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ARTICLE

William Gaddis' Education-Writing and His Fiction: A Fuller Archival History

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The little use that critics of William Gaddis' fiction have previously made of his corporate writing career has concerned a very limited portion of its history: the fact that his cancelled book on classroom TV for the Ford Foundation contributed material to *J R's* school-centric plot. Gaddis' own dismissive retrospective account of the interest and significance of his corporate work has constrained critical investigation. The archive, though, reveals a close, sustained relationship between his corporate work and fiction. This article sets out their linked histories and surveys the archival material that future discussions of the relation between Gaddis' corporate and artistic careers will need to take account of.

William Gaddis spent most of the twenty-year span between the publication of his first two novels working as a corporate writer-for-hire. Yet despite the well-preserved archive, connections between Gaddis' long corporate career and his fiction are more often gestured at than examined.¹ No other document he produced during these years contributed so much to his fiction as *Television for Today's Education*: the book on school television that the Ford Foundation commissioned and then cancelled half-written in 1963. Consequently, on the rare occasions that critics have mentioned Gaddis' corporate work as a context for his fiction, it's the one document that they've specifically referenced. Standing synecdochally for over a decade of work, it plays a consistent but misleading role in the field.

The first critical allusion to the Ford work—as source material “salvaged for an early sequence in *J R*”—comes in the introduction to Steven Moore and John Kuehl's collection of what they considered the best extant Gaddis criticism, 1984's *In Recognition of William Gaddis*.² Moore himself later places “new-fangled pedagogy” alongside “the abuses of capitalism... and the farcical notion of ‘corporate democracy’” as targets against which *J R* “crusades,”³ and subsequent critics have similarly implied that Gaddis saw educational TV as a particularly ridiculous symptom of problems with the wider culture. On this account, the corporate career—condensed to the Ford project's dealings with classroom TV—gave Gaddis a jaundiced inside view of that culture's infrastructure, and little else. The corporate work's significance would thus be biographical rather than artistic: providing exposure, in Joseph Tabbi's words, to “chaos, incompetence, corruption, and the apparent bureaucratization of everything first hand.”⁴ Experiences *around* corporate writing, rather than that writing itself, condition the novel.

¹ The briefer non-creative employment histories of Gaddis' peers—from Thomas Pynchon's work for Boeing's in-house magazine to Kurt Vonnegut's equivalent position at General Electric to Joseph McElroy's time in the coast guard—have had their connections to the fiction either diligently mapped by scholars (in Pynchon's case) or enthusiastically promoted by the authors themselves. The day-job or early-career writings of the generation preceding them—from Wallace Stevens' insurance-writing to Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological research to William Carlos Williams' medical work—have approached canonical par with their poetry or fiction. Gaddis' equivalent work, by contrast, remains almost entirely unread.

² Moore and Kuehl, “Introduction,” 13.

³ Moore, *William Gaddis*, 12.

⁴ Tabbi, “The Autopoesis of American Literature,” 114.

In an earlier piece, Tabbi looks beyond Ford to Gaddis' subsequent work as a corporate speech-writer, and in doing so diverts brief attention toward that writing's significance. He suggests in passing that "it is even conceivable that, rather than simply depleting his literary energies, Gaddis' corporate experience provided a technical training of sorts for *JR*" because of the opportunities it gave him to write in voices and jargons not his own.⁵ Yet even here, Tabbi's subsequent report of Gaddis' unpublished remarks that "what he most enjoyed... was that he could get in quite a few personal opinions (on technology, education, and various other topics) under the guise of speaking as a corporation executive" frames the writing as drudge-work to which Gaddis himself brought all that was of interest.⁶ Understanding the corporate work's relationship to *JR*, which is indeed significant, requires a clearer history than currently exists of just what the corporate work actually involved, particularly on the topic—television education—where its influence has already been widely if not precisely acknowledged.

As the archive reveals, education—particularly the theory and practice of technologically augmenting it—was a subject to which Gaddis' corporate writings continually returned. Between the Ford project's collapse in early 1963 and his abandoning of corporate work at the end of the decade, he wrote about educational investment for IBM and the relation of technology and teaching for Kodak, worked on a number of instructional videos of the kind his Ford work had examined, and even scripted quizzes, interviews, and inserts to accompany them. Despite the unusual overtness of its influence on *JR*, then, the Ford Foundation project is only part of the picture: not just a one-off source for the novel, but the inauguration of nearly a decade's professional work on the novel's major themes.

This overlap between corporate writing and fiction is epitomized by Gaddis archiving his own retrospective account of the Ford project not with that project's notes and drafts but in a disorganised folder of notes toward *JR*. As a more public figure following *JR*'s awards and the corporate career's end, though, Gaddis was

⁵ Tabbi, "The Compositional Self in William Gaddis' *JR*," 699.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 699.

often anxious to downplay their relationship. In post-*J R* interviews about his work, he mentioned the corporate writing only as a symptom of the misery that followed the critical and commercial failure of *The Recognitions*. A reduction of the whole era to being “obliged to go and work in a pharmaceutical company, which I did not like”—focusing only on his pre-Ford work for Pfizer, not mentioning that even this work was primarily writing—is representative.⁷ Although Crystal Alberts was the first to reveal that he deliberately archived them alongside his fiction—suggesting that he took them seriously, at least as source material—she follows his public lead in dismissing the “insipid corporate documents” as a whole.⁸ Yet as I’ll show, many of those documents, and in particular those on instructional TV, were substantial pieces of thinking to which Gaddis was willing to attach his name and reputation as a novelist as well as a research-competent technical writer. Their depth of influence on the fiction follows from the previously unacknowledged extent of this engagement. In what follows, I’ll show how the parallel timelines of his writing-for-hire and his much-interrupted work on *J R* illuminate the one’s contributions to the details, ideas, and structures of the other. Elsewhere in this issue of *Orbit*, I analyze what the corporate archive lets us better understand about the origins and implications of *J R*’s style,⁹ and about the novel’s rhetoric on culture and education.¹⁰ The present archival history sets out, less analytically, the material and chronology that prompt such revisions.

The archive, above all, undermines the linked ideas that Gaddis merely repudiated instructional TV as a symptom of cultural decline, and that his corporate work was a mere distraction from—at best a store of authentic detail for—his fiction. Accounts of the relation between Gaddis’ corporate career and his fiction must deal with that career’s whole arc, which belies the putative direct causal line from

⁷ Gaddis, “The Art of Fiction no. 101,” unpaginated.

⁸ Alberts, “Valuable Dregs: William Gaddis, the Life of an Artist,” 245.

⁹ See “Friction Problems: William Gaddis’ Corporate Writing and the Stylistic Origins of *J R*” – <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.gaddis.2>.

¹⁰ See “William Gaddis’ ‘Ford Foundation Fiasco’ and *J R*’s Elision of the Teacher’s-Eye View” – <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.gaddis.3>.

the misery of his experience with Ford to his historical attitude to instructional TV to its rhetorical role in the novel. More broadly, the history undermines his retrospective suggestions about the corporate work's lack of independent intellectual challenge and value; we can no longer take his word that it had nothing to offer his fiction in terms of ideas or technique. I set out the sources that establish these constraints in three historical sections, covering the periods before, of, and after his work for Ford.

Part 1: Before Ford

J R was not the first time Gaddis used his much-begrudged day-jobs for creative inspiration, nor even the first time that he used writing for hire as a narrative arena for questions of politics, agency, and discursive contagion. The "FORD FOUNDATION FIASCO," as Gaddis subsequently labelled a folder containing a draft of the abandoned book project (see **Figure 1**),¹¹ preceded *J R* by twelve years.

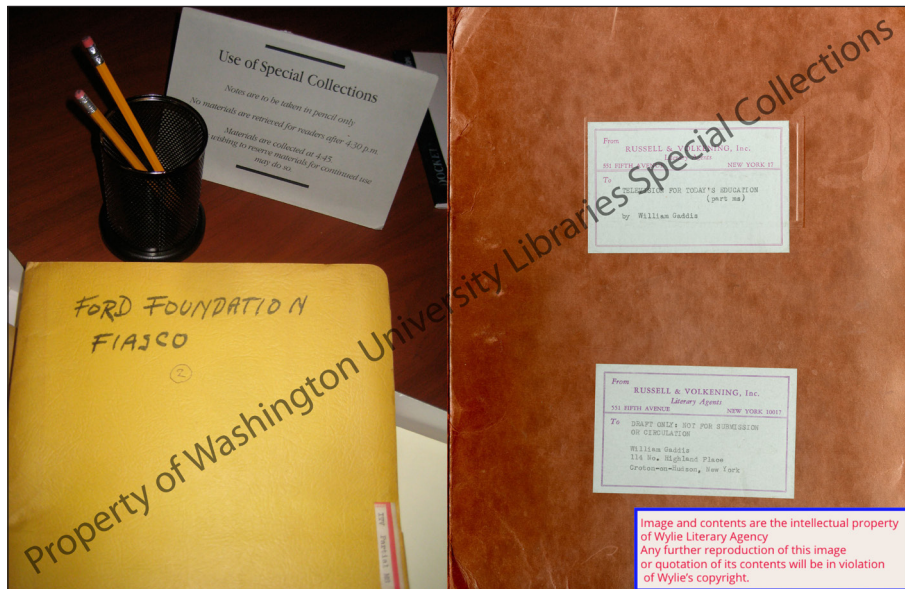


Figure 1: Folders containing draft versions of Gaddis' completed chapters.

¹¹ Box No. 133, Folder 475. Corporate Writings, in The William Gaddis Papers, Washington University St Louis Library, Missouri.

Twelve years before the "Fiasco," though, amid early work on *The Recognitions*, Gaddis' job writing short general-interest radio scripts for UNESCO in Paris was already inspiring a never-finished story called "Ernest and the Zeitgeist," initially conceived as a post-existential examination of the logic of responsibility but eventually a straightforward institutional satire.

The existential conception of the story figured UNESCO, thinly veiled under the name of "The Ministry," as the locus for a contemporary free will debate:

the moral investure must be moral responsibility; but how so if the notion of Deliberate Chance operates. Direct contradiction. Impossible.

Therefore: We must turn from the (Ex.) notion of Logical moral responsibility; to that of illogical but Still Binding responsibility.

*And deny, ad hoc, Accident.

b. The purpose of the Ministry then is to continue the (Illusion) of man's responsibility; such channels as inspiration &c.¹²

Later plans, though focusing more on the logic of the institution per se, maintained the ambitious, species-level scope:

POINT: How personal & national bonds of interest corrupt an organization founded upon Ideals. From the inside, the thorough corruptibility of man &c.¹³

Both thematic versions hinge on the same basic story, starring Ernest, a not entirely un-Gaddis-like¹⁴ young Ministry worker "who hoped one day to write an earth-shaking work of some sort, he could not decide which, for it was always a play when he worked at a novel, or poetry when he worked at a play."¹⁵ After vio-

¹² Gaddis, "Notes toward 'Ernest and the Zeitgeist,'" unpaginated.

¹³ Ibid., unpaginated.

¹⁴ An *Orbit* referee points out how much Ernest also has in common with the character of Otto Pivner in *The Recognitions*.

¹⁵ Gaddis, "Drafts of 'Ernest and the Zeitgeist,'" 444444444444.

lating "the Ministry's most important policy—a universal effort to offend no one"¹⁶ by taking visiting Islamic delegates to see *The Lost Weekend* at the cinema (spark-ing a controversy that undermines the Ministry's founding conviction that "once whole-hearted understanding is reached over fish, singing and dancing, and Assur Nassirpal, such embarrassing subjects as religion, economic rights, lebensraum, social exploitation, and racial prejudices based on centuries of experience will follow"¹⁷), he wins favour by writing a speech about a centipede with a wooden leg, which brings him organizational success and responsibility that open up into existential quandaries.

Gaddis' numerous drafts of the story get no further into the plot than the speech's reception, and the vast majority of their prose is taken up with unspool-ing the Ministry's long lists of protocols, articles of faith, and bureaucratic mys-tifications. Laments in the notes about "more spent on paper work, publicity Ec. [*sic*] than on any project itself - hot lunches for Lebanon \$2000/publicity, salaries \$8000" anticipate the priorities of an encyclopedia's budget in *J R*: "two hundred sixty-six thousand on promotion, sixty six thousand in production and, yes and six hundred sixty dollars went in research writing and editorial costs."¹⁸ *J R* is anticipated again by the particular structure of "Ernest"'s institutional absurdi-ties: for example, since the Ministry already has a full quota of other American employees, making a full-time role officially off-limits, Ernest's conditions of hire are such that "Well after he compleated [*sic*] each piece of work, he was given a contract dated some weeks before in which he pledged to do the work he had already done."¹⁹ This foreshadows *J R*'s report-cards to which pupils must con-form, press-releases that precede events, misspelled business cards that prompt legal name-changes, and other cart-before-horse promulgations of bureaucratic norm.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸ Gaddis, "Ernest Notes," unpaginated; Gaddis, *J R*, 693.

¹⁹ Gaddis, "Ernest Drafts," 1.

Gaddis eventually seems to have imagined "Ernest" as much as an exposé as an allegory. On the back of notes toward it, in a draft letter that may or may not have been sent, he addresses William Bradford Huie, editor of the newly relaunched *New American Mercury* (an advert for the first issue of which is filed along with the notes).²⁰ The venue appeals to him, he suggests, because of its stated enmity toward "the cult of the common man, the boobs who have become bureaucrats..."²¹ What better place, he implies, for a story about UNESCO:

I don't know how much you know about Unesco, or what you think of it. I've done writing for their radio and press service during this past year, and some time ago started a story based on that incredible organization. I've never finished it because I could not imagine any magazine which would be willing to publish it, even if it were found to be acceptable as a story. It has come along as fairly broad satire.²²

This sense of separable acceptabilities, as art and as attack, shows Gaddis aware of the complexities of adapting real bureaucratic structures into stories with wider rhetorical goals. The letter thus seems to have been written after the shift from existential exploration to organizational critique. The division was never total, however: even the earliest drafts focus on ludicrous bureaucracy, and even the later notes attend to broadly existential categories like the need to saturate the narrative with "[e]veryone's frustration; & uncertainty of self."²³ Gaddis' own universalizing tone here risks

²⁰ The *New American Mercury* is best known these days for having descended, after Huie's reign ended in 1953, into a less and less politically respected outlet for virulent racism, editorially captured by a procession of the well-funded interest groups all Gaddis' subsequent fiction would parody. Gaddis' snarkily anti-bureaucratic take on UNESCO seems a natural fit for Huie's deliberate reframing of the magazine as a hub for sophisticated conservatism (as for the aegis of its founder, HL Mencken). In terms of what it subsequently became, the closest we get to an ideological link is that among Gaddis' possible plot points was "Ernest lives with coloured boy - but how to fire him? 'Regardless of race, sex, creed'" ("Ernest Notes").

²¹ Qtd. in Gaddis, Draft letter to William Huie, undated.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gaddis, "Ernest Notes," unpaginated.

mirroring the Ministry's trivial pan-culturalism within his story: above Ernest's writing desk is a placard of guidelines that includes "5. Use word Man wherever possible; also, Humanity; Freedom; Right(s); Equality".²⁴ Before he gave it up, Gaddis' conception of "Ernest" combined minutely detailed satire of life as a writer-for-hire with broadly existential concerns about the place of "Humanity" in a world whose language makes cant of experience: a synthesis of genres and combination of concerns that would structure *J R*. The "Ernest" archive, then, makes a case for tracing the influence of Gaddis' corporate writing career on the logic of his fiction right back to the beginning of both.

After *The Recognitions* failed to make his fortune or even his name, Gaddis soon had to return to the piecemeal writing-for-hire that "Ernest" had satirized. This seems to have begun as early as 1957: the date that he subsequently gave literary critic John Seelye as the point at which he had begun work on *J R* and his civil war play *Once at Antietam*.²⁵ By 1962, when he got the Ford commission, his attempts at creative work had stalled, as *The Atlantic* rejected excerpts from *Antietam* and a theatre director he had contacted about performing it overestimated Gaddis' progress when requesting "a more finished script than I read a couple of months ago... I trust you've made lots of progress with it since... I hope you'll have a copy for me in a couple of weeks."²⁶ Steven Moore suggests that *Agapē Agape* was Gaddis' primary focus between 1960–62, work on it ending with the acceptance of the Ford commission, but the archive establishes just how much of this era was spent on non-creative work.²⁷

Specifically, Gaddis was doing "Ernest"-style renewable short-term work for Pfizer, who were especially happy that his 500-word illustrated biographies of figures from

²⁴ Gaddis, "Ernest Drafts," 7777777777777777.

²⁵ Gaddis, letter to John Seelye, May 21st 1962, 246. Steven Moore's edition of Gaddis' letters includes a letter Gaddis sent to himself containing the basic idea for *J R* in 1956 ("William Gaddis to William Gaddis, August 27 1956"); the Seelye letter may just indicate that real work on the novel began after an interlude.

²⁶ Rose, letter to Gaddis, Apr 3rd 1961.

²⁷ Moore, "The Secret History of *Agapē Agape*."

the history of science, each profile flowering in its final paragraph into an advert for current products, were going over so well in Finland. He was further congratulated on his work running the reception at the National Tuberculosis Conference, and beyond Pfizer was learning how to pitch for positions writing medical pamphlets, some technical and some educational.²⁸ Despite having hitched some coat-tails into work on one about cancer,²⁹ his own proposal for one on The Heart was turned down. Despite the limitations of this work, Gaddis wasn't concerned to keep his artistic world separate: by 1962 his publishing correspondence came through his Pfizer mailbox.³⁰ This was the state of play when he accepted the Ford Foundation's commission to write a whole book on the history of instructional TV.

Part 2: Ford

Disappointingly, the "Fiasco" archive doesn't clarify why Gaddis was offered the commission, and he himself was never to find out exactly why it got cancelled. While other files in his corporate-work folders contain useful para-textual documentation—solicitations, invoices, feedback, revision, and detailed correspondence with the people who commissioned, edited, and put their name to that writing—this material is conspicuous by its absence from the Fiasco folders. The Ford Foundation's own archive gives some insight on why the project came into being but none on why it ended up in Gaddis' hands.³¹ His own correspondence and research material, though, reveals that he found work on the project challenging and worthwhile, that its success or failure had significant professional stakes, and that it overlapped with reading and thinking he was already doing towards his creative projects.

Buried away in notes toward *J R*, Gaddis leaves us a clear account of the timeline and of his grievances (see **Figure 2**).³²

²⁸ For the relevant correspondence, see William Gaddis Archive: Business Letters. Box 25, Folder 164.

²⁹ Final printed versions preserved in Gaddis Archive: Box 135.

³⁰ See William Gaddis Archive: Business Letters. Box 23, Folder 154.

³¹ The documents suggest that Ford ran the early stages of the project through an agency called "International Research Associates," who may have been the initial contact for Gaddis ("Budget Approval Form").

³² Gaddis, "Loose Sheets Headed 'Ford Foundation Project'".

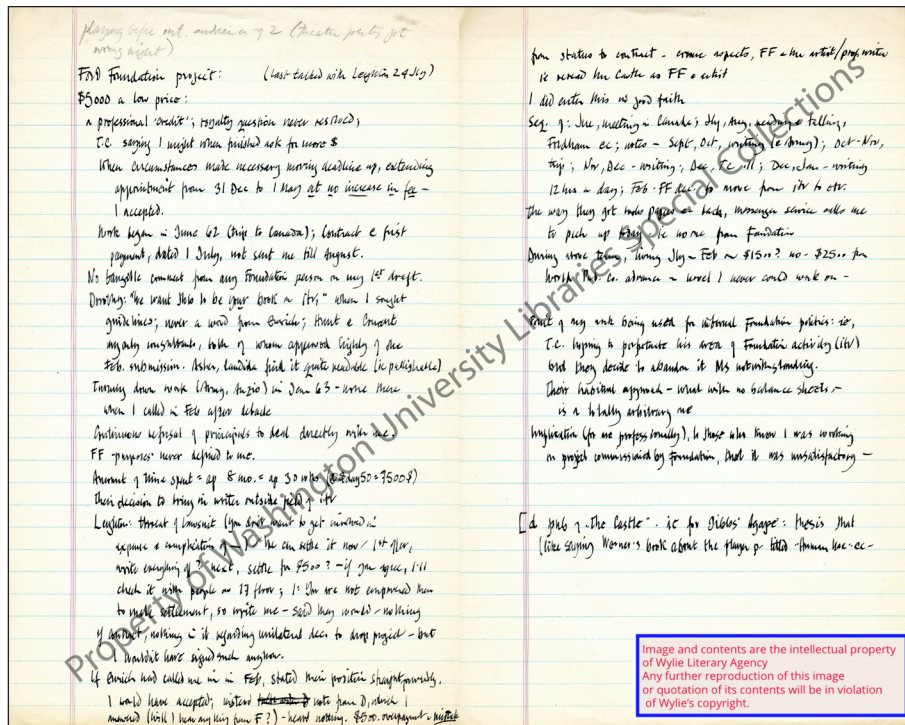


Figure 2: Gaddis' Account of the Ford Project's Collapse.

This is a square document, testimonial in form but lacking an obvious addressee. Indexed to "now," it mentions the possibility of a lawsuit to recoup unpaid costs, and so may represent Gaddis' attempt to get all the relevant data in one place for decision-making purposes or future legal reference.³³ Neither of these would suffice to explain why it ended up among his notes for *J R* rather than among his legal papers or with the material he actually produced for Ford. This raises a third possibility: that he recorded the information with the express intention of basing future fiction on it. The final, square-bracketed entry mentions *J R* character Jack Gibbs, and contains an

³³ Gaddis' biographer Joseph Tabbi points out that this document is written in a calligraphic hand distinct from Gaddis' usual note-to-self style (Tabbi, email message to author, May 6 2014). From the time of a severe youthful illness up until his death, Tabbi suggests, Gaddis practiced this calligraphic writing at times of great stress or distress. The document's purposes may thus have been more therapeutic than practical.

allusion to Kafka's *The Castle* that makes it into the final novel when Gall, the writer hired by the novel's version of the Ford Foundation, is lamenting that his project has collapsed and his commissioners are proving impossible to contact.³⁴

Much of the biographical detail recorded here makes it into the novel too. The opening statement "\$5000 a low price,"³⁵ for example, precisely tracks Gall's account of his own Foundation experience halfway through *J R*: he had been commissioned "to write a book on school television for a lousy five thousand dollars. I worked on that while I was living on the advance I got for this Western and when I took it in half finished I thought I'd use that payment to go back and finish the Western, and then the Foundation just canceled the whole thing."³⁶ Nothing in the archive contradicts the details of Gall's narrative: such details of Gaddis' Ford experience as he put into the novel the archive suggests he transcribed directly.

The document also establishes the timeline of the project—Gaddis having begun work in June 1962 with an initial expectation of finishing in December of that year, which was soon extended to May 1963 "[b]ecause he wanted to visit a number of active in-school television programs and include interviews with personnel involved in the programs."³⁷ Gaddis did most of his writing throughout January 1963 after completing those visits and interviews, and it was only a month later, after he had submitted his first batch of work, that Ford cancelled the project, in Gaddis' account because they had "decided to move from itv [instructional television] to etv [educational television]."³⁸

This decision, Gaddis makes clear, had nothing to do with the quality of his work: he attributes both the commission and the cancellation to "Foundation politics,"³⁹

³⁴ See Gaddis, *J R*, 418.

³⁵ Gaddis, "Ford Foundation Project," unpaginated.

³⁶ Gaddis, *J R*, 418.

³⁷ The Secretary, memo to Alvin C Eurich, Dec 27, 1962.

³⁸ Gaddis, "Ford Foundation Project," unpaginated. The difference between instructional and educational TV, as Gaddis discusses in his work for Ford, is that the former is designed for classroom use to supplement teachers, and the latter involves self-contained programs designed to be watched without supplementary explanation.

³⁹ Documents in the Ford Foundation archive give some suggestion of what these might have concerned: a March 1963 corporate speech explicitly notes that Ford's program-filming was hampered by actors' unions and suggests that the company get out of the ITV game as soon as possible. See White,

and the urgent worry on his part is the “[i]mplication (for me professionally), to those who knew that I was working on project for Foundation, that it was unsatisfactory.”⁴⁰ This his account denies on a number of levels, citing the fact that his “only consultants... approved highly” of the material he submitted, and that his agent Candida Donadio was among those who found it “quite readable (ie publishable).”⁴¹ Unlike most of Gaddis’ corporate work, this piece was to have had his name attached, and one reason he gives for having taken a low payment up front is that it would be a significant “professional credit.”⁴² As such, its cancellation could have had serious implications for his career as a corporate writer.

The document also gestures toward the most perplexing question of all: how Gaddis came to get the job. How did someone with no prior experience on the topic end up writing a book about instructional TV? Gaddis offers no reasons, but establishes that it was “their decision to bring in writer outside field of itv.”⁴³ What kind of thing were they looking for, and what kind of guidance did they give as it went along? Gaddis seems to have been in the dark on the first question—“FF ‘purposes’ never defined to me”—and to have been frustrated in relation to the latter, noting the “continuous refusal of principals to deal directly with me” and that he received “No tangible comment from any Foundation person on my 1st draft.”⁴⁴ He was, however, told that “we want this to be your book on itv,” which goes some way to explaining the overall tone of personal judgment that is so distinctive in the completed chapters by comparison to his other—usually anonymous or ventriloquised—corporate documents.⁴⁵

Ford’s own archive suggests that they may have been looking for something more celebratory and Ford-focused.⁴⁶ Gaddis’ correspondence with the literary critic John Seelye just before the cancellation at least indicates why *he* initially took the project on:

“Address to Affiliates Meeting.”

⁴⁰ Gaddis, “Ford Foundation Project,” unpaginated.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴² *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴⁶ The earliest preserved proposal for the project is also the most detailed, treating their five years of “experimental programs” as “a story well worth telling,” and specifying the need for “a number

I took the offer as a job and of course on getting into it found it an infinitely more involved affair than I, fresh from the boresome tasks of writing speeches &c on the balance of payments problem and direct investment overseas, had at first considered, thinking I suppose to treat it all in those fairly matter-of-fact propagandistic terms.⁴⁷

While this might seem to conflict with the note-to-self's claim that "I did enter this in good faith," it suggests that Gaddis' efforts became more good-faith as the writing process went on.⁴⁸ The Fiasco wasn't, like much of his earlier corporate writing, rote work in the service of interests he despised. What distinguished it was the amount of energy it absorbed through addressing a rich and open question—including the independent research work of those site visits and interviews—as TV teaching's potential value emerged neither clear-cut enough to report uncritically, nor specious enough to blithely lie about.⁴⁹

Gaddis speculates in the same letter, indeed, that this strenuous even-handedness might be a problem for his first finished batch of "material to take in to the Ford folk,"

which I don't know how they'll feel about but worse I'm not sure how I feel about, I haven't had a chance to get off and look at it myself and my impression is I may have fallen between two stools, huzzahs for the tonic effect it

of chapters which would outline in some detail those aspects of the instructional television process which have been uniquely developed within the framework of the National Program" ("Budget Approval Form," unpaginated). But it's impossible to know whether the "purposes" evolved internally before Gaddis was brought on board, or whether they may have changed through discussions with him.

⁴⁷ Gaddis, letter to John Seelye, Feb 2nd, 1963, 249.

⁴⁸ Gaddis, "Ford Foundation Project," unpaginated.

⁴⁹ While we might wonder about the degree of influence that the Foundation exerted over the attitudes Gaddis expresses in the Fiasco, there's very little evidence that he wrote to flatter them. They are mentioned less than ten times in total, usually in factual statements like "In variety and extent, the last two named Ford funds were more widely responsible for the growth and development of educational television in this country than any other sponsorship" (*Television for Today's Education* II–17). At no point does Gaddis give them credit for any of instructional TV's successes or play down their role in its failures. It may be that Ford cancelled the project on the basis of his insufficiently flattering approach, but there's little in the completed chapters that would suggest he let flattery get in the way of his argument. The note-to-self's bafflement that "FF 'purposes' never defined to me" ("Ford Foundation Project") suggests that Gaddis might not have known exactly how to pander even if he'd wanted to.

is having in (public school) teaching interspersed with caveats on technology devouring its own children, all this complicated by constant notes and thoughts and reading on the side on *my* book started many years ago mainly on this same area, technology/democracy/the artist.⁵⁰

As the note-to-self suggests, the Fiasco archive contains precisely no written feedback from Ford. Gaddis' offhand talk of "material" seems like it should apply to a smaller body of work than the three full chapters that survive. The archive doesn't establish whether *all* the preserved chapters were the subject of a correct apprehension that "Ford may simply say 'Pay him and get him out of here!' (or of course they may be even more brief, just 'Get him out of here!') when they see what I've done,"⁵¹ or whether he continued to work on them after an initial positive response to a small subsection. This letter, though, along with the note-to-self's mention of Gibbs, confirms that—whether "*my* book" refers specifically to *J R* or to *Agapē Agape*—Gaddis was still thinking of, and reading towards, his back-burnered creative projects while he was working on the Fiasco. Indeed, it contains occasional, gratuitous echoes of those projects—as in the passing comment that "large classes vary as much as Antietam and Thermopylae."⁵² His inability to offer unqualified "huzzahs" for the technology might thus follow as much from his personal reading and interests at the time as from what he discovered in his targeted Fiasco-research.

This involving ambivalence gives the lie to the few existing accounts of Gaddis' use of the material in *J R* and the attitudes they take it to encode. Early in *J R*, Gaddis introduces two characters, Gall and Ford, who are researching a project much like the Fiasco by visiting the school where the novel's part-time-teacher protagonists work. Gall notes one of them, Jack Gibbs,

having a smoke in the boys' washroom while his class is being taught by television, speaking of technological unemployment.

⁵⁰ Gaddis to Seelye, Feb 2nd 1963, 249/50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵² Gaddis, *Television for Today's Education*, IV-38. Gaddis had been working on the civil war play "Once at Antietam," some of which was later salvaged for passages in *A Frolic of his Own* (1994), and the full draft of which is preserved in Box 115, Folder 403 of his archive alongside *Frolic* notes.

—I don't think that's a point the Foundation wants you to stress, particularly.
But it's your book⁵³

replies Ford. Critics who have acknowledged the specifically televisual nature of the school-system education *J R* depicts have read the novel as Gaddis' your-book version of the Ford Foundation Fiasco, free from the interference of his sponsors, and so free at last to pour scorn on education's resort to TV as an epitome of the culture *J R* critiques.

While "technological unemployment" doesn't come up much in the finished Fiasco chapters, they nevertheless belie this reading.⁵⁴ Given what the archive reveals of the direct relation between Gaddis' experiences and those he gives to Gall, the novel's use of the language of "your book" seems if anything to clarify that Ford hadn't constrained Gaddis' writing even when he dissented from the little he understood of their goals.⁵⁵ Throughout, he remained sanguine about TV's classroom value. Sceptical about technology-advocates' insistence on the medium's power to improve classroom teachers' lives, he nonetheless suggests that the fact that such rhetoric

springs, in good part, from [their] evangelical fervour... does not make it the less real or less potentially valuable, for in battling the popular image of television as a rude monstrosity which replaces the teacher and dehumanises education, they are forcing one another's attention back to the human elements

⁵³ Gaddis, *J R*, 20.

⁵⁴ In his interview with *The Paris Review*, Gaddis does describe "looking around me as I became thirty and forty and fifty at what goes on, thinking this is not what serious education is all about" ("William Gaddis, The Art of Fiction"). I'm indebted to Steven Moore, in a personal conversation, for pointing out that Gaddis' own children went to school between the writing of the Fiasco and *J R*'s completion, which may have altered his pedagogical convictions before he did the bulk of work on *J R*. None of the material in the Gaddis archive suggests that their schools experimented with instructional TV. Moore's edition of Gaddis' letters doesn't clarify the issue, though Gaddis wasn't too anti-technological to warn his son (who later went on to work as a film producer) "I think it's unfortunate that you cross off the film/a-v area at school" (Letter to Matthew Gaddis, 284).

⁵⁵ While his draft lacks the engagement with Ford's particular contributions to field that the project's initial developers had thought necessary, there's no obvious incompatibility between their wishes and the serious investigation he wrote.

that should never have left the classroom in the first place, and even now are petrified mannerisms in many schools where television has never been seen.⁵⁶

Gaddis' investment in the "human" did not require writing off TV, or even its classroom use, as "rude monstrosity" in the manner of some of his critical exegetes. Readings of the novel that take the Fiasco material's salvage as a pretext for blanket condemnations of contemporary education thus need to deal with the archival evidence that Gaddis took the whole field of pedagogical TV seriously over a span of many years.

The best archival material for helping us understand why Gaddis' project was interrupted comes from what Ford replaced it with. Potential replacement authors were contacted within a month, and the document that seemingly came out of this new partnership, finished in 1965, differs less in its conclusions than in being a much simpler, survey-driven affair.⁵⁷ Its conclusion that "ultimately success or failure of ITV depends on the extent to which the classroom teacher is willing to cooperate with the program" seems like a set-up for Edward Bast's and Jack Gibbs' uncooperative obstructions of the system in *J R*.⁵⁸ What made this more palatable to Ford than Gaddis' version seems therefore to have been a matter of its quantitative methods: "your book" being too inherently qualitative to carry weight with its intended audience.

Beyond what they show about the extent of Gaddis' thinking about pedagogical and institutional matters, his preserved research notes also help us trace both his timeline of interests and *J R*'s composition history. Scholars anxious to know what Gaddis read are indulged by a convenient single-page summary of monographs he consulted and his judgments on their usefulness, simply headed "The Books" (See **Figure 3**).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Gaddis, *Television for Today's Education*, IV-39.

⁵⁷ Examining attitudes to the idea and experience of classroom teaching across a variety of "stakeholders" from administrators to students, from elementary schools to universities, from Texas to Detroit, it provides through numerical analysis something not so different from what Gaddis concluded on the basis of readings and interviews. Classroom teachers worry about the lack of interaction with students, administrators worry only about the background logistics, and "TV, as a mass medium, must be geared to the average student." (International Research Associates, "Attitudes Toward Instructional Television: A Report," 63).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹ Gaddis, "Loose note – 'The Books.'"

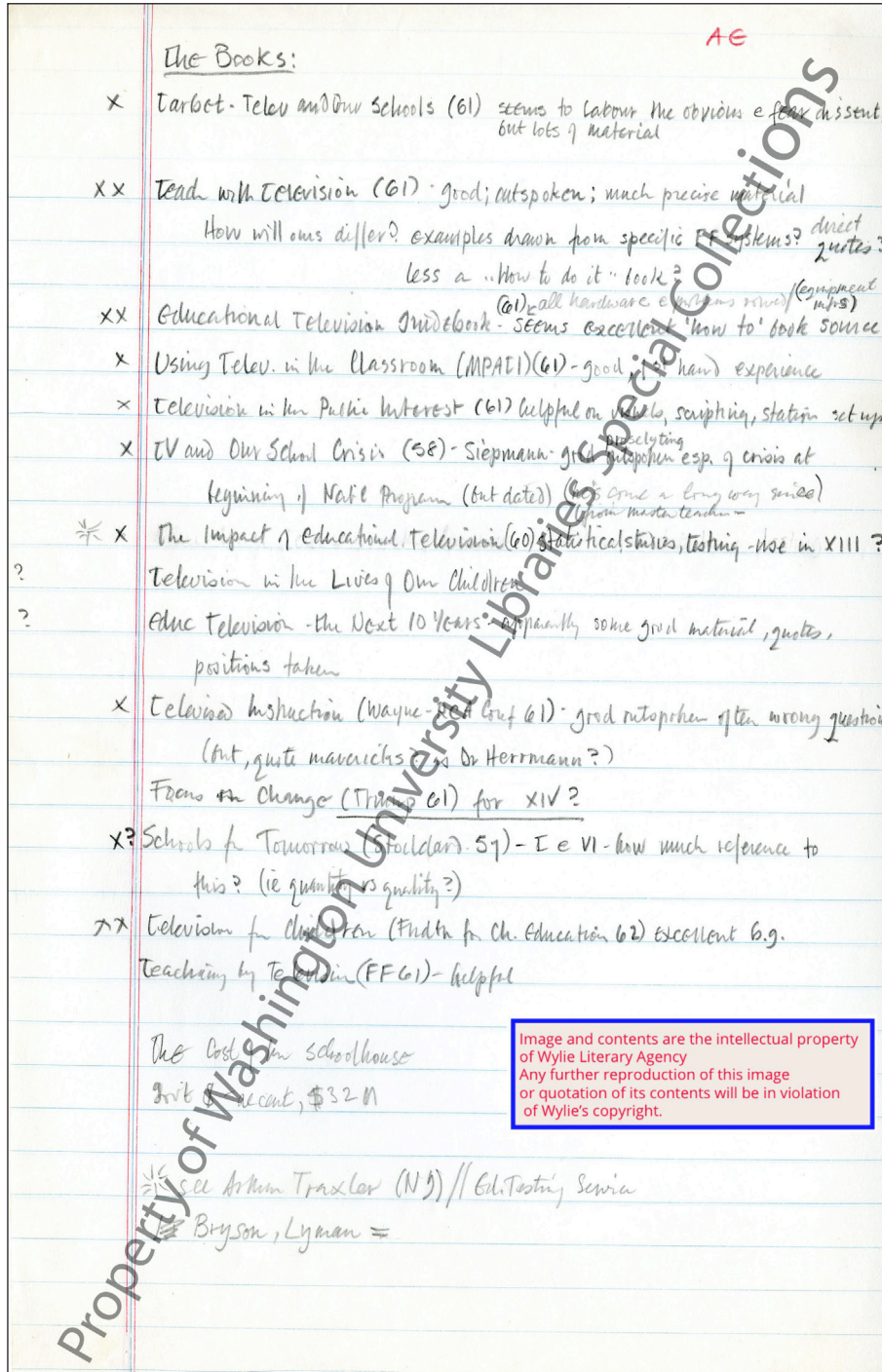


Figure 3: Gaddis' List of Books Consulted for the Ford Project.

This list is particularly handy since the completed chapters are entirely without formal citations. Tim Conley traces *J R*'s pedagogical pessimism to the critique of behaviourism's modern education-theoretical precedence found in a source—John Holt's 1964 *How Children Fail*—that Gaddis taught before he completed *J R*, but which was itself only published the year after the Fiasco was abandoned.⁶⁰ In a loose note towards the Fiasco, however, Gaddis was already formulating his own such reservations:

Programmed Instruction – Skinner (The Original Theorist?)

(Schramm) Acting as catalyst – how do students know eg – role of the machine – more adequate 'theory of learning' that we know very little about theory of learning – based essentially on behaviouristic al science⁶¹

Gaddis' objections to the under-scrutinised application of operant conditioning⁶² pre-date his reading of Holt, offering us an earlier basis for the character Jack Gibbs' seemingly Gaddis-endorsed rumination on "this behaviourist B F Skinner just intrigued the way he's parlayed his infantile ideas into such a successful..."⁶³ as well as for the presence of a textbook salesman *called* Skinner.⁶⁴ The parenthetical reference to "Schramm," meanwhile, may indicate another character's origin.

The reference appears to be to Wilbur Schramm, whose 1962 summary article on research into the effectiveness of educational TV Gaddis' "catalyst" language alludes to.⁶⁵ Quite what he has to do with the Schramm in Gaddis' novel, an author whose war

⁶⁰ See Conley, "This Little Prodigy Went to Market: The Education of *J R*".

⁶¹ Gaddis, "Untitled Loose Note w/ Schramm".

⁶² Operant conditioning was Skinner's advance on the Classical conditioning described by Pavlov: for Skinner, we learn not only to associate stimuli with each other, but to associate our *actions* with their settings and their consequences. Its significance for education was in the possibility to constrain settings so as to generate desirable actions on the part of students, who could then have those actions reinforced by pleasant consequences.

⁶³ Gaddis, *J R*, 485.

⁶⁴ The other educational theorist Gibbs cites is E L Thorndike "with his book *Animal Intelligence* to lay foundations for modern public school testing in terms got from nature at first hand in the intelligent behavior of chickens" (581). I have not found any reference to Thorndike in the Fiasco notes.

⁶⁵ See Schramm, "Chapter IV: Learning from Instructional Television".

experiences interfere with his writing and who subsequently kills himself, is unclear, but the absence of a "Schramm" from character-tables that are among the earliest preserved notes toward *JR* suggests that he was invented and named later in the writing process than the rest of the central characters (See Figure 4).⁶⁶

Name	DESC.	RELATE	DESC.	DESC. or MOTIF?	Name	DESC.	DESC. or MOTIF?
JR	DESC. (to all p-20 may not related)	Business	Mrs K. Ogilvie		d. Ogilvie	DESC. A child 7	
Skid		man	Mrs. Williams		d. Ogilvie	DESC. A child 5	
Slides		employee	(Mrs. J. J. J.?)		DESC. A family member (Brook?)		
Schramm		painter	Brook's Brother	being isolated	Family?	DESC. A family member	
d. Ogilvie		professionist	Brook's Bro.	DESC. A family member	Mrs. Debra	DESC. A divorcee	
Spang		family man, future cousin	Brook's Sister		DESC. A family member		
John Wilkes		family man	DESC. A family member		DESC. A family member		
Mr. Debra		family man	DESC. A family member		DESC. A family member		
Hilde		family man	DESC. A family member		DESC. A family member		
—		family man	DESC. A family member		DESC. A family member		

Figure 4: An Early Table of Characters for *JR*.

⁶⁶ Gaddis, "Unheaded *JR* character Table".

The archive no doubt harbours further such minutiae about the Fiasco research's contribution to the novel that was shelved and recommenced either side of it.

Gaddis' documented interest in Holt's book indicates that he kept reading around the subject post-Fiasco, as does the fact that the one reference to educational policy that the Gaddis Annotations website traces is to 1965's Elementary and Secondary Education Act.⁶⁷ The one substantial element of *J R*'s educational world not foreshadowed in the Fiasco is the visit of the Congressman Pecci to watch the televised lessons in action, which may be an allusion to the most significant piece of legislation passed with regard to educative technology between the Fiasco's end in 1963 and *J R*'s publication in 1975: the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act. Details and references in the novel date from after 1963, then, and indicate that Gaddis stayed informed on educational technology and pedagogical debates as he continued to accept work in the field, commissions for which the Fiasco work must have counted as a credential. Perhaps the Fiasco's most significant and lasting contribution, however, is that it seems to have been the origin of compositional techniques that served Gaddis throughout the rest of his fiction-writing life.

The archive makes clear that he assembled most of his first full draft by cutting and pasting together a vast number of small chunks—paragraph-sized or smaller—of argument or quotation (see **Figure 5**).⁶⁸

As Alberts has documented, thin scissored strips come to characterize the working notes and many full pages of drafts for Gaddis' post-Fiasco fiction.⁶⁹ In the Fiasco, this technique let Gaddis organize disparate sources, notes, and voices toward one overall argument. *J R*'s most immediately striking formal quality is the way it makes sense from waves of fractured, overlapping, unattributed dialogue: another form of distinctively organized polyvocality. The Ford work's cut-and-paste composition may thus be the earliest and perhaps most fundamental of the corporate work's contributions to the *form* of Gaddis' subsequent fiction.

⁶⁷ Gaddis Annotations website, "Scenes 1–10."

⁶⁸ Gaddis, loose *Television* draft page numbered "IV.26".

⁶⁹ Alberts, "Valuable Dregs".

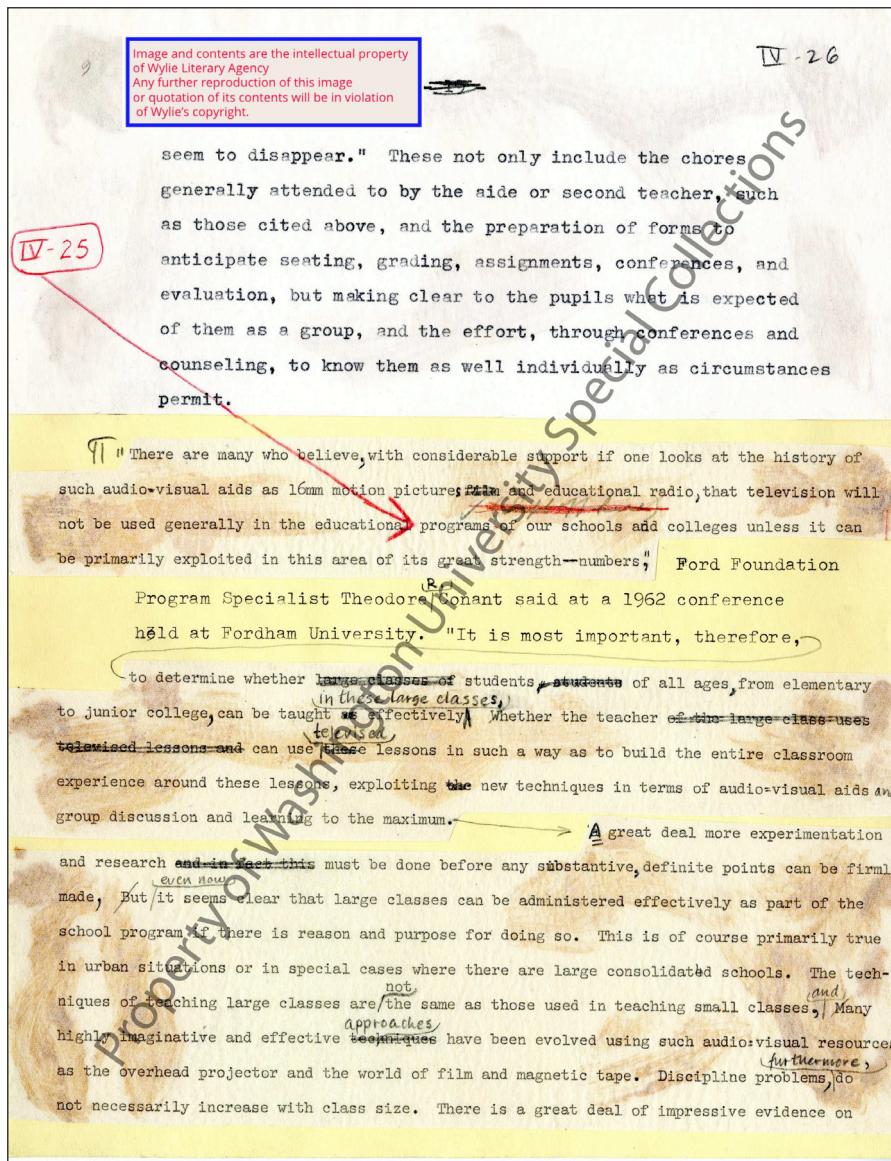


Figure 5: A Fiasco draft page in cut-and-paste format.

3: After Ford

Gaddis continued regularly working on matters of education and technology for another seven years after the Ford project collapsed. Indeed, during this period, he produced more finished work on the topic than he did of the novel. He not only gained further relevant research experience, but actually created educational mate-

rial in a number of formats. Throughout the 1960s he rarely distanced his reputation as a corporate writer from his reputation as a novelist, which was often of interest and value to his employers. It is this span of his career that most gives the lie to the idea that Gaddis kept his creative and his living-making careers maximally separate during the time when his fiction wasn't enough to support him.

In the immediate aftermath of the Ford project's cancellation, Gaddis looked for other avenues to publish the work he had done. His agent Candida Donadio had found the completed chapters "lively enough for a subject that doesn't particularly send me. Chapter I is magazine, don't you think, in the Harper's, perhaps Atlantic tradition?"⁷⁰ Accordingly, Gaddis submitted all three chapters to *Harper's* later in the year, getting a negative response since "[h]is point of view isn't strong enough for us, for one thing, in the light of all that's been written on the subject."⁷¹ Despite his failure to find the material an audience, Gaddis' willingness to try reveals that he took the work he had done seriously enough to try and publish under his own name in the kind of venue he had long sought for both shorter fiction and non-fiction.⁷² This belies his later wholesale dismissal of his corporate writing as mere distraction from and imposition against his fiction when he began to construct an authorial persona through a series of interviews in the 1980s. Pride in his work and the argument it contained is thus another plausible explanation, alongside the more widely assumed reasons of his resentment of Ford and his putative distaste for the use of television in classrooms, for working the material into *J R*.

His resentment of the politicking and the Kafkaesque inaccessibility of his employers at the Ford Foundation didn't stop Gaddis, as soon as May 1963, drafting and possibly sending an application for their Program for Poets and Fiction Writers to support work on *Once at Antietam*: this letter seems the basis of Gall's hopes, in *J R*, to "settle things with this Foundation where they're handing out grants to

⁷⁰ Donadio, Letter to William Gaddis, Feb 11, 1963.

⁷¹ Bermel, Letter to Candida Donadio, Oct 22 1963.

⁷² His archive contains rejection notes from *Harper's* and *The New Yorker* dating back to 1946, both for unpublished short stories contained in his files and for seemingly unpreserved non-fiction sketches with titles like "Social Life of a Single Man in New York." See Gaddis Archive: Unfinished Drafts. Box 127, Folder 450.

novelists who want to write plays."⁷³ It was his creative prose, however, that he took up again in the immediate aftermath of the project's collapse. As early as April, he gets thanked for delivery of a manuscript.⁷⁴ It's unclear what Gaddis sent:⁷⁵ it may have been material toward *Agapē* or even *Antietam*, but the more intriguing possibility is that the frustration of his failures with Ford sent him right back to work on *J R*, the novel he had described before the Fiasco as "dropped in about '57."⁷⁶

Certainly, by April of the following year he had made progress on the novel, as Donadio was asking him to "remember to send [sic] me the J.R. chapters as well as the AGAPE proposal for the NAL people."⁷⁷ "NAL" is the New American Library, who subsequently gave Gaddis a contract for *J R* and *Agapē Agape* combined, hoping that he would complete at least one of them within three years. Although this let him briefly give up non-literary work,⁷⁸ Gaddis struggled to get much work done on either project in this period, leading NAL to cancel the contract and try to recoup their advance in 1969, two years after they had hoped for some finished work. The material he put together toward the proposal, though, suggests that when he returned to the novel in the Fiasco's aftermath, he was energized by a new sense of education's narrative potential.

An undated 6-page prospectus sets out an arc for what Gaddis hoped would be "a comparatively short novel."⁷⁹ With the central relationship between JR and Edward Bast—in this version a doctoral student as well as a teacher—established, "the story is the story of these two figures maturing: the one through acquiring a moral sense, the

⁷³ Gaddis, *J R*, 417.

⁷⁴ Jacobson, Letter to William Gaddis, Apr 8 1963.

⁷⁵ An earlier letter mentions that Helen Jacobson—the manuscript-thanker—had asked him for "a drawer full of old notes on ANTIETAM to peruse in Europe for 1mo." (Gaddis, Letter to Candida Donadio, Mar 64). However, he also mentions that he doesn't feel up to compiling the Antietam material, and this implication about its incoherence makes anything he would have sent unlikely to be referred to as a single "manuscript".

⁷⁶ Gaddis, Letter to John Seelye, May 21 1962, 246.

⁷⁷ Donadio, Letter to William Gaddis, Apr 22 1964.

⁷⁸ A personal letter mainly concerning his divorce ends with "regarding books, writing—the second book seems scarcely easier than the first, harder really—god save us from the 3rd!—but I have a good publishing contract now and so no need for other work" (Gaddis, Letter to Alice, Sept 30 1965).

⁷⁹ Gaddis, "Summary Following Opening Part," 1.

other through his contact with the world."⁸⁰ The entire prospectus is framed in these educative terms, distinguishing it from his pre-Fiasco summing up of *J R* to Seelye as merely a "novel about business," and his description of it in a copyright-guarding 1956 letter to himself as "essentially a satire on business and money matters."⁸¹ The final novel of course contains no such structure of parallel successful educations, and its very fabric was differently conceived at this stage: the hyper-specific tracings of business details that build the finished novel were explicitly ruled out as fictive material: "Once J.R.'s capabilities in business have been established, his subsequent business activities may be expanded with less detail to their workings."⁸²

There are further differences at the level of plot:⁸³ in this version JR has a significant family, who figure in a projected ending notable for its *Recognitions*-style grandiosities about religious vocation: "Bast searches frantically for JR, finding, in that dismal community where we began, that he is really the son of the indigent Reverend Lear, a man driven almost over the edge of sanity by the contradictions in his Christian mission..."⁸⁴ Bast, meanwhile, has a "desolate love affair with the model Charlene (Charlie),"⁸⁵ while his aunts' "land is taken from them by the school board."⁸⁶ This last point is one of the few where the final novel's concern with school as a system and institution comes to the fore (there is no mention of instructional

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸¹ Gaddis to Seelye, May 21 1962, 246, and Gaddis to William Gaddis Aug 26th 1956, 228. The latter does talk of JR as importantly "brought up on the sets of values and the criteria of success which prevail here in our country today" and "reared in our culture," but such concerns are here secondary to the repeated use of the words "business," "economy", and "enterprise."

⁸² Gaddis, "Summary," 2.

⁸³ Some details mapped out at this stage do stay in: the girl hired to pretend to jump out of a window for saving by a congressman, the way JR comes to believe in his own commissioned biography, and the artist whose work is bought as a tax loss and so "disappear[s]" (3). This latter can be traced even further back to notes for a separate never-finished story called "Art's Place," which also anticipated *The Recognitions* insofar as "[a]ll this, then, is the fuel for the Dealer's proposal to the Painter that he forge a Goya portrait" (Gaddis, "Art's Place"). JR's proposal in the final novel that Bast marry an heiress for reasons of business convenience, meanwhile, would actually have come to pass in the NAL proposed version.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

television): at this stage, it doesn't seem like Gaddis was set on using his Ford material, even though the spectre of the Ford project's collapse seems a plausible explanation for this version's strong thematic focus on education.

His less clearly-dated working notes confirm that his Ford disappointment led Gaddis to plan Foundation-focused incidents for the novel: an "F patroness" "tie[d]" into the novel's business networks, a "Foundation family in b.g. [presumably 'background'] as repository for stored itv project,"⁸⁷ and "involved in cultural function with JR."⁸⁸ The Ford Foundation experience looms largest in the NAL version's projected ending. JR's empire, developed through "staggering gifts to charities and foundations which he has made for tax purposes," would collapse as a result of his Foundation "ties," having "given the controlling block of stock in his company to some (as yet undecided) voracious charity" who beat him at his own game.⁸⁹ These ideas did not make it to the final novel, though the Foundation's pulling out of the school TV project to focus on community broadcasting does help JR's empire (including eventually his own arts foundation) spin out of control. The array of Foundation-focused ideas Gaddis records in the years immediately after the Fiasco, though, make clear how directly it catalyzed work on the novel.

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Despite his retrospective claims about his obscurity in the post-*Recognitions* years, it was widely known throughout the period after he signed up with NAL that Gaddis was at work on a book about a child prodigy. In late 1964 the Washington Post asked him to submit something from his work in progress for a special issue on children,⁹⁰ while a 1966 letter from Czech publishers seems to assume that the novel is already in print.⁹¹ Yet it was during the NAL span that he seems to have made least progress on it: Arabel Porter had prodded him in 1965 with a hope that "you can report not only that your notes bulge out of the folders, but that also you have been writing and have something

⁸⁷ Gaddis, loose note, untitled w/"F patroness."

⁸⁸ Gaddis, loose note, untitled w/"cultural function."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰ Hills, Letter to Gaddis, Sept 17, 1964.

⁹¹ Dilia, Letter to Gaddis, Nov 7, 1966.

to show us,"⁹² but a draft letter to her in mid-1967 suggests that little progress has been made on that front: "This spring is seeing a lot of the time-, energy-, emotion-consuming nonsense of the recent era cleared up, my teaching commitment ends in a couple of weeks, and with full time again to give to the novel I hope for my own sanity as well as everyone's to see it done late in the year."⁹³ This is also as early as we find him lamenting a lack of progress in his personal letters, mentioning the need "to get long postponed things done... to get Edward Bast back on the tracks."⁹⁴ Late in 1965 Donadio mentions the publisher having "read the partial manuscript,"⁹⁵ suggesting that Gaddis had managed to send something, but for the most part his correspondence ratifies NAL's decision to cancel the contract in 1969 and seek to recoup their advance on the basis of having received no evidence of progress.⁹⁶ By the end of this period, Gaddis himself seems to have begun to despair of his literary career: on the back of a letter from a New York Times staffer asking him to take part in a "book of interviews with outstanding American writers," he writes "What Keeps me alive to these people?"⁹⁷ While work on the novel, with its initially catalyzing new focus on education, took a back seat to other life issues, Gaddis was, however, getting back into the education question in his writing-for-hire.

Indeed, his very first piece of corporate work after the Fiasco seems to have been IBM's commission, later in 1963, to assemble a brochure on their educational investment policies. His primary task here was to synthesize various internal IBM documents and previous public addresses by company bigwigs, to establish something ideologically coherent and palatable out of their disparate attitudes to the role of the humanities in education, to the relationship between educational institutions and wider social developments in "automation", and, most of all, to their planned shift from giving universities unrestricted grants to targeted funding (or, in the language *J R* so adeptly satirizes and that IBM wanted him to bowdlerize, to "investment by

⁹² Porter, Letter to Gaddis, May 28 1965.

⁹³ Gaddis, Draft Letter to Arabel Porter, unpaginated.

⁹⁴ Gaddis, Letter to Judith Thompson, [April ?] 1967.

⁹⁵ Donadio, Letter to Gaddis, Aug 16 1965.

⁹⁶ The correspondence between Donadio, Gaddis and the publishers on this contract is preserved in Gaddis Archive Box 23, Folder 156.

⁹⁷ Méras, Letter to William Gaddis, 1968.

direction").⁹⁸ Critiques of the "direction" inherent to language-promulgation are central to both Gaddis' Ford work and to the stylistic logic of *J R*. The IBM work gave him vital practical experience of how this process worked from the inside.

At Eastman-Kodak later in the decade, education was the foremost topic of Gaddis' wide-ranging work, intersecting again with matters of technology. In particular, a long-toured, ever-evolving speech for the company's future president GB Zornow on "educational futures" finally became a photo-and-text booklet of its own. Here, unlike in the IBM work, classroom use and the pedagogy of the visual are very much to the fore. The company claim to be interested less in providing "visual aids" for teachers, and more in systematically redefining "visualization in its own right, which has conditioned all of us," a topic at the heart of Gaddis' concerns in *J R*.⁹⁹ Gaddis' work here too involved adopting the vocabulary of the corporate systems he would satirize with such ventriloquistic precision in *J R*, seeing the educational process through market eyes to the point of adopting the corporate "we": "technology's actual day-to-day contribution in the classroom usually comes down to something like what we marketing people call the point-of-sale... that moment when the teacher decides or decides *not* to support the day's lesson with some visual or audiovisual aid."¹⁰⁰ It's to the Kodak work, then, that Tabbi's speculation about the corporate work's "technical training" seems most applicable. Tabbi focuses on the opportunities for ventriloquy, but the Kodak material is also particularly rife with the passages, apparent throughout Gaddis' corporate writing, that sound like unmodified cuttings from his later systems-theory-inflected nonfiction essays.

It's as important for Kodak as for Norbert Wiener, for example, that "as technology advances, systems themselves become parts of larger systems. Certainly, it's understandable to be enthusiastic about the medium we know best. But this sort of single-system enthusiasm can often defeat its own purpose."¹⁰¹ While this grounds a pitch for Kodak's ability to cooperate with the computer industry, it also reflects Gaddis' ability to speak with a kind of expertise and insight that was directly useful

⁹⁸ Steers, "Address to IBM Corporate Recruiting Conference," 3.

⁹⁹ Zornow, "Education Technology Shapes the Future... Are You Ready?" (unpaginated spread 6).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, unpaginated spread 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, unpaginated spread 8–9.

to his employers precisely because it challenged their current practice:¹⁰² certainly by this late stage of his corporate career, his writing had become more than mere ventriloquy.¹⁰³ It thus offered Tabbi's "technical training" at a more substantive and thematic level, with plausibly wider-ranging consequences for the fiction.

The paths of all Gaddis' post-*Recognitions*, pre-*J R* writings seem to have crossed in late 1967, as some fragmentary correspondence reveals that Gaddis and Donadio had been in conversations about publishing parts of Gaddis' *Agapē* material on the player piano with Keith Botsford, an academic and editor who was at the time facilitating the partnership between the Ford Foundation and the New Teacher's Center. Whether Botsford wanted the material to appear under either organization's aegis is unclear,¹⁰⁴ but Donadio was anxious to have Gaddis do something with what he'd written. Gaddis himself demurred on the basis that it would be unrepresentative of his work if taken in isolation. Botsford proposed publishing *Agapē* notes *as* notes, with himself and Gaddis then writing accompanying pieces that might represent "two versions then of the possible 'use' of a novelist's [*sic*] notes on reality."¹⁰⁵ Gaddis seems less enthusiastic than his agent about making his slow and fragmentary progress toward a final artwork the matter of public interpretation. His "severe torments about showing it in public" lead him, most interestingly for the history of *J R*, to suggest that if he does give the material to Botsford it should appear "over another name (Jack Gibbs) though that,

¹⁰² He also offered constructive dissent on more general economic and political matters, as in a loose note to Kodak supervisor Dick Reisem in which "my basic concern for the timeliness of this talk is its premise of an improving economy where my own doubts enter. As you recall this was very much an element in our interviews but my own feeling now is increasingly that by October the general confidence in continuing economic recovery... may have palled" (Gaddis, cover letter to Reisem).

¹⁰³ It was at Kodak that Gaddis wrote the only other corporate document beside the Fiasco that wasn't to be presented either anonymously or pseudonymously. For internal consumption only, "Some Observations on Problems Facing Eastman Kodak's Advertising Distribution Department" was Gaddis' identification of and proposed solution to workflow problems. Its commission and positive reception gives a sense of Gaddis' standing at the company, and shows that the kind of critique he was able to generate from his intimate familiarity with systems didn't necessarily have to be deployed against the institutions that sustained those systems.

¹⁰⁴ He writes on NTC letterhead, and was at the time the editor both of the *New York Times Magazine* and the newly founded journal *Delos*: the latter, for all that information on it is hard to find, seems a more likely venue than the former, since he mentions that Gaddis' piece could appear in "Issue 2": the NYTM had been going since 1896 (Botsford, Letter to William Gaddis, Nov 17 1967).

¹⁰⁵ Botsford, Letter to William Gaddis.

too, may get another remove (to Hyman Grynszpan) before the whole welter is laid to rest."¹⁰⁶ These, of course, are characters from *J R* (Grynszpan a fiction-within-the-fiction), and this confirms that Gibbs' struggles with his work on the history of the player piano were already part of the *J R* plot, even though they weren't mentioned in the earlier prospectus. Gaddis, then, continued to give *Agapē* thought as he focused on *J R*, but seems to have decided before the NAL contract expired that the novel should take priority over the non-fiction; moreover, he here already conceives of *Agapē* in fictive terms, notably in its having an authorial persona distinct from himself.¹⁰⁷ Its eventual published fictional form might therefore be traced to this era. Nothing seems to have come of this confluence of Ford, *J R*, teaching-institutions, and *Agapē*, but once again the barriers between the various aspects of Gaddis' writing life during this period reveal themselves to have been much more porous than he later insisted.

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Back at IBM in 1968, meanwhile, Gaddis actually got to write a treatment and script for a company-internal piece of instructional TV: a quiz based on a format Harry Reasoner had done nationwide with CBS as a "citizenship test" of how well its audi-

¹⁰⁶ Gaddis, Draft Letter to Keith Botsford, undated.

¹⁰⁷ Gaddis was unconvinced by Botsford's enthusiasm about genre-experiment that made too much of the fact/fiction relation. In response to Botsford's proposal to write about "how these seem to me notes twds the 'translation' of American reality into a novel" (Botsford, Letter to Gaddis), Gaddis replies with escalating scepticism:

the project has never presented itself to me as a novel, except —& possibly this is what it would eventually be "about" —insofar as it does play a part in a novel in progress; and would not on the one hand be an anti-novel as one seige {sic} of self-publicists has it nor, on the other, part of [insert] what [end insert] that perhaps more puerile bunch has it with their pomposities in 'new' forms of fiction as the dreary notion of the 'non-fiction' novel, &c. Now I'm afraid that an essential part of the problem is becoming evident already, which is that beginning to try to write about the project becomes a part of the project itself and takes on in its own way the pompous and inchoate atmosphere which that project should reserve for itself (Gaddis, Draft Letter to Botsford).

This passage reveals that Gaddis' ideas about the material's self-sufficiency qua "novel" must have shifted before he finally published *Agapē Agape* under his own name without the implication that he was its speaker. His emphasis on the "pompous and inchoate" aspects of what he was trying to achieve might also put in question the tendency of reviewers and critics to align Gaddis' voice with that of the eventual book's speaker, as well as to read the use of the material for Gibbs' unfinished project in *J R* as aligning Gibbs and Gaddis philosophically rather than just in terms of work-habit misery.

ence knew their America. IBM's version was for salesmen, to test how well they knew about the company and its worldwide reputation. The film would speak the questions, allow some time for answering, and then reveal each answer with a short elaboration on its significance. Gaddis' work was mainly in writing these tidbits and quips, but a draft introduction that didn't make it into the final version shows him engaging with the distinction between instructional and educational TV:

At about this time in the program we usually threaten you with some sort of entertainment –a movie you can sleep through, a movie about things and places you already know about because you know the story first hand and places and people and machines at first hand... the film we have here isn't one you can sleep through.¹⁰⁸

This anti-passive emphasis sees Gaddis applying the pedagogical claims he had made about the capacities of TV instruction in the Ford project. His education-centric work for IBM, commenced almost as soon as the Ford project had collapsed, thus comes full circle here. Even before the Ford project Gaddis had done much more extensive film-script work for the Army, and for both Kodak and IBM he had scripted short films and slideshows. But this quiz was his first finished piece of *instructional* television work. Earlier in the decade, though, he had been involved in the development of a much larger-scale project that never quite came to pass, but which gave him even greater exposure to the practicalities of visual pedagogy.

In 1965, Hillel A. Schiller, together with Gaddis' long-term friend Martin Dworkin, a professor of education at Teachers' College, started shopping around a proposal for an educational TV series that would clarify the real nature of scientific life and work, which he felt existing media had failed to convey to a citizenry increasingly reliant on the products of that work.¹⁰⁹ The project's goals are set out in a plan for the whole series (See **Figure 6**).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Gaddis, "Draft Introduction for IBM Quiz Film".

¹⁰⁹ Although Bernard Looks has documented Gaddis' relationship with Dworkin, including specifically in terms of their differing attitudes to teaching (see Looks: "The Novelist and His Mentor"), he nowhere mentions this collaboration.

¹¹⁰ Schiller, Dworkin, Gaddis, "Challenge of Science Series: Problem Areas and Research Goals".

-DRAFT-

RESEARCH PROJECT - CHALLENGE OF SCIENCE FILM SERIES		PROBLEM AREAS + RESEARCH GOALS	
PROJECT CORE - MAJOR TOOL	GENERAL PROBLEM	AREAS OF RESEARCH INTEREST / SPECIFIC DISCIPLINES	PRACTICAL PROBLEMS / GOALS
<p>READ DOWN THEN ACROSS</p> <p><u>Challenge of Science Series</u></p> <p>I - The Shape of Life PAUL A. WEISS</p> <p>II - Hand, Heart, and Hand GEORGE W. CORNER</p> <p>III - What's in Your Genes? EDWARD L. TATUM</p> <p>IV - Genetics Emits its Letters JAMES D. WATSON</p> <p>V - Yellow, Green and Pink MELVIN CALVIN</p> <p>VI - From Mite to Might JAMES VAN NIEL</p> <p>VII - Natural, Natural, Natural! CURT STERN</p> <p>VIII - The Vaccine and the Virus ALBERT SABIN</p>	<p>THE INVESTIGATION OF STRATEGIES and TECHNIQUES to explore AN ESTHETIC, VISUALLY ORIENTED APPROACH to LEARNING ABOUT SCIENCE APPROACHED TO THE TRADITIONAL ANALYTICAL VERBAL APPROACH</p>	<p>Science Education (curriculum, content)</p> <p>History of Biology</p> <p>PSYCHOLOGY (learning principles) (motivation)</p> <p>CHIEMATOGRAPHY (film principles)</p>	<p>1. To experiment with the aesthetic, visual integration of non-scientific and historical material in the teaching of science.</p> <p>2. To study the aesthetic, visual, and presentational features of scientific publications, and a selection of books & concepts.</p> <p>3. The inclusion of scientific research, visualization, and non-visual, student-oriented science.</p> <p>3a. create new measurement tools</p> <p>4. To attack problems of esthetic perception in learning.</p> <p>5. To test cinematic theories positing the essential nature of film as a presentation of specific subject matter.</p> <p>6. To test various esthetic and dynamic techniques of film making in relation to their potential to influence individual experience within an audience.</p> <p>A. To extend the form of visual and auditory presentation and to have thoughtful students</p> <p>B. To create a group of films whose intellectual themes would be evolution central in the study of biology (Films I-IV)</p> <p>C. To measure the effectiveness of films in motivating interest in and changing behavior toward science</p> <p>D. To show the importance of esthetic factors in holding and presenting subject matter.</p> <p>E. To create multi-media approaches to deal with individual differences in learning</p> <p>F. To make the development of the complete film thinking - not to imitate nature, but to explain it - and to stimulate the individual's use of the cinema as a replacement among the people of the world. (Krauss)</p>

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Figure 6: 'Problem Areas and Research Goals' for the Challenge of Science Project.

Gaddis, on board as a script writer, had addressed many of the central issues in his work for Ford. Those that came under the heading of “practical problems,” like testing “various aesthetic and dynamic techniques of film making in relation to their capabilities to influence individual difference within an audience,”¹¹¹ he had researched for Ford chapters he never got to write, with titles like “Specialized Uses of Television Instruction” and “The Impact of New Educational Technology.”¹¹² The Schiller project’s broader goals—such as “to measure the effectiveness of films in motivating interest in and changing behaviour towards science”¹¹³—meanwhile involved a reflexive approach by which they could use responses to the films they were making to test hypotheses about what kind of films best fulfilled their pedagogical intent.¹¹⁴

From Schiller’s point of view in particular, the project was valuable as much for the kind of data it might produce about the effectiveness of instructional television—particularly on his pet issue of the necessity of an aesthetic dimension to teaching—as for those effects themselves. His sights were set on an intervention “between curriculum revision and teaching methodology reform,”¹¹⁵ both of which were issues Gaddis had foregrounded in his Ford work as considerations to weigh in any educational use of technology. Schiller appealed to Gaddis’s involvement by clarifying that they were in the process of assembling official documents along these lines: Dworkin “is in the process of writing a letter to me which spells out Teachers’ College interest in the potential research that can attend the creation and testing of these films.”¹¹⁶ This appeal to research significance suggests that Gaddis’s involvement was motivated by interest as well as money: certainly if he believed that instructional television was a symptom of everything wrong with American culture, then the Schiller project reveals that he was willing to be even

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Gaddis, “Outline,” unpaginated.

¹¹³ Schiller, Dworkin and Gaddis, “Challenge”.

¹¹⁴ Gaddis’ IBM quiz film had required similar thinking: a note of unclear authorship in his notes suggests that writers treat the quiz as “in itself an opportunity at a survey of information and attitudes among a vital segment of the Company” (Unknown, “Preliminary Thoughts” 2).

¹¹⁵ Schiller, Letter to Dworkin, Aug 3 1965.

¹¹⁶ Schiller, Letter to William Gaddis, Oct 7 1965.

more directly complicit in that culture's abuses than we have previously understood. Unfortunately, Gaddis doesn't preserve any of his own relevant correspondence, but he was on board enough to have his name—and his reputation as a novelist—to the fore in Schiller's letters soliciting funds.

The project had funds from Rockefeller University, but most of the correspondence in Gaddis' archive relates to the need to secure funding from larger bodies like the National Science Foundation. The last relevant document suggests that Gaddis's work was unpaid: Schiller clarifies to potential funders that

It is easy to say, "Show us a script." However, this is precisely where help is needed! William Gaddis, for example, the novelist and script writer who I wish to engage to work with us, by the rules of his guild is not permitted to write "on speculation." He must and should be paid for any time required for specific consultation with scientists, educators, and for the actual drafting of first a treatment and then the ultimate script.¹¹⁷

This consultation was precisely Gaddis' work for the one test-run piece of filming that seems to have gone ahead while he was still involved: an interview with Paul Weiss, a biologist at the University of Texas who was to be the star of the first episode on "The Shape of Life." Gaddis wrote the questions, primarily about what Weiss recalled of his own education, both institutional—"Were any unusual methods used by your teachers to train your powers of observation?"—and broader: "Can you recall any early creative expression that you manifested as a child or youth which your humanistic background stimulated and nurtured? Was this important in your turn toward science?"¹¹⁸ Gaddis never scripted a whole structured episode based on this material, but that he did this legwork establishes that his ongoing thinking about practical pedagogy and the process of learning involved pro bono work for friends as well as paid work for corporations.

¹¹⁷ Schiller, Letter to Richard Paulson, Jan 24 1966.

¹¹⁸ Gaddis, "Questionnaire for Paul Weiss," unpaginated.

The research-centric motives behind that investment align with some of the attitudes Gaddis encodes in *J R*. Filed along with his minimal notes toward the script-work is an offprint of Dworkin's article "Toward an Image Curriculum: Some Questions and Cautions." On top of the concern with practical pedagogy there is caution that "[t]here is a dangerous element of anti-intellectualism in the new 'visualism' as ideology of a new group seeking professional power and status."¹¹⁹ This acknowledgement of pedagogical optimism's vulnerability to wider systemic abuses and appropriations prefigures the narrative of systemic takeover that *J R* makes of the Ford material. Yet that both Dworkin and Gaddis had been content to work with Schiller suggests that neither of them were ready to give up on the prospect that instructional television could be done well, and that research-driven thinking was the best way to ensure, in Dworkin's words, "that visual literacy not become one more armament of propaganda... as the idea of 'visual literacy' is the more closely involved in the operations of an industrial-commercial-educational complex having immense powers over much of our lives."¹²⁰ Rather than the yawning gulf of years that those critics who have acknowledged the Ford work's relation to *J R* have presumed between the two, then, the interim period was saturated by work on a variety of projects in a variety of genres that gave Gaddis hands-on experience with both corporate education-funding and the creation of practical pedagogical tools. As his work with Dworkin shows, it also involved further engagement with theoretical research that covered much of the novel's turf.

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1969 saw the shift from a worklife dominated by writing-for-hire to a full-time commitment to *J R*.¹²¹ This was the year that NAL finally cancelled Gaddis' contract, freeing him to auction off the sporadic work he had done on the novel, work he was thus urgently prompted to collate. It was also the year that the first piece of the novel—the

¹¹⁹ Dworkin, "Toward an Image Curriculum: Some Questions and Cautions," 130.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹²¹ Some of Gaddis' energy was still devoted to chasing up payment from earlier non-literary work, in particular a months-long legal wrangle with Audio Adventures, for whom he had written scripts for guided tours of Greenwich Village and edited someone else's "unusable" "Downtown New York" guide (Gaddis, Letter to Messrs Murphy, Stall, and West, June 28th 1969).

school-centric segment titled "J.R. or The Boy Inside"—was accepted for publication. This is the only section of *J R* we can be sure was produced and polished under the NAL contract period: that it examined settings in which Gaddis had continued to work in his corporate writing suggests that during the period 1963–69 his corporate work's concerns constrained the novel's. Most crucially, with these new conditions already established, he got a Rockefeller Foundation grant "for the purpose of freeing me to work toward the completion of a work of fiction" which, a year later, he found to have "accomplished its purpose" so well that he asked for a six month extension in which he thought he could finish what he still anticipated being a shorter novel.¹²² All this made 1969 the year when he could finally put an end to his corporate career, breaking with another IBM film project over interference with his script, and turning down work from Kodak.

The Rockefeller application documents are now housed in the same place as the Ford Foundation material: they reveal both another stage in *J R*'s evolution, and how Gaddis was seen by the literary field at this time: as distinctively talented, but more importantly at risk of being cast out from literature. One of his own listed references discussed Gaddis' 1960s: "he went into a funk and depression from which it seems to me he has never recovered," to the extent that "[t]here is a good chance he will never write another book."¹²³ Another—the author David Madden, who was editing *Rediscoveries*, in which authors would make the case for forgotten books, to which he himself contributed a chapter on *The Recognitions*—diagnosed the problem: "[p]erhaps he has a job that prevents him from immersing himself in the new work."¹²⁴ Both recommenders suggested that help from a foundation like Rockefeller (or Ford) was the only way to get another book out of this uniquely promising middle-aged

¹²² Gaddis, Letter to William L. Bradley, July 23 1970. This letter also clarifies that as of July 1970, progress on *J R* amounted to "300-odd pages in finished draft", 60 of which Gaddis specifies were to become "The Boy Inside." This means he wrote 700 more between then and his submission of the first full manuscript to his publishers in late 1974. The bulk of the novel, then, was written after his corporate writing career.

¹²³ J R Humphries, letter to Gerald Freund, May 24, 1969, unpaginated.

¹²⁴ David Madden, letter to Gerald Freund, Mar 6, 1969, unpaginated. See David Madden, ed. *Rediscoveries*. Crown Publishers, 1971.

author. Rockefeller duly obliged, after an interview in which it became apparent that, however funky and depressed, “Mr Gaddis is an urbane gentleman.”

Gaddis' own contributions to his application, meanwhile, reveal that he agreed with his recommenders' worries: “the plentiful free-lance work has become central to supporting obligations in which ‘J.R.’, in terms of the continuum of time and involvement it demands if it is worth doing at all, grows increasingly remote.”¹²⁵ Gaddis here discusses *JR* in the terms of what's “worth doing” that are thematically important to the Gibbs thread of the novel itself. He also talks about having “gone from a rough to a second draft,” and his submission reveals intermediary stages in the novel's evolution. His letter, however briefly, contains his first new articulation of the novel's concerns since the summary he had sent to NAL; more interestingly, in the chapters he attached we can identify an intermediary style between the straightforward psychological realism of the earliest drafts, and the final novel's total removal of represented thought (I more thoroughly examine the corporate work's contribution to *JR*'s eventual language and style in one of the articles published alongside the current history).¹²⁶

On Gaddis' account, the relationship between Bast and JR is now fundamentally about finding time for work: it “concerns a young composer's efforts to do what he considers his work remote from the minute-to-minute reality of his actual life, which is gradually shaped by a boy for whom there is no reality but that of the tangible minute-to-minute world.”¹²⁷ This is notable for its failure to mention Business, as well as for having pared away almost all of the NAL proposal's *Recognitions*-hangover material about religion, doomed love, and the like. All of these are subordinated to the worry about finding time for “remote” artistic work: a clear indication that Gaddis' “funk” of the mid-to-late-60s influenced his novel's ideas and form, even as he took the professional work that contributed to that funk seriously on its own terms.

¹²⁵ Gaddis, letter to Rockefeller Foundation, 16 May 1969, unpaginated.

¹²⁶ See “Friction Problems: William Gaddis' Corporate Writing and the Stylistic Origins of *JR*” – <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.gaddis.2>.

¹²⁷ Gaddis, letter to Rockefeller Foundation, 16 May 1969, unpaginated.

When it comes to form, “[i]f there is a method of style to the book, it is in the effort to create structure in the appearance of chaos.”¹²⁸ While among what he submitted was the section that would become “The Boy Inside,” which has the most residual psychological technique of all the final novel’s passages (Bast for example being “the last to realize” something),¹²⁹ the submission also includes sections and passages that did not make it into the final novel and in which its characteristic style is not fully refined:

–I think I see him, she said to Gibbs. –If you can just get the children in here I’ll be right back... and he watched her gone looking suddenly small between two looming floral prints, two sets of elbows elbowing, of eyes eyeing hungry through vacant panes hung to bows like ornate toothbrush handles [...] ¹³⁰

This has the basic rhythm of the final novel’s narratorial passages, but with a preponderance of speech and thought markers: for example the speech tag “X said to Y,” which occurs more in the Rockefeller excerpt than in the whole final novel, and the way that the focalizer of “looking [X]” is made explicit by “he watched her.” These are the kind of orienting tags that the final novel pares away in its pursuit of a basic formal sense of “chaos.” By 1969, then, Gaddis had developed his novel’s formal terms, but only with the Rockefeller grant would he refine them, and have the time to apply them across the whole narrative.

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As the new decade began, his Kodak supervisor Dick Reisem continued to send him samples of the work that other freelancers were doing, ending one such letter with a poker-faced “How is the Great American Novel coming along?”¹³¹ Slightly more sincere wishes come from his old publisher Arabel Porter in the same year—“I’m so glad JR is going well again. I look forward to reading it one day”¹³²—and though her open-ended timeline proved more accurate than Gaddis’ hope to finish it within six months, Rockefeller did extend his grant and he never had another significant break from work

¹²⁸ Ibid., unpaginated.

¹²⁹ Gaddis, *J R*, 33.

¹³⁰ Gaddis, “Untitled *J R* draft submission,” 155.

¹³¹ Reisem, Letter to William Gaddis, May 27 1970.

¹³² Porter, Letter to William Gaddis, April 10 1970.

on the novel. He continued to sporadically accept work from Kodak, but did so now at his leisure: indeed, as he writes of one such assignment, "Sometimes a piece of routine work like that with a deadline is a good thing (also they pay me)."¹³³ By this point the occasional corporate work was no disruption of Gaddis' work-routine on *JR*, but a welcome opportunity for structure. The concerns and materials of the corporate-writing era were now fodder for the novel without being a competing commitment.

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Gaddis' corporate archive, then, no longer allows us to accept his retrospective framing of that career as an entirely separate, merely distracting adjunct to his fiction. It generated writing that he wished to publicly circulate as Novelist William Gaddis', allowed him to develop expertise on select topics, offered opportunities for research-oriented work that he sometimes accepted with only the hope of future pay, and led him to cultivate a reputation-guarding professional pride that both drew on and burnished his other reputation as a novelist.

The Ford project provides more direct source material for *JR* than any other document in Gaddis' corporate career, but it wasn't the full extent of the relevant work he did. If it had a foundational influence on the ideas and rhetorical structure of the novel, that is not to say that it is the only piece of corporate writing that did so: just that it is the only one whose influence consisted in the direct importing of material. That he accumulated so much more direct experience over the subsequent years without so directly repurposing it means that we can't let Ford material's presence in the novel stand in for an understanding of how Gaddis' whole corporate career contributed to his subsequent fiction. This paper's wider history, I hope, might clear the ground for investigations into the less source-material-centric dimensions of that relation. In this history's two more analytical and interpretive companion articles, I make a start on such investigation by examining the corporate work's role in the evolution and implication of *JR*'s distinctive form,¹³⁴ and of its rhetoric about education and culture.¹³⁵

¹³³ Gaddis, Letter to Matthew Gaddis, Sept 17 1970.

¹³⁴ See "Friction Problems: William Gaddis' Corporate Writing and the Stylistic Origins of *JR*" – <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.gaddis.2>.

¹³⁵ See "William Gaddis' 'Ford Foundation Fiasco' and *JR*'s Elision of the Teacher's-Eye View" – <https://doi.org/10.16995/orbit.gaddis.3>.

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