

Keynote: The Secular Soul of Literature in U.S. Arts Policy
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Good afternoon. Let me first thank Deborah Ott and Laurie Torrell for being wonderful hosts. Our email conversations have been very provocative. I hope the spirit of our exchanges continue this afternoon. It is a privilege to be speaking to you today and to rekindle a connection to the literature community. While I'm trained in philosophy, I am rooted in literary traditions.

I. Soul Made Object

Right now, we function in a climate highly skeptical of the role of the artist, the arts and, of course, literature and creative writing. This skepticism isn't only intellectual, it has been activated in the decreased investment in literature from former funders like Wallace or Ford Foundations. In a word, the skepticism is material. And part of this ongoing battle will be to establish the materiality of ideas, thinking, and the craft of imagination.

As any Kenyon College graduate knows (which I am) — the molecules of our daily lives are intertwined with literary traditions, including the inherited genealogies embedded in each word that we use. When the incredible density of even the simplest word is celebrated and joined to other words, in a sentence or a phrase, the writer comes to map the world. Not only does the writer come to map the world, but through an architecture of sounds, rhythms, and histories which form concepts, the writer makes possible ways of being-in-the-world which had been heretofore invisible or silent. In some sense, the writer makes the world speak or allows sensibilities — or sensibility itself — to come into being. For example, after William Carlos Williams, we will might never see a real red wheelbarrow in the same way again. The world speaks to us anew after we've experienced his text. We see *more* in the red wheelbarrow than had been possible without the poet. Therefore, we see *more* in the world. As readers, we are given stereoscopic vision, in which our own mundane experiences - with objects, texts, and people - might now come alive with meaning or menace.

Virginia Woolf explains this process of scene-making:

A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative. This confirms in me my instinctive notion — it is irrational; it will not stand argument — that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene — for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is “proof” of their reality. (Woolf, 142).

Thus, as writers and supporters of writers, you create spaces and possibilities where the “sealing matter might crack,” where we might actually encounter some more than our usual reality, something perhaps even more permanent than an individual life.

Look at Sartre’s explanation of this world-building, contrasting the usual layperson’s reality from the reality of the writer:

...for the [non-poet], words are domesticated, for the poet they are in the wild state. For the [non-poet], words are useful conventions which gradually wear out and become non-servicable; for the latter, they are natural things which sprout naturally upon the earth like grass and trees. (Sartre, 308-309)

He goes on:

...for the poet, language is a structure of the external world...[words] are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his eyeglasses. He maneuvers them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. (Ibid., 309)

I am enchanted by the clarity of this depiction of world experience, as Sartre describes the extra-sensibilities brought to all of us by the writer-artist. Sartre provides an explanation for the value of the writer:

...the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare. It is assumed that no one is ignorant of the law because there is a code and because the law is written down; thereafter you are free to violate it, but you know the risks you run. Similarly, the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he’s innocent of what it’s all about. (Ibid., 321)

Once one has traversed a certain novel or poem, according to Sartre’s view, one can no longer claim naivete, for the sheer fact that the writer exposes aspects of existence to the reader. Today, the question remains, do we take Sartre’s approach seriously? Do we continue to value the writer and the novel, poem or short story, as materials that provide primary knowledge of the world? Or, has the general public relegated the literary arts to a secondary or even tertiary knowledge of the world, less valued by civil society than direct experience?

Perhaps today’s collective neglect to literature and poetry in the U.S. seeks innocence, allowing for “ignorance of the world.” In neglecting literary arts, do we seek abdication from responsibility? Sartre finally concludes, “When all is said and done, the message is a soul which is made object.” He then questions, “A soul, and what is to be done with a soul?” (Ibid., 330) Could it be possible to embrace this

view of the “soul made object,” in a secular manner, in order to think again, to rethink, the value of the literary object in public life?

Perhaps one of the features of any art form is a demand to constantly circle the same questions, even though the answers change through the centuries. Perhaps as we do this, other disciplines view us with puzzlement and frustration, due to what might appear to be a lack of immediate and obvious linear progress. In the extreme, we might reject linear progression so as to see and think more expansively, with incubation periods that may cover an entire lifetime. While our work creates many satisfactions and pleasures, it simultaneously confounds, overwhelms, and mystifies in order to (as Woolf describes) “making the sealing matter crack,” to allow for excessive floods of reality that can take decades to unpack. Indeed, we have a duty to try to deliver high quality work that hopes to capture an evergreen, intentional and serendipitous complexity.

II. Public Policy With or Without Literature

The activity of making such objects, especially when productive at yielding further questions, can be anathema to the typical, hermetic space of public policy. Public policy, currently envisioned, can be mechanistic and utilitarian and, for that reason, generally acts more according to moral and political imagination, than aesthetic imagination. Public policy seeks to solve questions through identification of discrete and immediate “problems.” An imaginative public policy maneuvers deftly through existing obstacles, crafting a strategy acceptable to most. This strategy is never acceptable to all. Rarely does the public policy domain introduce questions of world-creation, scene-making, or the real secular question of “what is to be done with a soul made object?” And perhaps this is one of our driving questions today: Are the arts and literature a necessity for the future of U.S. civil society? If not, how does one establish a position where the literary arts *are a necessity for the future of U.S. civil society?* More specifically: Is the development of the public sector - education, public space, representative government - possible without literature?

I imagine we collectively agree that civil society is not possible without the literary arts, assisted also by translators, publishers, and writing centers. Yet, how do we give authorizers, stakeholders, and representatives the support to demonstrate how civil society fails without literature or the literary citizen? While an openness for interpretation fertilizes new approaches to writing and art-making, it also provides unnerving fluidity in fields (such as public policy) determined to quantify the empirical phenomena of the world. Public policy is concerned with a specific kind of *making* the world, where the epistemic contraptions of policymakers differ significantly from the “verbal body of the poet.” From one perspective, the arts and literature *unmake the world of empirical finalities* in order to deepen experience,

by stopping to shape, examine, take time, and attend to detail and nuance. After all, literature knows how to begin, and how to end. Literature can grasp where language and thinking fail and yet still bring brilliance to the surface. Yet policy work must function with assumptions to work in fast and immediate ways to respond to emerging crises.

Perhaps it is in the best interest of public policy to *exclude the secular question of protecting souls*, even if those souls are works of art. For most public policy functions on rather ordinary (and perhaps outdated) models of rationality. For example, identify a problem, describe its features, implement solutions, attenuate features that aggravate the overall problem, attempt to solve the problem. In organizational development, we call this a “logic model.” One develops a logical, mechanistic structure of inputs, outputs, and outcomes in order to intervene on the world. Are such interventions the only kinds of interventions that should be valued in the public space? What of actions question the hermetic rationality of the logic model? What of actions that access the different *kinds* of rationality available to human beings, including the thinking of the artist that produces “souls made object”?

As long as proof of concept is according to impact models dependent on limited research modalities, public spending may continue to ignore the role of arts as a research tool, and as a participant in public sector in general. In other words, such rational models neatly and intentionally build art and aesthetic thinking *out of the system*. I work at the one of the intersection of where the arts and aesthetic thinking has been built out of the system: the U.S. research system. I’m not going to say much about this work today, but it’s my job to explain to how the work of the artist contributes to the development of new knowledge. While collaborations between arts and medicine can be groundbreaking, these collaborations must require subsidizing the artist in the studio, pursuing and protecting a dedicated, aesthetic line of inquiry.

Accepting Sartre’s concept of soul and applying it to public policy at local or national levels, would be an extraordinary act of civic imagination. Let me add that this concept of soul melds contradictory impulses and actions. It is a ‘subjectivity yielded in the objective’, ‘a discourse so contrived as to be silent’, ‘a reason which masks madness’ and a ‘thought which debates with itself’. (Ibid., 329-330).

And yet, there are examples emerging that suggest a growing demand for more expansive, imaginative approaches to public policy, approaches that might more readily heed the role of art, poetry, literature, the inclusion of these messages where ‘the soul is made object’. For another project, I met with the Director of Workforce Development at the National Academy of Sciences a few weeks ago. In that meeting, professionals who had been training in STEM disciplines were undertaking a pilot project funded by the Mellon Foundation, to reintroduce arts and humanities to STEM learning. Why? Because STEM training

on its own wasn't challenging graduates, people were leaving their STEM jobs and, according to this leader, needed humanities education to be successful. Another example is UVA's *Thriving Cities Project*. In this project scholars have eschewed quantitative measures in favor of study what they call "endowments". They define cities according to six endowments of The True, The Good, The Beautiful, The Sustainable, The Just and Well-Ordered, and The Prosperous. With these endowments, the UVA *Thriving Cities* project attempts to move beyond mechanistic conceptions of urban life. In some sense, they seek to speak to city as an object of soul.

The question remains, how might the literary field establish itself in these discourses without succumbing to the blandly mechanistic assumptions that underlie policy and can run in opposition to the life of the artist?

III. Presidential Politics

Literature was explicitly called to the table in 2008, during the Obama election campaign. First, the arts community felt candidate Obama, an author, would naturally represent artistic endeavors. Second, when the established arts policy committee realized they needed a statement of purpose, much like what you were working on yesterday, Michael Chabon was asked to craft a concise, poetic statement on behalf of a national arts agenda. He's a segment from his full one-page statement:

America's artists are the guardians of the spirit of questioning, of innovation, of reaching across the barriers that fence us off from our neighbors, from our allies and adversaries, from the six billion other people with whom we share this dark and dazzling world. Art increases the sense of our common humanity. The imagination of the artist is, therefore, a profoundly moral imagination: the easier it is for you to imagine walking in someone else's shoes, the more difficult it then becomes to do that person harm. If you want to make a torturer, first kill his imagination. If you want to create a nation that will stand by and allow torture to be practiced in its name, then go ahead and kill its imagination, too. You could start by cutting school funding for art, music, creative writing and the performing arts. (National Arts Policy Committee, 2008)

When I interviewed Chabon, he explained some of his reasoning behind this statement.

In that statement I felt, maybe this will be the time when someone stands up and says that art and music is not just ornamentation or luxuries, they are fundamental and central to the life of a country and to the lives of ordinary people that they are not just dispensable...none of other things are going to work properly if the people serving them are incapable of empathy...that's how you get torturers...(Chabon, 2014)

There is much to say about the historic role of the arts in the 2008 election. Here was an example of a similar group, like yours, seeking to develop a national agenda. There is also much to say about the role of presidential power in representing culture. Let me give you the main take-aways of my extensive research.

Chabon's statement was essential to the arts platform, but the arts sector was not prepared for the chaos of the political environment that would follow. In the face of great disappointment, some essential actors were quieted, powerless, and burnt out. We need to be able to move through such disappointments with greater success.

A second lesson of this presidential administration, for the arts sector, is that presidents do not move public opinion. The arts sector had put a naive but beautiful faith into the potential of the candidate Obama to carry the arts torch. Presidential rhetoric studies show that while presidents believe they have the power to persuade, they are unable to change public opinion. In fact, public opinion tends to sway in the opposite direction of a presidential administration. (We are an anti-authoritarian people.) In today's world, the "bully pulpit" of one powerful world leader may not provide the single leverage point that will turn the tables on an American public indifferent to the future of literature. And Americans aren't indifferent to literature in general, as shown by NEA SPPA studies (NEA, 200), they may be confronted with decreasing leisure time with too many competing entertainments. Incidentally, we might be more successful getting literary arts into more of the workday, rather than trying to compete for free time of the American public.

As Chabon observed in my 2014 interview with him, "the arts need to speak for themselves." But even the auspicious voices of the Obama's arts policy committee failed to have a future strategy or a vision beyond the candidate's power to implement an initial strategy. Your mechanisms for survival should be a combination of strategies that build literature into the fabric of the community, as *Just Buffalo* has done, but also strategies that provide voice and leadership in statewide, national and global discourses. The local voice is no longer contained to the local. We must learn to navigate how our local voices might transcend to provide leadership in so-called national and global arenas, so that we can get access to all the possible support mechanisms for our work - but also so that we have access to knowledge about the complexity of incoming threats to our field - threats that are likely to come from the effects global conditions. To be aware of incoming threats and opportunities of our sector, we have to begin to cultivate our long-term imagination for arts infrastructure to ultimately safeguard and support the writer's studio time.

IV. Futures

In yesterday's conversations, I've heard remarks about how the arts compare to other global crises. In fact, there's a group that studies global conditions in order to propose a picture of the future. This project, *UN State of the Future* report or *The Millennium Project*, supported by over 30 governmental, trans-national, corporate and private entities, outlines challenges that won't surprise you, among them:

sustainable development and climate change, the gap between the rich and the poor, transnational organized crime, and the endangered status of women. They've been doing these reports since the late 90s. However, one of the more curious categories of "global crises" is "long-term decision-making", sometimes called long-term thinking. Now, this might not surprise you, since we've returned to this theme again and again in the last 24 hours. We wish other authorizers and funders had longer-term vision to understand our work. At the same time, as Adrian explained, we need to build capacity within our organizations to embrace "long-term decision-making." I would like to suggest that we need to become better forecasters for our own survival but also so that we can determine where our agendas merge with the agendas of other sectors.

Ok, so the lack of "long-term thinking" is everybody's problem. Yet, we are at a particular disadvantage because our organizations, the cultural sector, has avoided this kind of activity - at the analytical and speculative levels. We are even more culpable, frankly, because we are, at the same time, the sector that is most qualified to enact the extensive properties of the imagination which, generally speaking, "presents what is absent." Which is to say, could the global crisis of long-term decision-making be an opportunity for literature to take a place at the policy table - not only as one of the many voices in the culture sector - but as the experts who can think vividly, in extended time frames, from past to future? We wouldn't want all writers to be applied theorists, like Ursula LeGuin's proposals of imagined futures for human experience. But couldn't we, in the very least turn this craft onto our own imaginings about where our field could go - from capturing our potential dystopias to our potential utopias?

Let me make 2 important points here and then provide you with a sample forecast for arts and culture. There is a great deal of research that I am leaving out - but please bear with me.

First, like Socrates, we know from the 2010 UN Creative Economy Report that we don't know. The authors cite the opportunity to "optimize the potential of the creative economy to promote more equitable development and alleviate poverty" (UN, 260). With the "Creative Economy" becoming a more clearly defined sector, policymakers are invited to use its success to contribute to the 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) that include ending poverty, achieving universal education, and establishing gender equality. Curiously, the authors recognize that the concept of "creative economy" derived in part from the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies author Rolf Jensen's *The Dream Society* (Ibid.,18). The UN report acknowledges the cultural sector's immanent uncertainty in statements such as: "New ways of making money or developing audiences are possible with digitization and new business models, but the future direction is uncertain. All cultural producers face potential instability in the years ahead as well as huge potential growth. The new systems could undermine what have become, in the last 50 years or so, the normal ways to organize production and distribution" (Ibid., 200). These conditions will be very

familiar to many arts organizations. However, nothing could be less ambiguous to demonstrate the need for more effective analyses of the future than the promise of “potential instability as well as huge potential growth”. In the face of such uncertainty, we need better long term vision to guide the way in which present decision-making informs a shared culturally-rich future.

Second, technologists and engineers have made future-thinking work for them in the material present. Supported by futures research, we are primed to use new technology next year, to upgrade our software, to encounter a learning curve as we try to assimilate new objects in our lives. While Intel’s screen development is informed by a cadre of science fiction writers, you also see their latest concepts appear in Hollywood films, again priming us to align with a particular kind of future. Essentially, technology has done an incredible job of shaping the popular imagination of the future through their work in forecasting and futures research. You need to be participating in this contest, placing literature somewhere in this world.

Finally, in futures research, we are quite literally off the map. Of almost 1,000 reports gathered by the European Commission in 2009, no work is conducted in journalism, curatorial studies, language, and culture. This also means that the arts are off the map of future public services that include education, science, government, technology, and engineering. Of course, this is highly paradoxical since visual and performing arts provoke us to consider how we shape our decisions, identities, and material and social realities in new or renewed ways.

One would hope that forecasting may inspire a new generation of artistic and cultural producers to think even more imaginatively about our collective aesthetic future, just as the science fiction of Gene Roddenberry or Isaac Asimov inspired the first generation of space exploration. This is not just a tactical issue, it is an epistemological issue. We need to begin to organize our knowledge in different ways, ways that allow for increasing complexity. To help build the public perception of a future that includes literature, one must also be acutely aware of how externalities (or other sectors) could influence your field. This work is not necessarily the activity of science fiction, but of strategy. Developing one’s long-term thinking draws along a heightened knowledge and awareness of other actors, which should better inform your strategy to strengthen your position.

In order to illustrate these ideas, I’m going to provide you with some sketches of the future of government and then the possible negative arts forecasts, followed by some recommendations. In some ways, this is to say that your well-being is no longer just about your well-being in your field. The fragility of your work is mirrored in other sectors experiencing equally intense fragility. Our success will be based on our ability to work dynamically and thoughtfully with the other fragilities around us.

V. Sketch: Arts and Government 2025

Okay, so what do I mean? First, to sketch arts and government, let me first give you a frame for government in 2025. From this basic framework, we could then think about how arts and culture might deal with the conditions and variables confronted by the mercurial public sector. This sketch was first presented to the New York Arts Education Roundtable, based on my own research related to future studies in governments. I was concerned with understanding where and how government was developing, so as to think about how arts and culture might meet up with it at the vanishing point, the future point beyond which we could not see. In my initial studies, I presented a positive and negative scenario for the arts and government in 2025. Sadly, I only have time to present one scenario and, perhaps as a call to action, I'll share with you the negative scenario that we may be facing.

Due to financial constraints, governments across the globe are examining how to be more efficient, serve their citizens and support innovation. In any forecast, the relation between government and citizen will be changing from use of online technologies, to increased citizen-volunteers, and growing pressures on public services. In 2010, the National Intelligence Council (an American agency) and the European Union's Institute for Security Studies, issued their first report on the changing nature of governments: "Global Governance 2025: At A Critical Juncture" (NIC/ISS, 2010). While the report focuses on global governance, its contents have implications at national and local levels. A messy picture is presented. Not only are governments more interdependent on one another, international challenges (such as climate change) will connect nations more than they have in the past. Just as we see in the economic crisis, our domestic conflicts and foreign skirmishes will be bound in causal chains with one another - especially in Europe. The report describes a multipolar world, where emerging economies expand their political significance, and where non-state actors begin to contribute in positive and negative ways to global developments. While food, energy, and water will be contested resources, "no overall framework exists to manage interrelated problems of food, water and energy" (NIC, 2010: v). As political power shifts globally, other nation states must learn to manage their own and others' fragility.

Turn now, to another report, the World Economic Forum's 2011 "The Future of Government: Lessons Learned from Around the World" produced by the Global Agenda Council on the Future of Government. This report centers on the need for governments to become adaptable, "continuously evolving to create value" (WEF, 2011: 5). The report argues for a "flatter, agile, streamlined and tech enabled (FAST) government" (WEF: 2011: 5) where nations reduce their civil workforce and depend on networks and/or shared labor forces. This approach proposes "open government" and "civic engagement," but also worries about the security risks inherent in networked systems. Less designed to map a future

timeframe, this report advocates for investments that increase public trust in government by making bureaucracies more dynamic through participatory technologies. As in the NIC/ISS study, governments are expected to value the role of non-governmental actors that encourage “trans-boundary” governance. This creates governments that do more with less, putting more responsibility on nongovernment actors to provide services once provided by national agencies. Add to these reflections “The Futures Report 2011” from Global Futures and Foresight, which suggests that numerous countries will have a public debt that exceeds 60% of their GDP, with public debt in 2020 hitting 131% in Italy, 124% in the UK, and 114% in France (Smith, 2011: 13). One can see that the interest in money saving “networked” strategies or citizen participation in infrastructure stabilization might include “citizen volunteers,” increased online services, as well as strategies to control increased public health costs. At the same time, governments will assist businesses in legislating ongoing pension and retirement debates as well as mitigating the impact of losing millions of workers to retirement (Smith, 2011: 53). Finally, an additional stressor on these systems will be an increase in city populations reflecting the fact that, in 2050, 70% of global populations live in cities with unmanageable public service price tag estimated at \$40 trillion (Smith, 2011:2).

Based on these scenarios, I propose the following concerns related to arts and cultural policy. The public financing for arts and culture will be reduced to nominal levels unless cultural leaders can play a role in mitigating the existing diplomatic and economic concerns, and participate in the restructuring of public debt. Either the arts are part of improving governance in economic fragility, or they will be seen as a distraction to efforts to negotiate instabilities introduced by multipolar foreign concerns, resource depletion, and deteriorating public infrastructure. In the negative scenario, the arts get caught in messy conflicts between nations, as attempts to navigate the multipolar world result in heightened conflict and fragility. In this case, the haphazard condition of the arts will reflect the citizens’ ability to practice and perform *despite* the fact that governments don’t know what to make of the role of the arts in foundational shifts in how government work is conducted. In this case, the artist’s role becomes more important as a citizen with aesthetic skills and knowledge, rather than a participatory actor in a burgeoning arts sector. It is possible that the arts sector contributes to inequities insofar as artistic experiences and education are more available to those with wealth and resources. Further, with the emergence of E7 countries and an exploding middle class in China and India, spending on arts and culture will reflect a nation’s global economic viability as a consequence of being rich enough to support the luxury of a public arts infrastructure. Under these conditions, strong programs that protect heritage and native cultures may be critical to balance an arts system that, like a pinball, is subject to radical uncertainties in public infrastructure investment, as well as domestic policies that will be linked, more and more, to concerns in other countries. In this future, the arts sector is challenged to find its place as either a matter of public interest or, alternatively, to take a place as a non-government or “non-state” actor that participates laterally in the public decision-making.

So, you have a quick view of how the arts and culture might be subject to other forces, global and domestic. In this estimate, no one public sector actor has absolute security. As a result, no one public sector actor could confer security on to the literary arts, or any other art form for that matter. We are confronting a truly democratic demand - as we all participate in finding a place for the arts in our future civil society. Please remember, also, that all this talk about the future is really a heuristic tool that allows diverse groups to come to consensus about the direction they are going, and allows others to participate in this wayfinding with them. If you can come to a consensus as to where literature might be in the future (or literary arts in NYState), it will be much easier to communicate to stakeholders who are highly invested in commanding these horizons.

To begin thinking in these terms, I provide the following recommendations:

1. Solicit cultural researchers to conduct research on literary arts and public policy. Edit a volume on literature, creative writing and public policy. There is currently no available current and viable research on this topic that I could find. While you are very good at framing your work locally, find ways to frame your work globally, as globally relevant. Partner with significant national or international organizations to gain visibility and access knowledge and resources.
2. Document the people, places and occasions where literary influence exceeds expectations within its immediate community. Demonstrate that literary well-being is also the well-being of communities and citizens. Show how literary flourishing allows for the flourishing of other disciplines and ways of life. In other words, demonstrate that you are not self-interested or isolated, and that your work connects to others in meaningful ways.
3. Maintain memory, oral histories, and collective learning about what has failed and succeeded in terms of furthering the interests of literature in American life and American policy. Learn and share this history to inform your decision-making. Teach the younger generation about the pitfalls and assets unique to developing infrastructure for your field.
4. Assess what went wrong, so to speak, when literature failed to continue to be supported by the primary philanthropists. Create documentation that analyzes these conditions, so as to avoid them in the future, but also to better understand how externalities affect the well-being of your field. Anticipate these short-falls in the future. Present alternatives but, more importantly, anticipate future short-falls that will shape your field. Develop collective strategies to survive these challenges.

Importantly, establish consensus about threats, in order to work collectively to navigate the threats when they arrive on your doorstep.

5. Find and use existing data sources about your field. For example, partner with the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) in order to understand the careers of creative writing graduates, to find ways to foster their success or understand the climates, conditions and innovations that they are facing. Be prepared for both generational and epistemic shifts.
6. Re-frame the rules of the game. Scrutinize the values and rules that created the negative conditions, in order to describe these negative conditions in detail. Articulate a revised frame from which to work, in order that these negative conditions aren't perpetuated inadvertently by the field itself. This would most likely be a frame that you own, rather than a frame that you inherit from others.
7. Foster a paradigm shift. This must start within your organization, as a collective effort, to introduce a paradigm shift beyond your organization. In this model, the organization works dialogically, collaboratively, and interactively as a living organism to come to a new perception about the world, which can then be shared more broadly. Be prepared when conditions demand a paradigm shift, and align your most imaginative stakeholders to enact a robust long-term imagination for your organization and for the field at large.

VI. Literature Builds the World

I will close with one example of how literature quite literally builds the world around us - not simply the metaphorical world, or the conceptual world, or even one's internal world - but the physical world.

In our community, we have an new contemporary art museum being built - the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art. We hired an award-winning architect, Steven Holl, to design the building. Holl's design draws directly from Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Garden of Forking Paths". Very literally, the building is being constructed from literature and the paradoxes of time and space described in this story. And so we are preoccupied, with the rather unending complexity of the labyrinth of the book, a labyrinth of time, and a labyrinth of symbols - and then connecting these labyrinths to contemporary art. And we, as a community, are contemplating our multiple possible futures within the space of the museum, embracing our forking paths. As Borges writes, "In all fictional works, each time man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates others, [but in this work] he chooses — simultaneously — all of them. He creates diverse futures, diverse times which themselves proliferate and fork."

How then do you, as a literature community, choose and eliminate our paths to protect the soul of our work and the soul of civil society? How do we create diverse futures that proliferate and fork for our writers and our organizations? That is the hard work ahead.

Thank you.

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