

Alac, Morana & Coulson, Seana. (2002a). If you YOYO, are you on your own? *Apparatur: Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kultur* 4/02: 42-50.

If you YOYO are you on your own?

Morana Alac & Seana Coulson

Cognitive Science Department

University of California, San Diego

In an article entitled "The YOYO theory: YOur're on Your Own" published in Paper Magazine in February 2002, David Hershovits describes the ethic of rugged individualism espoused by airline pilots in the wake of the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. The acronym YOYO (for You're On Your Own) had formerly been reserved for the case in which an air traffic controller bid a pilot *adieu* as he left the controller's airspace. However, in view of the airline hijackings on that fateful September 11th, the acronym represents the extent to which a pilot at the helm of a hijacked airplane is largely left to his own devices – a fate Hershovits implies extends metaphorically to all Americans. Below we describe how the principles of conceptual blending, or conceptual integration theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, 1998, 2002) can elucidate meaning construction in this example and point out how the text creates irony by manipulating our inclination to construct conceptual integration networks.

Conceptual blending is a set of general cognitive processes used to combine conceptual structure in mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998). Mental spaces are very partial representations of the entities and relations of a particular scenario as perceived, imagined, remembered, or otherwise understood by a speaker (1994). Blending takes place in a *conceptual integration network*, an array of mental spaces which typically includes two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space. *Input* spaces represent information from discrete cognitive domains, a *generic* space contains structure common to the two inputs, and the *blended* space contains structure from both inputs, as well as its own emergent structure. Emergent structure arises out of the imaginative processes of blending. The first process is called *completion*, and involves the juxtaposition of information from different spaces; *completion*, as in pattern completion, occurs when part of a cognitive model is activated and results in the activation of the rest of the frame. Finally, *elaboration* is an extended version of completion that results from

mental simulation, or various sorts of physical and social interaction with the world as construed with blended concepts.

Pilots and Passengers on their Own

Hershovits' text opens by discussing the attitude "You're on your own", taken recently by several commercial airline pilots. Pilots know that, in cases when they lose contact with the control towers, they must rely on themselves. They also urge their passengers, if faced with a hijacking, to fight back rather than succumb to terrorists. When pilots feel that they are not controlled by the control towers, they assign the responsibility for the passengers to the passengers themselves by saying: "You're on your own". In this scenario, pilots and passengers can rely only on themselves.

In terms of conceptual structure, there is an analogical mapping between the mental space of pilots ("pilots input space") and the mental space of passengers ("passengers input space") (Figure 1). In this mapping the pilots are mapped to the passengers, and the necessity of relying upon oneself in the pilots space is mapped to the necessity of relying upon oneself in the passenger space. These mappings invite the construction of the blended space ("airplane space") where both the pilots and passengers feel that they have to rely upon themselves since they are not supervised by some higher source.

This is a *mirror network* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002), an integration network in which all spaces - inputs, generic, and blend - share an organizing frame. An organizing frame for a mental space is a frame that specifies the nature of the relevant activity, events, and participants. An organizing frame provides a topology for the space it organizes - that is, it provides a set of organizing relations among the elements in the space. When two spaces share the same organizing frame, they share the corresponding topology and so can easily be put into correspondence. The input spaces *mirror* each other in the sense that they have the same organizing frame. So does the generic and blended space. In our example all spaces contain two entities and there is no relationship of control of one entity towards the other. The blended space is richer than the other spaces: the blended space reflects more complex - airplane - situations where both pilots and passengers are left on their own and rely just on themselves.

Americans on their Own

Now, HersHKovits points out that the pilots/passengers situation can serve as a metaphor for the present situation in the USA "... an apt metaphor, I thought, for the state of our times": the contemporary feeling that American citizens experience towards their government and the events around them. Since the citizens can no longer depend on their government, they, as pilots and airplane passengers, have to take control of the situation on their own. We are now provided with the mental space of the contemporary American situation (USA space) where the prominent actors are American citizens left on their own. The citizens feel that they have to take care of themselves since the government cannot provide for them. "We can no longer depend on the government to defend us ... Our bubble of health and safety has been burst. Perhaps it was always in doubt, but as long as there were no emergencies to test it, we would never know. Now we do".

The metaphoric mappings between the airplane space and the USA space are diagrammed in figure 2. This network can be characterized as a *single scope network* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). A single-scope network has two input spaces with different organizing frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. Its defining property is that the organizing frame of the blend is an extension of the organizing frame of one of the inputs but not the other. The airplane input space provides the organizing frame for the USA input; we understand the USA situation in terms of the airplane situation where pilots and passengers have to rely on themselves because there is no reliable controlling entity above them. There is a cross-space mapping between the airplane input and the USA input: pilots and passengers in the airplane space are connected to American citizens in the USA space. The projection to the blend is asymmetric: the airplane input supplies the organizing frame (no control - "You're on your own") to the blended space. This simple single-scope network is the prototype of conventional source-target metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The input that provides the organizing frame to the blend (airplane input), the framing input, is what has been called the "source". The input that is the focus of understanding (USA input), the focus input, is what has been called the "target." The airplane input, since more concrete and better understood (relevant to our recent September 11th experience), is mapped onto the more abstract and less understood, in this situation, USA target domain.

Selective projections from different spaces and integration in the blend provide the basis for compression. Figure 2 illustrates an efficient compression of all Americans with passengers

in an airplane. This allows us to manage the network more efficiently. This part-whole compression allows us to manipulate the mental representation of passengers who have to rely on themselves instead of having to mentally represent the whole American population. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that both this mapping and its compression in the blended space are supported by the way people in U.S. identified with passengers on the airplanes involved in the events of September 11th, and imagined themselves there. This act of terrorism had such a great emotional impact on American citizens because people were easily haunted by the idea, "It could have been me."

Both situations – the airplane situation where pilots/passengers are not controlled by the control towers and have to rely upon themselves, and the USA situation where the citizens do not feel fully protected by their government and have to rely upon themselves – are built upon the counterfactual situations where airplanes *are* controlled by control towers (Figure 3) and American citizens *are* controlled and protected by their government (Figure 4). The counterfactual scenarios function as normative situations for the situations where no control is present. We understand that the situations of no control are neither desirable nor expected. This sense of anomaly is achieved through comparison with the counterfactual situations where the control is present. The diagrams in figures 5 and 6 are more complete since they reflect the dependence of the situations where there is no control on the situations where the control is exercised. The diagram in figure 5 combines the diagrams in figures 1 and 3, and the diagram in figure 6 combines the diagrams in figures 2 and 4.

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 are boldfaced. This is done in order to highlight their explicitness. Everything described so far has been explicitly expressed in Herskovits' text. However, the text also provides some linguistic elements that prompt us to construct other integration networks which are not explicitly expressed in the text. Below we describe how such networks are constructed and how they produce an ironic stance towards the cultural model of self-reliance explicitly stated in Herskovits' text. The elements of the figures not in bold are not explicitly expressed in the text.

Self-Reliance and the YOYO Epithet

Herskovits' article ostensibly discusses the feelings of American citizens, highly amplified after the events of September 11th, that they can no longer depend on the government to defend them as they "come under attack from sources outside the realm of anti-missile shields

and other high-tech weaponry". What American citizens must now do is to take matters into their own hands. The text explores the reaffirmation/strengthening of American cultural model of self-reliance and self-defense. Our model of self-reliance specifies that one should believe in oneself, be able to stand and act for oneself without depending on somebody else's opinion, guide or help. The roots of the model can be found in Emerson's famous essay "Self-Reliance" (*Essays, First Series*, 1841), the most memorable example of his philosophy of individualism, where he instructs his listener to trust his own judgment above all others. His motto, "Trust thyself", represents an idea deeply embedded in American culture. A variation on the same model can be detected in a variety of contemporary instance of our culture; an example is familydefense.com web-site. The web-site opens by stating "In the wake of the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, our hearts and prayers go out to all the innocent people and their families who fell victim to the attack on America by terrorists", and goes on by exclaiming, "REFUSE TO BE A VICTIM - DEFEND YOURSELF & YOUR FAMILY! ... We offer a wide variety of safety and non-lethal self-defense products to protect you and your entire family". The site sells objects such as The Money Lab - Counterfeit Notes Identifier – Pepper Sprays, Telescopic Steel Batons, Stun Guns, features different images of the American flag, and cites the Second Amendment of Constitution: "... the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed". Hershovits' commentary from Paper magazine explores this cultural model.

The linguistic prompt of importance is YOYO, the acronym for "You're on your own". Whenever Hershovits mentions the need for pilots/passengers and American citizens to rely on themselves, he accompanies it with the linguistic expression YOYO. YOYO also appears as the concluding word of every paragraph. Every threatening situation with which American citizens might be confronted can only be solved in terms of YOYO: "And we can only arrive at one conclusion: YOYO". Why is this phonological form so often mentioned and what is its role in the text?

As soon as the acronym YOYO is formed, readers are given the possibility to associate it with the lexical item yo-yo, referring to the toy that falls from or rises to the hand as it unwinds and rewinds on a string. What might seem an accidental acronym, YOYO is initially linked to the idea of pilots who have to rely upon themselves (and advise the same behavior to their passengers) and invokes from long-term memory the concept of the toy yo-yo. To better explain the construction of mental structures and links between them, I will refer again to some basic

concepts provided by conceptual integration theory. I will start by analyzing how the yo-yo mental space maps onto the airplane input space (Figure 7).

The Yo-Yo Blend

The YOYO expression is both a formal and a conceptual blend. The blend is formal in that the reader is supposed to recognize what may seem a coincidental phonological similarity between the acronym for "You're on your own" and the toy yo-yo. The blend is conceptual in that the schema of a yo-yo toy frames the scenario of pilots and passengers who believe that they have to rely upon themselves (for a similar description of concept "My karma ran over my dogma" see Coulson & Oakley, 2000). The conceptual integration network for this blend, then, contains one input space, "yo-yo input", involving a toy yo-yo and the agent that is playing with the toy, another, "airplane input" (the airplane blended space in figure 1) involving pilot and passengers who are relying upon themselves. The conceptual integration network also involves a generic space with one entity involved in some action, and a blended space that integrates some structure from each of the input spaces.

As the commentator provides us with the airplane input which contains the YOYO acronym, we invoke the toy yo-yo input space with a representation of a pair of disks that fluctuate on a string controlled by the hand's movements. As soon as the two inputs are present, partial mappings between two inputs are established (the pair of disks of the toy yo-yo is mapped onto the pilots and passengers) and the blended space is built. The blended space contains information from each of the inputs as well as emergent structure that arises as a product of the imaginative processes of integration. The blended space in this network contains the frame from the toy input and fulfills the roles from the yo-yo structure with elements from the airplane input. The emergent meaning in the blended space highlights the fact that pilots and passengers act as toys on the string: their action, even though it may seem to be self-generated, is in fact controlled by the actor who holds the string on which the toy is appended.

The idea of string is often used in the metaphor of control. Very similar concept is found in the puppet metaphor where puppet acts as if alive; however this impression is created by its being connected with strings to the actor that directs its movement. The other common image is the dog on the leash controlled by his owner. Because of our general cultural knowledge and the knowledge of other metaphors, we know that the string can stand for control. This enables us to construct the new emergent meaning in the blend where pilots/passengers are controlled. The

emergent meaning projects back to the airplane input space where we now clearly see that the pilots and passengers' feeling of self-control is only a false illusion. Our initial conception of that input space is changed and we are only able now to look at it through the glasses that the blended space provides.

The same applies to the USA mental space. Because of the constant repetition of the acronym YOYO in the discussion of the need of American citizens to rely only upon themselves, we are immersed in the conceptual network with two input spaces, that of the present American situation (the blended space from Figure 2) and that of the yo-yo (derived from the airplane - yo-yo network, Figure 7). In the present conceptual network (Figure 8), the USA input space, which contains American citizens who feel that they have to defend themselves, is framed by the toy yo-yo space as the two yo-yo discs are mapped onto the American citizens.

Blending & Irony

But that mapping does not in itself provide the irony of "yoyo theory." We need the blended space in order to fully explain the meaning construction. It is in the blend that specific aspects of the yoyo theory, such as the falsity of the feeling of being in control, come about. The blended space inherits partial structure from each input space and by the juxtaposition of familiar material develops emergent content of its own. If we consider just the mappings between two input structures, we are concerned only with corresponding elements in two spaces. However, because of the basic processes of *composition* (projection of content from inputs into the blend space) and *elaboration* (simulated mental performance of the event in the blend where the connections to long term knowledge enable imagination of possible scenarios) new meaning emerges in the blend.

The blended space structure is built with the toy yo-yo schema whose roles are filled with elements from the USA input. American citizens are seen as the toy that looks as if it is moving on its own, but is controlled by the actor's hand movements. The emergent meaning in the blend highlights the fact that the American citizens, despite their impression of having to assume control, are nonetheless under the control of their government. This emergent meaning depends on the fact that the projections to the blend are only partial. There is the projection of the idea of the string from the yo-yo space to the blended space. Due to conventional metaphor mappings, the string evokes the idea of control. In contrast, there is no projection of the idea that the American citizens are taking control of themselves from the USA input space. However, since

there exists the normative USA input space where the government is actually controlling the citizens (Figure 6), we know that the controlling entity from the blended space maps back to the government even though the government is not present in the USA input space of interest¹.

The force dynamics of the yo-yo scenario, in which the toy is controlled by the hand's movements, is exploited analogically to frame the relationship between the American citizens and their government. The emergent meaning is achieved despite the disanalogy between the control exercised in the toy yo-yo space, which is not present in the USA mental space. This emergent meaning is now influencing our original conception of the USA input space. Under the impact of the new meaning, we now notice the falsity of Americans' conviction that they are in charge. The blended space provides us with the critical position towards the cultural model of self-defense, that originally constituted the input space to the conceptual network (the blended spaces in Figure 2 which implies the blended space in Figure 1). Without this blend (Figure 8), we would be left to believe in the need in our self-protection from "more bioterrorism in the future", from "possible accidents with the nuclear power plants", from "irradiated foods", or from "economic crises".

But since we are provided with the mapping between the two mental spaces (the USA space and the yo-yo space), we are compelled to build a new blend that undermines the idea of self-reliance. Through the process of elaboration we can mentally simulate all possible mental scenarios in which Americans feel as if they have to rely on themselves. Now we see the absurdity of behavior of American citizens in all the examples that the text lists: when, during the anthrax scare, they stockpiled Cipro; when, in the case of an emergency, they would rely on their cell phones rather than evacuation plans filed by the state; or when, despite the fact that the stock market shows signs of recovering, they prefer to stay liquid so that they can get their money out in case of an emergency.

This ironic stance is realized in Herskovits' text through an interesting operation upon this conceptual network (Figure 8). The text can be understood at two levels: the level of input spaces (airplane and USA input) or on the level of blended spaces which project back to the input spaces and produce the ironic position towards them. The first level is explicit, while the

¹ This also explains the fact that in the yo-yo input space, the hand is not simply left out in order to preserve topological mappings between the airplane and the USA input spaces. Even though the airplane and the USA input spaces do not contain elements which correspond to the controlling

second is implicit. The first level produces compassion and consent; the second, irony and doubt. At the first level (Figure 2) there is source-target mapping between the airplane space and the USA space. Knowledge structure from the airplane space is projected to the USA space and the target space is understood in terms of the airplane space: American citizens are just like pilots and passengers who have to fend for themselves.

At the second level the text produces a mocking position towards the cultural model of necessity of acting on our own without waiting for the government's advice on how to behave. This ironic position is realized by playing with different mental spaces in the conceptual integration network. In particular, Hershovits' constant repetition of the acronym YOYO provides us with an additional input space (the toy yo-yo input space), which leads to the construction of new blended meanings. Through the emergent meaning in the blended space we become aware that the American citizens are deluded by the idea of self-defense. Even though they believe that they rely on themselves, the blended space points out the fact that they are controlled by their government, just as a yo-yo toy is controlled by the hand's movements.

Besides repetition of the acronym YOYO, the existence of this second level to the text is supported by the illustration that accompanies the article. This illustration depicts a hand, with a sleeve adorned with blue stars, holding the toy yo-yo. The whole picture has colors of the American flag. In this visual blend, through the process of compression, we are presented all at once with the image of the yo-yo toy and the idea of the American nation.

However the text refers explicitly only to the input spaces (the airplane inputs space and the USA input space, Figure 7 and 8) as if not noticing the blended meaning created. "With good reason to expect more bioterrorism in the future, one must act now and not wait for government advice on how to behave... YOYO". "We've spent billions of dollars on the military and defense to gain an illusion of a kind of safety that can no longer be sustained. With dirty bombs within the grasp of any lunatic wishing to put up some money, no one is safe ... YOYO". "... there are genuine threats to our health and well being out there. YOYO". "We've long deluded ourselves into believing that here in America, we were safe from all the chaos and mayhem that regularly sprouts up in remote parts of the world, far, far away from our insulated lives. No longer. Say hi

element in the yo-yo space, they can evoke the corresponding elements from their normative counterfactual spaces (Figure 5 and 6).

to our neighbors, the Talibans. The future everyone warned us about is here to torment us today. YOYO".

But the sophisticated and perhaps cynical reader knows that the compassion explicitly expressed for the American citizens in their quest for self-reliance is not sincere. Below the surface level the article mocks the cultural model of self-reliance, even as it outwardly trumpets it. By constant mention of the acronym YOYO a new meaning is created which highlights the inconsistency of the cultural model of self-reliance explicitly evoked in the text, and the lack of control implied by the yoyo blend. The irony emerges in the blended space where the pilots, passengers, and U.S. citizens alike are at once masters of their own fate and controlled by the hand that holds the yoyo. Moreover, it is the blended space in which the absurdity of the image of the self-reliant yo-yo can arise.

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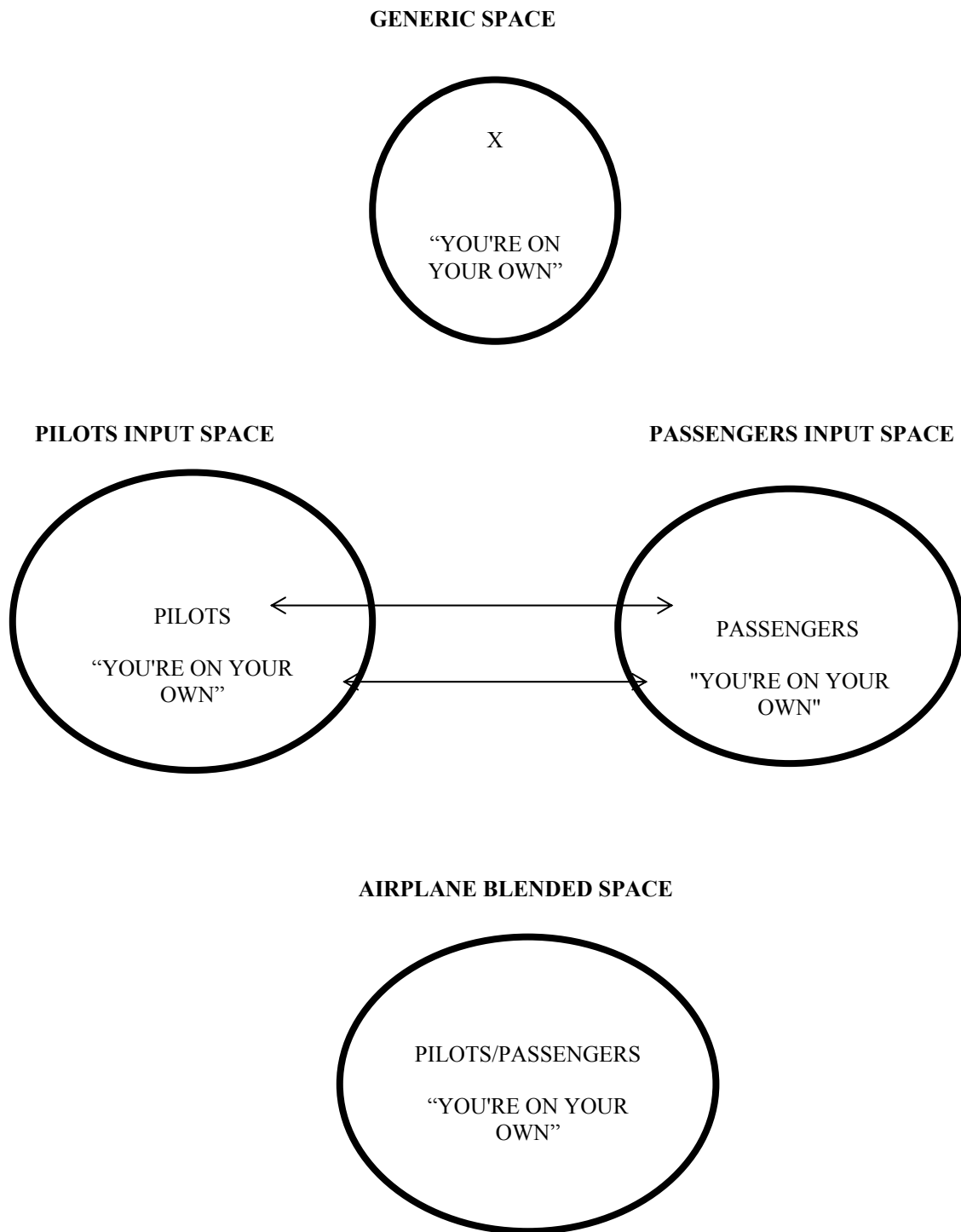


Figure 1.

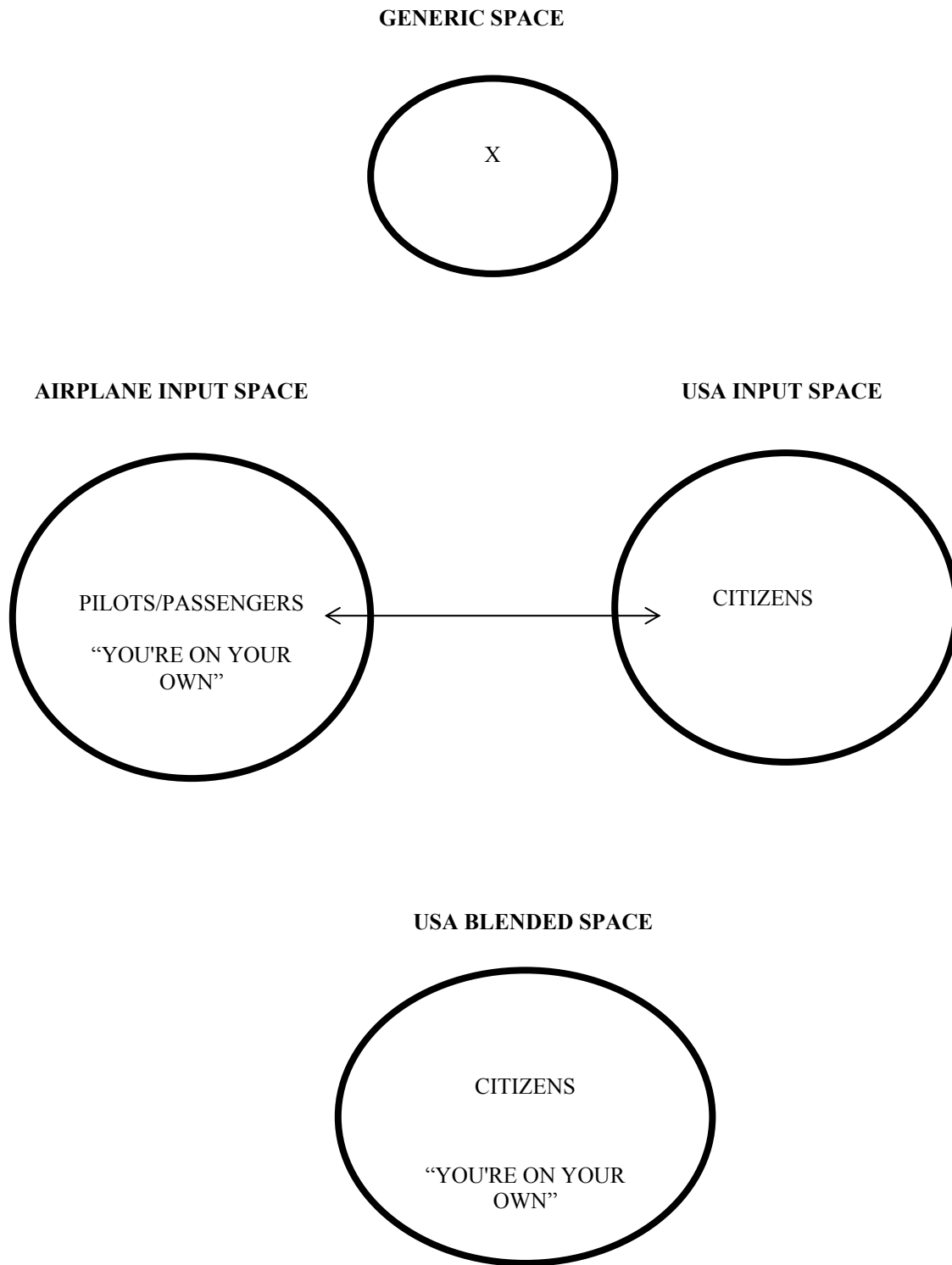
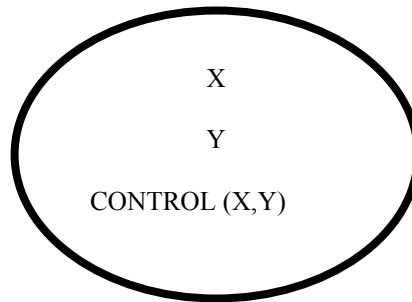
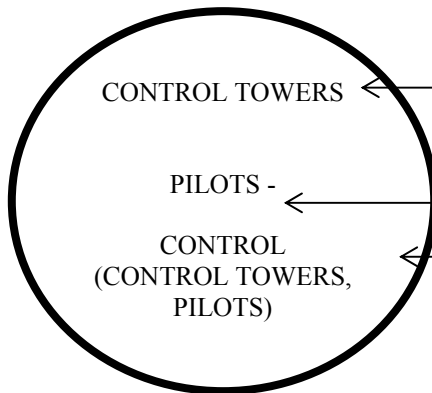


Figure 2.

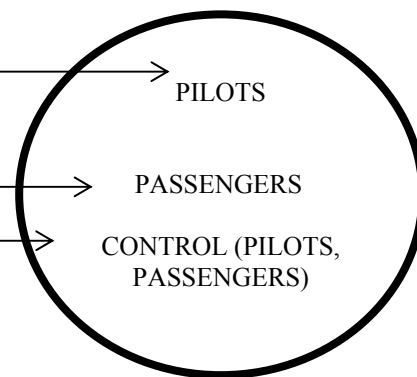
GENERIC SPACE



PILOTS INPUT SPACE



PASSENGERS INPUT SPACE



AIRPLANE BLENDSPACE

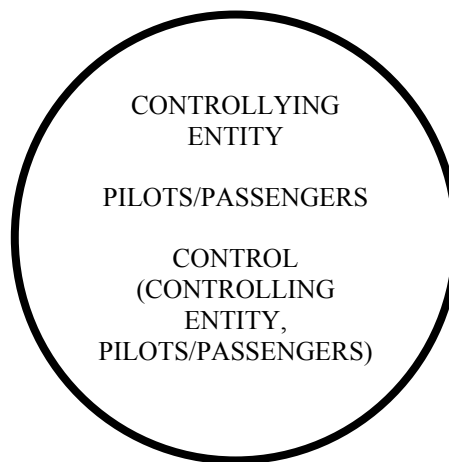


Figure 3.

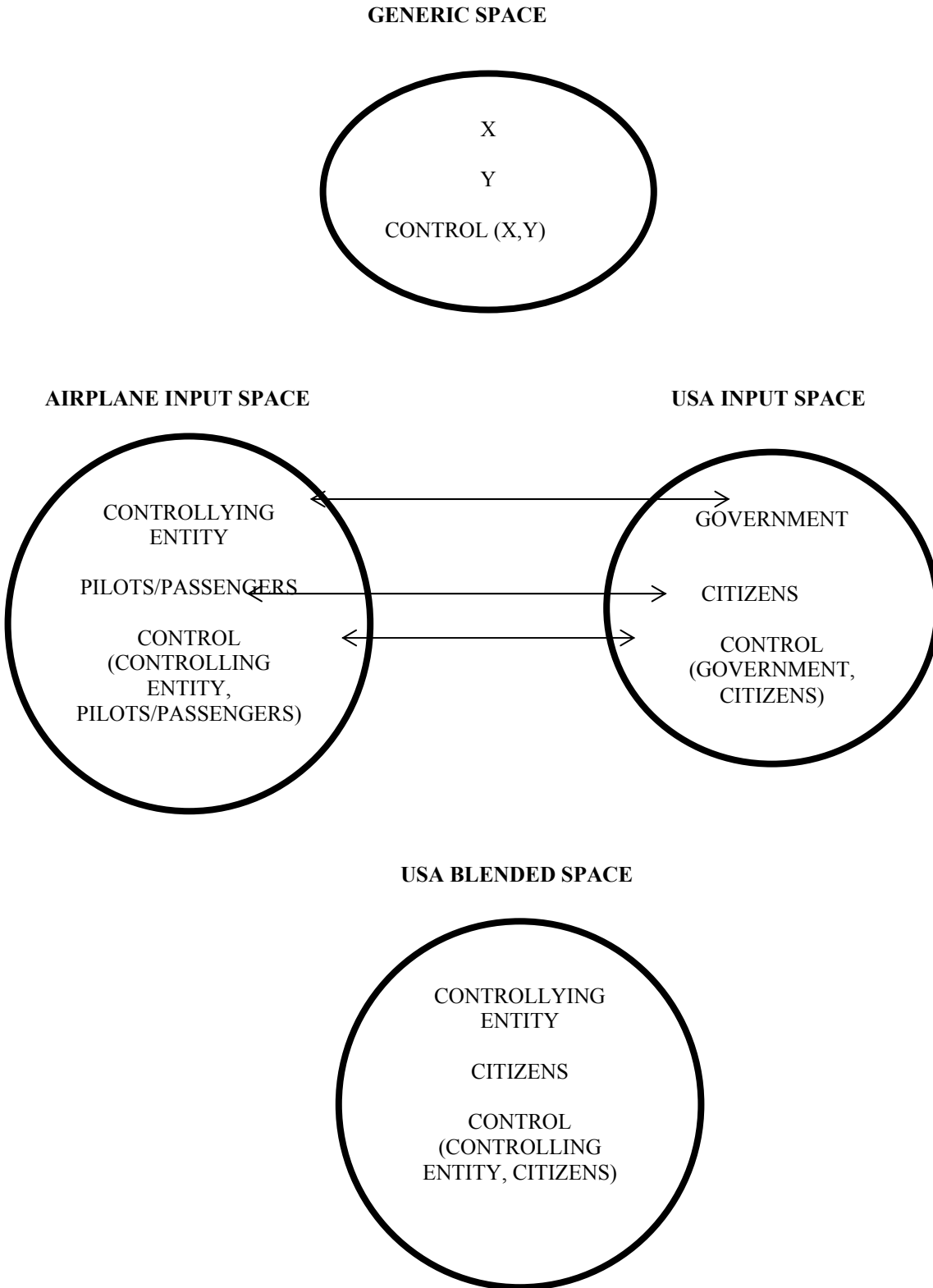


Figure 4.

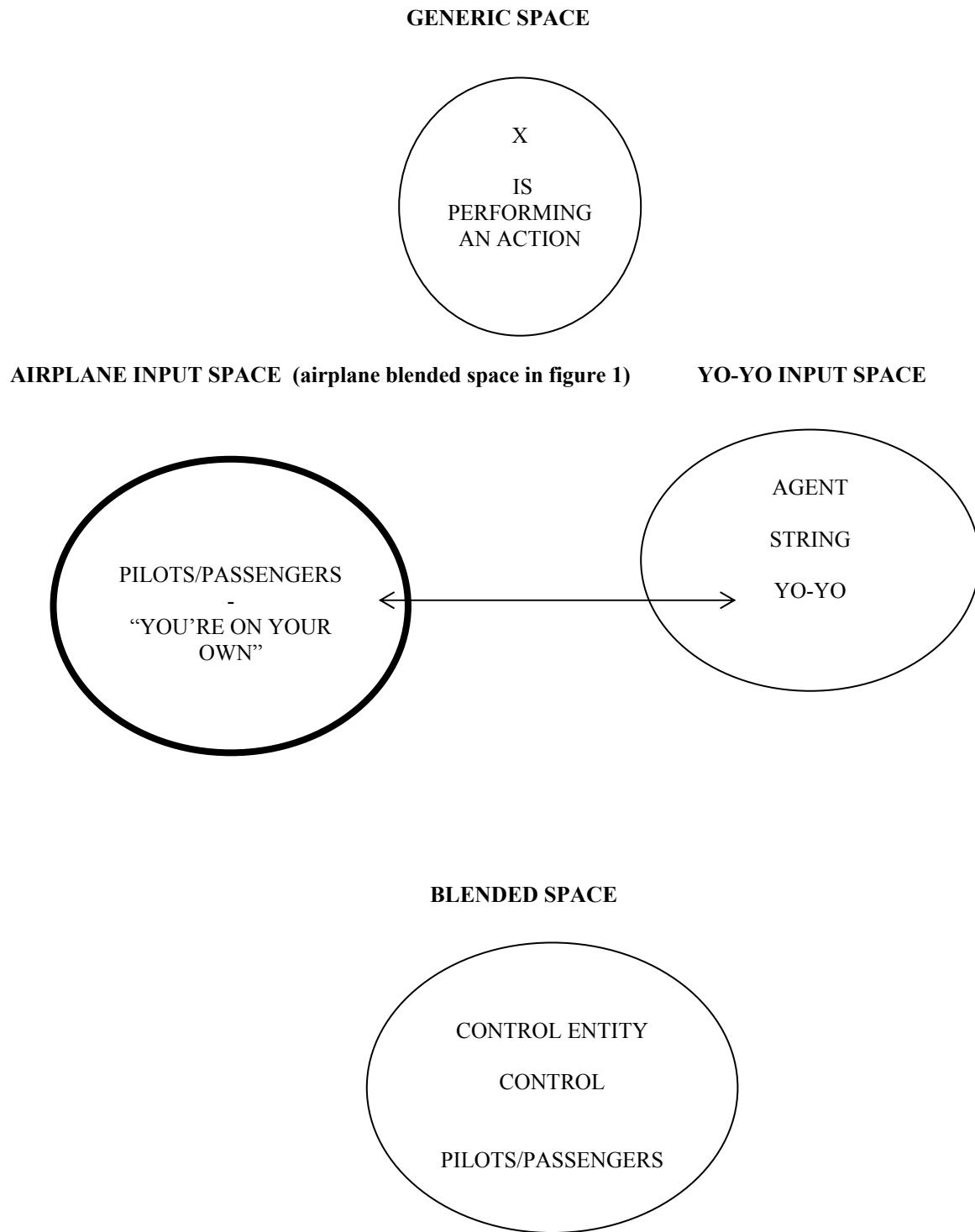


Figure 7.

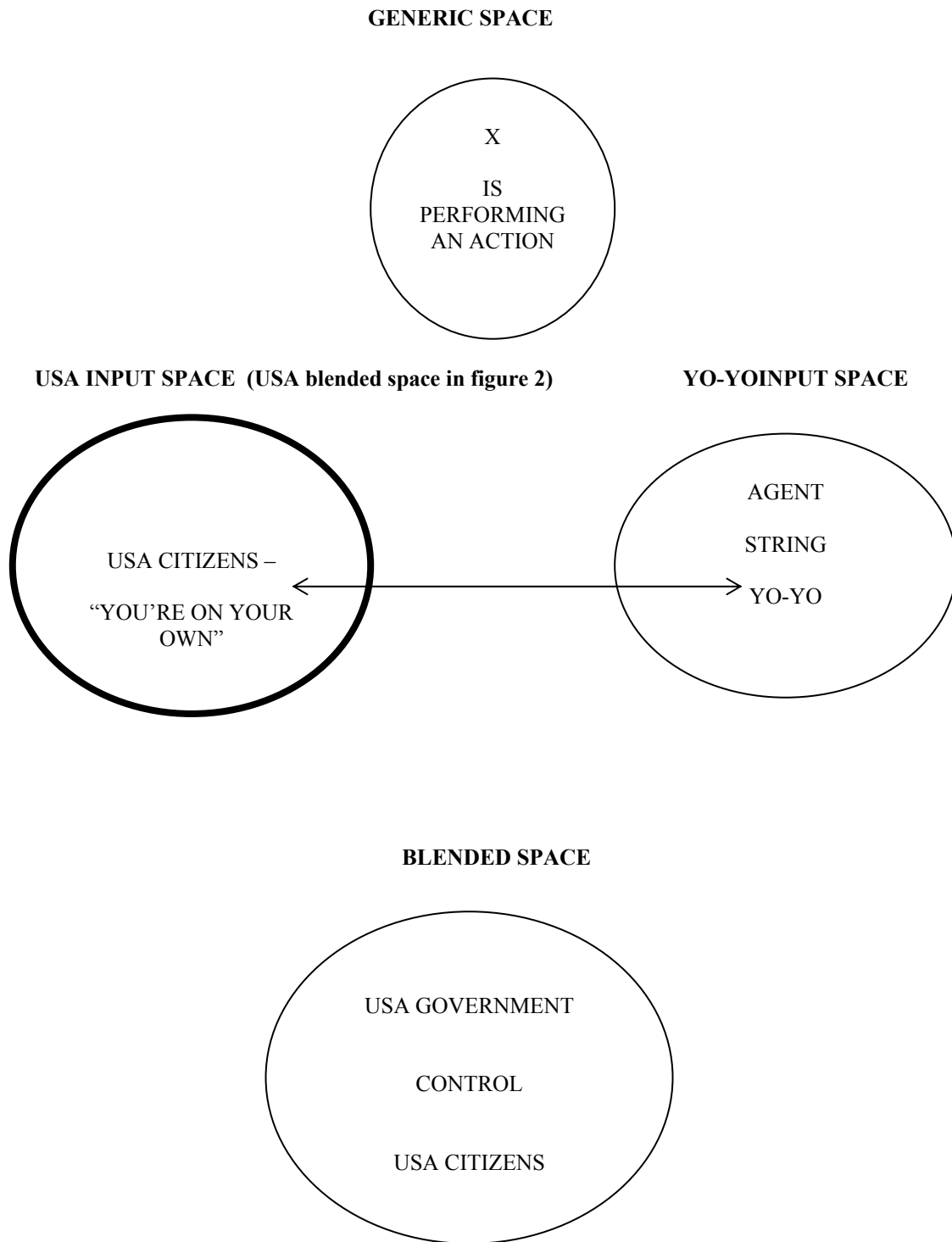


Figure 8