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Poetics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/poetic

Culture in crisis: Deploying metaphor in defense of art

Terence E. McDonnell^{a,*}, Steven J. Teppner^b^a Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, 810 Flanner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA^b Department of Sociology and Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy, Vanderbilt University, 1801 Edgehill Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Cultural sociology
Metaphors
Arts organizations
Cultural policy
Organizational failure
Distinction/democracy

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the public discourse around cultural organizations under threat of closing. When discussing these crises, do people cling to old metaphors or find new ways to defend the arts? We compare the use of metaphor across the field of cultural organizations from high to popular culture and nonprofit to commercial. These questions are timely, with U.S. cultural policy under strain and rising rates of closure facing orchestras and theaters. Rather than forging a new path, we ultimately find that discourse around high culture nonprofits relies on old, elitist metaphors.

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1. Introduction

The Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Rocco Landsman, was recently asked about the health of the nonprofit arts sector in America. “Look,” he explained, “You can either increase demand or decrease supply. Demand is not going to increase. So it is time to think about decreasing supply” (quoted in Marks, 2011, p. E01). This sentiment, that we have overbuilt the nonprofit art sector, has become a frequent refrain among cultural policy leaders. Bill Ivey, Landsman’s predecessor at the NEA, delivered the sobering news to arts philanthropists as early as 2004, stating, “Our policy model is forty years old. Our primary partnering strategy of matching grants to nonprofits has matured, and for the past ten years, our nonprofit refined arts have presented striking indicators of an overbuilt industry—depressed wages, lack of capital, defensive, conservative business practices. To paraphrase *Oklahoma*, **‘We’ve gone about as far as we can go’**” (Ivey, 2005, p. B6; emphasis added).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: terence.e.mcdonnell@nd.edu (T.E. McDonnell), steven.j.teppner@vanderbilt.edu (S.J. Teppner).

Declarations of crisis and imminent danger are not just hype and hyperbole. High profile closings or threatened bankruptcies have increased recently—including the St. Louis Symphony, the Brandeis Rose Museum, Coconut Grove Theater, Ballet Florida, the Museum of the Southwest, the Pasadena Playhouse, and many others (see Section 4). Explanations for the crisis facing cultural nonprofits abound: competition from other forms of entertainment and media, technological change, shifting demographics, economic recession, decreased government funding, shifts in philanthropy, overbuilt facilities with high overhead costs, and the rising cost of artistic labor (see Ivey, 2005; Tepper and Ivey, 2008; Woronkiewicz et al., 2012). Apart from explaining the social and economic forces bearing down upon the nonprofit arts sector, scholars need to pay greater attention to what these moments of crisis reveal about the value and relevance of certain cultural institutions in our lives and our communities.

Cultural sociologists have focused on the macro structures that influence the rise of organizational forms in the arts, how innovation and new cultural forms relate to market forces, and how organizational forms diffuse across cultural fields (see DiMaggio, 1982; Peterson and Berger, 1975; Zolberg, 1994). Far less work has examined moments of crisis or transition when organizations, or entire fields, face the threat of extinction—e.g., when organizational forms die or specific organizations falter, threaten bankruptcy or go under altogether. Until recently, closings of high culture, nonprofit organizations (HCNPs) were few and far between because the entire sector was organized to resist closure. DiMaggio notes that arts policy in the U.S. is oriented toward “institutionalization”: “nurturing arts organizations, preventing existing organizations from failing, encouraging small organizations to become larger and large organization to seek immortality” (DiMaggio, 2000, p. 56).

Organizational scholars in other fields examine organizational demise, but they focus on ecological and market forces that precipitate decline (Brüderl and Schüssler, 1990; Freeman et al., 1983; Hannan and Freeman, 1977). There is little scholarship, in the arts or otherwise, focusing on the cultural work that stakeholders engage in when debating organizational closings. We argue that such cultural work—the arguments, stories, value-statements, justifications, and language deployed by supporters and critics—reveals important, often hidden, assumptions about the value and relevance of art for citizens, cities and art forms. This is particularly important because HCNPs were historically characterized by dueling conceptions and competing missions. On the one hand, they have supported the elevation of fine art as sacred and distinctive and appealing to sophisticated and enlightened patrons, while on the other hand, they have promoted access to the arts, community service, and education. Cultural nonprofits have variously positioned themselves as both of the people and *above* the people (see Section 2).

Liz Lerman, a MacArthur fellow and renowned choreographer, articulated this tension at a recent meeting for leaders in the nonprofit arts.¹ With one hand raised in front of her face, she pinched the end of an imaginary string; with the other hand at waist level, she pinched the other end of the string. She remarked, “This is how we have organized the arts in this country—with some of us up here (pulling on the top end of the invisible string) and some of us down here (pulling on the bottom end).” Then, she drew her two hands into a horizontal plane with the imaginary string now running from left to right. “And this is how we need to organize the arts in the future.” Hierarchical to egalitarian; that was her message delivered forcefully through a metaphorical image.

Lerman’s statement was powerful because she deployed a metaphor that evoked a set of related images, feelings, thoughts and perceptions. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 3) have written, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” The power of metaphors comes from their capacity to influence policy and politics. Scholars who study social movements have argued that the way an issue is “framed” can make all the difference in whether it gains public and political support (Jasper, 1998; Kane, 1997; Snow and Benford, 1988). Our focus on the use of metaphor by arts organizations in crisis (1) reflects and reveals how advocates understand their value and (2) sheds light on how metaphor may shape the capacity of these organizations to survive.

We find that when HCNPs face crisis, their supporters fall back upon metaphors and frames that position the fine arts as distinctive, fragile, exceptional, and deserving of high status despite decades

¹ Witnessed by Tepper at the Spring 2004 meeting at the White Oak Conference Center, “The future of cultural policy.”

expressing commitment to democratic participation. We analyze the public statements of supporters and critics debating the value of dozens of nonprofit arts institutions on the brink of closure. We compare these statements to those made about other endangered cultural organizations arrayed along dimensions of high culture/popular culture and commercial/nonprofit—including jazz clubs, art-house theaters, fairs, libraries, bookstores, record stores, and amusement parks. While leaders of national arts associations, foundation officers, and cultural policy scholars call on nonprofits to adopt more inclusive and diverse approaches to engaging communities, HCNPs under threat enact the old model even while admitting it is unsustainable. By falling back on elite metaphors and cultural frames in the short term, HCNPs undermine their capacity to change to more democratic frames in the long term. This inability to commit to alternative frames ultimately fuels a broader crisis of legitimacy by reinforcing a belief that art and culture are not for all communities.

The U.S. cultural system provides a good arena for analyzing arguments surrounding the potential death of cultural organizations. Unlike in Europe, state support averages only 10% of total revenue for the typical nonprofit arts organization. In the U.S., the private sector drives the cultural system, leaving cultural organizations to rely on philanthropy, private donations and earned income (like ticket sales and merchandize) to survive (Renz, 2003). The nonprofit model, which began growing exponentially in the 1960s, has resulted in a very diverse set of cultural organizations in virtually every city across America (see description below). In short, arts organizations exist in America largely because their communities support them through attendance and donations, and not because of taxes and subsidy. The life and death of an arts organization in the U.S. context, therefore, depends more on advocacy and public appeal and less on the work of politicians, policy makers and government administrators. We believe this yields particularly rich public accounts and justifications in the face of organizational crisis.

2. Nonprofit arts in the United States

2.1. *Differentiation, status, and the rise of the nonprofit arts institution in America*

In the middle of the 19th Century, visual art, theater, and orchestral music were part of a system of private ownership organized on a largely commercial basis. Larger cities—Philadelphia, Boston, New York—had commercial galleries, museums modeled on Barnum's curiosity shops, and musical groups funded by subscription models, alongside various enterprises and sole proprietorships. Organizational forms were diverse but there was little formal differentiation between high arts and popular arts. Venues juxtaposed minstrels with more serious theater, symphonic music with popular ballads, painting with stuffed animals. Diverse art audiences brought varied socioeconomic classes together: bankers and fishmongers could be found side-by-side cheering and booing Shakespearean actors.

By the late 19th Century, the fine arts in the U.S. emerged as part of a process of upper class formation among urban elites. Cultural and social leaders began differentiating tastes and sites of leisure from the growing urban masses. Beginning with museums and orchestras, and extending later to dance and theater, elites built nonprofit institutions that stood outside market forces, resisted the pressures of appealing to broad and vulgar tastes, and were run by boards of wealthy patrons who perpetuated these exclusive organizations to fortify their prestige and social dominance. Buttressed by new organization, the fine arts began a century of differentiation from the growing sector of commercial and popular arts. Thus, the cultural hierarchy we know today—high vs. low brow, sacred vs. profane, fine vs. popular—was institutionalized in the nonprofit form and expanded over the 20th Century through legitimating educational institutions, foundations, national professional associations and the rise of cultural critics and curators (see DiMaggio, 1982; Levine, 1988; Peterson, 1996; Zolberg, 1981).

By the mid-twentieth century, the arts ecosystem included a small but growing group of nonprofit arts institutions and a declining, but significant, cadre of high art proprietorships (Kriedler, 1996). Most nonprofit arts institutions at this time clustered in dense urban centers. The expansion of the nonprofit sector accelerated dramatically during the "Ford Era" of arts funding, from 1950 to 1990. Under the leadership of Ford Foundation Vice President W. McNeil Lowry, the nonprofit arts system received a steroid-like injection of resources that produced record growth for the next four decades.

Ivey summarized the effects of Ford-era leverage schemes: “. . . in 1965 there were 7700 nonprofit arts organizations; today there are well more than 40,000. In 1970 there were sixty symphony orchestras; today, more than 350” (Ivey, 2005, p. B6). That growth occurred because the Foundation invested more than one-half of a billion dollars to extend the reach of nonprofit arts throughout America. Most of these Foundation funds were in matching grants—a tactic that required institutions to recruit new donors and raise additional funds. In the wake of the Ford arts initiative, national, state and local arts agencies were founded in unprecedented numbers. These agencies followed the Ford model of creating new arts nonprofits and strengthening existing nonprofits through capital campaigns, institutionalizing the Ford approach as the default cultural policy in the United States. This funding model accomplished one of Ford’s early goals: to close the fine arts divide in America between those living in core urban centers and those living in small and midsize cities. Virtually every city in America could now claim its own museum, orchestra, theater and dance company (see Blau, 1992; Kriedler, 1996).

Even while the fine arts were suffused with a seemingly democratic and populist impulse, they remained committed to their elitist roots. As mentioned above, the nonprofit model produced networks of local elites who controlled the new regional institutions. Professional associations and university programs in arts management and art history ensured that organizations were run by experts, often from outside the community. Additionally, the economic model for new organizations was premised on the support of elite donors, members and subscribers. While the institutions “brought great art to the people” (Tepper, 2008), they also created opportunities for elites to display cultural capital and to participate in exclusive social gatherings, like black-tie fundraising parties.

2.2. *Tensions and contradictions*

The ideology of the nonprofit arts is premised on distinction and the sacredness of art, but the legitimacy of the nonprofit model requires deference to the greater public good. In return for not paying taxes, nonprofit institutions are expected to benefit the public and, therefore, must be more than an elite patrons’ club. Simultaneously, the elevated position of high art must be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of all social classes in order to elevate and maintain the status of their patrons (DiMaggio, 1982). This legitimacy is built upon widespread arts education and government grants to arts organizations that valorize art. By seeking cultural authority through government and education, HCNPs align themselves with democratic purposes—often at odds with their core ideology emphasizing excellence, esoteric knowledge, and restricted public access (Cummings, 1991; Zolberg, 1986).

This contradiction in mission was apparent from the beginning. Early in the 20th Century, progressive reformers, who saw museums more like libraries, challenged the traditional elite museum model (DiMaggio, 1991). These reformers stressed broad education, open access, abundant interpretative material accompanying collected works, and public accountability. The Carnegie Foundation was instrumental in defining the shape of the early 20th Century museum, pushing museums toward the reformist. So, on the one hand, museums were beholden to the elite interests of their patrons and board members. On the other hand, they were partnering with the Carnegie Foundation to serve their communities (DiMaggio, 1991). These dual allegiances produced a gap between rhetoric and action. In spite of all the reform talk and pilot programs, museums were still beholden to the traditional model, in part, because of the exigencies of daily operation like raising money, satisfying members, and deferring to trustees. DiMaggio identified a “restricted code” used internally that supported the traditional model and an “elaborated code” used externally that gave priority to the reform ideal and helped seed small community-based pilots.

The case of the early 20th Century museum demonstrates that cultural professionals balanced the competing models of the museum—elite vs. democratic—as much through rhetoric as through practice. Outside the museums, art professionals deployed an egalitarian language—emphasizing civic duty, public education, and community interests. Internally they engaged staff and trustees with a discourse emphasizing hierarchies, connoisseurship, esthetic excellence, and formality. In times of crisis—the subject of our exploration—museums receded into their hard shells of traditionalism, at least in their actions and behaviors. Tellingly, when neighborhood branches of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art faced financial difficulties, the museum director “was quick to protect the museum’s

core activities at the expense of public education,” eliminating branch museums and related educational programs (DiMaggio, 1991, p. 284). We extend DiMaggio’s insights to explore whether the public rhetoric of stakeholders also reflects a retreat to traditional notions of high art during times of crisis.

This tension between elitism and populism beset HCNPs from the beginning. Victoria Alexander (1996) shows that museum professionals continue to face this tension today. Responding to corporate and government sponsorship, museums face pressures for increasing popularity and access while at the same time maintaining their “legitimacy as houses of high culture” (Alexander, 1996, p. 825). Rather than focusing on the internal and external shift in language and priority, Alexander shows how this balance is maintained by “shifting resources”—mounting popular blockbuster exhibitions in order to pay for more esoteric, curatorially driven exhibitions.

During the heyday of nonprofit arts expansion—the 1950s to the 1990s—the core tension described above was largely held in check. HCNPs unabashedly promoted themselves as bastions of excellence—bringing status and prestige to their cities. While these institutions continued to promote public purposes—such as educational outreach—the idea of art for art’s sake was rarely questioned. Elite patronage, buttressed by government and foundation funding, supported the ideas of artistic innovation, preservation, support for individual artists, modernism, and excellence (Brensen, 2001; Campbell, 2000; Saunder, 1999; Zeigler, 1994).

2.3. *The democratic turn in cultural policy discourse*

If HCNPs have harbored dueling ideologies, the elitist view has dominated for most of the 20th Century. This began to shift in the 1970s in response to the civil rights movement and cultural pluralism. The NEA launched the “Fine Arts Extension Program” in 1973, which funded artworks from minority communities and established a grant category for folk culture. Professional cultural managers swelled the ranks of nonprofit arts management, pushing HCNPs to seek a broader funding base. This shift required an emphasis on accountability and access alongside esthetic criteria (Zolberg, 1981). The democratic turn culminated in the mid 1990s with a national public affairs forum, formally articulating that the arts were a “public good,” critical for civil society, fostering diversity, and building livable communities. In the 20-page report from the forum, “excellence” was mentioned only one time. In contrast, “community” was mentioned 18 times (American Assembly, 1997). “Egalitarian” and “community” arguments were emerging from the shadows to usher in a new era of reform (see also Cherbo and Wyszomirski, 2000; Presidents Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 1997).

This new era of reform never materialized. Despite initiatives supporting diverse art forms, amateur artists, unincorporated arts organizations, and new forms of arts education, the cultural landscape largely remained the same; government agencies, national service associations, and foundations continued to work with the same set of nonprofit, fine arts institutions. Despite expanding education departments and improving marketing campaigns, these institutions still operate as they have for the past 40 years: courting season subscribers and wealthy patrons, building stately facilities, and remaining committed to an esthetic that privileges elite knowledge and cultural capital (Evans, 2010; Ivey, 2005; Lee and Long Lingo, 2011).

2.4. *Culture in crisis*

The 21st Century nonprofit arts system in the U.S. faces new strains and stresses. Across states, public funding is stagnant or falling precipitously. The California Arts Council has seen its budget slashed by 94% (California Arts Council, 2004); Texas’ council by 50%, Wisconsin by 67%; and Kansas cut its arts funding entirely (Pogrebin, 2011). Many HCNPs, even large well-known ones, have faced potential bankruptcy. As public and private funding declines, demographic and technological changes are shifting the demand for art and entertainment in the U.S. away from HCNPs. Attendance for most HCNPs is significantly down, especially for the youngest cohorts (National Endowment for the Arts, 2009). Even those organizations not facing imminent decline see a challenging road ahead: maintenance of expensive facilities, declining ticket sales, rising competition, and wages in the nonprofit arts sector remaining flat.

Faced with threat and crisis, supporters of HCNPs could defend themselves in one of two ways, either (1) retreating to existing dominant ideologies, justifications and metaphors or (2) putting forth new ideologies and new cultural frames that can help recruit new supporters and provide innovative models of future action. Scholars drawing on a cognitive perspective suggest that people cling to the familiar in the face of crisis (for a review, see [Kahneman, 2011](#)).² Organizational sociologists ([Staw et al., 1981](#)) also suggest that external threat can force organizations to rely on routine and eschew innovation.³ From this first perspective, we would predict that HCNPs would cling to their dominant ethos, defending themselves by drawing on elitist language and metaphors that set them apart from other cultural forms, portraying their institutions and art forms as special, distinct, and above the everyday life of their communities. On the other hand, cultural sociologists, like Ann Swidler, suggest that during unsettled times people often seek new ideologies to guide action ([Swidler, 1986](#)). During crisis, old assumptions and routines become less useful and people seek new interpretations and cultural frames. From this perspective, we would expect HCNPs to search for new frames and expand beyond traditional views to permit a more open and democratic view of culture.

This leads us to ask the following questions: When HCNPs face extinction do they get down with the people or look down on the people? Do they employ populist or elitist language and metaphors?⁴ Additionally, are there important differences between HCNPs and popular culture or commercial organizations? Answering this last question helps us understand how and why the metaphors deployed by advocates of HCNPs, like symphonies, differ from the metaphors used to advocate for art house movie theaters, record stores, local parades, or libraries.

As noted above, scholars have shown that art forms are classified, for the purposes of assigning social value, along two axes: (a) the first is based on the nature of its audience, and (b) the second is based on the organizational form. Thus, art forms can be seen as “high” and refined if they appeal to elite and sophisticated audiences; or they can be seen as “low” and popular if they appeal to broader, populist tastes. On the other axis, art forms can exist outside of market pressures (beholden to esthetic or social value) or they can be commercial and organized around profit. In order to tease out the extent to which public arguments to save cultural organizations are influenced by the type of audience/art form or the type of organization, we analyzed cases of crisis in the four quadrants defined by the high/popular and nonprofit/commercial: (1) high culture nonprofit, (2) high culture commercial, (3) popular culture nonprofit, and (4) popular culture commercial.

3. Data and methods

We began by identifying cases of cultural organizations in crisis in the four quadrants in [Fig. 1](#). Using LexisNexis and Google news search, we identified news reports of organizations at risk.⁵ This search yielded 134 cases across all four categories from the last 30 years (1981–2011). Then, we conducted a deeper search for articles around these cases, including local newspapers outside the LexisNexis offerings. If a case had five or more articles written about it, we included it in the sample. The authors and five assistants coded a subset of this sample to identify emergent frames and to develop a coding scheme. All coders then iteratively analyzed additional subsets of the sample until there was high intercoder reliability. Once reliability was established, each assistant coded a subset of the remaining sample.

3.1. Two ways to measure metaphor

We adopted two approaches to analyze the metaphors that appear in this public discourse: one deductive, one inductive. We deductively analyzed broad patterns of metaphor across the sample

² In particular, the literature on “availability bias” is useful ([Tversky and Kahneman, 1974](#)).

³ Work on “threat rigidity” is useful ([Staw et al., 1981](#)).

⁴ This tension is present in other fields, as well. See, for example, [Johnston and Baumann's \(2007\)](#) work on gourmet food writing.

⁵ To identify cases, we searched for cultural forms (orchestras, ballets, theaters, museums, etc.) with keywords like “crisis,” “closing,” “bankrupt,” “going under,” “shutting doors” and the like.

	Nonprofit*	Commercial
High Culture	art museums, theaters, ballets, orchestras, operas, playhouses, public radio stations	art galleries, jazz clubs, arthouse/ independent movie theaters, Broadway theaters, for profit museums
Popular Culture	libraries, parades, cultural and ethnic festivals, indie/college radio stations, aquariums, halls of fame	bookstores, record stores, comic book stores, drive-in movie theatres, amusement parks, fairgrounds

* By “nonprofit,” we refer less to an organization’s tax status than whether it is primarily non-commercial. In other words, while most organizations in this category are nonprofit, we also include some organizations that are government run, like public libraries.

Fig. 1. Case sampling frame.

around the tensions between elitism and democracy that have appeared in the discourse and practices of nonprofit arts institutions. These poles align with [Griswold's \(2004\)](#) distinction between the humanities and the social science views of culture, which guides our deductive framework. According to the humanities view, culture is seen through the metaphors of hierarchy and fragility. When advocates view culture as hierarchical, they evaluate some culture as better than other culture. For these advocates, cultural institutions then work to identify and support “the best that is thought and known” ([Arnold, 1885](#), p. 122). Because they view culture as fragile and easily lost, cultural institutions work to preserve and protect that culture. In the face of threat, if advocates for nonprofit fine arts cultural organizations cling to the dominant humanities-based ethos, we would see arguments couched in the metaphors of fragility and hierarchy.

Alternatively, if advocates of nonprofit, high culture organizations use democratic rhetoric to defend threatened institutions, they might adopt metaphors associated with [Griswold's \(2004\)](#) social science view of culture. Rather than viewing culture as hierarchical and fragile, the social science view sees culture as egalitarian and robust. Arguments that see culture as egalitarian takes a more pluralistic stance compared to the hierarchical view: no culture is any better than any other. In this sense, comic books are equal to canonical literature and popular movies are as culturally rich as avant garde theater. An egalitarian view encourages participation in cultural activity broadly—amateurs are just as important to the cultural ecology as professional artists. In this sense, an egalitarian stance is inherently more democratic than elitist hierarchical sensibilities. If culture is robust, the imminent demise of an orchestra, ballet company, or art museum would not be seen as a threat to culture broadly. Some cultural institutions and forms come and go, but cultural activity (music, dance, and art) continues. What matters is whether available culture meets the needs of the people, not the protection of the culture of the wealthy.

Overlaying our grid of organizational-art form types (high-popular and nonprofit-commercial) with [Griswold's \(2004\)](#) axes of hierarchical-egalitarian and fragile-robust, we can make the following hypotheses: (1) high culture nonprofits (e.g., symphony orchestras) will use both fragile and hierarchical metaphors; (2) high culture commercial venues (e.g., jazz clubs and art house cinemas) will use robust (market driven) but also hierarchical (because they present serious and sophisticated culture); (3) popular culture nonprofits (e.g., festivals and libraries) will use fragile (the nonprofit form

suggests a need to be “protected” from the market) but also egalitarian (enjoyed by all); and (4) popular culture commercial venues (e.g., record stores and amusement parks) should employ robust and egalitarian metaphors. Using these categories as a guide, we coded whether our articles about the closure of cultural organizations included fragile, robust, hierarchical, and/or egalitarian claims:

Fragile: organization cannot survive in the market/needs support (i.e., donors, state); the cultural form is under threat/needs protection; losing organization would disrupt the cultural ecology leading to additional closures; organization is necessary for the survival of the cultural form; organization is needed to protect/maintain cultural tradition.

Robust: organizations that cannot survive in the market should close; cultural form faces inevitable decline, but decline is OK; the cultural ecology is robust/organizations come and go; cultural form will persist despite the loss of organization; losing organization opens up opportunities for innovation.

Hierarchical: need organization to encourage excellence, talent, or professionalism; culture civilizes and organization improves citizenry; organization gives prominence to original, distinctive culture; need organization because other culture too commercial; this venue attracts the “right” kind of people.

Egalitarian: organization encourages amateur participation; cultural form is just as good as any other culture; cultural form has broad appeal/is intended for everyone; inexpensive enough for anyone to enjoy.

We also took an inductive approach and coded for all possible metaphors and frames deployed in our articles. In addition to coding for fragile, robust, hierarchical and egalitarian claims, we also coded for when articles referred to these cultural organizations using metaphor, as when one article described an organization as a “treasure.” This way we could measure qualitative patterns in how people frame the importance (or not) of these organizations. To make these qualitative patterns more apparent for readers, we ran the quoted text of these instances of metaphorical work through wordle.net, which visually represents patterns in text through a word cloud. The size of the words is proportional to the number of times it appears in the text, giving clear visual prominence to frequently appearing metaphors.

4. Results

4.1. *The crown: high culture nonprofits*

How successful have HCNPs and their supporters been at moving discourse away from discussions of their elite status to discourse of their contributions to community? Said differently, have they shifted the frame? The results of our coding confirms our prediction—HCNP cling to old metaphors of hierarchy and fragility. Fig. 2 shows the percentage of articles on HCNP venues in crisis that include hierarchical, fragile, egalitarian, or robust claims. As the figure reveals, 43.5% of articles make hierarchical claims and 33.9% make fragile claims. A few articles make egalitarian and robust claims for HCNPs, but these claims appear about half as often as hierarchical or fragile frames.

Among those articles that make a hierarchical claim, 78% discuss how the organization is needed because it encourages excellence, talent, genius, or professionalism. For fragile claims, the majority of claims are split between two positions: 33.3% of articles making fragile claims say these organizations are necessary to protect cultural tradition and heritage, while 30.8% argue that the cultural form is under threat. These claims are consistent with arts advocates and policymakers' long-standing support of the “best that is thought and known” and their habitual casting of “their” arts as threatened and in need of protection.

Despite the efforts of arts advocacy groups to articulate the value of symphonies and museums to the community, and the community-oriented policies these organizations have embraced, when

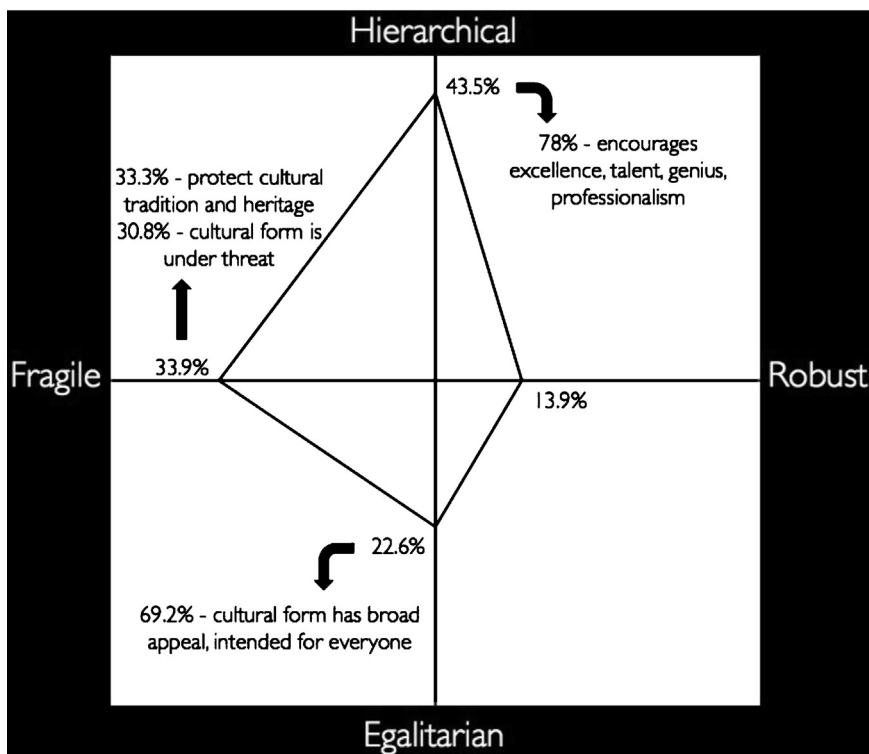


Fig. 2. Percentage of articles on **high culture, nonprofit** organizations in crisis that included hierarchical, fragile, egalitarian, or robust claims. When more of those articles are of a particular subtype, the text accounts for the percentage of articles that were of that subtype. $N=199$ articles.

advocates argue for the value of HCNPs in the face of crisis, rhetoric falls back on metaphors of wealth and elite status. More than any other metaphor, symphonies, ballets, playhouses and art museums were described as “jewels” (see Fig. 3). The Philadelphia Orchestra is a “treasure,” the “solid gold Cadillac of orchestras” and a “cultural jewel.” Ballet Florida is “one of the jewels of the city.” The Rose Museum at Brandeis is a “gem of a museum,” a “crown jewel” and the “jewel of Brandeis.” The Bellevue Art Museum is a “bright little bauble.”⁶ Advocates communicate status through this discourse. “Crowns” evoke royalty, “Cadillacs” suggest wealth. According to one article, the Syracuse Symphony met an “unceremonious end,” implying that it had a status worthy of ceremony. Discussion of the Rose Museum also suggested its elite position—“A Brandeis staple, a pinnacle of culture.” The discourse around our cases of HCNPs privileged wealth, status, and cultural excellence.

In making a case for why HCNPs need to survive, people often argue that these institutions serve as symbols of a community. For instance, the Syracuse Symphony was described as “a jewel in the crown of Central New York’s cultural establishment.” The “Ballet Florida helped turn Palm Beach Bounty from a cultural backwater into a cultural oasis.” Foremost among examples of organizations serving as symbols of a community was the Philadelphia Orchestra, which was twice described as a global cultural “ambassador” and once labeled a “gift to the nation.” In this way, the Philadelphia Orchestra functions as a symbol for national and international audiences, more so than for local residents. Importantly, images of gifts, ambassadors, and oases suggest that HCNPs stand apart from everyday life, privileging ceremony and distinction over engagement and connection.

⁶ All quotations in Section 4 draw upon the newspaper reports described in Section 3.



Fig. 3. A wordle, made from newspaper quotes that used metaphor to make sense of **high culture**, **nonprofit** organizations on the verge of closing. Circles highlight the metaphors of crowns and jewels.

If HCNPs are a positive symbol of a city or region, then the demise of a cultural organization casts a shadow on the reputation of that city. For example, many felt that the bankruptcy of the Philadelphia Orchestra undermined the city's status. As one article stated: "An orchestra is a symbol of opulence and musical excellence. The Philadelphia Orchestra, these days, has become a symbol for bankruptcy and a threatened future." Another argued that "the 'Fabulous Philadelphians,' as the orchestra became known. . . is the first of the traditional 'big five' orchestras to seek Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection." In this sense, the loss of the Philadelphia Orchestra marks a loss of the city's status as a "big five" city and points to an uncertain future for Philadelphia as a whole.

Discussion of the Ballet Florida also evoked this sentiment that losing elite cultural institutions threaten a city's image.

A "city" that is alive can be measured by its cultural life, its museums, ballet, opera and orchestras. It is a place that invites visitors to partake in its riches, not only in its physical attributes such as sun and sea. We have indeed stepped back into the past. West Palm Beach is a city with empty concrete behemoths and vacant lots, a monument to greed.

The argument being made here is that cities without ballets or orchestras are lifeless. Importantly, "riches" are defined here as the nonmaterial benefits of culture. So, images of wealth are used at the same time advocates disassociate themselves with material wealth and greed. This discursive strategy reflects how elites have historically used arts to reinforce privilege while, at the same time, downplaying the material privilege they enjoy.

Arguments for how to save HCNPs boil down to the traditional strategy of securing elite donors, as opposed to generating support from the broader community. This fixation on saviors is captured by the claim that "what the Pasadena Playhouse needs is a financial white knight, a Lancelot who can swiftly rise to its rescue." If only organizations could find that one big donor, all the problems would be solved. But communities are limited in the numbers of big donors available to rally to their cause. For instance, the Syracuse Symphony faced a "breaking point, where you exhaust your donors, the big

ones—that's like turning off the machine when someone's on life support." Even with the limitations of relying on big donors for the operating budget, one article stood against making community-based arguments because of how they alienate the "art lovers" who frequented the Bellevue Art Museum: "promoting a museum as a community gathering place can leave out some of the art lovers who often pay to get in and donate to the museum." The message here is that financial support from big donors is more important than, and inimical to, community support.

We do not want to imply that the community-oriented language is entirely missing from the discourse around HCNPs in crisis. For instance, one article appealed to the community on behalf of Ballet Florida: "if Ballet Florida has touched your life, please help us continue our work." Another article called the Syracuse Symphony the "cultural heart of the community." But beyond these few claims, appeals to the broader community were largely absent. Just as often as these articles invoked the community value of these organizations, they would blame the community for the crisis. One article argued that "a symphony is a sign of a community that believes in itself" implying that the loss of the symphony was because of the lack of community confidence.

In addition to hierarchical claims, we find evidence that HCNPs rely on metaphors of fragility. The loss of ballet symbolizes "the fragile state of culture." Playhouses are like princesses who need "white knights" to protect them. One advocate suggested that classical music is so fragile that even great performances could not save it: "One of my favorite tropes is that excellent music-making will prevail. But this concert represented a sober warning. This Tchaikovsky Fifth was as good as orchestra playing gets. Yet even this caliber of performance may not be enough to save the Philadelphia Orchestra." As storehouses of culture, advocates argue that these fragile organizations need support in order to continue to have art, classical music, ballet, or theater. Embedded in the fragility discourse are notions of culture wars—that embattled organizations need defense, for without them our society would fall into a cultural "void." These fears imply that entire artistic traditions could be lost with the collapse of HCNPs. The Rose Museum at Brandeis was "cannibalizing itself" and faced a Sophie's Choice by squandering its cultural heritage. As one article argued, "you don't sell the timpani to save the orchestra."

To summarize, HCNPs are cast as fragile but precious assets. When HCNPs face crisis, advocates argue for their elite status and pursuit of excellence. They look to wealthy donors for survival and are oriented toward maintaining their reputation for external audiences rather than concerning themselves with their failure to meet the needs of the community. In the end, we find the metaphor of the "crown" to be most apt. Rather than being part of community, the crown metaphor suggests that high culture nonprofits rest upon the heads of our communities; they signal status and ceremony; and they are precious and need protection.

4.2. *The soul: high culture commercial*

How do the metaphorical claims of high culture, commercial organizations (HCC) like jazz clubs and arthouse movie theaters differ from nonprofit venues? In some ways, the metaphorical work is similar. Looking at Fig. 4, articles around the demise of these for-profit organizations also privilege hierarchical metaphors, with 29.2% of articles making hierarchical claims. But in other ways the differences are stark. With respect to the fragile vs. robust axis, 29.2% of articles make *robust* claims about commercial high culture venues in crisis—almost three times as often as fragile claims.

Hierarchical metaphors take a different tenor when discussing HCCs at risk. Rather than discuss capacity to promote excellence, talent, genius, and professionalism, advocates of HCCs instead attend to how these venues promoted authentic, real, or original culture. Of those articles making hierarchical claims, 61.9% focus on the value of authenticity. This focus on authenticity aligns with the metaphors articulated in articles on HCC venues in crisis.

When for-profit organizations like art galleries, jazz clubs, Broadway theater, and art-house movie theaters are threatened, the language of jewels, gems, and treasure rarely appeared in the discourse. Such language only appeared twice, when describing the Morosco Theater of New York as an "American treasure" and "architectural jewel." Defenders of both nonprofit and commercial organizations of high culture made the case that these organizations were distinct and worthy of survival. Whereas defenders of HCNPs evoked the separateness of elite wealth, defenders of NCC organizations sought to frame these institutions as authentic spaces.

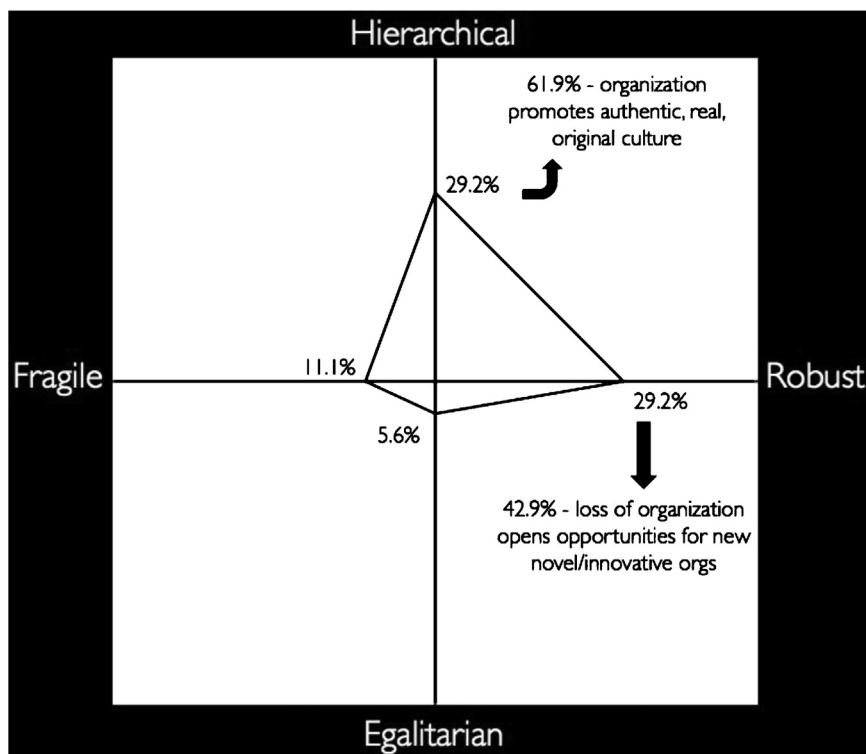


Fig. 4. Percentage of articles on **high culture, commercial** organizations in crisis that included hierarchical, fragile, egalitarian, or robust claims. When more of those articles are of a particular subtype, the text accounts for the percentage of articles that were of that subtype. $N=88$ articles.

Rather than producing “excellence,” the value of HCCs derive from their capacity to create authentic experiences and spaces set apart from mainstream—often corporate—taste. For instance, Washington DC’s Biograph theater offered films that were “difficult, not commercial, not accessible,” “off beat,” “eccentric” and “marginal.” One article argued that it wanted “coming generations to feel that authentic space.” New York’s Small’s Jazz club “had a completely different taste.” The wordle in Fig. 5 captures the extent to which these cultural organizations evoke imagery of “real places”: “authentic,” “atmosphere,” “independent,” “dirty,” and “smoky.” This discourse lacks the language of eliteness that pervades the defense of high culture, nonprofit organizations. Rather than some culture being better than others, this culture is distinct from (though not necessarily better than) mass commercialized culture. These sites are not resting atop like a pristine crown; rather they embrace authenticity. Specifically, advocates reference the idea of the soul—as opposed to the crown. These institutions do not get their status from being highly visible jewels, rather they represent the ineffable and “true” character of a place.

Discussions of HCCs in crisis did not express fear that the loss of these organizations meant the loss of the cultural form, especially when compared to discussions of symphonies or ballets. When Dowe’s on 9th, a jazz venue in Pittsburgh, closed, one article stated, “I don’t think it reflects the end of jazz, that the jazz audience is withering and going away.” Of the Biograph Theatre’s closure, one article wrote, “when something ends, something else begins.” In discussing the Morosco Broadway Theater, one article asserted that “the outcome will affect the theater community, emotionally if not financially,” suggesting a minor loss rather than a symptom of systemic collapse across Broadway theaters. Advocates for-profit high cultural forms seem to view them as less fragile than their nonprofit counterparts. While people might “mourn the loss” or “feel as if I need to console people for the loss in



the family,” defenders did not see the closing of these organizations as creating a cultural “void,” as indicative of broader “crisis” or that the “arts are under attack” as appeared in the discourse around HCNPs.

Despite being commercial institutions, defenders work to mark these organizations as distinct from “profit-oriented” cultural enterprises. These cultural sites are “labors of love” as one article put it. In addition, the owners’ rational business sense is often minimized, as in “much of the business was alchemy, an intuition about audience tastes.” This follows scholarly work on authenticity, which shows that people see the profit-motive as diametrically opposed to notions of authenticity (Frith, 1981; Lloyd, 2006; Peterson, 2005).

Additionally, more than for ballets and orchestras, advocates use religious imagery to discuss theaters and jazz clubs. The wordle in Fig. 5 also shows the prominence of religious metaphors: “soul,”

“chapel,” and “sanctuary.” Those working to save the Morosco theater claimed they were on a “crusade.” The Biograph Theater had “become a sanctuary to its fondest customers,” suggesting that it was both a refuge from the everyday and a holy site. This notion of being a holy site also appears in the quote we referenced above that likened the Varsity theater to the Parthenon—one of the world’s most famous temples. As noted above, discourse around these organizations imbued these sites with a “soul.” Varsity Theater was described as “Palo Alto’s cultural soul,” and of the Morosco Theater, one article argues that the “continuous practice of our craft in these buildings has given them a soul.” Importantly, these mystical metaphors of magic and religion focus on the ritual experience of being present in these places; this is in contrast to the metaphors of jewelry and treasure that emphasize the symbolic function of HCNPs in crisis. Rather than being the “best that is thought and known” in the Arnoldian tradition (Arnold, 1885), defenders of these for-profit institutions take a stance closer to John Dewey’s (2005) ideas of art as experience.

The soul metaphor suggests that HCCs share sacred, authentic experiences distinct from the everyday. By marking commercial spaces like jazz clubs and arthouse theaters as sites for the “soul,” people differentiate HCCs from structurally similar, but profane, sites of popular culture. Unlike the vulgarities of comic bookstores and summer blockbusters, the cultural experiences available at HCCs revitalize participants. Unlike symphony orchestras, commercial fine arts resemble popular culture sites economically and structurally. As such, defenders of HCCs aggressively distinguish them from more popular forms of commercial culture. Authenticity is crucial to this differentiation. As sociologists have suggested, defining spaces like blues clubs, farmers’ markets, and ethnic neighborhoods as authentic demarcates status (Grazian, 2003; Peterson, 1997) while avoiding the

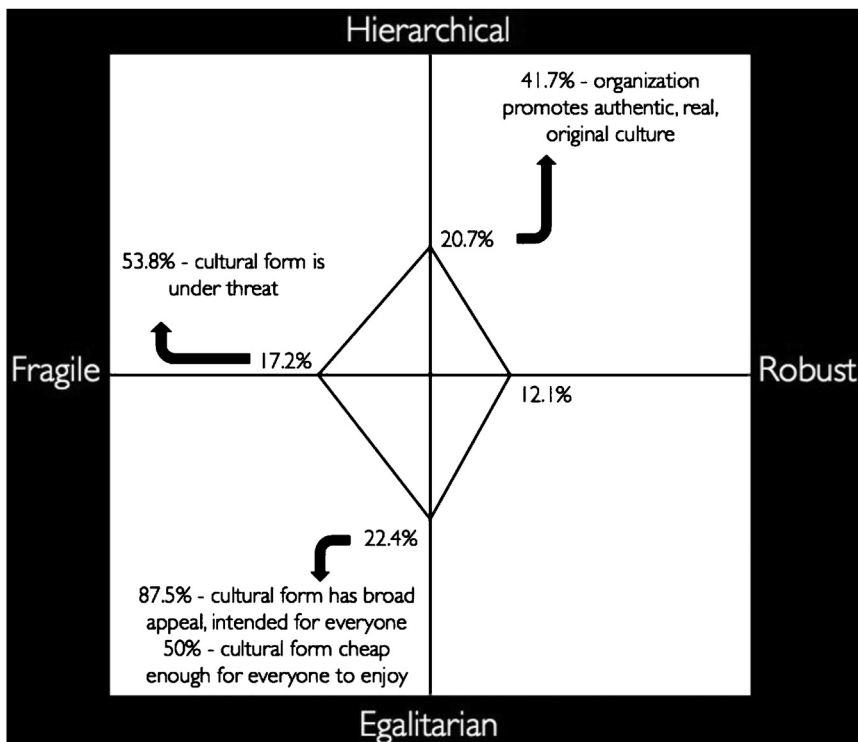
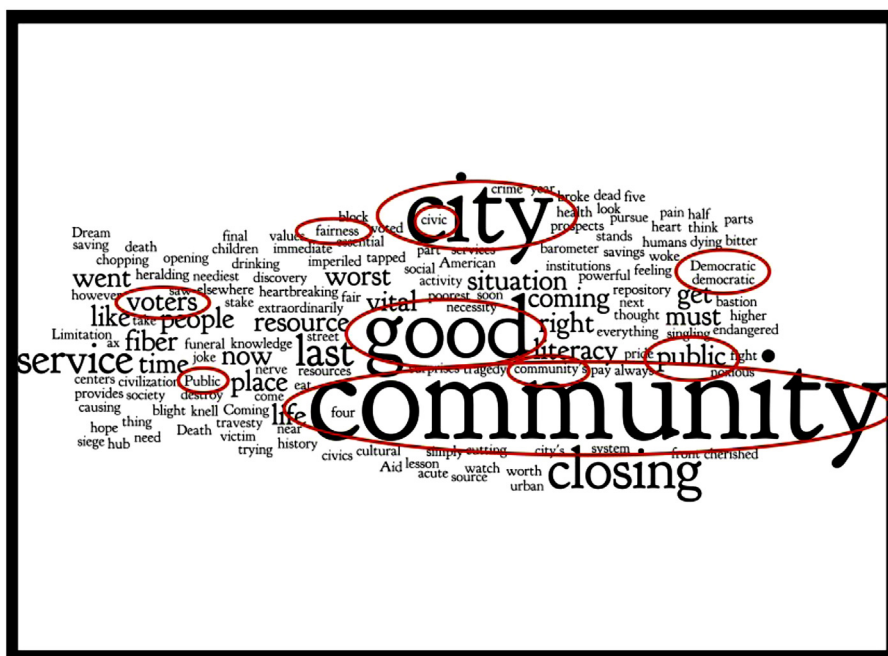


Fig. 6. Percentage of articles on **popular culture, nonprofit** organizations in crisis that included hierarchical, fragile, egalitarian, or robust claims. When more of those articles are of a particular subtype, the text accounts for the percentage of articles that were of that subtype. $N=84$ articles.

4.3. The heart: popular culture nonprofit

Closer inspection of the metaphorical work in these articles confirms these broad findings. Articles tended to describe PCNPs as public *centers* of community activity and vitality. The Salinas Library was called the “hub” and the “heart” of the community. In other respects, these venues were seen as sources of life and health for the community and its citizens (see Fig. 7). The Aurora Library was a “vital system” and “barometer for the community’s health.” When speaking of the end of the Hollywood Christmas parade, one person said “when that last float went down the street last year, half my life went with it.” Of the Belle Isle Aquarium, one article quoted a citizen arguing that the aquarium closure was symbolic of the health of Detroit: “what’s the point of living near a city that’s being culturally degraded?” When PCNPs ultimately fold, people “mourn” for the life these organizations



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brought to the community. Not only do people mourn the death of the venue, but they also mourn the death of community. For instance, when speaking of the closure of the KUSF radio station, people described it as “heartbreaking” and likened it to “funeral,” but one article suggested it was a “social death.” What was important was not the content of the cultural form, but the way the form brought people together. Not only is the life of the community at stake, but so are democratic values. As the wordle in Fig. 7 highlights, discourse around these institutions were rife with the language of democracy: “voters,” “public,” “good,” “civic.” Of the Steinbeck library, one described its closing as the “death knell of democracy.” When a PCNP venue is threatened, that is one thing. But the failure of the community to vote to protect these organizations is indicative of the state of democracy in these communities. Significantly, the heart is a pervasive metaphorical image. Like a heart, PCNPs represent the lifeline of the community; people and culture flow through them and they promote health and vitality.

The metaphor of the “heart” reflects the history of popular nonprofit cultural organizations as gathering places and centers for community life. The public library movement and the diffusion of zoos across American cities in the latter half of the 19th Century coincided with broad-based reform efforts aimed at creating civic order and community within new urban environments (Borden, 1931; Bostwick, 1910; Rosenthal et al., 2003). With rising industrialization and fears of social breakdown, reformers heralded these public sites of leisure and education as critical for civic engagement and community vitality. While they were also seen as spaces for personal education and enlightenment, their role as gathering sites and anchors for cities and communities was celebrated from the very beginning. The metaphor of the “heart” is consistent with the idea that the civic, social and cultural life of the community flowed through these public centers (see Kaufman and Tepper, 1999).

4.4. *Memory: popular culture commercial*

Like the PCNPs, advocacy for popular culture, commercial organizations (PCCs)—such as record stores, amusement parks, and drive-in movie theaters—do not reveal strong tendencies toward the fragile/robust or hierarchical/egalitarian poles. That said, it is surprising that patterns pull more toward fragile and hierarchical than robust and egalitarian (see Fig. 8). One would expect more robust framings around commercial organizations working in the “survival of the fittest” ecology of the market and more egalitarian frames around popular culture forms aimed at the masses. In all the other quadrants described above, the rhetoric aligned with their position in the field. We suspect that the lack of robust arguments here might be due to the fact that many of the organizations in this quadrant are part of “dying breeds.” Drive-in movie theaters, small independent record stores, and amusement parks like Coney Island are not being replaced by other, similar organizations. Technology and the changing organization of cultural production and distribution are dramatically shifting the landscape for some of the commercial, popular organizations in our sample. While it is true that symphonies, jazz clubs, libraries, and arthouse cinemas might ultimately be replaced by new types of organizations and institutions, there has not yet been a wholesale replacement of these institutions. On the other hand, the numbers of drive-in movie theaters and independent bookstores have plummeted precipitously over the last 30 years. In other words, the “fragile” arguments might be driven as much by dramatic change in their environment as by long-standing cultural cues, which we argue is likely the case with nonprofit high culture.

In the commercial, popular culture field (PCC), articles reveal the same metaphors we have seen in other fields. Like the rhetoric around nonprofit, high culture organizations (NPCC), these commercial, popular culture sites were likened to precious stones. Scribner’s bookstore in New York was likened to a “Beaux-arts jewel case” and a “treasure.” Lexington Virginia’s Hull’s Drive-In was a “community treasure.” Of the Nashville Fairgrounds, one person argued that “we have a jewel right here in Davidson County and a real opportunity to capitalize.” Shakespeare Books is one of “Dallas’ most treasured literary institutions.” As was true in the field of commercial, high culture venues in crisis, these popular culture sites were also enchanting and spiritual. The Grandview Drive-In of Angola New York was described as “magic.” People often made “pilgrimage” to Scribner’s bookstore, which was a “magical place” that evoked “a certain reverence.” The Nashville Fairgrounds had a similar draw as

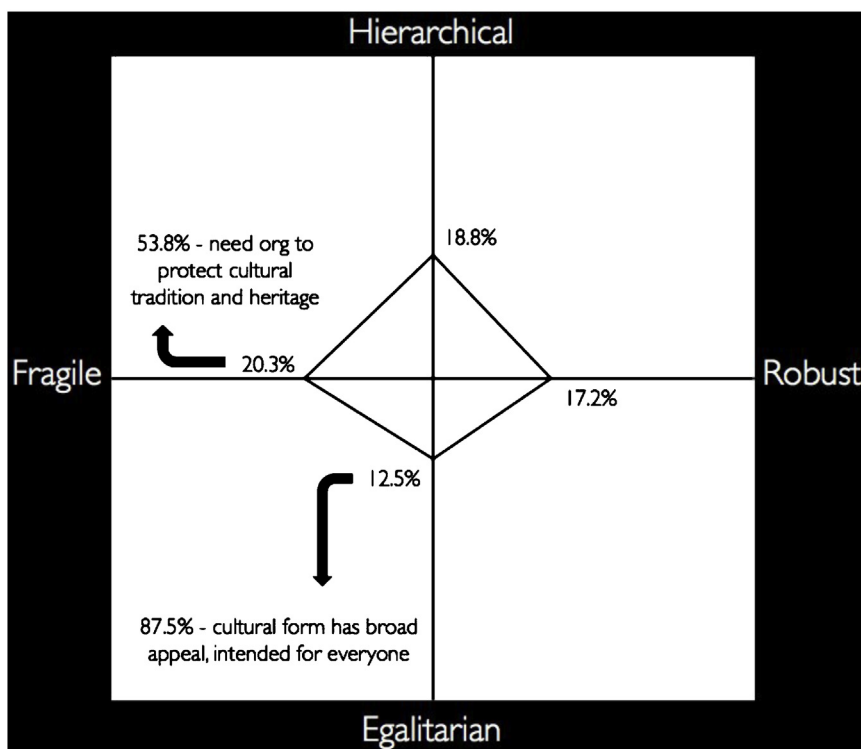
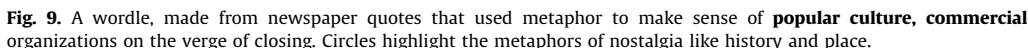


Fig. 8. Percentage of articles on **popular culture, commercial** organizations in crisis that included hierarchical, fragile, egalitarian, or robust claims. When more of those articles are of a particular subtype, the text accounts for the percentage of articles that were of that subtype. $N=106$ articles.

“the Mecca of amateur racing.” This pattern of drawing on metaphors from high culture fields suggests advocates for these venue are likening them to more valued or valorized art and culture. The fact that advocates for fairgrounds, amusement parks, bookstores, and drive-in theaters borrow metaphors from high culture fields is unexpected. Of all four categories, commercial popular culture establishments are the least institutionalized—lacking boards, well-established and active professional associations, and formal links with the educational establishment, government, or philanthropy. Compared to more institutionalized fields, advocates for these organizations start with a less developed repertoire of argument and metaphor. This may account for why they borrow metaphors from other fields and why their use of metaphor is less consistent.

In addition, more than any other field, the thought of losing these commercial, popular culture venues elicited nostalgic rhetoric around place. Some of that nostalgia centered around the uniquely American quality of the cultural form. For instance, of Hull’s Drive-In, one article stated that “the experience of going to a drive-in is completely undefinable. They’re just cool. After 26 years I finally feel completely American.” Similarly, the Grandview Drive-In is an “American staple” and “American Icon” and its loss is a “symbol of America’s changing value system.” Other nostalgia linked the venue to the history of the locale. Describing Scribner’s, one article stated that the closing “drew people who still feel affection for the elegant, vanished New York that Scribner epitomizes.” The wordle in Fig. 9 underlines this finding, with repeated use of the language of history and place: “landmark,” “destination,” “Mecca.” This nostalgia seems less about the content of the cultural form and more about how these places were somehow “out of time”: the memory and feelings evoked were more powerful than the movies or the books inside them. Because advocates frequently evoke nostalgia, we



As mentioned above, these popular commercial entities are victims of disruptive technological and economic change. Baseball parks, roller skating rinks, amusement parks, and drive-in-theaters are intimately tied up with images of a simpler past, and, for many, these sites of amusement are connected to memories of childhood. This nostalgia is not wrapped up in the unique, virtuoso experiences of high culture, but in the everyday ways of life of yesteryear. As people confront unsettling technological and cultural change, they long for an imagined past—a past symbolized by those institutions and spaces that call forth memories of childhood (Benson, 2005; Davis, 2011; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Poletti, 2009).

In crisis, HCNPs (e.g., symphonies) describe themselves as victims of economic and social change, needing protection, and drew on metaphors of the crown that emphasize status, wealth, excellence and distinction. By comparison, HCCs (e.g., jazz clubs) draw on the metaphor of the soul to depict themselves as distinctive, but their distinction came from being authentic, rather than exceptional. PCNP venues (e.g., libraries) draw on the metaphor of the heart, emphasizing their role in connecting and enlivening communities. Finally, PCC organizations (e.g., bookstores) draw on a variety of metaphors, but somewhat favor “memory.” More than arguing for specific sources of support, owners and fans of these institutions nostalgically lament the passing of an era and the loss of institutions bound up with happy memories.

Please cite this article in press as: McDonnell, T.E., Tepper, S.J., Culture in crisis: Deploying metaphor in defense of art. *Poetics* (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.01.002>

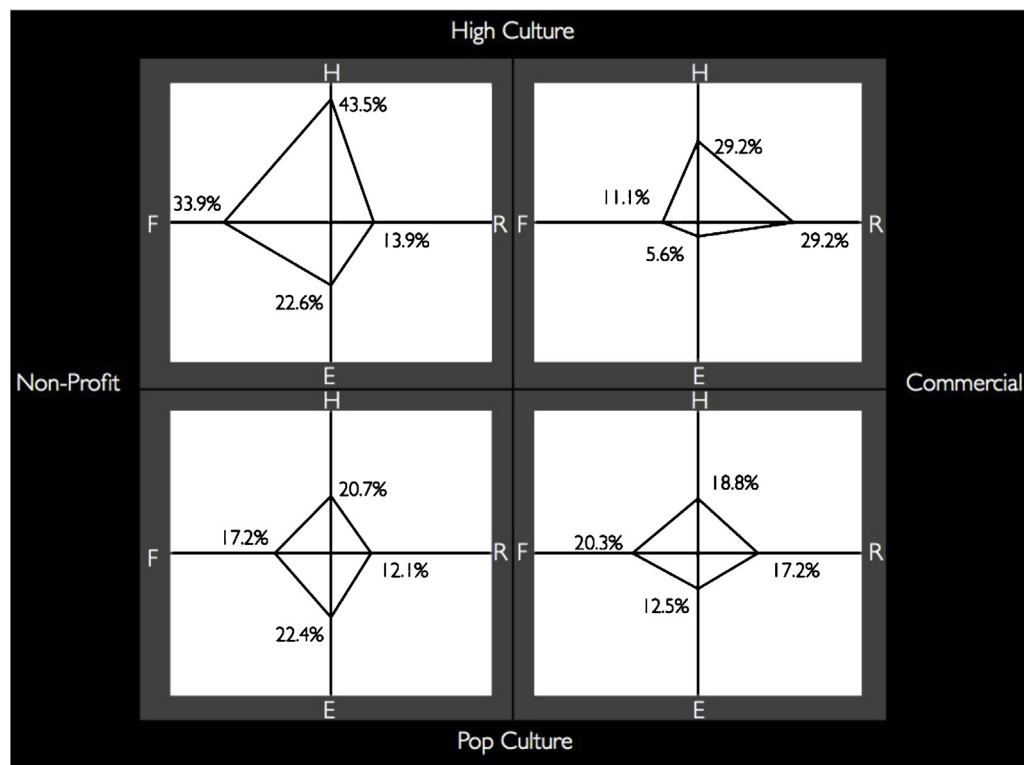


Fig. 10. A comparison of the fields of high culture nonprofit (upper left), high culture commercial (upper right), popular nonprofit (lower left), and popular commercial (lower right) organizations by the percentage of articles that make hierarchical (H), fragile (F), egalitarian (E), and robust (R) claims.

Claims trend toward the patterns we expected for the HCNP, HCC, and PCNP quadrants: advocates cast HCNPs as fragile and hierarchical, HCCs as robust and hierarchical, and PCNPs as fragile and slightly egalitarian.⁷ However, while the patterns are not strong, PCCs trend away from expectations, leaning toward hierarchical and fragile poles rather than the egalitarian and robust poles we predicted.⁸

What might explain these findings? We argue these patterns in how organizations employ metaphor stem from an organization's position within the broader field of cultural production and the stakeholders who could "save" the organization. In this context, a savior is a single actor or small set of actors who are able to make a very large contribution, meaning organizations with an imagined savior can target symbolic appeals more narrowly to the tastes of their imagined savior. In this sense, framing arguments for wealthy community members is strategic for HCNPs. When democratic policies and educational outreach fail to secure enough demand, their history of large donations from elite patrons fuels a credible hope for "white knights" defending fragile cultural forms. Once the crisis is weathered, HCNPs could look to identify more sustainable approaches to survival. For this reason, metaphors of distinction (e.g., treasure) and fragility (e.g., needing Lancelot) appear as appeals to their imagined saviors.

⁷ **HCNP:** Fragile statements appeared 2.43 times more often than robust. Hierarchical statements appeared 1.92 times more often than egalitarian. **HCC:** Robust statements appeared 2.63 times as often as fragile statements. Hierarchical statements appeared 5.21 times more often than egalitarian. **PCNP:** Fragile statements appeared 1.42 times more often as robust statements. Egalitarian statements appeared only slightly more often than hierarchical statements.

⁸ **PCC:** Hierarchical statements appeared 1.5 times more often than egalitarian. Fragile statements appeared only slight more often than robust.

Like HCNPs, PCNPs have a different potential savior: the community. However the “community” can act either through actors in government offices who can contribute large tax resources (a “savior”) or through diffuse community engagement. For city/state supported organizations like libraries, public radio, or parades, the community can act by voting for referenda or politicians who will protect these organizations, or vote with their feet by visiting these sites and demonstrating their support. As such, advocates organize their metaphors to show how central these organizations are to community (i.e., the “heart”). But there is a tension here. They have to make egalitarian claims to gain support from a broader community, but at the same time they argue for the distinctiveness of these organizations (i.e., NPR [National Public Radio] as more central to the community than commercial radio). This helps to explain why there was more balance along the hierarchical/egalitarian axis.

HCCs position themselves as different from other commercial enterprises, but accept that they compete within a market. They do not seek a singular savior; drawing instead on a market logic that if they cannot get people in the door, they deserve to fail. Pleading to donors is an unfamiliar strategy for these commercial organizations, which have no history to suggest the strategy could be successful. So, advocates aim their pleas at consumers and articulate an experiential value of individuals consuming these cultural forms: either through distinctive authenticity or capacity for religious or magical experiences (i.e., soul).

Our most unexpected findings came from PCCs and the tendency to make hierarchical and fragile claims. PCCs draw on metaphors common to all three other quadrants: they are community treasures that provide unique American experiences from a better era. Since these mass cultural forms lack a regular clientele, compete with commercial giants like Amazon.com, and cannot rely on donors riding in to save the day, PCCs are left without a clear savior. With a savior, organizations can focus their symbolic work. Without a clear savior, we see a field scrambling for metaphors, borrowing from the rhetoric of other cultural forms. While there is a central metaphor of memory that threads through advocates’ claims, there was much less convergence in this quadrant than the other three.

6. Conclusion

From their early foundings, HCNPs have been constrained by their organizational form and, more importantly, by the culture and ideology embedded in their mission and history (DiMaggio, 1986). This ideology, often hidden from public view, becomes evident when we examine the metaphors deployed by arts advocates as they defend their institutions in times of crisis. We have demonstrated that in spite of the “democratic turn” in cultural policy (see Section 2.3), HCNPs continue to view themselves and their value to society in terms of old metaphors of wealth, excellence, and distinction. In addition, advocates for these dying organizations frame their arguments in metaphors of hierarchy and fragility, especially when compared to cultural organizations from other quadrants in the field (see Fig. 10).

Importantly, scholars have found that metaphors in a variety of fields have consequences for public policy and public support. Judy Segal (1997) argues that health policy is constrained by three metaphors widely associated with biomedicine—the body is machine, medicine is war, and medicine is business. All of these metaphors focus on acute intervention, heroic specialists, cost, and efficiency. Missing from much of the debate are social determinants of health including social class, education, environmental exposure, and so on. In foreign policy, Keith Shimko (1994) argues that the metaphor of the “domino effect” has led to strategic conclusions that are exaggerated and often misleading. Stephen Jay Gould (1995) discusses how the metaphor and iconic image of evolution as a “ladder” has constrained public and scientific understanding of how species evolve and diversify. He argues that “cone” would have been a better and more useful metaphor. Finally, the metaphor of “mother earth”—which gained popularity in part because new technology enabled satellite images of earth to render our planet as small and fragile—has helped propel and sustain the environmental movement.

What metaphors would serve the nonprofit, high culture community best? How are policies and actions constrained or enabled by existing images? In discussing her research on biomedical metaphors, Judy Segal argues that analyzing metaphors should be part of the health policy debate. She writes, “The point of such a study is to ‘wake up’ as Martin (1996) says, ‘dead metaphors’ so that we can see what they are doing, so that we can understand the ways in which they constrain not only the outcomes of debate, but also what is possible to argue at all” (Segal, 1997, p. 219). Cultural policymakers may also need to

shed old, dead metaphors. When cultural advocates fall back upon metaphors embedded in notions of fragility and hierarchy, they fail to mobilize broad support and demonstrate public relevance. They treat their arts institutions as entitled to support by virtue of their traditions, their claim to excellence, and their perceived high status. These claims embrace a “culture war” mentality by viewing culture as fragile and in need of protection from its enemies and from the market. They perceive the world as hostile to their values, feeling embattled and misunderstood. This defensive posture does not facilitate the forging of new relationships and new types of cultural engagement in their communities. We argue these metaphors block the road to organizational change and innovation.

What if we saw our cultural institutions as robust and egalitarian? What if we viewed the death and birth of organizations as part of a natural and dynamic process? What if we valued and considered community voices as much as we do the opinions of cultural elites? Would such a robust ecological view of the arts discourage arts leaders from investing disproportionate resources trying to keep organizations on life support? Would this view support more high-risk projects? Would it help us focus attention more on creating healthy systems rather than viable organizations? Would a robust and egalitarian model allow for a more open dialog around the arts? Would we embrace our critics and offer them more opportunities to question our authority? Would we embrace amateur artists and producers and alternative venues? Would robust and egalitarian metaphors help us support immigrant art, flashmobs, community art centers, and independent record labels and publishers?

When we talk about a robust ecology, we are not suggesting a neo-liberal, market-driven model of cultural policy where only the “fittest” organizations (those with market value) survive. We recognize that government policy, both through regulation and subsidy, is a critical part of a healthy arts sector. We do, however, support more innovative policy interventions, which means considering new institutional forms, new types of enterprises, new forms of art, and new ways of connecting to communities. We argue that existing metaphors limit our ability to consider alternative ways of supporting the arts and constrain the way people talk about their value.

This article looked at public discourse, capturing the character of discourse that appeared in city newspapers. We acknowledge that arguments made on behalf of the arts vary based on context (e.g., who is making the argument and who are they trying to persuade) and our data miss discursive strategies enacted in private among arts professionals. Arts organizations are embedded in a complex set of relationships and answer to multiple stakeholders. We recognize that nonprofit arts leaders and their boards navigate these relationships using multiple arguments. For instance, arts leaders may use the language of fragility and excellence when talking to donors and the language of community and egalitarianism when talking to city officials. For that matter, differently positioned people (e.g., board members vs. artists) might employ different kinds of metaphors (Glynn, 2000). Future research might seek out this internal variation through interviews or by accessing internal documents such as strategic plans, advocacy documents, fundraising letters, and board minutes. These data would allow for a deeper analysis of the link between metaphors and the more deliberate tactics and strategies deployed by organizational leaders.

In a meeting of grantmakers in 2008, Phil Henderson, the president of the Surdna Foundation, said that when it comes to policy, “the arts were over there, and everything else was over here. A question is how can the arts become central. What is their relevance? How do we speak to people about them?” (Focke, 2009). More than at any other time, moments of crisis attract public attention, and they offer arts leaders an opportunity to “speak to people” about the value of the arts. When under this spotlight, arts advocates appear elitist, pander to wealthy donors, and suggest the death of a specific organization will be the death of art. Such moments affirm for a skeptical public that community-based initiatives are more for show than for the community. “How can the arts become central?” Who knows? Things might change when HCNP’s begin by talking about themselves less as jeweled “crowns” and more as the “soul,” “heart,” and “memory” of a community. Metaphorically speaking, it is time to dig for new metaphors.

Acknowledgements

Versions of this paper were presented at both the Social Theory, Politics & the Arts Annual Meeting (2010) and at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (2011). We thank Japonica

Brown-Saracino, Bill Ivey, Elizabeth Long Lingo and Erin Metz McDonnell for their feedback. We also thank our talented undergraduate coders: Kendall Cox, Margot Danis, Genevieve Gale, Leah Vanderwerp, and Laura Young. Finally, we are grateful for the feedback from Victoria Alexander, Anne Bowler, Tim Dowd, and the anonymous reviewers.

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Terence E. McDonnell is Kellogg Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. McDonnell has researched trends in reading and Internet use, the effectiveness of protest art, and interaction with cultural objects. His research has been published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Social Problems*, and more. His current book project examines how AIDS prevention campaigns are undermined by misinterpretation and creative appropriation. He received his PhD from Northwestern University.

Steven J. Tepper is Associate Professor of Sociology and Associate Director at the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University. Tepper's research and teaching focuses on creativity in education and work; conflict over art and culture; and cultural participation. He is the author of *Not Here, Not Now, Not That! Protest over Art and Culture in America* and coeditor of *Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life*. He received his PhD from Princeton University.