapping the conventional concept of a play over the events of her life. The metaphor appears in the text as an extended explanation of how a recovering alcoholic can go about taking the action of step three (turning her will and her life over to the care of God):

> The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success...Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. (2001:61)

The metaphor reappears on the next page as the authors tell us that, as alcoholics in recovery, they "had to quit playing God" and "that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director" (2001:62). Six pages later, the metaphor is echoed: "We are in the world to play the role He assigns" (2001:68). Again, this list is not exhaustive.

In Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's blending theory (2002), this metaphor from the AA text is called a blend of the two concepts involved, and this blend is a result of a conceptual integration network. These networks consist of mental spaces, which Fauconnier and Turner define as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action" (2002:40). In our cognitive structures, mental spaces represent sets of activated neurons, and the connections between mental spaces represent the co-activation bindings taking place in our minds as we make use of a blend. These connections between co-activated spaces, then, are called cross-space mappings.

Building on some of the principles of conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual blending theory expands the discussion of metaphor to an on-line process which also draws on our conceptual domains stored in long-term memory. This on-line process represents how metaphorical understanding works in our short-term memory, so it accounts for novel and creative uses of existing metaphors. Whereas conceptual metaphor theory entails a process of directly mapping structure from a source to a target domain, blending theory attempts to account for the multiple unconscious mechanisms involved in the process. These mechanisms still enable us to use the structure of one domain to understand the information in another domain, but this process happens via the use of temporary mental spaces we create "on the fly" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002:49) to be able understand a concept in a new way. In a blend, there are at least four mental spaces: 1) input space 1, 2) input space 2, 3) generic space, 4) blended space. (There may be more than two input spaces in a blend, but only two are necessary for a blend to occur.) The two input spaces supply the blend with our existing knowledge from the different domains. The information in the input spaces (and all of the mental spaces) is connected to existing knowledge of two types: schematic knowledge and specific knowledge. Fauconnier and Turner (2002:40) use the term "frames" to describe the schematic knowledge which is recruited from long-term memory to input space 1, like existing patterns of inferences on how a play is conducted. Frames of meaning here would include, for example, the script, the stage/setting, the role of the actors, and the role of the director. Input space 2 would recruit specific knowledge from long-term memory, like specific memories of personal actions and outcomes in past experience. Counterpart connections are then made between the two inputs.

As a conventionalized metaphor, LIFE IS A PLAY (Table 1) includes some counterpart connections that we can anticipate before looking specifically at how the metaphor is working in the blend:

PLAY	LIFE
Actor	Person living life
Stage/Setting	Person's environment
Other actors	Other people

Table 1. Counterpart connections in LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor

In addition to the cross-space mapping of counterparts, whatever structural elements the two input spaces seem to have in common are projected to create the elements of the generic space. These generic structural elements are then mapped back onto the counterpart connections from each of the inputs (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). These connections and their accompanying structural elements are projected into the blended space where the integration of the newly emergent knowledge or material is integrated. The blending diagram below (Figure 1) shows the mental spaces and the newly emergent material which results from the conceptual integration network.

Generic Space

Agent.

Patient.

Instrument.

Goal.

Input 1 (Play)
Director.
Actor.
Script.
Stage/Setting.
Events in play are meaningful narrative.
Other actors.

Input 2 (Life)
Michelle.
Self will.
Michelle's environment.
Events in Michelle's life are random.
Other people in Michelle's life.

Blend
Director is agent.
Michelle is actor/patient.
Director's work is to write the script for her life.
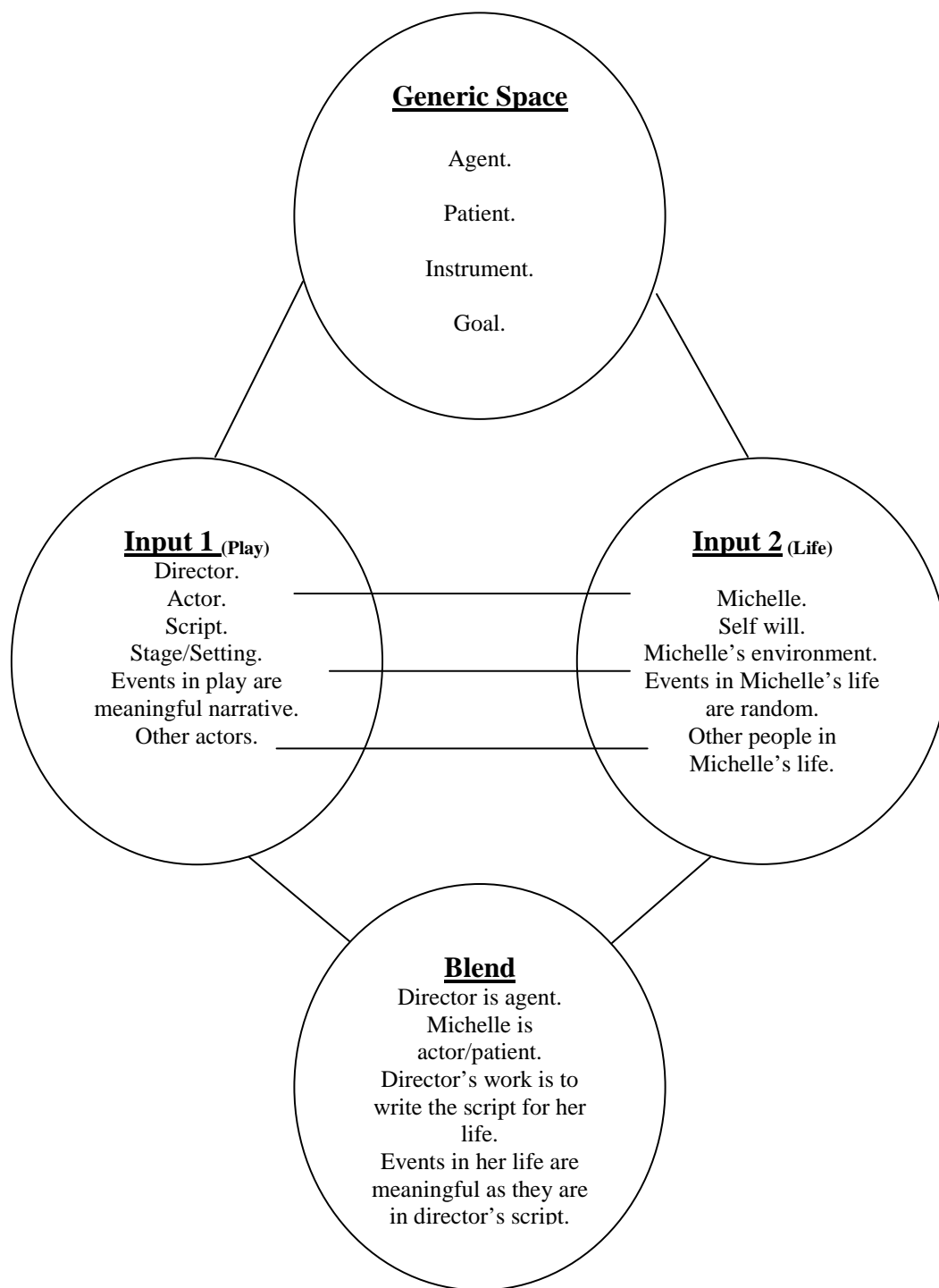Events in her life are meaningful as they are in director's script.

Figure 1. The blend within the conceptual integration network

Not surprisingly, the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor and variations on this theme appear as a megametaphor in Michelle's story, too. Fauconnier and Turner (2002:49) discuss the process of "entrenchment" in blending theory whereby blends, mappings, and frames also become commonly used conceptual models within a community like they are recurring here. In the following excerpt, Michelle makes use of the metaphor again when she finally decides to ask a friend for help with her addictions:

> And I went to her house. And...Hindsight...And this is how God works. She—which I didn't know at the time—she was an R.N. I knew she was a nurse, but she had worked at a treatment facility before in Baton Rouge a few years before and so had some experience with detoxing patients and the whole...getting into AA, going to meetings, and doing that sort of thing. So that really, really helped me, and I know that that was just part of God's plan.

Not only does Michelle mention God's plan again, but she also mentions "how God works." According to the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor, God's work would be that of either the playwright (the one who writes the script/plan) or that of the director. As Michelle continues recounting that day, she tells me how she asked God for "direction:"

> And I remember, before I went to her house, I kind of basically told God, "Ok, God, I need some direction because I don't know what to do." And I thought throughout that...I would see little things that basically just led me to her house. And so I told her everything, and that's how I started going to meetings.

Even though Michelle describes asking God for direction before she was ever exposed to the AA text's use of the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor, this use of elements of the network shows that she had already been in contact with the metaphor even before her exposure to it from the AA text. While the AA text very specifically defines God as the "director" of the recovering alcoholic's life, the metaphor she is drawing on is one that has been deeply entrenched as a conventional metaphor already. As mentioned above, the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor has been around for thousands of years, having been applied in conjunction with the concept of predestination. What is so significant about this metaphor as it appears in Michelle's story is its frequency and its ideological dominance as she continues to rely on it to make sense of her life and to create her identity in the past, present, and future. When she was disconnected from the text in her early exposure, she was unable to conceive of herself in any way that would merge with the AA system. Without conceiving of herself as a part of the AA system, she could not conceive of the system as any part of herself. In this case, the language in the text did not offer an objective meaning; she had to create semantic constructs from the AA ideology before she could interpret the concepts that she later came to believe. Her new understanding of the AA ideology, in turn, allowed her to conceive of the language in the text differently from how she had understood it in previous exposures. Certainly, the words in the text did not change. This section of the text, now in its fourth edition, has remained basically unchanged since the 1939 publication of the first edition. What did change was her relationship to the language in the text when the community taught her how to become a speaker of their language.

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