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*Reframing Modernism: the Corporation,  
the University, and the Cold War*

Modernism has always been rhetorical, and its ideal of autonomy has always operated as a social practice.<sup>1</sup> For a number of reasons, criticism forgot this for a while. In the later twenties and into the thirties, for instance, material pressures of global economic depression and a sense of the inevitability of a second world war persuaded many to see aesthetic experimentation as a politically irresponsible withdrawal from social engagement rather than as a form of anti-bourgeois protest. Thus George Orwell in *Inside the Whale* (1940) looked back on the previous decade as one in which too many modernists—Henry Miller was his chief example—remained sealed off, like Jonah in the Bible’s “great fish,” from social responsibility. In this climate literature was valued for its potential utility, and utility was gauged mainly by explicit political commitment, which is to say by its content, not its formal innovations. Later, in the 1950s, modernist literature became a staple of liberal education in American universities and was absorbed into the canon under the aegis of the New Critical prohibition against contextual study: valued for its formal complexity and fulfilling John Crowe Ransom’s 1937 dream for the professionalization of literary criticism, modernist literature became the isolated object of study for credentialed specialists in “technique.”<sup>2</sup> Then in the sixties and seventies, recoiling from the notoriously illiberal and sometimes fascist politics of leading modernists, postmodernist critics, following Orwell’s lead, tended to equate formal experimentation with a

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<sup>1</sup> For a strong account of autonomy as a variable social practice among modernists, see Andrew Goldstone, who carefully excavates the uses to which ideals of autonomy were put; *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See John Crowe Ransom, “Criticism, Inc.,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 13:4 (1937), which calls for establishment of specialists in “technique” in order to carve out disciplinary space for literary study against on one side the dominant historical model provided by philology and on the other the belle-lettristic mode of periodical reviewers.

retreat from history; they also fostered distrust of what was understood as the correlative doctrine of aesthetic autonomy, a suspicion later reinforced by Pierre Bourdieu's influential sociological account of the "taste" for modernism as a form of class distinction.<sup>3</sup>

In recent decades criticism has restored a richer, more diverse understanding of the ways in which modernism has operated in the world, often by emphasizing the efforts of modernists to hawk their wares as a special kind of commodity<sup>4</sup>—"make it new and improved and modernism will change your life!"—and more broadly by acknowledging that all literature is a form of communication with rhetorical designs on its readers. What distinguishes the rhetorical ambitions of modernism, I have argued elsewhere, is its fundamental aim to clear a space within the increasingly congested media ecology of the early twentieth century for more authentic modes of communication.<sup>5</sup>

That modernism's discursive battles depended on rhetorical assertions seems obvious in retrospect, but modernists themselves are partly to blame for our critical amnesia. Ezra Pound, in his pre-Fascist, Arnoldian phase, saw a social use for great literature: not only invigorating—redolent with "*nutrition of impulse*"—literature also, in all its chaotic subversiveness, restores "clarity and vigour" of thought.<sup>6</sup> But emphasis on the necessary cleansing of information channels also led Pound to argue that the new renaissance of letters depended on the purging of "rhetoric," by which he meant "loose expression" and the kind of "luxurious riot" he associated with Milton and the Victorians. Pound claimed to have helped Yeats strip English poetry of its "perdamnable rhetoric," but, in the name of a "truth" seemingly beyond rhetoric, the imagistic poetry of the future—

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<sup>3</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. Richard Nice (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), esp. the first chapter.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt, eds. *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). For the commodity status of modernist texts, see Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> See Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 20.

“harder and saner,” “like granite”—could attain “power” and “force” only by substituting one kind of rhetoric for another.<sup>7</sup> Imagism, like the encyclopedism to which Pound later turned, was always making claims. Later, however, sealed in a well-wrought urn, modernism’s rhetorical ambitions were muted by criticism’s readiness to understand aesthetic autonomy as something other than a particular way of engaging with the world.

In this essay I will explore a little known chapter in the afterlife of high modernism’s social emplotment by examining an experimental educational space during the Cold War in which two institutions, the University and the corporation, played key roles in turning modernism to a new use. The experiment was a ten-month program in the liberal arts for Bell System middle management that ran from 1953 to 1960. Initiated by the phone company and designed and run in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, it was called the Institute of Humanistic Studies for Executives. The program included no applied business training of any kind. On the contrary, it is no exaggeration to say that the program was originally designed to culminate in the reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Even though the full program included a broad range of materials in the humanities and social sciences, Joyce was the only author to whom an entire seminar was devoted—in the first spring, eight three-hour seminars on *Ulysses*—and he was the only literary author in the curriculum represented by multiple works: both *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* were read in a world literature course and were supplemented by guest lectures by pioneering Joyce scholar William York Tindall (who in 1925 had smuggled a copy of *Ulysses* into the United States, where it was banned until 1933). Freud scored two—*The Future of an Illusion* and *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*—Shakespeare only one, *Hamlet*. Thus the idea of Joyce as well as his texts figured significantly in the curriculum of the Institute, and for that reason will also loom large in the later pages of this essay.

On one hand, the Institute of Humanistic Study for Executives can be understood as a characteristic product of the Cold War. As Greg Barnhisel has recently discussed, in the mid-1970s a revisionist account of the relationship between modernism and the Cold War began to explore how abstract expressionism,

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<sup>7</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 21, 12, 11-12.

“apolitical and internationally prestigious, was an ideal ‘weapon of the Cold War’ for the United States.”<sup>8</sup> Barnhisel develops existing accounts of the ways in which American diplomats and cultural authorities repurposed modernist literature and art in the 1950s in order to persuade European and South American intellectuals that American culture comprised more than supposedly debased Hollywood entertainment, crass commercialism, and paranoid militarism. But unlike earlier accounts, Barnhisel’s extensive archival work reveals that the Central Intelligence Agency’s covert funding of abstract expressionism was not part of a “sleekly efficient” government project but rather only one effort among many overlapping and sometimes contradictory state-sponsored and private projects that focused not only on abstract expressionism but also on other modernist painting and literature. By emphasizing individual creativity and deemphasizing anti-bourgeois critique, this coalition of public and private entities deployed modernism as a form of pro-Western propaganda. Where various idealized versions of autonomy once provided social stances for modernists to assert literature’s freedom from particular forms of constraint, including that of the nation, a generalized conception of modernist autonomy, rejiggered by cultural diplomats, became a sign of Western independence standing against the threat of Soviet collectivism. Crucially, then, Barnhisel’s refreshingly non-conspiratorial account shows that Cold War modernism, far from simply promoting an American version of the brand, “*redefined* modernism as an affirmation of Western bourgeois liberal values that were considered particularly integral in the American self-construction.”<sup>9</sup> In this context, the Institute could be read as simply another means through which the cultural energies of modernism, channelled into a Western bloc agenda, were redirected from subversion to containment. Indeed, by 1961 Lionel Trilling lamented that the critical force of modernism, its edge sheathed in syllabi, had been blunted by the University classroom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Trilling, “On the Modern Element in Modern Literature” (1961); rpt. in *The Idea of the Modern*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 59-82.

On the other hand, the Institute for Humanistic Study for Executives can be seen as promoting a different understanding of modernism as rhetoric, one consonant with the contemporary work of American critical theorist Kenneth Burke. Burke began life as a critic in the 1920s with an explicitly formalist approach to literature as self-expression, but while he initially positioned aestheticism as a check against the growing tendency to value literature for its social utility, he soon began to work towards a model of cultural criticism that, drawing on both Freud and Marx as rhetoricians, came to understand literary texts as rhetorical strategies for coping with recurrent situations encountered in social life.<sup>11</sup> As Burke argued in 1938, rhetorical analysis could tease out the “attitude” taken in response to particular situations in both art and life, and forms of art could be treated “as equipments for living, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes.”<sup>12</sup> By thinking about rhetoric as a “persuasion to attitude” and of “attitude” as “being an incipient act, a leaning or inclination,” Burke theorized a matrix of rhetorical effects in which both literary structures and social acts could be located.<sup>13</sup> In this context, the Institute’s use of *Ulysses* as its curricular telos begins to look less an inevitable stage in modernism’s institutionalization and more like a joint effort by the University and AT&T to make of use of it as equipment for living.

To explore this peculiar moment in the uses of modernism, I cleave here to Burke’s interest in the effects of rhetoric and therefore attempt both to reconstruct the cultural narratives threaded through the Institute for Humanistic Study and to assess the effectiveness of the program’s effort to retrain business executives for a world just beginning to sense the inevitability of economic globalization. Ultimately, however, my assessment of the Institute, though grounded in archival resources,<sup>14</sup> has less to do with assessment per se than with

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<sup>11</sup> For the history of Burke’s shifting attitude toward rhetoric in connection with his evolving model of literary criticism, see Paul Jay, “Kenneth Burke and the Motives of Rhetoric,” *American Literary History* 1:3 (1989): 535-53.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Burke, “Literature as Equipment for Living,” first published in 1938, was collected in Burke’s *Philosophy of Literary Form* in 1941; I quote here and later from the 1961 Vintage revised edition, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1969), 50.

<sup>14</sup> The archives for this project include a mass of administrative memos, planning papers, and press releases housed at University of Pennsylvania library; papers from the AT&T

my interest in the idea of making use of modernism in the American midcentury and in what this story might tell us about the value of literary study today.

Enrolling seventeen executives in its first year and averaging twenty thereafter, the Institute provided nearly a year's sabbatical leave from the business world at full pay; after the first year, AT&T also began paying for the families of participants to spend the year at the University of Pennsylvania. Over the ten months, the participants, all white men with an average age of thirty seven, were immersed in the liberal arts through intensive reading, lectures, and seminar discussions. According to Penn sociologist E. Digby Baltzell, the inclusion of *Ulysses* was the "pet idea" of the program's initial designer and its first director, Morse Peckham, at the time Associate Professor of English at Penn: "he fought for it. To him it symbolized the function of a liberal-arts education—to provide a liberating experience and to stimulate the intellect. He believed that an intensive analysis of Bloom's day in Dublin, June 16, 1904, would do just that."<sup>15</sup> Peckham's first proposal in fact took a narrower view, noting that *Ulysses* would be "admirable" for introducing students to "modern literature and to show them as many of the techniques of literary analysis as possible."<sup>16</sup> Later, however, when Peckham published a retrospective account of the program in 1960, he grounded the value of *Ulysses* in criteria both broad—"there is scarcely any other work which is so perfect an introduction to the modern temper"—and specific: first, it requires, as any critic trained in the era of the New Criticism would be careful to point out, "very close and careful reading" and therefore trains readers to be more attuned to nuances of meaning; and second, "study of *Ulysses* ... is a kind of liberal education in itself."<sup>17</sup> But if Peckham understood

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corporate archives in Warren, New Jersey; and a set of transcriptions from tape recordings made by student-executives ten years after the end of program from the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron in Ohio. I thank the librarians at these archives for their help and for permission to publish extracts from the materials.

<sup>15</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, "Bell Telephone's Experiment in Education," *Harper's Magazine* (March 1955), 74.

<sup>16</sup> "University of Pennsylvania Program for Executives of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, First Proposal, October 7, 1952," 4. University of Pennsylvania Library. The Office of the President Files. UPA 4, Box 53. Institute of Humanistic Studies (I), 1950-1955.

<sup>17</sup> Morse Peckham, *Humanistic Education for Business Executives: An Essay in General Education* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 122, 123.

the encyclopaedism of *Ulysses* as a ready-made synecdoche for the liberal arts, his elaborate curriculum shows he was not tempted to let it actually stand in for the whole.

The ten-month course of study was organized into three broad areas: Philosophy, the Arts, and Science. Philosophy included four courses: Practical Logic; Social and Ethical Values; and the Philosophy of Science. Six courses were devoted to the arts: World Literature; How to Read a Novel; *Ulysses*; World Art; Modern Architecture and City Planning (taught in the spring in order to overlap with the *Ulysses* seminar); and the History and Aesthetics of Music. Science included seven courses, but that number is a little misleading insofar as the heading included social and physical sciences (History of Science; Social Organization; Psychology and Culture; Society and the Individual; Modern Systems of Government) and also what were termed “Historical Sciences” (Outline of History; American Civilization).<sup>18</sup> The list of books changed a bit each year, but the 1957-58 list is representative: its ninety-one books included de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World*, and Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Great Crash, 1929*, selections from Marx, Adam Smith, and Keynes, Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture*, Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche*, C. Wright Mills’ *White Collar*, and literature from Homer (*The Odyssey*, of course) to Arthur Miller by way of the greatest hits of the Western canon. As one would expect in 1950, the literary selections included no books by women or people of colour, though Oscar Williams’s *Anthology of Modern Verse* likely included a scattering of poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Gertrude Stein and other women.<sup>19</sup> In the 1950s Virginia Woolf had not yet been admitted into the modernist canon with Mann, Proust, and T. S. Eliot, all of whom were included, *The Waste Land* having been added in 1957. Ruth Benedict appears to have been the only woman with a book of any kind in the curriculum. Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), needless to say, remained invisible, despite having won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953, and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940), completed with the help of a Guggenheim, did not find a home in the curriculum either. So

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<sup>18</sup> Peckham, *Humanistic Education*, 112-13.

<sup>19</sup> The book listed in “Proposed Textbook List for 1957-1958” under this title was probably Williams’s *A Little Treasury of Modern Verse: English and American* (1952); the 1947 edition included these women poets as well as others currently less well known.

even if the Institute did not itself produce a fixed canon, its seven years of syllabi reproduced the white masculinist contours of the US literary canon pretty closely.

This curriculum was supplemented with guest lectures by Penn faculty, some of which pushed beyond the Western boundaries that shaped most of the curriculum. In addition to lectures on “Psychiatric Theories of Personality,” nuclear physics, and “The Medieval City ” (by visiting faculty member Lewis Mumford), a number of lectures focused on Asia, from “Confucianism” and “The Chinese Lyric” to “Asia: Background” and “Bhagavad Gita.”<sup>20</sup> But even more impressive than the diverse array of lectures by Penn faculty was the startling number of outside speakers. According to one observer, in the first year of the program “the students were exposed in rather intimate groups to about a hundred and sixty of America’s leading intellectuals,” all of whom were asked to stay for at least a half day.<sup>21</sup> Here’s a small sample: R. P. Blackmur, adding to the non-Western dimension of the curriculum, lectured on *The Tale of the Genji*; Delmore Schwartz came in to talk about *The Brothers Karamazov*; Erich Fromm lectured on “Psychology and Ethics”; Alfred Kazin on World War I’s impact on American society; and Louis Kahn delivered “What is an Architect?” Also giving guest lectures were W. H. Auden, cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, Henry Steele Commager, and Virgil Thomson. Most notable from a historical perspective was the appearance of Claude Shannon from Bell Labs, only a few years removed from his ground-breaking paper “A Mathematical Theory of Communication” (1948), which essentially invented the science of information theory. Shannon, who would soon withdraw from public view owing to what he considered the over-hyping of the phrase “information theory,” titled his talk “Communication Theory.”<sup>22</sup> The second year the list of speakers was cut back to

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<sup>20</sup> “Background Statement,” Appendix iii. University of Pennsylvania Library. Office of the President Files. UPA 4, Box 53. Institute of Humanistic Studies (II), 1950-1955.

<sup>21</sup> Peter E. Siegle, *New Directions in Liberal Education for Executives* (Np: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1948), 11.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Mitchell Waldrop, “Claude Shannon: Reluctant Father of the Digital Age,” *MIT Technology Review* (July 1, 2001): <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/401112/claude-shannon-reluctant-father-of-the-digital-age/> (accessed June 29, 2015).



a more modest number, only one hundred.<sup>23</sup> The program also organized field trips to the United Nations, Philadelphia Orchestra Concerts and museums in New York, Washington, and Philadelphia, as well as to art exhibitions and theatrical performances. One morning they were treated to a bassoon demonstration; another time they watched a film on swamp life in Canada.

In the first year's cohort, all but two of the executives already had a college degree, but in second year's cohort, a third of the executives had only a high school education (not uncommon in corporations at this time), and of "the college graduates, most were engineers or business-school men."<sup>24</sup> AT&T paid the tuition of \$12,000 per student a year, about \$100,000 a student in today's dollars, or in total nearly two million annually. AT&T at this time was benefitting enormously from a post-war economic boom—and from a huge increase in telephone use during World War II—and therefore was hugely profitable. It was also, of course, a monopoly that would later be broken into the Baby Bells. Universities too were doing well owing to the so-called golden age of government funding during the postwar enrolment boom.

The Institute undoubtedly was much more than the superficial makeover implied by the snide title of an article in the *Nation*: "Finishing School for Executives."<sup>25</sup> One liberal arts graduate remarked that he had been expecting "a review and refresher course. ... The result was a complete shock."<sup>26</sup> Although an internal Penn report from the Institute's final year wonders, "Did we shock these men sufficiently, or yield too readily to the united pressure of their heavily conservative taste and opinion?", the same report notes that "one repeatedly gets the statement that the year ... is and will remain the most exciting and meaningful year of a man's whole life"; one student claims that "he got more

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<sup>23</sup> John Markle, "Widening the Scope of Management Development: The Institute of Humanistic Studies for Executives," in *Strengthening Management for the New Technology; Organization-Automation Management Development, General Management Series, No. 178* (New York, 1955): 60.

<sup>24</sup> Vance Packard, "Why Business Men are Going Back to School," *American Magazine* (1955): 114. Peter F. Drucker reports in *Concept of the Corporation*, Second Revised Edition (New York: Mentor Book, 1983) that "IBM hired its first college-educated engineer only a year or two before the outbreak of World War II," 7.

<sup>25</sup> David Ray, "Finishing School for Executives," *The Nation* (6 December 1958): 426-36.

<sup>26</sup> "Background Statement," 13.

from it than from four years at Harvard (where he knew Whitehead personally!).”<sup>27</sup> And in 1957 an outside firm commissioned to evaluate the program estimates that about a quarter of those attending were “thrown” by the course: “Some find their religious beliefs upset, or their political or ethical values challenged. ... A few feel adrift, ‘mixed up,’ almost sick over their conflicts (in at least one case, actually sick).”<sup>28</sup>

Relying on a recognizably modernist model of shock as estrangement, the founders of the Institute conceived of it as a space of highly compressed education in which the individual would grow into a more engaged relation to the modern world. The president of Pennsylvania Bell at this time was W. D. Gillen, who was also a University of Pennsylvania Trustee. As Gillen’s Vice President John Markle described it, he and President Gillen believed that “what was needed was some kind of a program that would sharpen the individual’s creative insight, widen his frame of reference to many fields of human behavior, and provide him with some techniques with which he could test the logic and consistency of his behavior.”<sup>29</sup> Why this felt need? One word comes up repeatedly in justifications of the program—overspecialization—and a second comes up often: conformity. As Markle put it, a former generation of business managers had necessarily turned inward during the great depression to problems of “production, sales, finance, and technological development”; after the war, however, the corporation had to turn outward “to consider itself in relation to the community, to the nation, and to the world.”<sup>30</sup> The science of industrial management had solved technical issues; the turn to the liberal arts, he hoped,

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<sup>27</sup> “Report to the Administration on seven years of The Institute of Humanistic Studies for Executives, June, 1960,” 3. University of Pennsylvania Library. Office of the President Files. UPA 4, Box 58. Institute of Humanistic Studies (V), 1950-1955.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Williams Associates Committee Report, “Report of Douglas Williams Associates on the Interview Findings on the Institute of Humanistic Studies” (April 1957), 19. University of Pennsylvania Library. Office of the President Files, UPA 4, Box 88, Institute of Humanistic Studies (I), 1955-1960.

<sup>29</sup> Markle, “Widening,” 57.

<sup>30</sup> Markle, “Widening,” 56.

would help solve “problems of human affairs” by creating more flexible, creative, and worldly business leaders.<sup>31</sup>

Although the linkage between conformity and overspecialization predates the Cold War in both European and American social theory, the post-war period sharpened these concerns considerably. Indeed, one could argue that the Frankfurt School’s concept of critical theory, conceived in the 1930s, came to advocate critical reason precisely in order to contest the increasing power of technical specialization and conformity.<sup>32</sup> Herbert Marcuse, for instance, grasped submission to social norms and technological rationalization as twin facets of a more general process of social transformation in a 1941 essay. It was in his Cold War era books, however, such as *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and especially *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), that Marcuse articulated the radical critique of conformity and industrial society in terms that came to dominate both popular culture and leftist theory in the 1960s, from counterculture suspicions about the latent fascism of corporate culture to theories of alienation and pervasive commodification advanced by Guy Debord and the Situationist International.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, the emergence of information studies has located the issues to which this vein of Marxist critique responds in the broader context of information overload. The sense that there is, to cite the title of Ann M. Blair’s book, “too much to know” dates from the early modern period, when reference books first emerged to deal with the problem, but the phrases “information age” and “information overload” are first recorded, according to the *OED*, in 1960 and 1962 respectively.<sup>34</sup> Specialization emerged as a distinctive cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Markle, “Widening,” 57.

<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, Richard Wolin, *The Frankfurt School Revisited* (New York: Routledge, 2006), who describes Max Horkheimer’s focus on “interdisciplinary materialism” as an antidote to “the *fetishization* of expertise,” 1.

<sup>33</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1988): “Individualistic rationality has developed into efficient compliance with the pre-given continuum of means and ends” (144). Other examples abound, from Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society* (1954) and *Propaganda* (1962) to Jean Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects* (1968).

<sup>34</sup> See Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), who focuses

phenomenon over the nineteenth century in response to rapid multiplication of new areas of knowledge, and the pace of specialization increased over the twentieth century. One American response in the late nineteenth century was the research university, a new model of educational institution that was borrowed from Germany; another was the increasing division of both labour and management into smaller and smaller specialities.<sup>35</sup> These developments produced both the disciplinary structure of today's universities and a massive increase in industrial production.

By midcentury, as Mark Bowles has shown, the perceived value of specialization had given way to fears of overspecialization.<sup>36</sup> Technical training in computing and other specialized services contributed both to the narrowing of expertise and to anxieties about automation, quantification, and conformity. The rise of specialization in the corporate world and the University, moreover, were not simply parallel. As corporations increasingly required graduates with "specialized degrees and narrow areas of expertise," "college curricula gradually changed . . . by offering new advanced and more specialized coursework," and with liberal arts gradually eliminated from degree requirements, "students graduated with little humanistic training."<sup>37</sup> There is thus a deep historical logic to the decision by AT&T, the largest communications company in the

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primarily on manuscript notes and on reference books frequently compiled from such notes.

<sup>35</sup> Chad Wellmon argues that "the ideal of the German research university was a response to a pervasive Enlightenment anxiety about *information overload*"; see *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 4. For an account focused on the American adoption of this model in the late nineteenth century, see Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas* (New York and London: Norton, 2010); Menand pays particular attention to specialization in connection with the formation of academic disciplines.

<sup>36</sup> See Mark D. Bowles's Case Western Reserve doctoral thesis, "Crisis in the Information Age? How the Information Explosion Threatened Science, Democracy, the Library, and the Human Body, 1945-1999" (1999), one chapter of which focuses on the AT&T experiment; a version of the chapter was published as an article and remains the only published scholarly treatment of the Institute outside of contemporary managerial studies: "The Organization Man Goes to College: AT&T's Experiment in Humanistic Education," *The Historian* 61:1 (1998): 15-31.

<sup>37</sup> Bowles, "Crisis in the Information Age?", 185.

world, to invoke the liberal arts as a solution to a crisis in information processing: the corporation would restore what its own evolution had eliminated, a sense of the whole to manage fragmentation.

Exacerbating anxieties about fragmentation, automation also produced deep concerns about conformity: would mechanical standardization produce standardized workers? Such anxieties were most influentially articulated in 1956 by William Whyte's landmark book *The Organization Man*, which described precisely the danger of the narrow, unimaginative corporate drone that AT&T was targeting with the Institute, and also by Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. But popular discussions of conformity as a serious cultural problem had begun earlier in the decade: Whyte coined the term "Groupthink" in an article in *Fortune* magazine in 1952 (*OED*), and in 1950 David Riesman, one of the many speakers to visit the Institute, published *The Lonely Crowd*, an influential sociological study of modern conformity that was included in the crate of books student-execs were given on arrival. For Whyte the problem with a collectivist ethos and unquestioned loyalty to the organization was that the creativity of the individual would be suppressed and therefore, ultimately, so would profits; for Marcuse the danger was a more fundamental suppression of freedom and the disappearance of opportunities to change the status quo. Whyte's book was added to the crate in 1957. Whether Marcuse's would have been in 1964 remains an open question.

If overspecialization and conformity worried American leaders in the Cold War era, so did the fact that the Soviets were training far more engineers and scientists than was the US. After the unexpected Soviet testing of an atomic bomb in 1949, efforts to close the engineering gap became a priority, but greater attention was also devoted to liberal arts. One of the most influential voices warning against a myopic focus on technological advancement was Clarence Randall, former head of the Inland Steel Company, who argued that a "'broadly cultivated mind' ... would offset technical hypnosis and overspecialization."<sup>38</sup> It rapidly became the US consensus that the liberal arts, combating overspecialization and conformity, would help resist Soviet domination by fostering individualism, creativity, and the valorisation of freedom. This

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<sup>38</sup> Bowles quotes Randall (and others) in "The Organization Man Goes to College," 19.

argument got a lot of traction with the government and a wide range of private entities, from the Ford Foundation to MoMA.<sup>39</sup> Similar fears about an education gap have emerged in the early twenty-first century, not in response to the possibility of a new Cold War in wake of renewed Russian expansionism but in response to (seemingly) low test scores of US students in STEM disciplines relative to those in, say, South Korea, and owing to anxieties about the number of computer scientists coming to the US from South Asia and potentially from China.<sup>40</sup> Today's concerns are overblown, and it is China, ironically, that is turning to the liberal arts just as the US and the UK seem to be backing away.<sup>41</sup> In the 1950s, in contrast, AT&T was happy to shake hands with liberal arts faculty at Penn: it would be good publicity for the University and for Bell, and the Penn administration seems genuinely to have believed in the mutual value of collaboration between the business world and the University.

Despite this Cold War context, the Institute for Humanistic Study did not function as an instrument of pro-Western propaganda. Even as cultural expressions of US liberalism were being mobilized for persuasive purposes by the government and allied agencies, there is no evidence that the founders of the Institute, unlike, say, Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs, self-consciously construed individualism per se as a weapon in the Cold War. Rather, the 1950s saw broad non-governmental interest in adult education, with a great variety of programs springing up all over the country.<sup>42</sup> And although belief in a great books curriculum as an antidote to overspecialization dates back at least to the 1920s, it was in 1952 that Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago founded through the Encyclopaedia Britannica the *Great Books of the Western World* publishing project, designed in large part with

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<sup>39</sup> On the Cold War mobilization of the liberal arts and the buy-in from a range of public and private entities, see Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, 1-54, and Menand, *Marketplace of Ideas*; 40-42, 65-6.

<sup>40</sup> See Andrew Thacker, "The Frenzy About High-Tech Talent," *New York Review of Books*, July 9, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, You Guo Jiang, S. J., "Current Thinking and Liberal Arts Education in China," Doctoral Thesis, Lynch School of Education, Boston College (March 2, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> For an overview of many such programs, see Siegle, "New Directions in Liberal Education for Executives."

business people in mind.<sup>43</sup> The Penn-AT&T collaboration was thus only the most intensive and prolonged experiment among many that focused on infusing executive training with education in the humanities.

It was also the only one to place so much emphasis on literature and the arts. Penn and AT&T promotional materials liked to play up the so-called esoteric dimension of the Institute, *Ulysses* in particular. This was the era when Marilyn Monroe was photographed reading a copy of the book, and though the photographer claimed that Marilyn really did own a copy that she enjoyed reading, clearly the photograph was meant to provoke a frisson of incongruity.<sup>44</sup> Hence in the opening of the fall 1955 issue of *Bell Telephone Magazine*, John Markle poses the question “Why is it that another man who has a comprehension of what James Joyce is trying to say in “Ulysses” can make a greater contribution to the Bell System than if he knew nothing about this detailed study of life in a modern city?”<sup>45</sup> But however much publicity materials overplayed the culturally counterintuitive—i.e., the humanistic—dimension of the Institute, the structure of the curriculum and the rigor of classroom time indicate that Peckham and his corporate collaborators subscribed to a vision similar to Friedrich Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education, the belief that aesthetic culture could heal the rift between rational and sensual that culture at large produces.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For a briskly informative history of their collaboration, see Carrie Golus, “Special Collections tells the story of a cornerstone of American education,” *University of Chicago Chronicle* 21.18 (July 11, 2002): <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/020711/greatbooks.shtml> (accessed 9/14/15).

<sup>44</sup> For photographer Eve Arnold’s claim, the picture itself, and a link to a catalogue of books in Monroe’s library at the time of her death (yes, it included a copy of *Ulysses*), see “Marilyn Monroe Reads Joyce’s *Ulysses* at the Playground (1955),” *Open Culture* (November 8, 2012): [http://www.openculture.com/2012/11/marilyn\\_monroe\\_reads\\_joyces\\_ulysses\\_at\\_the\\_playground.html](http://www.openculture.com/2012/11/marilyn_monroe_reads_joyces_ulysses_at_the_playground.html) (accessed 9/14/15).

<sup>45</sup> John Markle, “How Can we Broaden the Telephone Man’s Horizon?” *Bell Telephone Magazine* (Autumn 1995), 173.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, James Donald, *Sentimental Education: Schooling, Popular Culture, and the Regulation of Liberty* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1992), 9. The ethos of the Institute also resembles that of F. R. Leavis, whose commitment to the intrinsic value of the liberal arts, and literary culture in particular, emerged in its most well-known form in 1959 in the British “two cultures” debate between Leavis and C. P.

So how much healing actually went on in the literature classroom? Again, even though a wide range of literature was taught, including other examples of modernism, such as *The Waste Land* and Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, I will follow the curriculum by focusing in particular on *Ulysses*. Detailed study questions are extant for other courses—e.g., “Is it possible,” history professor John Blum asks in an assignment on George Kennan, Eric Goldman, and Frederick Lewis Allen for the American Civilization course, “to identify and define the isolationist, internationalist, and interventionist groups, ideas, or patterns of behavior within American society?”<sup>47</sup> Evidence about the literature courses, in contrast, is scanty but suggestive. From the perspective of a Joycean curious about the moment of reading in the 1950s, it is disappointing to find only a few comments specifically about *Ulysses*. There is reason to believe, however, that emphasis on the book was one of the more controversial aspects of the program, even compared with the lingering controversy surrounding Pound's having been awarded the Bollingen Prize in 1948, which also generated some debate. According to one participant's account in the AT&T corporate archives, some student-executives thought *Ulysses* was too difficult and should be dropped, but this student, William Cashel, believed that it should remain in the curriculum because the book stimulated so much discussion and so many conflicting perspectives.<sup>48</sup> Cashel called the literature curriculum in general a “great success” and opined that in working his way through a wide selection of world and contemporary literature, he came to believe that in the past he had “missed a great deal of value by not reading more”; he also singles out *Ulysses* as “one of the several books from the course I will read again.” Cashel wrote his detailed report on the program—the only one of its kind I've been able to discover—very soon after completing the curriculum. I tried to track him down to find out, among other things, whether he ever did revisit *Ulysses*, but he died in 2000 at the age of eighty, having had, like most Institute participants, a very successful career at AT&T (before leaving to become president of Campbell Soup). Surviving family members recall him speaking fondly of the Institute.

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Snow following Snow's Rede Lecture describing a split between the sciences and the humanities.

<sup>47</sup> “Study Questions (1957-1958), American Civilization Seminars, Institute of Humanistic Studies for Executives.” University of Pennsylvania Library. Office of the Vice-Provost. General Files, UPA 6.7, Box 16. Institute of Humanistic Studies (I).

<sup>48</sup> AT&T Corporate Archives, Warren, New Jersey.



Beyond publicity releases, comments about *Ulysses* tend to crop up in pieces written by instructors and in published comments by students. Thus historian Arthur Dudden (who himself did not even teach literature) tells the story of an accountant whose initial antagonism toward *Ulysses* disappeared after preparing a report on the “Sirens” episode. A dance band musician in college, the accountant ended up spending forty-two hours preparing his presentation and ultimately exclaimed: “You know ... this man Joyce has something for everybody if he looks hard enough.”<sup>49</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, an article in *Esquire* records a dissenting opinion: “My God! Some of the other stuff we get! Did you ever read *Ulysses*? By James Joyce? It’s just a big pile of dirt.”<sup>50</sup> The article also gives a lot of air time to one of the Joyce instructors, David Mallery, who argues that while some greatly resisted *Ulysses*, all ultimately realized—even the one who called it a pile of dirt—that “far from belaboring something too long [ultimately] ... They were dazzled, rather than irritated ... by the many styles and the virtuosity. There was very little interest in the connection with the Odyssey, great interest in Bloom as a person, perhaps as a representative of themselves, and they were very interested in the vision of life the book gave.”<sup>51</sup> Of course one suspects some bias effect here: as all instructors know, we tend to describe our classes in rather positive terms whenever anyone is willing to listen.

One can try to build on such glimpses by revisiting what the archives reveal was the one book of Joyce criticism assigned in the course, Richard M. Kain’s *Fabulous Voyager*. First published in 1947, it’s a book that stands up pretty well. From Kain they would have learned that the “two basic themes of *Ulysses*” are “social criticism and philosophical relativity—the first somewhat submerged, the second considerably magnified.”<sup>52</sup> One could do worse than to start with these

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<sup>49</sup> Arthur P. Dudden, “Reminiscences of Six Years—And Some Reflections,” 7. Address by Dr. Arthur P. Dudden, Associate Professor of History, Bryn Mawr College at a Presentation of the Institute of Humanistic Studies for Executives at the University of Pennsylvania, April 15-16, 1959, Philadelphia, Pa.” Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles papers, box M2188, folder 13.

<sup>50</sup> John Keats, “The Education of the Power Elite,” *Esquire* (April 1959): 35.

<sup>51</sup> Keats, “The Education of the Power Elite,” 36.

<sup>52</sup> Kain, *Fabulous Voyager* (New York: Viking, 1959), 4.

broad notions, but Kain was also very interested in style and writes well not only about art as a critique of values but also about the various technical means through which *Ulysses* generates what he calls “a narrative pattern of its own” independent of both Homer and the esoteric symbolism emphasized by Stuart Gilbert’s trot, one of the few guides to *Ulysses* available at the time.<sup>53</sup>

It is hard today to imagine a future in which business leaders would think it a good idea to ask their young executives to sit through eight three-hour seminars on *Ulysses*. The expense of time alone suggests not, and in fact the gloriously prolonged ten months of the AT&T program contributed to its demise. Even posing the question to most people outside the university these days, and sadly to some inside as well, would likely elicit amusement at best. Indeed, a friend of mine who teaches business school courses in ethics observes that most of his students consider anything but the core business courses a waste of time: they dismiss them as “do-gooder” requirements. Even beyond business schools, reflexive dismissals of literature or philosophy courses in society at large owe much to a presumed antithesis between the liberal arts and vocational training, a longstanding presumption shared on both sides of the divide. Various initiatives to reinvigorate the liberal arts in the US have challenged the foundational nature of the distinction by attempting to rethink the category of usefulness. How can the usefulness of a liberal arts education be articulated and then distributed throughout the educational system? How can the category of “use” be expanded without being absorbed by the reductiveness of a purely vocational or instrumental vision?<sup>54</sup>

Clearly, in the 1950s AT&T saw a quasi-practical value in *Ulysses* and in the liberal arts that has lost much its purchase in public discourse today. But in order to get beyond uncritical nostalgia for a time when public and private investment

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<sup>53</sup> Kain, *Fabulous Voyager*, 21.

<sup>54</sup> For an example of how Burke’s pragmatism opens a greater range of nuance with respect to the uses of literature, see *The Rhetoric of Motives*, esp. “The ‘Use’ of Milton’s Samson,” 3-5. For a sustained account of the need to rethink relations between utility and literary study, see Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

was funnelled toward the liberal arts,<sup>55</sup> it's necessary to look deeper into the aims of the Institute and ask whether it got results. To these issues I turn now.

Mark Bowles has argued that the Institute was discontinued after seven years because it ended up radicalizing the students, and it is certainly true that Peckham's founding vision aimed for emancipation. But even though participants read excerpts from *Capital*, the curriculum did not culminate in a seminar on radical economics but on *Ulysses*. The goal, we might infer, was less "Corporate Executives of the World Unite!" than Stephen Dedalus's more individualistic aspiration to purge himself of internalized authorities: "in here it is," he drunkenly declares while tapping his brow, "I must kill the priest and the king."<sup>56</sup> Insofar as the program was not meant to promote collectivism but to shock participants out of familiar patterns of thought and into a more experimental frame of mind—that is, to the extent that the program was designed as an exercise in popular modernism—*Ulysses* understandably seemed like a good bet. As Joseph Kelly has described in *Our Joyce*, in the early fifties *Ulysses* had only recently begun to emerge as a "modern classic": deemed pornographic in the United States only twenty years earlier, it was still a relatively dangerous book.<sup>57</sup> Beyond the lingering whiff of criminality or "the glamour of the clandestine,"<sup>58</sup> Kain's emphasis on the novel's "independent pattern" of stylistic play would have encouraged a sense of Joyce's critical distance on the literary traditions he seemed to embrace by resetting Homer in Dublin. That is, if Peckham saw *Ulysses* as a summation of the liberal arts in and of itself, it operated critically as well as synecdochically.

Peckham and the Bell leadership found much common ground early on. Peckham's prescient vision of the value of interdisciplinary thinking would have

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<sup>55</sup> For the darker side of US government funding during the Cold War, see Francis Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: the CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2001) and Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), 15: 4436-7.

<sup>57</sup> Kelly, *Our Joyce: From Outcast to Icon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), esp. 79-84. See also, Kevin Dettmar, "James Joyce and the Great Books," *The Common Review* 2.1 (Winter 2002): 28-38.

<sup>58</sup> I borrow the quoted phrase from Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: the Battle for James Joyce's "Ulysses"* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 260.

spoken to the Bell emphasis on creative problem solving; it also underscores the Institute's affinity with Kenneth Burke's ideal of literary study. Burke understood his approach to the sociology of literary form as in part a response to the problem of overspecialization and happily observed that his bracketing of cultural hierarchies, in which an "abstruse work of philosophy" might be studied alongside "a dirty joke," was likely to "outrage in particular those persons who take the division of faculties in our universities to be an exact replica of the way in which God himself divided up the universe."<sup>59</sup> Compare Peckham: "The great difficulty in present-day college and graduate school pedagogy is that the instructor too often behaves as if his were the only way to organize the data of his subject." Understanding the relativity of modes of organization and structure: this, for Peckham, was the key to becoming "cultivated,"<sup>60</sup> and it is easy to see why Bell would admire the expansive understanding of utility Peckham advocated.

But Peckham and Bell were never perfectly aligned. Elsewhere Peckham's idealistic language draws on a long tradition of Romantic revolt fused with modernist critiques of routinization, and here's where we see fault lines that later widened into chasms. Sounding more like Marx than Joyce this time, Peckham argued in 1954 that "the corporation should arm its executives against itself."<sup>61</sup> Drawing on modernist tropes of autonomy, individualism, and liberation, Peckham embraced a vision of education as emancipation that undoubtedly still resonates with humanities professors today but which the AT&T board may well have found unnerving. Imagine the board reading that "the young executive does not need training toward greater operational efficiency as much as he needs a sense of identity independent from the company."<sup>62</sup> Unsurprisingly, even though Bell and Peckham alike believed in cultivating the self as a key to innovation, Peckham ended up clashing with his AT&T collaborators and resigned as director after his first year. Correspondence between Peckham and Penn president Gaylord Harnwell indicates that Peckham felt that the Institute's oversight committee, which included Markle and a second AT&T official, was

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<sup>59</sup> Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 260-61, 262.

<sup>60</sup> Peckham, "Emancipating the Executives," *Chicago Review* 8.3 (1954): 110, 111.

<sup>61</sup> Peckham, "Emancipating," 107.

<sup>62</sup> Peckham, "Emancipating," 107.

infringing on Penn's academic autonomy by exercising too much control over curriculum.

And yet Gillen and Markle don't come out looking like corporate villains. Most of the examples of interference cited by Peckham are petty, and ultimately he seems to have been motivated by a sense of proprietorship: "I feel that the institute is no longer what I created nor what I was asked to create."<sup>63</sup> Yet the oversight committee did not attempt to impose a corporate ideology on the curriculum. No one ever objected, for instance, to the debate on comparative economics in which students assumed the personae of Marx, Smith, and Keynes.

The students, moreover, certainly felt the program had a politically liberal or progressive tilt; Cashel referred casually to Walter Kaufmann as "somewhat godless in the usual sense."<sup>64</sup> One lesson here may be that progressive academic idealism requires pragmatic leavening if collaborations with outsiders, corporate or otherwise, are to work. In retrospect, Peckham looks guilty of garden-variety Ivory Towerism: he adopts a posture that locates itself beyond getting and spending—he was trained as a Romanticist after all—and while this perspective is what enables critique, it also must be provisional if one wants to run a program. In this context, it is worth noting that the most disdainful published account of the Institute, "Finishing School for Executives," draws its ammunition not from the corporate side but from the dismissive opinions of anonymous scholars and administrators at Penn.

But what did the student-executives themselves think? Morris Viteles, a Penn industrial psychologist (and virtual founder of the field), conducted both yearly evaluations and a follow-up study ten years after the program ended. In the long-range impact report, published in 1971, Viteles concludes that the program was a great success and asserts that the participants showed "not only significant gains in *knowledge* ... but changes in *attitudes*, *values*, and *interests*"; "Artistic interests had ripened and open-mindedness had crept into the evaluation and even acceptance of new and 'strange' styles in literature, the graphic arts, and

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<sup>63</sup> Peckham, letter to Harnwell, May 31, 1955. University of Pennsylvania Library, Office of the President Files, UPA 4, Box 88. Institute of Humanistic Studies (V), 1955-1960.

<sup>64</sup> AT&T Corporate Archives, Warren, New Jersey.

musical composition.”<sup>65</sup> Admittedly, Viteles had a clear professional interest—a conflict of interest, really—in promoting the Institute’s success, but he brought data to the table, including detailed questionnaires and dictaphone recordings made by the Institute participants in response to a set of prompts. Unfortunately, the archive holding the data no longer has a dictaphone, so I could not listen to the voices of mid-century students, but twenty-five of the fifty-eight transcripts are extant.

The participants were asked to respond to four prompts: 1) the impact of the program on their managerial behaviour; 2) its effect on their decisions and on how decisions were implemented; 3) its effect on behaviour relative to personnel, finances, and planning; and 4) its effect relative to the social, economic, and political “surrounds” of their business.<sup>66</sup> One of the most striking features of the transcripts is that while nearly every respondent *begins* by stating that he finds it impossible to name a specific example of how the Institute experience has entered into his subsequent business life, nearly to a man they express great confidence in the notion that the Institute nevertheless did provide enormous, if elusive, benefits. Some suspect that the influence is “subconscious,” others that it is diffuse yet pervasive, and some that while the program might not have helped them in their business lives, it certainly enriched their lives more generally. But these initially vague assertions are almost invariably followed by a gradually recovered series of positive memories. Even if the speakers often backtrack, hedge, and wonder if what they are saying is really true, the longer they speak, the more they tend to connect what they consider valuable in the present with their past at the Institute. Often the documents read like transcripts of psychoanalytic sessions, or perhaps as an oddly affirmative version of Samuel Beckett’s nearly contemporary play *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1957): sitting alone with a tape recorder, the executives talk themselves into insights, pause the tape and resume later, sometimes having listened to their previous recording before taking up the thread again to revise or refine earlier thoughts.

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<sup>65</sup> Viteles, “The Long-Range Impact of a Programme in Humanistic Studies for Business Executives on Managerial Attitudes and Behaviors,” *International Review of Applied Psychology* 20.1 (1971): 6.

<sup>66</sup> Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles Papers, 1921-1980. Transcript no. 35, p. 5.

Three concerns emerge repeatedly from the transcripts. First, most men believed that the Institute taught them, as Bell executives hoped it would, a certain flexibility of mind: how to entertain multiple points of view, how to empathize with co-workers in order to see conflicts or challenges through their eyes, how to see around problems instead of jumping to conclusions. Most felt that they handled personnel issues far more effectively owing to their ability to see that emotion, not just logic, enters into complex interactions—one executive asserts that what the program really taught was a kind of “sensitivity,” which, he hastens to explain, should be associated not with weakness but with perception. Many also mention that these abilities helped them participate more productively in negotiations with labour unions.

Second, nearly all of the respondents are eager to report on their increased engagement with social problems. Given that these recordings were made in the late sixties, it is not surprising that a large number of them comment on “the Negro problem,” on “minorities” more generally (usually American Africans but also on Latinos), and on “the disadvantaged.” Many of the executives assert that business has a moral responsibility to try to improve race relations—by instituting non-discriminatory hiring practices, but also through private-sector urban renewal, job training programs, and outreach programs to secondary schools. Nearly all felt that Bell and other companies ought to step up as agents for social change in their surrounding communities, and a surprising number reported being themselves directly involved in socially progressive programs.

Of course, at least two kinds of potential bias effects (independent of Viteles’s own potential bias) may come into play here. First is the general problem of illusory correlation—the tendency to perceive relationships between events or conditions where none actually exists; and second, participants had a vested interest in demonstrating that they had not wasted their time ten years earlier, that they were good people whose thoughts were worth recording.

Nevertheless, the third theme is one less easily dismissed as a form of bias effect: a number of executives report a lessening of commitment to the Bell system. It is on this basis that Bowles concludes that “for the corporate executives, having a work force less committed to the free enterprise system and more tolerant of socialist forms of government was a significant failure in the

human relations approach.”<sup>67</sup> Although archives do not fully support the claim that AT&T closed the Institute on ideological grounds, hints that a loosening of loyalties might result from the program emerged as early as 1954, when, after an annual dinner at the Philadelphia Racquet Club with the president of AT&T, student-executives were asked to comment on the course. In Baltzell’s published account, one student observes: “I still want to get along in the company but I now realize that I owe something to myself, my family, and my community.” A second notes that the course “stimulated a creeping discontent and loss of complacency.” A third crystallizes what might ultimately have come to seem a problem for Bell: “Before the course, I was like a straw floating with the current down the stream. The stream was the Bell Telephone company. I don’t think I will ever be like that straw again.”<sup>68</sup>

The independent evaluation of the Institute conducted in April 1957 confirmed that the kind of radical emancipation envisioned from the start by Peckham might indeed be underway. According to this report, “almost a third of the alumni” believed that “as a result of the program’s influence, the Telephone Company is no longer the be-all and end-all of life to them which it was, pre-Penn.”<sup>69</sup> Here again is the problem of correlation: a lot people in the sixties changed their minds about the role corporations in American life without the benefit of a liberal education. What’s more, according to Peter F. Drucker, the reigning management guru of the era (and, of course, one of the Institute’s many invited speakers), corporations were necessarily entangled with the public interest and should act accordingly.<sup>70</sup> Even if many major corporations resented Drucker’s ground-breaking brief for corporate responsibility, his views on corporate management were, for a time, becoming the norm.

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<sup>67</sup> Bowles, “Crisis in the Information Age?” 212. Bowles tends to cite evidence for changes in participant attitudes but not for his conclusion that AT&T executives were genuinely disturbed by these shifts.

<sup>68</sup> Baltzell, “Bell Telephone’s Experiment in Education,” 107.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas Williams Associates Committee Report, “Report of Douglas Williams Associates on the Interview Findings on the Institute of Humanistic Studies,” (April 1957), 29. Office of the President Files, UPA 4, Box 88. Institute of Humanistic Studies (I), 1955-1960.

<sup>70</sup> Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, 6, 237-58.



It is certainly possible that, as Bowles argues, AT&T decided that the program was succeeding all too well, and that its end in 1960 was inevitable once evidence came from a 1959 study by Viteles—who hoped to rally support for the endangered program—that “the participants became more tolerant of non-capitalistic political ideologies.”<sup>71</sup> This sort of evidence lends some credence to the cynical faculty suspicion recorded in the article “Finishing School for Executives”: “companies believe in liberal education insofar as it doesn’t work.”<sup>72</sup> Or as Bowles puts it, “the [AT&T] executives feared that costly humanistic training represented a threat to the free enterprise system.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet there was more to the story than this. A 1960 article in *Business Week* observes that “the reasons for the institute’s death are beclouded by the insistence of everyone connected with it that it was a success,”<sup>74</sup> but material concerns clearly figured powerfully. Documents in the Penn archive indicate that AT&T, no longer willing to foot the bill, wanted to shift to a tuition basis, but even though Penn secured a grant to pay for wooing executives from other companies, too few were interested. Even the Bell companies, moreover, were becoming increasingly less willing to let their most promising young executives take a ten-month sabbatical at full pay.

What can we conclude from this complex of evidence? Given that it is notoriously difficult to quantify the effects of any particular educational program, especially, perhaps, in the liberal arts, it is as reasonable to assume that the closing of the Institute had as much to do with the march of quantification as with a genuine fear that humanistic training was in danger of turning middle management into commies.<sup>75</sup> But whether or not AT&T felt threatened by

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<sup>71</sup> Bowles, “The Organization Man Goes to College,” 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ray, “Finishing School for Executives,” 436.

<sup>73</sup> Bowles, “Crisis in the Information Age?” 187.

<sup>74</sup> [No Author], “No More Humanities for Brass,” *Business Week* (June 18, 1960), 123.

<sup>75</sup> It is also possible (though the AT&T archives are silent on the matter) that with the massive postwar increase in higher education enrolment in the US between 1955 and 1970, Bell may have begun to find more ready access to the kind of employee they were trying to produce through the Institute. For college enrolment patterns and their implications, see Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, esp. 63-79. For the trickier business of gauging the number of liberal arts degrees vs. professional degrees, see Steven Brint, Mark Riddle, Lori Turk-Bicakci, and Charles S. Levy, “From the Liberal to the Practical

humanistically modified executives (a kind of reverse *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), it seems clear that the program did in fact promote a greater degree of independent, flexible thinking. The *Business Week* article records a student comment that anticipates the recordings made ten years later: “I find myself today taking a much broader view and making more critical analyses of both on- and off-the-job problems. ... Decisions do not come as spontaneously, and more of the opposite viewpoint automatically registers.”<sup>76</sup> If Peckham’s vision of emancipation appears for many to have come true, how much of that change can be traced back to his general vision of the liberal arts, epitomized by *Ulysses*, and how much to the Burkean notion that the arts could become equipment for living?

The question warrants one last turn to the transcripts. They contain *many* general comments about finding more time for reading, and finding more *pleasure* in reading. One respondent traces his new reading habits back to an Institute teacher “who encouraged us to read, read, read”—“at least 30 to 40 thousand novels in our lifetime”; he does not record his current count but reports that he reads at least an hour every night and always has “several books going.”<sup>77</sup> Another wishes that the Institute’s injunction to read could have been kept alive in the Bell System; he introduced a circulating library in his branch and encouraged people to read books bearing on sociological change, such as Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*. Certainly one could over-emphasize the influence of literature on all the changes reported in the transcripts. Do the repeated references to learning to see through another’s eyes derive from Richard Kain on parallax effects in *Ulysses*? Unlikely: no reliable evidence exists that reading literature (Western or not) promotes empathy,<sup>78</sup> and with respect to increased

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Arts in American Colleges and Universities: Organizational Analysis and Curricular Change,” *Journal of Higher Education*, 76.2 (March/April 2005), who show that in the early to mid-60s, enrollment in liberal arts degrees—which had outnumbered professional degrees in the 1910s and 1920s, when higher education was largely restricted to the middle and upper-middle classes, and then dropped in the immediate postwar period—regained its historical majority status, only to begin losing it again in the 1970s.

<sup>76</sup> [No Author], “No More Humanities for Brass,” *Business Week* (June 18, 1960), 123.

<sup>77</sup> Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles Papers, 1921-1980. Transcript no. 63, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford, 2010).

awareness of racial injustice, several non-literary elements in the program must have proved even more eye-opening, such as a lecture on “Urban Renewal” in 1955 by the visionary architect Carl Feiss, one on “The Negro in Philadelphia” by George Schermer (a well-known expert on race relations and at the time Executive Director of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations), and sessions in 1957-58 on social stratification, social conflict, and American minority groups run by Otto Klineberg, who three years earlier had served as an expert witness for the winning side of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, the US Supreme Court case that ended legal segregation in public schools.<sup>79</sup>

And yet there’s something in a remark by one student-executive that seems like an ideal realization of the general aims of the Institute’s program as well as a long-term residual effect of plunging ten years earlier into the literature curriculum in particular. He is among the many who comment on deepened interest in reading, but he also explicitly discusses the value of literature to business managers. At first, he says merely that literature offers what he calls “perhaps [a] deeper understanding of human nature.”<sup>80</sup> This of course has been a standard defence of literature since Aristotle, not to mention one more recently proposed to help benighted government officials come to terms with the greed that produced the global financial crisis of 2007.<sup>81</sup>

But our student-executive has more to say. I like to imagine that the sentence that immediately follows his remark on human nature came after a long reflective pause, from a searching effort to wrest value from his earlier experience: “[we] experience in literature as well as in the arts the pell-mell way that experience comes to us in real life, with ideas and practice all muddled up in

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<sup>79</sup> Office of the Vice-Provost, General Files, UPA 6.7, Box 16, Institute of Humanistic Studies (I) and (II).

<sup>80</sup> Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles Papers, 1921-1980. Transcript no. 37, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Gayatri Spivak quotes Charles Isherwood’s response to Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan’s reported surprise at “the excess of greed of Wall Street” during the subprime mortgage crisis: “He didn’t see that coming? ... I hereby recommend [for top-tier economists] a crash course on what men and women are” (28); Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

one complex.”<sup>82</sup> This offers a pretty good account of the kind of knowledge provided by literature, in this instance the granular historical data about interpersonal relations that literature catches in its web. And it is literature’s interfusion of particularity and abstraction that in this context distinguishes it from, say, the case study method of instruction used in law schools and beyond. This executive, in other words, is not just talking about narrative, he is talking about what classical rhetoric termed *pathos*, and what today is more likely to be called *affect*—the feelings that articulate experience *as* a particular kind of experience. He’s also touching on the special kind of semantic complexity that literature produces as part of its mode of communication: a “muddled up” complex of meaning, potential meaning, and non-meaning. To Claude Shannon’s discovery of perfectly quantifiable communication, literature responds with forms of cultural noise that will not be eliminated.

One has to wonder, however, how long such noise could interfere with the locked-in signal of the modern corporation. The transcripts acknowledge the long-term difficulty of negotiating between ideals of reflection and the demands of the corporation. One executive devotes much time to the “temporary disadvantages” of the program: “it took me quite a while,” he remarks, “to get to the point of having a strong, sustained interest in some aspects of our measured performance, which interest I simply had to have because it was a requirement of my job. . . . [I]t took me some time to synthesize the warring elements of my two different worlds or to strike a middle of the road course in which I’d be comfortable.” As usual, he cannot come up with an example, but he continues: “I feel I finally got back my interest in measured results, in my competitiveness, but it took time, it wasn’t easy and I did this mainly because I had to, I think.”<sup>83</sup> “I had to, I think”—the qualification is poignant. Is “I think” a reluctant concession to the necessity of forgetting? Or can it also be read as a defiant assertion—“I *think*”—a resistance to that which threatens to foreclose thought, the immediate necessity of measurable results?

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<sup>82</sup> Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles Papers, 1921-1980. Transcript no. 37, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Archives of the History of American Psychology, Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Morris Viteles Papers, 1921-1980. Transcript no. 5, p. 7.

In the end, the Institute of Humanistic Study is perhaps best seen as Stephen Dedalus sees history in the “Nestor” episode, as a space of ousted possibilities. A corporation and a university established a productive collaborative relationship for seven years; they invented an institutional space in which an accountant could be enchanted by the music of *Ulysses* even as a peer considered the book a shocking pile of dirt, a space in which one young executive was inspired to tell a gathering of suits at the Pennsylvania Racquet Club that he would never again be a straw floating downstream. When Trilling lamented that his undergraduate students could not truly experience the invasive, de-stabilizing force of modern literature, he blamed the University: the institutionalization of modernism entailed its domestication. But if the collaboration between AT&T and Penn was at one level part of the Cold War process of weaponizing modernism, and, at the same time, paradoxically, part of the process of defanging it, the law of unintended consequences tells us that the rhetorical effects of modernism will always exceed the aims of its deployment.