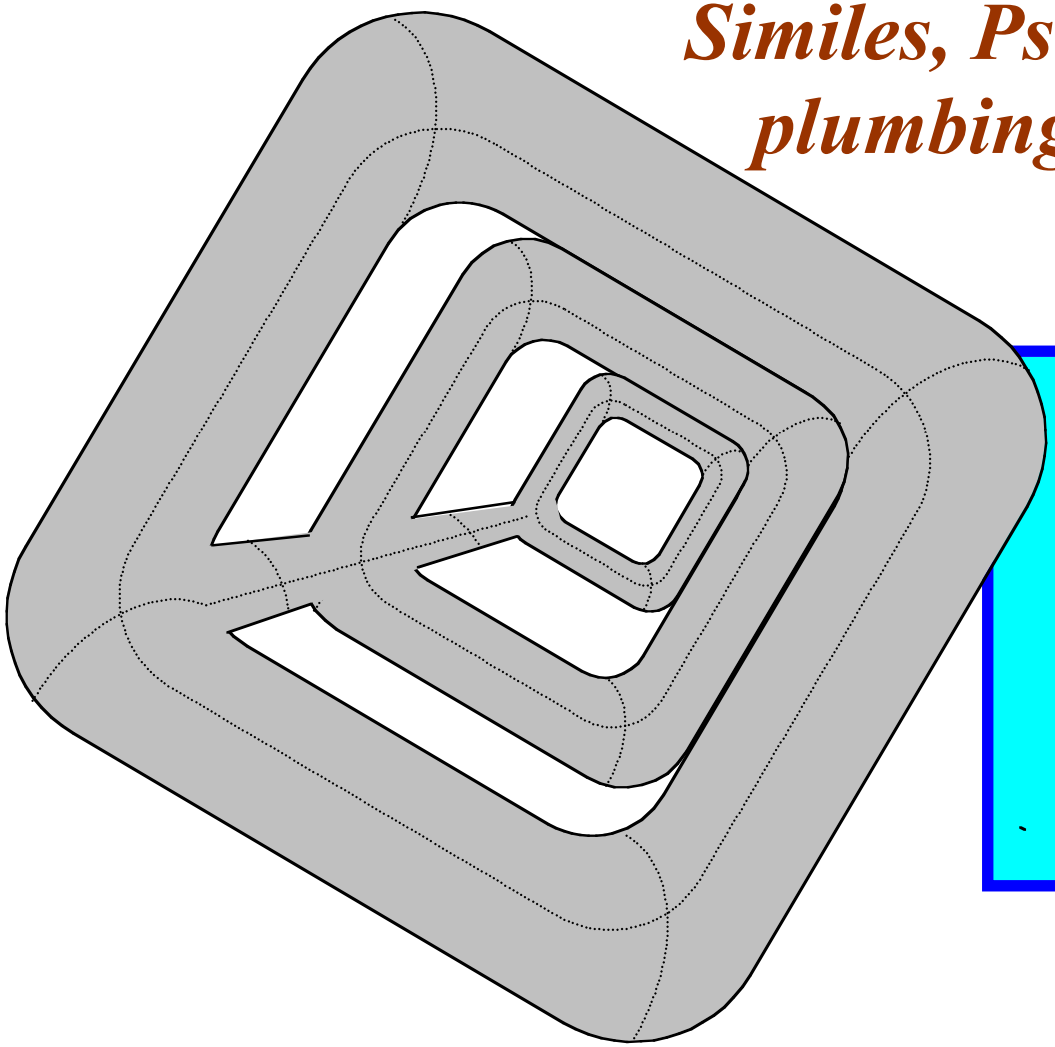
Framing and Re-Framing in Creative Language

Similes, Pseudo-Analogies and the plumbing of creative language



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Creativity as Re-Conceptualization …

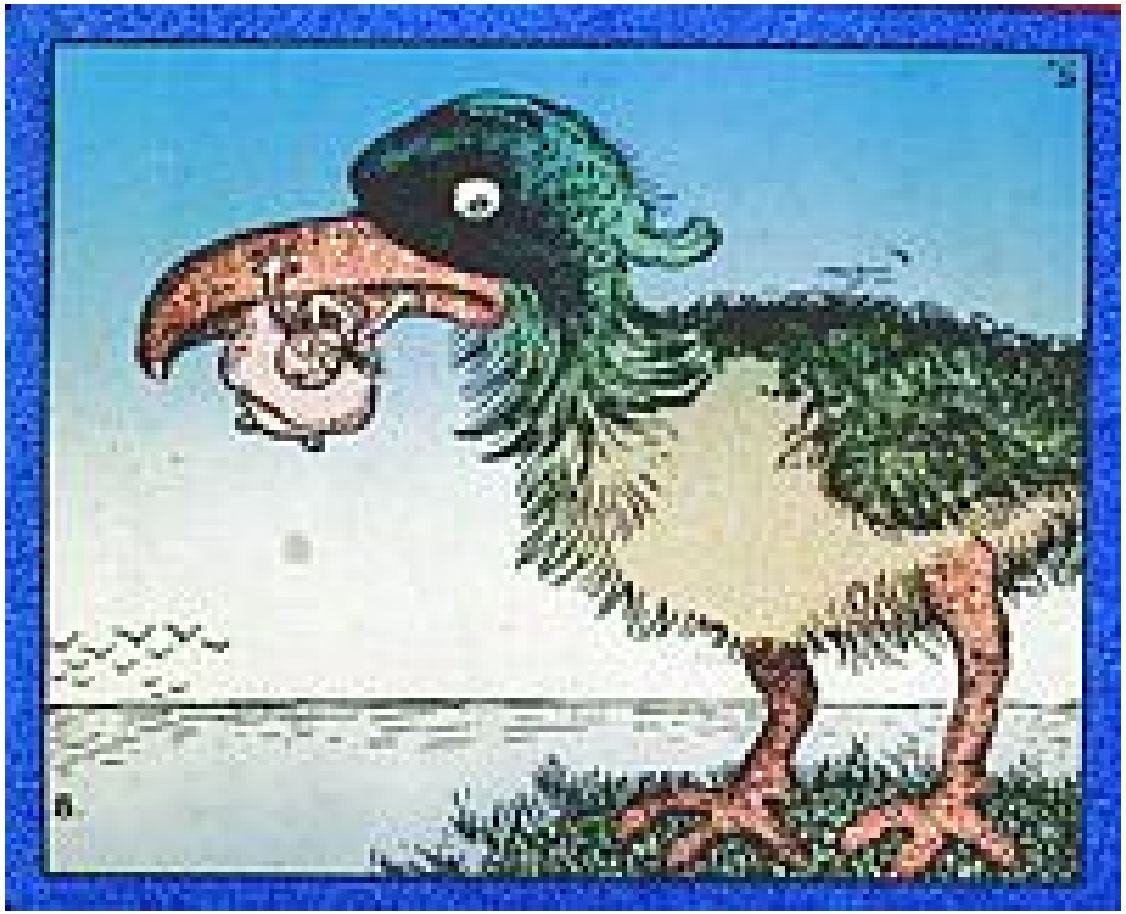
The Upside-Downs of

Gustave Verbeek:

New York Herald (1904)

Early pioneer of the comic-strip (now mostly forgotten)

Creativity as Re-Conceptualization (and reuse)



Gustave Verbeek:

New York Herald (1904)

A comic strip of 6 panels that turns into another 6 panels when turned 180 degrees, to create a total strip of 12 panels.

Creativity as *Useful*, *Non-Obvious* Re-Conceptualization

Office of Government Commerce

Boring!

£40,000 for a new *(and very un-creative)* logo?

Source: Simpson, A. **(2008).** ***OGC reveals new logo to red faces.*** ***Daily Telegraph*, April 29.**

Humorous Creativity as Affective Transformation

A simple transformation yields a major reconceptualization.

90 degrees

In *humour*, the transformation brings out the *ridiculous* in a topic

Creative Ridicule: Re-Framing via Affective-Analogies

Many humorous comparisons have the apparent structure of an analogy:

"Having a **smoking section** in a restaurant is like having a **peeing section** in a swimming pool"

(George Carlin)

"He worked over an idea like a diamond cutter with facets and angles and refractions of light. ... He was like a train hobo with a chicken bone. When he was done there was nothing left for anybody"

(Jerry Seinfeld praising *George Carlin*)

Each comparison transfers a potent affect, but what is actually mapped?

Emergence: What is Mapped is often not given, but implied

"Aunt is calling to Aunt like mastodons bellowing across primeval swamps" **(P. G. Wodehouse, *The Inimitable Jeeves*)**

"Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food" **(Raymond Chandler in *Farewell, My Lovely*)**

"They'd put you in the psycho ward, and believe me, the people who run that place are about as sympathetic as Georgia chain-gang guards" **(Raymond Chandler in *The Long Goodbye*)**

Structure-Mapping is possible in each case, but is it essential to meaning?

Pseudo-Analogical Comparisons: Mapping not essential?

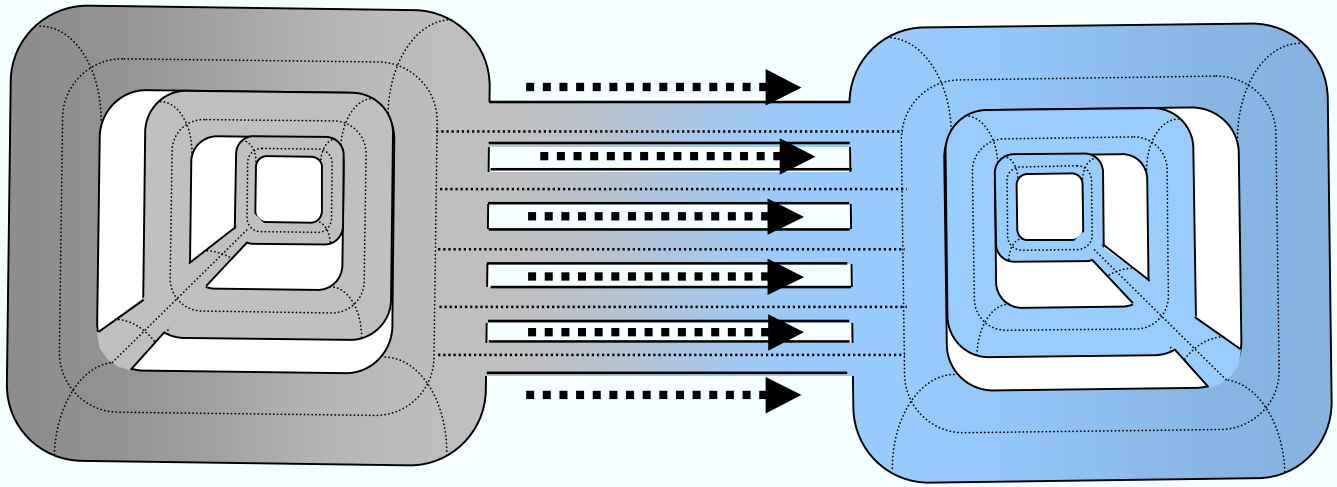
"*The swell [of the harbor] is as gentle as an old lady singing hymns*"
(Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*)

"The general spoke again, slowly, using his strength as carefully as an out-of-work show-girl uses her last good pair of stockings"
(Raymond Chandler in *The Big Sleep*)

"*I belonged in Idle Valley like a pearl onion on a banana split*"
(Raymond Chandler in *The Long Goodbye*)

"*She smelled the way the Taj Mahal looks by moonlight*"
(Raymond Chandler in *The Little Sister*)

Creative Plumbing: Analogies, Metaphors and Similes



Classical Analogies

Many Metaphors

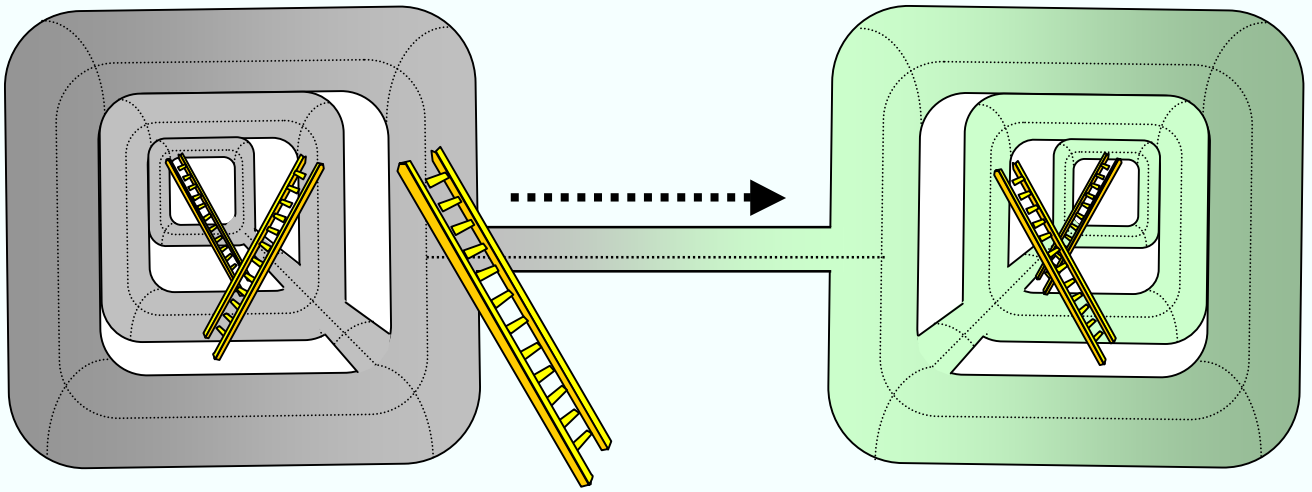
Some Similes

Complex Source Description

Described Target / Topic

Classical Analogies are "Fat Pipes" with high-bandwidth mapping

Creative Plumbing: Analogies, Metaphors and Similes



Pseudo-Analogies

Some Metaphors

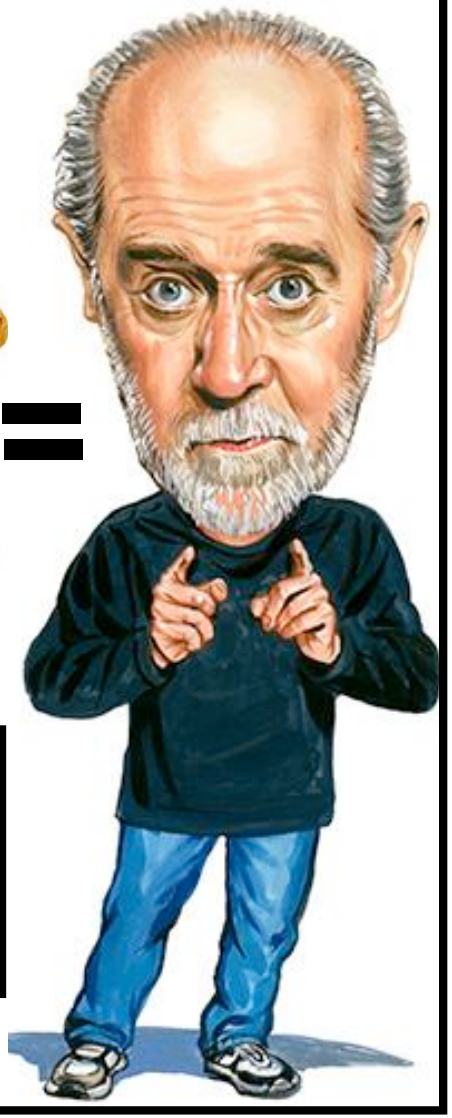
Many Similes

Complex Source Description

Described Target / Topic

Similes / Pseudo-Analogies are "Thin Pipes" with compressed transfer

X is like **Y** *(because …)*



George was <u>like</u> a train hobo with a chicken bone.

When he was done there was nothing left for anyone.

Constructions that support Linguistic Creativity

Many constructions support creativity by:

- **Allowing juxtaposition of incongruent ideas**
- **Signalling intent to be imprecise, creative**
- **Signalling affective tone of a proposition**
- **Implying rather than explicitly saying**
- **Establishing collusion with the listener**
- **Biasing the interpretation of the listener**
- **Providing a safety net for failed conceits**

Some Examples: Constructions Facilitate Creative *Suggestion*

"Authors of film novelisations, not unlike pornographers, rarely get the respect they deserve" **(film critic Joe Queenan)**

"It's grandiose, strainingly adherent to its evanescent internal precepts, and full of enough metaphorical signifiers to choke Derrida" **(Vanity Fair article on *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*)**

"This man makes Machiavelli look like the hero of a Frank Capra movie" **(blogger *Manifesto Joe* describing Dick Cheney)**

"If he were any more laid back, he'd be a snooker table" **(columnist describing Sky TV's gnomic weatherman)**

X is the **Y** of the **Z**

Riesling is the **Kenny G** of the **wine** world:

technically brilliant, but oh-so-lacking in credibility!

A Web Corpus of Figurative X *is the* Y *of* Z Constructions

David Cameron is the Tony Blair of the conservative party

Michael Jordan is the Tony Hawk of the basketball world

Milton Caniff is the Rembrandt of the comics

Scipio Africanus is the Tommy Franks of the Roman legions

Peter Brett is the Tolstoy of the F train

Daniel Melingo is the Tom Waits of the contemporary tango

Shahruhk Khan is the Tom Cruise of the Bollywood Industry

Edward Abbey is the Thoreau of the desert

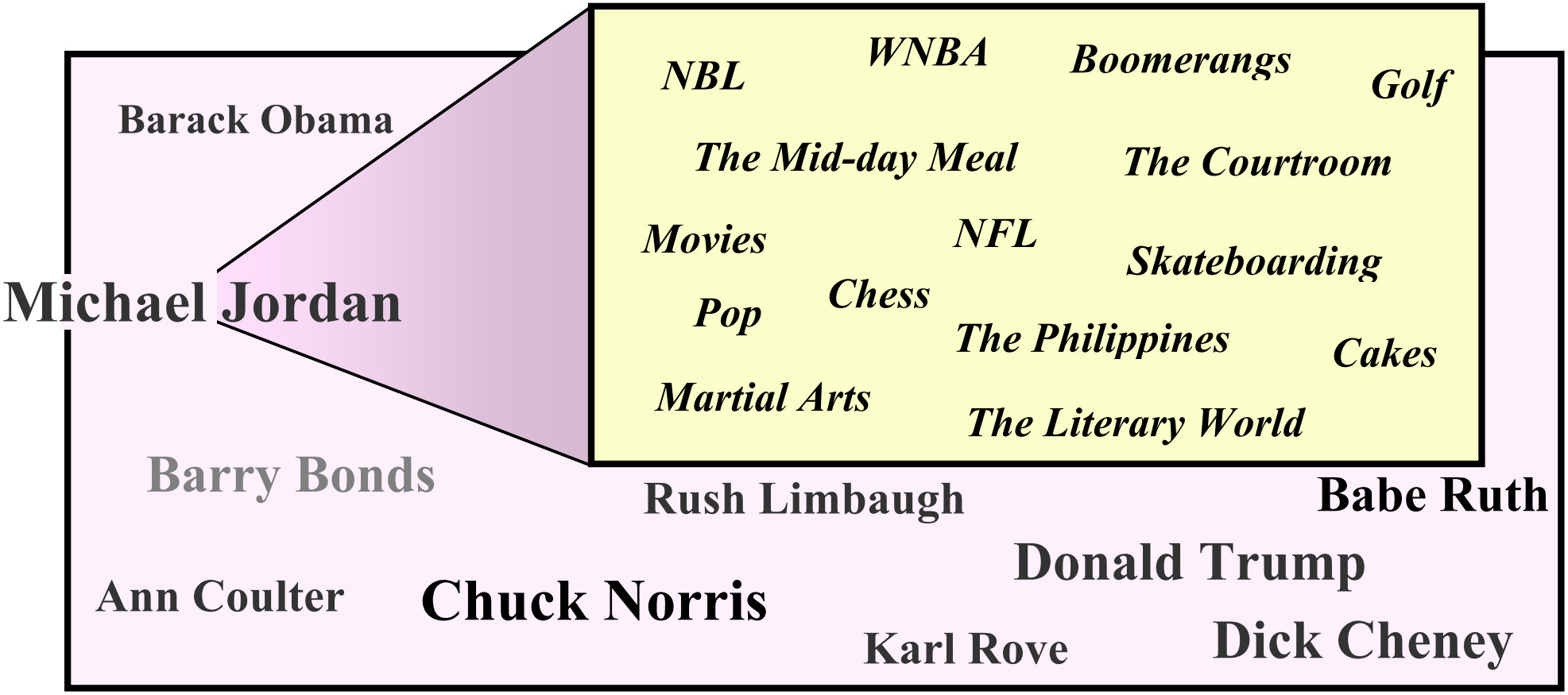
June Wanniski is the Thomas Paine of the Reagan revolution

Bill Gates is the Thomas Edison of the tech industry

Paris Hilton is the Zsa Zsa Gabor of the 21st Century

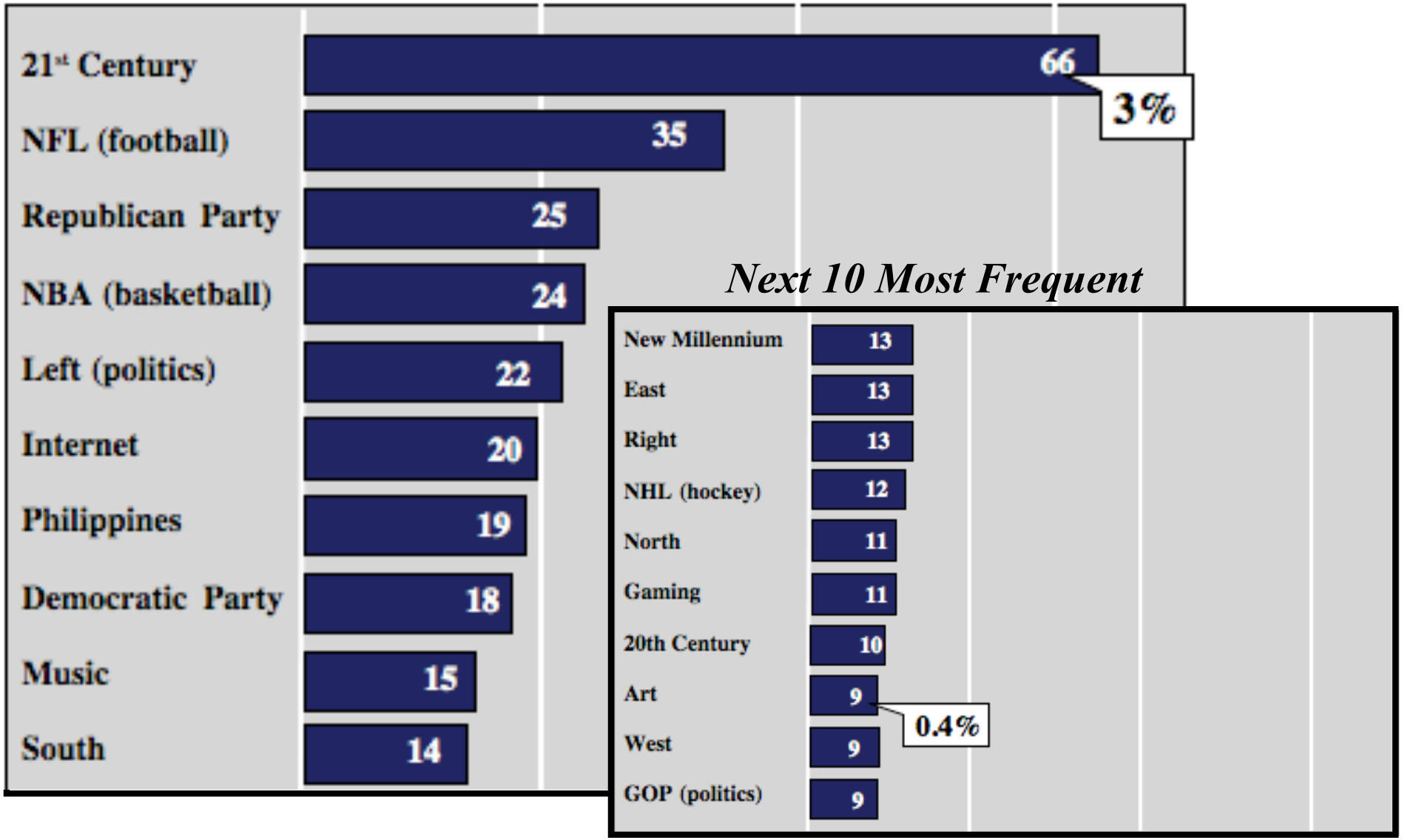
… (and 2179 more)

An Inventory of Vivid Topics: Used to build Complex Comparisons

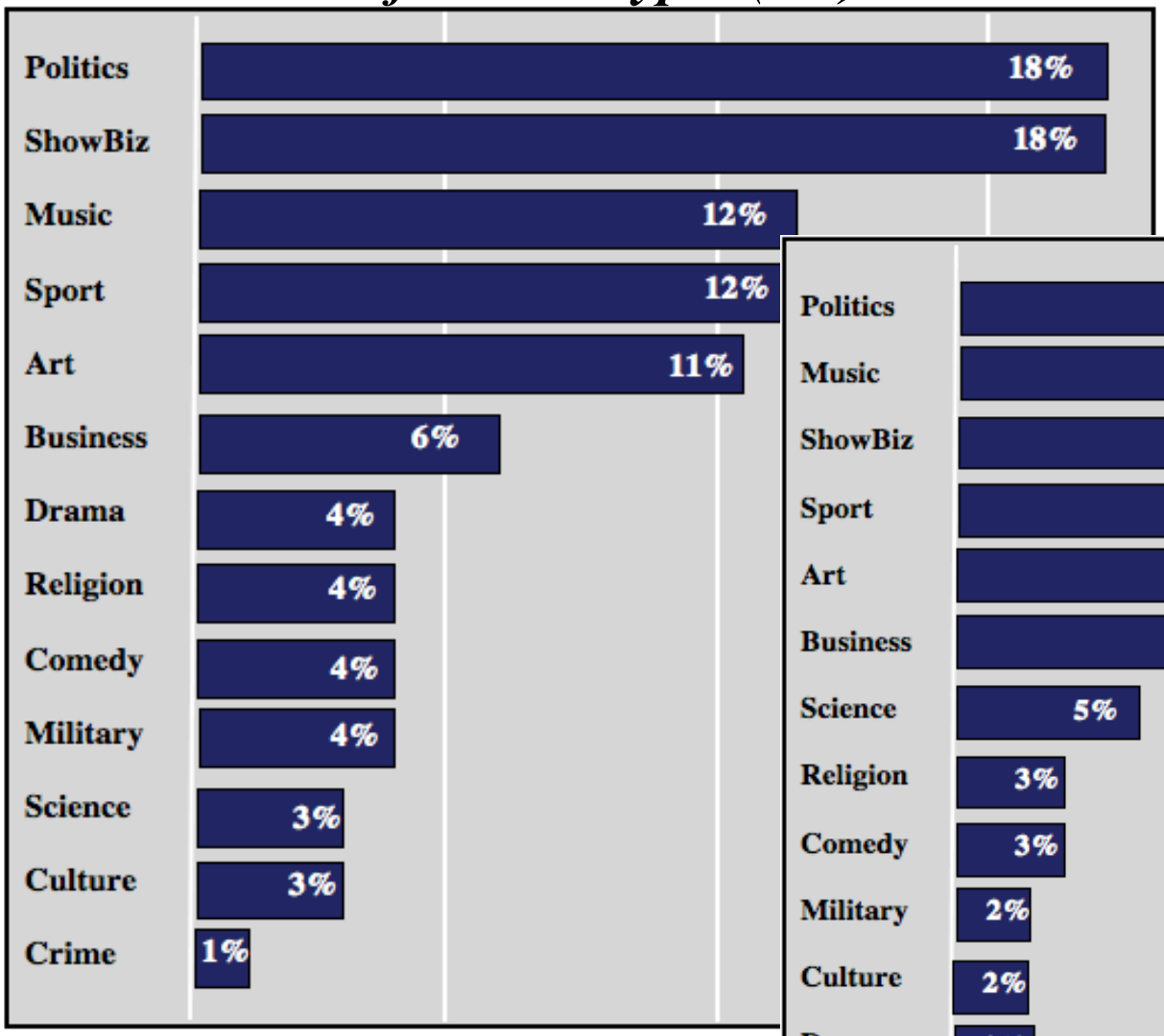


These topics are widely known, have salient properties, are easy role models

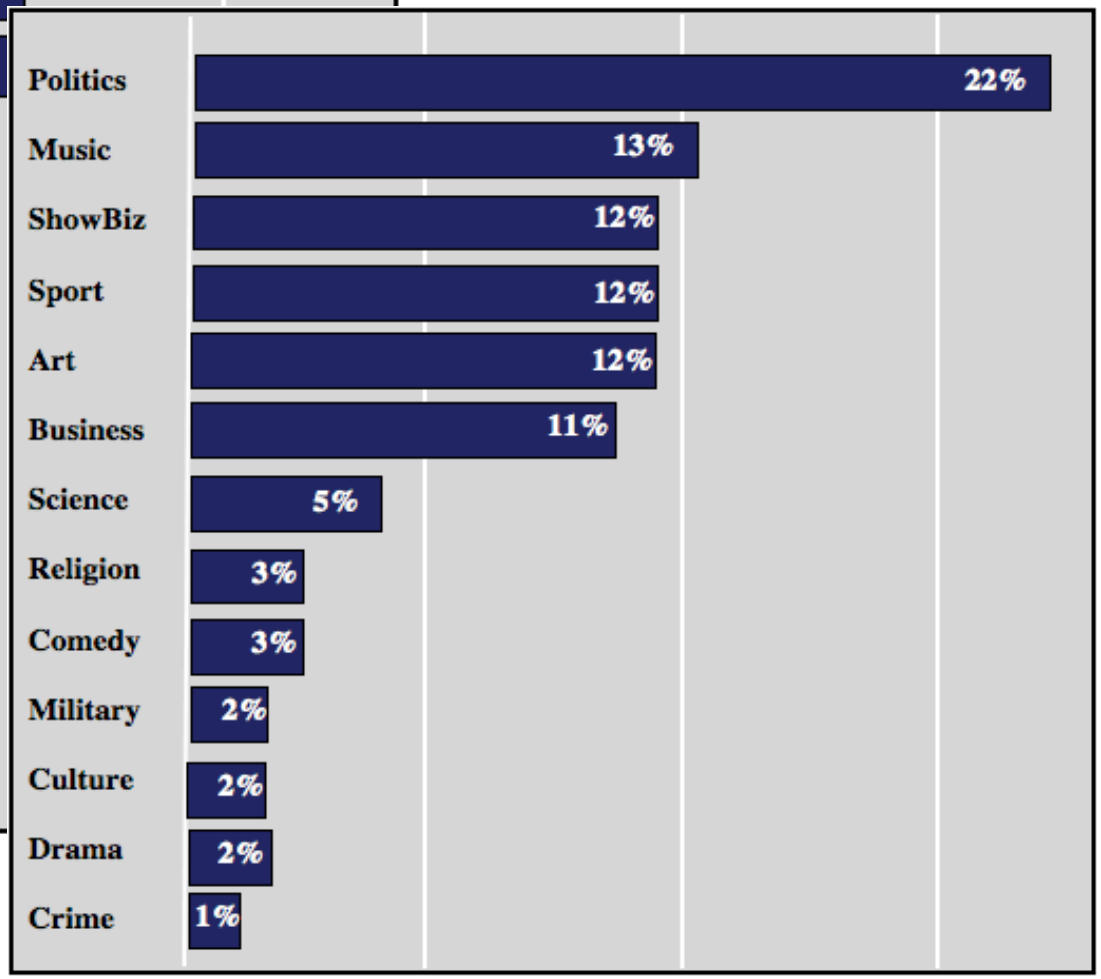
Top 10 Most Frequent Topic Domains (Z's)



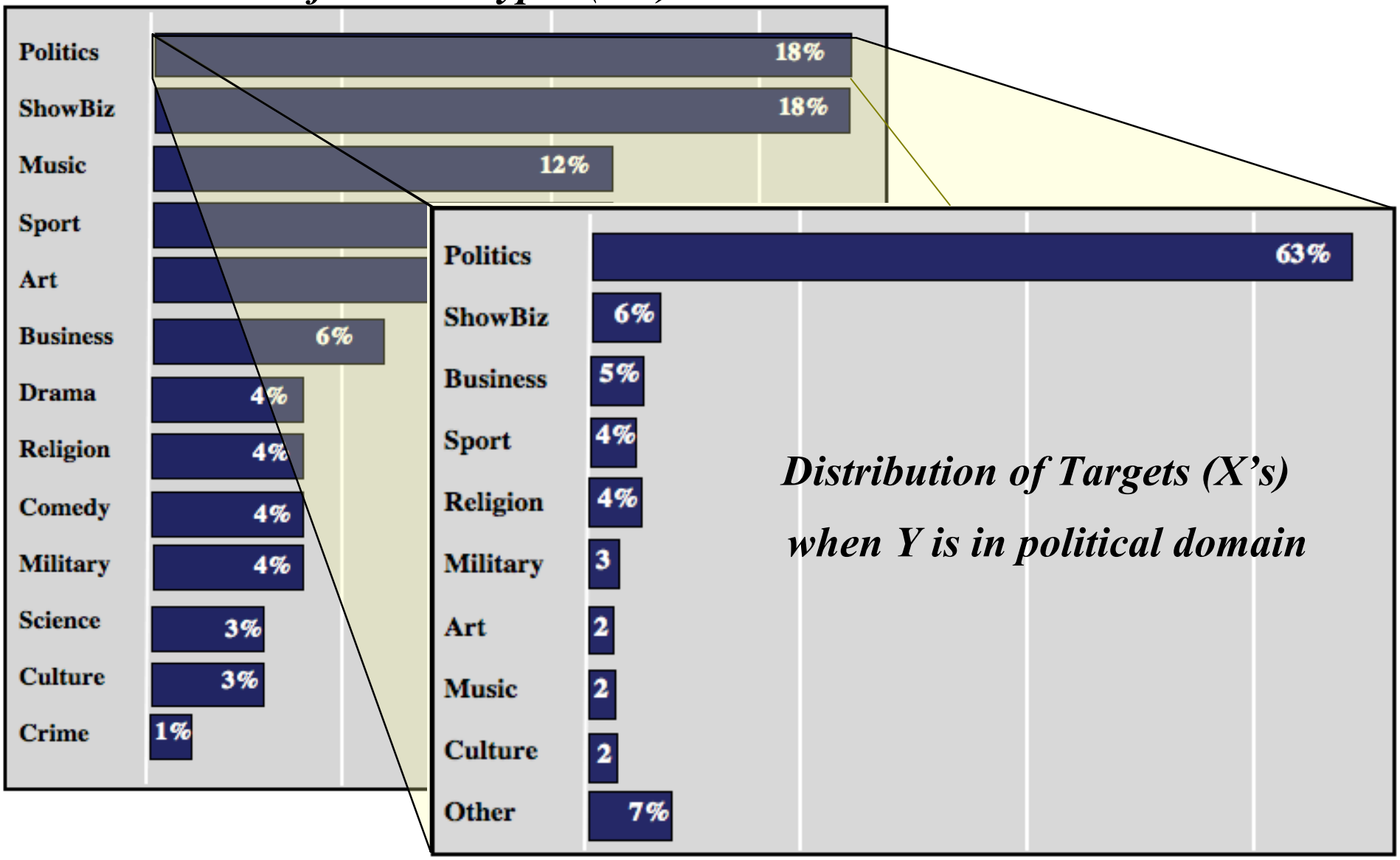
Distribution of Source Types (Y's) in XYZs



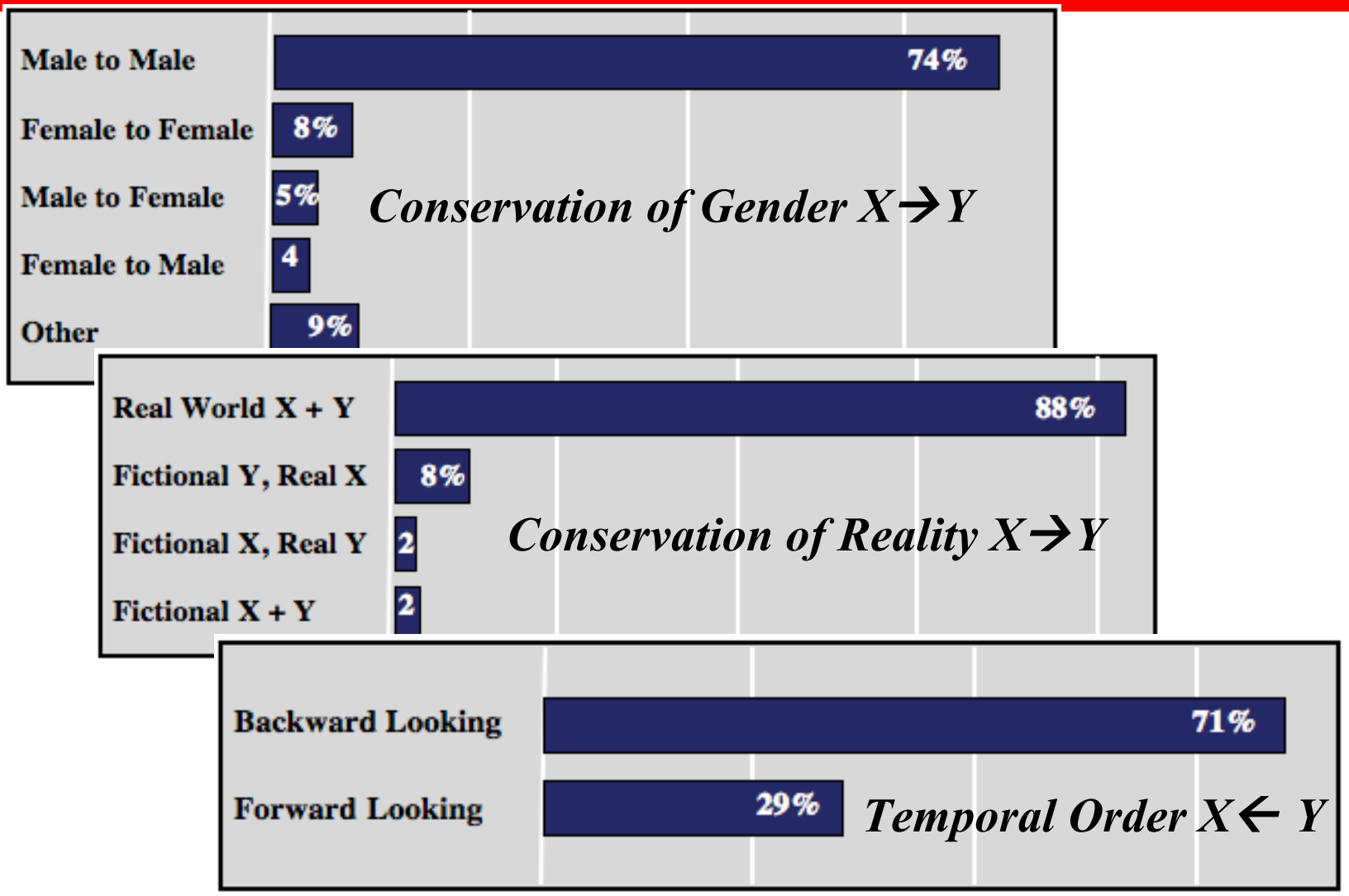
Distribution of Targets (X's)



Distribution of Source Types (Y's) in XYZs



Conservation of Ontological Form in XYZ Structures



	Politics	Music	Art	ShowBiz	Business	Crime	Military	Sport	Comedy	Religion	Science	Culture	Drama
Politics	63	2	3	7	5	0.5	3	5	1	4	2	2	1
Music	6	61	5	7	4	0	1	6	1	1	1	0	1
Art	3	8	64	5	6	0	0	5	1	1	1	1	1
ShowBiz	9	8	8	37	9	1	0	7	5	1	2	1	3
Business	8	3	5	5	53	0	0	9	0	0	8	1	2
Crime	16	2	8	0	13	24	0	8	2	5	10	5	0
Military	43	1	1	1	8	0	30	2	1	4	3	0	0
Sport	5	7	3	8	8	1	1	53	3	1	2	1	1
Comedy	19	5	5	8	7	1	0	12	29	3	1	1	3
Religion	33	5	1	3	7	1	2	3	1	26	3	4	0
Science	6	1	5	2	13	2	1	4	1	4	51	5	1
Culture	19	9	4	15	10	0	1	0	1	1	3	27	3
Drama	14	6	4	7	18	1	1	11	1	2	1	5	15

Conclusions: Degrees of Freedom in Support Structures

0 No degrees of freedom (canned phrases, linguistic *objets trouves*)

e.g., "Epic Fail!" "Top of the world, Ma!", "Of all the gin joints in all the …" etc.

1 One degree of freedom (one replacement in standard template)

e.g., "[Grey]$_X$ is the new black" "In [Space]$_X$ no one can hear you scream!"

2 Two degrees of freedom (two replacements in standard template)

e.g., " … between the Scylla of [deflation]$_X$ and the Charybdis of [inflation]$_Y$"

Fractional Dimensionality: some replacements strongly entail others

" If Eskimos have 26 words for snow, then [People]$_X$ have as many for [Topic]$_Y$ "

Let's Conclude With: Creative Non-Conservativity

Alfa Romeo is the Quentin Tarantino of the automotive world

Chicken Inasal is the Oprah Winfrey of the menu

Pac Man is the King Lear of the 1980's videogame revolution

Samsung DLPs are the Lindsay Lohan of the television market

The Razr is the Kate Moss of phones

The Borgata is the Julia Roberts of casinos

Bradley's Battleship is the John Travolta of board games

Krug is the Dorian Gray of the wine world

Red meat is the Donald Trump of cancer

The K750i is the Chuck Norris of the photography world

The tuna sandwich is the Michael Jordan of the mid-day meal