

Philanthropy, Responsibility and Influence: Business Engagement with Society in the 1950s¹

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Abstract

This paper argues that the strategic use of philanthropy and the accumulation of social and cultural capital by key actors shaped both corporate practices and international relations during the 1950s. The article seeks to answer how philanthropic strategies influenced US foreign policy and what roles individual actors played in blurring the lines among business, philanthropy, and politics. The paper also describes and analyzes post-war business engagement with society and the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility in the 1950s. Philanthropy's role as a strategic practice is discussed through examples of US relations with India, Japan and Italy. The article will investigate a critical decade (1950s) where companies, philanthropic leaders and governments exerted great influence on foreign policy and international relations and, as Eleanor Brilliant describes a time when the borders separating philanthropic, third sector activities and political activities were blurred. The article will also highlight the importance of social and cultural capital as it was accumulated and leveraged by members of the Rockefeller family as well as by Adriano Olivetti as he led his company's growing business presence in the US. The paper will also investigate the roles of a select group of lesser-known individuals who worked behind the scenes to advance the agendas of corporate, philanthropic and government leaders. The work of these individuals illustrates the power of cultural, social, and symbolic capital; for example, their educational achievements (cultural capital), networks (social capital), and reputations (symbolic capital) enabled them to gain power and influence.

Keywords: Philanthropy, CSR, Modernism, Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Mid-century

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1. Introduction

The late 1940s and 1950s marked a time when Western society was still coming to grips with globalization, the post-war economy and Cold War tensions. Companies were increasingly more visible in their efforts to engage with society and contribute to the greater good. Since the US private sector had proven its patriotism in multiple ways in the preceding decade, business leaders were eager to sustain and enhance their citizenship efforts. The increasing practice of cultural diplomacy offered new avenues of engagement for business and philanthropy. Concurrently, many companies were also embracing European Modernism with adventurous designs for office buildings and, in some cases, initiating formal programs to support the arts and humanities.

The early 1950s also witnessed the expansion of new state laws (in the United States) that allowed corporations to be more philanthropically engaged with efforts to improve the common good. In an often-cited 1953 case, *A. P. Smith vs. Barlow*, it was found that charitable contributions by corporations do not have to demonstrate a direct benefit to companies (Washington Law Review 1954). In other words, companies were free to support broader community efforts such as education, social services and the arts. As Baumol and Bowen pointed out, the establishment of company foundations for charitable giving grew dramatically; in 1939 there were 20 and in 1962, there were more than 1,500. While tax laws surely were a factor, companies were also taking on more responsibility for community needs in response to stakeholder expectations (Baumol & Bowen 1966).

This paper examines business engagement with society and the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility in the 1950s. This decade is worthy of renewed attention due to the pivotal changes in the relationship of business to society. Following decades of evolving business practices and shifting societal expectations, the 1950s witnessed unprecedented collaboration between corporations, government, and cultural institutions. Included in this study are discussions of the role of philanthropy as a mechanism for companies and foundations to demonstrate their citizenship in the context of societal expectations.

The following essay argues that the 1950s marked a decisive turning point in corporate responsibility practice, fundamentally reshaping how businesses engaged with society in four key areas: 1) corporations came to be seen as leaders in supporting critical social issues; 2) corporate leaders gained the trust and the power to convene important dialogues around societal issues; 3) corporations and foundations collaborated with government to advance local, state, national and global agendas; 4) increasingly in the 1950s, art, culture, design and the humanities were seen as tools of economic development and diplomacy by businesses, foundations and government. Drawing on historical records, philanthropic studies, and recent literature on modernist design, this paper explores how corporate responsibility evolved during this transformative decade

In examining the literature on corporate responsibility at mid-century, Howard Bowen and Patrick Murphy are often cited as early thinkers in defining the role of business in society. Bowen's *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, published in 1953, is probably the most cited source and was thankfully republished in 2013 making it more accessible to new

generations of scholars (Bowen 1953). The publication of Peter F. Drucker's *The Practice of Management* in 1954 represented a new and formal view of management theory and practice and helped to raise the profile of the corporate executive and their role within and outside of the company. Patrick Murphy, writing in 1978, characterized the time period leading up to the 1950s as "the 'philanthropic' era in which companies donated to charities more than anything else." Subsequently, in Murphy's view, "1953–67 was classified as the 'awareness' era, in which there became more recognition of the overall responsibility of business and its involvement in community affairs" (Murphy 1978, pp. 20-21). While these classifications are helpful, various industries practiced more or less sophisticated types of social responsibility depending on the leadership style of the CEO and the company's willingness to move away both from traditional philanthropy as well as shareholder primacy.

The 1950s also witnessed a deeper look and increasing critique of the corporation in film and popular literature. William Whyte published *The Organization Man* in 1956 and painted a picture of a dehumanizing corporate culture where conformity was seen as a weakness and an actual threat to American democracy. The portrayal of the modern company in novels like *Executive Suite* (Hawley 1952) and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (Wilson 1955), signaled a more public curiosity of the company in society. Hawley's *Executive Suite* traced the evolution of a family-owned furniture company in southeastern Pennsylvania. The book was made into a popular and award-winning film in 1955. While the book provided a broad context of American manufacturing at mid-century, the movie dramatized the conflicts inherent in family-owned business as well as the tensions of shareholder capitalism. The film reached a dramatic climax in a boardroom battle over profit versus responsibility to multiple stakeholders. Implicit in this conflict was the focus on short-term versus long-term view of the business and the tensions around shareholder primacy. These works explore the tensions that emerged in an era of emerging stakeholder capitalism where managers and senior leaders faced trade-offs in meeting the expectations of the consumer, the employee, the community and the stockholder.

2. Cultural Diplomacy

Following the large-scale roll out of the Marshall Plan in 1947, American foreign policy continued to seek ways to influence the rebuilding of Europe and thwart the threat of communism including more collaboration with companies and foundations. The Point IV Program, announced by Harry Truman at his inaugural address in January of 1949, deserves more attention since it influenced the practice of international development and the private sector's involvement with global development. Its goals were simple, "Creating markets for the United States by reducing poverty and increasing production in developing countries...Diminishing the threat of communism by helping countries prosper under capitalism." (USAID ND) In simple terms, "Expecting altruism to result in friendship and gratitude, American philanthropic generosity was meant to demonstrate the willingness of the United States to share its wealth with its needy neighbors" (Amuzegar 1958, p. 531).

According to Stephen Macekura, "As the first formal government program explicitly designed to ameliorate social, economic, and political conditions in any 'underdeveloped' nation, Point IV brought international development policy into the U.S. foreign policy

apparatus to an unprecedented extent” (Macekura 2013, p. 130). Point IV was built on a similar premise as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in its global aspirations to lift the rural poor out of poverty. A key element of Truman’s proposal was the involvement of the private sector in international development efforts. It is safe to say that this approach to development not only influenced the creation of USAID in 1961 but also fueled the nascent Corporate Social Responsibility movement. Adding to the complexity of this emerging international development paradigm, the participation of US foundations such as Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller was significant. Kumar and Brooks have described the workings of these foundations serving as bridges, platforms and satellite (Kumar & Brooks 2021).

This time period was also important to the promotion of American modern art through cultural diplomacy in what Greg Barnhisel has labeled “Cold War Modernism” (Barnhisel 2015). As Edward Berman and others have argued, the boundaries between big business, government and large foundations were blurred as the US shaped its post-war foreign policy (Berman 1983). This blurring was most notable in the small circle of (mostly male) elite leaders who were advancing US foreign policy through capitalism, philanthropy and government. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, American cultural diplomacy increasingly included efforts to incorporate the visual arts, design and architecture into strategic programming. The early efforts, however, are mostly attributable to the Rockefeller family. The Rockefeller family epitomizes the potential of one family to exert a great deal of global influence due to their social and cultural capital. While the inclusion of modern art into diplomatic relations was seemingly unprecedented, it is no surprise that Nelson Rockefeller, no stranger to culture nor politics, was integral to the US Government’s efforts to integrate art into diplomacy. Institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the related Rockefeller family supported organizations were involved in a number of international development efforts.

Nelson Rockefeller was appointed by President Roosevelt to lead the US Government’s Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) in 1939. Rockefeller had a deep interest in Latin America and often used his personal philanthropy to fund cultural programming (Arndt 2005). Through his engagement with MoMA, the Museum was, “strategically focusing on the development of art infrastructures in Latin America: if modernism was to be the banner under which America would deploy its international cultural policy in Brazil, it was necessary, to begin with, to induce the appearance of modern art museums similar to, and guided by, the MoMA” (Söderlund 2019, p. 2). Freedom of expression, as evidenced in abstract art, connoted a free and democratic society.

Based on the success of his business success in developing the Avila Hotel (1942) in Venezuela with the help of Wallace K. Harrison, Rockefeller was also engaged in the growing embassy programs and government building abroad and was involved in the selection of Harrison & Abramovitz to design embassies in Rio de Janeiro (1948) and Havana (1950) as well as the United Nations Secretariat Building (1947-1952) in New York City. Modernist architecture and design became emblematic of a progressive image that the US was promoting and exporting globally (Loeffler 2011). Corporate modernism as evidenced in celebrated buildings like the Lever House and Seagram Building in NYC as well as the PSFS Building in Philadelphia communicated power and prestige while reflecting managerial efficiency through the use of glass and steel and simple geometry.

As Grace Ong Yang (2020) argued, modernism afforded corporations the opportunity to adopt elements of design as elements of corporate branding. As Ron Robin noted, “...the embassies were identical in style to the headquarters of monolithic American conglomerates that were simultaneously arising throughout the world. Unconsciously or otherwise, the striking similarities between the embassy designs and the architecture of corporations conveyed to beholders that the United States envisioned a global economic arena of unrestricted commerce and harbored a deep conviction in the intrinsic ties between free trade and free government” (Robin 1992, p. 145). In the 1950s, branding was a relatively new practice especially in the areas of consumer motivation. Influential publications such as the Harvard Business Review explored this emerging dynamic in a number of articles in the 1950s (Newman 1955).

3. Museums and Cultural Capital

In 1951, after John D. Rockefeller III and his wife Blanchette visited Japan as Cultural Consultants to the Peace Settlement Mission, a plan was put in place to create a series of cross-cultural exchanges. The Rockefellers were directly involved with three exhibitions hosted by The MoMA. In a clear demonstration of social and cultural capital, MOMA was again called upon to act as a cultural diplomat at the behest of the Rockefeller family and the United States Government. The Japan Society in New York had been created in 1907 to foster understanding between the US and Japan but ceased operations during the war years and when operations resumed in 1952, Rockefeller served as President. Rockefeller’s efforts went well beyond exporting American culture to Japan. As Kida explains, “It is thus evident that America was both attempting to foster a feeling of amity towards Japan in its own population, through a process of cultural exchange that introduced them to aspects of Japan’s culture such as crafts and architecture, and also trying to foster pro-American sentiment in the Japanese population, drawing it into the liberal democratic camp” (Kida 2012, p. 393).

The MoMA organized a 1955 exhibition titled Textile and Ornamental Arts of India organized by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr and designed by Alexander Girard. Charles and Ray Eames produced a short film for the exhibition (Mathur 2011). In 1958, Charles and Ray Eames visited India for three months at the invitation of the Government and with the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation to study design efforts and to make recommendations for a formal design training program (Eames, 1958). Subsequently, the Ford Foundation grants helped the Ministry of Industry to establish the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad. “The Institute was founded to offer training, research and services in the field of design so that Indian manufacturers could compete more effectively in world markets” (Staples 1992, p. 51). These efforts, not surprisingly, aligned with US foreign policy in strengthening India’s economic and cultural strength.

Building on their legacy of promoting global design, The MoMA collaborated with The Ford Foundation and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in organizing a major exhibition, Design Today in America and Europe, for travel to India in 1959. Modeled on the Good Design series, the exhibition included furniture, dining ware and other domestic objects that modeled the MoMA’s standard of good modern design at affordable prices. Beyond the political overtones of cultural diplomacy, the exhibition hosts, the National Small Industries

Corporation, had aspirations of inspiring good design among India's manufacturers (Kari 2010). The exhibition of over 300 objects toured Armristat and New Delhi and was seen by more than 190,000 visitors (Franc 1994). By highlighting modernism through the validation of the MoMA and through the influence and philanthropy of the Rockefeller family, business was able to promote capitalism, democracy and good design in active partnership with the government.

Italy also became a focus for post-war diplomacy and cultural production was singled out for further support both as tool for building international understanding but also to help support a market in the US for Italian art and design. Like efforts in India and Japan, traditional arts and design were featured in a major exhibition supported by the Marshall Plan. Italy at Work, organized by the leaders from the Art Institute of Chicago and the Brooklyn Museum and opening in 1951, featured crafts and design that reflected the uniquely Italian traditions of ceramics, glass, textiles, and furniture. A small section devoted to industrial design included Olivetti and Fiat. The catalog presented artists and designers that were exemplars of historic traditions of craft and decorative arts, except for Gio Ponti and the producers of industrial arts (Rogers, 1950). Beyond building closer ties and goodwill with Italy and raising awareness of distinct cultural traditions and innovations, the exhibition was also intended to expand the market for Italian products in the US. These efforts were intended to foster pro-American sentiment and align consumption with democracy and, as Antje Gamble (2024) also suggests, the US was also using Italy to validate its commitment to culture.

4. Olivetti's Social and Cultural Capital

In 1933, 32-year-old Adriano Olivetti took over as leader of a typewriter factory founded by his father in the town of Ivrea, Italy. Adriano elevated Olivetti, a small family business and early manufacturer of typewriters, to the world stage over a period of 30 years until his death in 1960. Under Adriano, the Olivetti company became a global experiment in humanizing an industrial city (and region) by means of art, architecture and design. His thinking was progressive for an industrialist in the early twentieth century, especially in his focus on taking care of his employees as well as the local community. As one scholar summed it up, "...he succeeded in creating an 'Olivetti-system' through the creation of favourable attitudes and consensus for the firm, improving the quality of the life of his fellow citizens, developing shared value systems; generating a strong sense of belonging to his firm, fostering the motivation of the individual and constructing a strong brand with a very positive image" (Arrigo 2003, p. 127). For Adriano, cultural and social responsibility meant well-designed facilities, good housing and daycare and an extraordinary focus on progressive design.

During World War II, Olivetti was exiled in Switzerland where he "came into contact with key leaders in the US Government including CIA Director Allen Dulles, Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, and Henry Kissinger" (Barbiellini & Goldstein 2012, p. 7). According to Barbiellini and Goldstein (2012), Adriano met David Lilienthal who led the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) work under FDR. In his own writing on his experience at TVA, Lilienthal asserted "that when the use of technology has a moral purpose and when its methods are thoroughly democratic, far from forcing the surrender of individual freedom and the things of the spirit to the machine, the machine can be made to promote those very ends" (Drumright 2002, p.

495). The Company's post-war influence extended well beyond Italy as evidenced by important building commissions in most major markets.

Lillienthal's focus on humanity coexisting with industrialism would have surely resonated with Adriano and his model of the interdependence of community, region and factory. Lillienthal's thinking on democracy and technology and the power of human development may have influenced Adriano's own thinking on the regional development in the Canavese district surrounding Ivrea. David Lillienthal espoused the interdependence of human life and natural resources as well as local participation in governance and called for a balance of centralized and decentralized governance. His book, *TVA—Democracy on the March* was published in 1944 and was widely read especially in post-war Europe where the TVA approach was seen as an attractive model to promote democracy and thwart communism (Drumright 2002).

Olivetti's influence in the United States became very tangible in 1950 when the company opened an office at 580 Fifth Avenue and later a research facility in New Canaan, Connecticut in 1952. The Company's main competitor in the typewriter and calculator markets was Remington Rand. Olivetti "competed on quality and innovation rather than price" and its products were differentiated by "design excellence" (Barbiellini & Goldstein 2012, p. 264). In 1952, the exhibition, *Olivetti: Design in Industry*, opened at the Museum of Modern Art. According to Jim Carter, "Olivetti was promoted as the paragon of modern design, the pioneer and flag-bearer of a coordinated corporate image that American industry, in its role as cultural producer, was fervently encouraged to follow" (Carter 2018, p. 103). What the public did not know, however, was that Olivetti funded the exhibition and controlled the design and content. Instead of a catalog, the exhibition was memorialized by a member's bulletin (1952), a 24-page publication replete with images of Olivetti buildings and products. The publication, designed by Leo Lionni, is printed in black and white with the exception of the cover where a large mustard-colored and iconic "O" dominates the page.

The MoMA example points to a shrewd use of a major art institution to validate a company eager to burnish its identity as a design leader. Olivetti made the calculated choice to enter the US market where they felt they could compete in an era shaped by politics, technology and an evolving international trade climate. There were, however, intangibles that the company leadership leveraged to their advantage. According to Adriana Castagnoli, "Olivetti's expansion also rested on Camillo's and Adriano's social and entrepreneurial vision, hence on advantages deriving from institutional assets such as the company's code of ethics and social responsibility (towards the environment, design, training, and work)" (Castagnoli 2014, p. 1303). The Olivetti example also differs in that their products were directly marketed to individual consumers as well as corporate clients at a time when they were building their presence in the American market.

Equally interesting is the 1954 opening of an Olivetti retail space in the same 580 Fifth Avenue building and designed by prominent Milanese architects, Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Rogers. The space included use of a variety of materials including elegant Italian marble and organic brass pedestals that were used to display the office products. The entire space was dominated by a 75-foot, sand-cast relief sculpture by Constantine Nivola. Now lost, the space

is described as “one of the most daring and powerfully imagined designs in postwar New York” (Sherer 2012, p. 260). Also in, 1954 MoMA organized a new exhibition, *The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design*, and featured a section devoted to Olivetti. (Carter, 2020) It appears as though Olivetti leadership was consciously exercising influence and power to establish and fortify their brand in the United States through very deliberate public relations, marketing and branding. In 1959, Olivetti began the process of acquiring US-based competitor Underwood. This acquisition is notable in this era in that it was rare for a foreign company to acquire a US company. In fact, at the time, it was the largest ever foreign takeover of a US company.

The intangibles of design leadership and cultural responsibility are clearly part of the differentiation the company brought to markets outside of Europe. The focus on environmental, social and design put Olivetti in a class of its own in terms of social and cultural responsibility. It would be decades before the business community adopted this progressive view of the role of business in society. Olivetti prided itself on leadership in what they termed “integrated design” and its unique grounding in Italy. By integrated design, Olivetti saw product design, corporate image and the corporate workplace as falling under a “single high standard of taste.” The 1952 MoMA publication reveals more detail on the elements of design in regard to advertising and promotional material; four characteristics are described, “(1) a sober use of language; (2) imaginative pictorial symbols; (3) presentation unified by one esthetic concept; (4) emphasis on the company’s high standard of design” (Bulletin, 1952). Hardly a playbook for design, these four characteristics do not really reveal any secrets about the Olivetti approach to design nor the Italian roots of their aesthetic. Both phrases, “high standard of taste’ and “high standard of design” are conceptually ambiguous.

This approach to integrated design became one of the defining features of this global brand. Olivetti was clearly ahead of the US where companies were just discovering the strategic role of design as part of brand identity. The involvement of renowned figures like Paul Rand and Eliot Noyes at IBM illustrates the growing seriousness with which business leaders approached corporate branding and image. Their influence extended well beyond mere product design, signaling a new era where the visual identity and public perception of a company became central to its strategy and reputation. Noyes, for example, led to the development of a comprehensive design guide for the company as well as playing a role in product design and the design of IBM building throughout the world (Harwood 2011). Senior leaders at IBM were well aware of the Olivetti approach especially since the company’s NY retail presence (discussed above) generated a great amount of critical attention including a glowing review by Ada Louise Huxtable (1954).

The abstract quality of all Olivetti design was known at the “Olivetti Touch” or the “Olivetti Idiom” as described by Toschi (2018). Olivetti’s focus on the abstract notion of its own identity rooted in Italy was commensurate with Italy’s efforts to promote “the highly marketable idea of a ‘national creative essence’ which, together with the artisanry which enabled the Italian designer to readily adapt his production to consumer tastes and industrial innovations, allowed the designer to compete in the rigorous international marketplace” (Orto 1995, p. 5). At Olivetti, “Design promoted not just technical values, but cultural, intellectual and artistic values as well. Its aesthetic style was also progressive: it was modern and rational, apparently

against the decorative aesthetics prevalent at that time, much in the manner of Behrens in AEG..." (Järvinen & Koskinen 2001, p. 28).

As Mauro Sciarelli and Mario Tani (2015) argued, Adriano Olivetti was practicing a form of stakeholder capitalism before the term existed. Olivetti was keenly aware that the company's identity was an intangible asset that required careful curation while also leaving room for experimentation and innovation. Olivetti went a step further in commissioning cutting-edge architects to design its advertising, factories and employee housing as well as social services. As one architectural publication stated, Adriano "consolidated the idea of a close-knit community founded on the awareness of the inalienability of the spiritual values of man's existence, capable of turning the challenges involved in the rise of industrial civilization and the endless opportunities of technological progress in man's favor" (Domus 2012). Olivetti also pioneered management practices which have become commonplace in the private sector. For example, an emphasis on integrated design and rigor in defining corporate purpose and brand promise were actively pursued by Adriano and his successors and accordingly structured its design practice much the same way design is integrated into major MNCs today many decades later.

It appears that Adriano was influenced by American modernism and planning and through the publication and translations of Lewis Mumford's **The Culture of Cities** in 1954 and **Italy Builds** by G.E. Kidder Smith in 1955. Kidder Smith's book is a curious attempt to contextualize post-war Italian architecture within unique Italian traditions. The introduction by Ernesto Nathan Rogers includes a brief passage explaining architecture's co-existence with fascism and the resistance movement while underscoring the positive role being played by architects in post-war Italy. Smith's book featured four Olivetti projects: Figini and Pollini's Day Nursery, Worker Housing and Olivetti factory and Nizzoli and Fiochi's Workers Housing; Leo Lionni designed the jacket while Olivetti executive Giorgio Soavi is acknowledged for his help with the Italian edition (Kidder Smith 1955).

A lesser-known element of Olivetti management philosophy was recently investigated by scholar, Caterina Toschi (Toschi, 2018). In order to sustain the Olivetti idiom, senior leaders sought a means to introduce new management recruits to Olivetti culture. A sales training facility, combining technical training and humanistic thought, was created in Florence in 1954 to immerse early in career executives in the identity of Olivetti. The curriculum went far beyond an introduction to the Olivetti business and exposed aspiring executives to the "Olivetti Touch" and the role of design with the company culture. Although US companies like IBM, GE and AT&T developed in-house management training programs in the 1950s, most companies relied on university-based training courses.

5. Corning Glass-Corporate Responsibility and the Power of Convening

Corning Glass, among a handful of other leading pro-social companies, embraced its role as a responsible company at the local and national level. As this industrial company evolved, its relationship with multiple stakeholders became a critical factor in business and social decision-making. At the heart of Corning's approach was an acknowledgement that science and art were interdependent and that good design was something that demanded deliberate attention. Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., one of the company's leaders, described his aspirations for

the new Glass Center, “we are seeking to present a rounded picture of a single industry in all its many aspects-historical, scientific, aesthetic, utilitarian, humanistic-indicating its past development, its present impact on society, its future potentialities. In particular, we are concerned with the humanistic aspect of the industry-that is, its relationship to those working in it and those for whom its products were designed, namely, the community at large” (Staley 1951, p. 11). This statement is fascinating in its progressive view of both industry and the recognition of stakeholders other than stockholders.

In 1951, Corning Glass leaders organized a conference to address life in the industrial age in collaboration with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). This remarkable gathering, hosted by Corning in their new modernist museum (Glass Center) and library, featured a diverse group of participants from all sectors of society with a large concentration of representatives from business and academia. The conference explored issues of human values in an industrial civilization and featured prominent scholars, art and cultural leaders and business leaders. Fortunately, the gathering is memorialized in a detailed publication of the proceedings (Staley 1952). One of his core themes was the perception that American culture is perceived as too reliant on consumption and capitalism and less on the humanities and individualism. The roster of participants included prominent academics, art and cultural leaders including the director of The MoMA and business leaders from GE, RCA, sociologists, and writers, including Margaret Mead, Leo Lionni and David Lilienthal of TVA fame and architect, Wallace K. Harrison.

The conference explored issues of human values in an industrial civilization and featured in depth discussions around topics such as the idea of community in the context of industrial civilization and issues related confidence in technology and personal morale. The conference became known for the openness to cross-fertilization of thought evidenced by the diverse group of participants. Corning Glass’s leaders were sounding a call on a pro-social view of business and its role in society. The organizers recognized that the world had changed significantly in the wake of WWII and were also acutely aware that business had assumed a new leadership role in the new world order. The act of a corporation convening thought leaders, however, was not new. Walter Paepcke, CEO of the Container Corporation of America (CCA) formalized the idea of convenings through the founding of the Aspen Institute in the early 1950s. His greatest impact and legacy were in promoting the cross-fertilization of thought through gatherings large and small.

As a business leader, Paepcke used his power and influence to bring many disparate partners together to advance his belief in the pro-social power of business. His humanistic crusade became less about advancing his business and more about using his influence to bring leaders together. His commitment to European Modernism marked the beginning of a new chapter for corporate cultural responsibility in the United States, while Chicago became a pioneering nexus for the corporate embrace of design and Modernism. In essence, Paepcke realized one of the goals of the Bauhaus with the integration of human-centered design throughout CCA. Not surprisingly, Paepcke was one of the participants in the Corning Conference.

6. Conclusion

The examples of The Museum of Modern Art, Olivetti and the deep influence of the Rockefeller family underscore the importance of Eleanor Brilliant's observation "about the borderlines between philanthropic, third sector activities and political activities, and how these borders may shift or even disappear under certain conditions of time and place" (Brilliant 1993, p. 95). This ambiguity around the role of companies, foundations and government prompted calls for more transparency and oversight from multiple stakeholders including government regulators, activists, Wall Street and concerned citizens. The ambiguity also raised concerns around the role of foundations in growing and sustaining the hegemony of the US (Parmar 2012). While new regulations and transparency in reporting have become standard, there remains a tension around individuals and institutions accumulating and leveraging social and cultural capital. The tension applies to museums as well since their missions dictate public education without donor influence.

The formalization of corporate philanthropy was also a key building block of an emerging normalization of corporate social responsibility that allayed shareholder objection to broader citizenship and employee engagement practices. In terms of architecture and design, businesses had at least two motivations to support these cultural efforts. First, it was recognized that arts were always a reflection of current societal thinking and reflected freedom of thought and expression. Second, companies were beginning to see the value in aligning their brands with innovation and creativity. Olivetti epitomizes how a company in partnership with a cultural institution could promote cultural, intellectual and artistic values through design practice.

Many artists, architects and designers saw industry as a means to advance new aesthetic principles such as those espoused by the Bauhaus and the concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*. The philanthropic leadership of Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford in the early twentieth century was now becoming more of an institutional rather than an individual practice among corporations. Ironically, it was the leaders of the steel, oil and car manufacturing companies that took the lead in advocating for more freedom in corporate engagement in societal issues. The financial industry, in the following decades, also played a role in both philanthropy and assembling corporate art collections. The embrace of European modernism led to innovations in advertising and product design also signaled a new era in art and commerce collaborations. Finally, museums were increasingly involved in elements of advocating for better industrial design through direct relationships with the production potential of companies.

At the core of this transformation were leaders such as Walter Paepcke, Adriano Olivetti, Jamie and Amo Houghton and the Rockefeller family. What they shared was a commitment to broader issues of social cohesion, celebrating humanity, and, of course, leading successful businesses. One of the key elements of this shift to corporate cultural responsibility was the openness to cross-fertilization of thought evidenced by the Corning Conferences and the Aspen convenings. Business leaders such as those from Corning convened conversations addressing unease around a perceived lack of confidence in industrial civilization and modernism in the context of the Cold War, global political tension and a growing international economy.

The social and cultural capital accruing to business and foundations is difficult to measure. There are notable examples of individuals exerting and gaining influence within the Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie Foundations. Most notable are Paul Hoffman who directed the Marshall Plan and later became the Ford Foundation president; Frank W. Abrams, who served as Chairman of the Board of Standard Oil Company and also as Ford Foundation trustee; Johns Foster Dulles who served as United States Secretary of State under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and as a Rockefeller Foundation trustee and President Dwight D. Eisenhower who served as a Carnegie Foundation trustee in 1950 while he was president of Columbia University.

However, there are other individuals whose stories remain untold who have contributed to this growing body of social and cultural capital. Revisiting the Corning Conference of 1951 and the participant list there are at least three individuals who played powerful roles in realizing the new power afforded to business: 1) David Lillienthal, TVA and Atomic Energy Commission played a major role in leading a massive development project aimed at empowering rural communities. Lillienthal was very conscious of his influence as a champion for business and community development. In 1952, he published *Big Business: A New Era* where he extolled the virtues of free enterprise; 2) Wallace K. Harrison, architect and planner, led the design team for the United Nations Secretariat in NYC and also designed embassies for the US government as well as significant buildings for Corning Glass, Alcoa and others; 3) Leo Lionni was an editor at *Fortune* as well as a designer and was instrumental in the The MoMA exhibition and later joined Olivetti as a design advisor.

These individuals, although hardly famous, played critical roles in catalyzing a paradigm shift in the role of business in society. They quietly led the transformation of the relationship of business to government and the third sector as they moved within the elite circles of American society. They were known and trusted by powerful leaders and were entrusted with creating a seismic shift in how commerce and culture could not only co-exist but become interdependent and synergistic. Each of these examples illustrate the workings of cultural, social and symbolic capital as each individual was able to accumulate these forms of capital to enable them to gain power and influence and to advance cultural diplomacy. These individuals helped to promote democracy and capitalism by positioning industry as a responsible citizen and were key in normalizing corporate responsibility.

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