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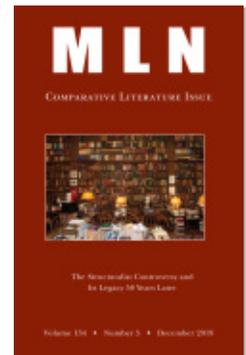
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Richard Macksey and the Humanities Center



Stuart W. Leslie

For four days in October 1966 Johns Hopkins became the beachhead of a French invasion that would fundamentally transform the humanities across the American academic landscape. “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy” put Hopkins on the map as the place where the leading lights of French literary theory and their American interlocutors began a generation-long debate about texts, language, reading, and methods that would reshape scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences. Some of the participants, such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan, had already made their mark internationally, and others soon would, most prominently Jacques Derrida. Some had previously taught at Hopkins, including Georges Poulet, and many would subsequently teach there with joint appointments or as visiting faculty, including Derrida. Even the no-shows, such as Michel Foucault, who did serve on the advisory board for the symposium, would become an important part of the Hopkins circle.

What began at Hopkins as a wide-ranging discussion about structuralism and post-structuralism, semiotics and deconstruction, soon spread to other universities. The short-lived Hopkins School migrated to and enriched many other top departments of comparative literature. J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man moved together from Hopkins to Yale a few years after the landmark symposium, and recruited Derrida to join them as a regular visitor. Miller and Derrida subsequently decamped for UC Irvine as the founders of its Critical Theory Institute. Hopkins would nonetheless remain an essential contributor to the broader

conversation. The symposium participants, nearly a hundred in all, representing most of the top universities in the northeast, recognized even at the time that something special had happened at Hopkins. Jan Miel of Wesleyan University's Department of Romance Languages spoke for many of his colleagues in saying: "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" reminded me that it seems to be a habit at Hopkins to be first, and that this is usually achieved not by force of numbers or dollars but by listening attentively to what is going on elsewhere and bringing ideas and scholars into a critical intersection" (Macksey, "Final Report" 61).

Rene Girard, who had joined the Hopkins Department of Romance Languages in 1957 and already made a name for himself with the publication of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961), provided the intellectual heft for the symposium (Haven, *Evolution of Desire*). Richard Macksey did most of the heavy lifting. He drafted the grant application to the Ford Foundation, handled the complicated logistics of the meeting, and later translated and edited the essays for publication, a volume which became a bestseller for the Johns Hopkins Press.

Prodigy and polymath, Macksey had come from Princeton to study with Georges Poulet, and wrote his dissertation, in French, on aesthetics in Proust. While Macksey held an appointment in the Writing Seminars his passion was literary theory and criticism. He preferred reading, discussing, and collecting books to writing them. He amassed a legendary library at his stately Guilford estate, but he never published his dissertation or any other monograph, and only a relative handful of essays and articles, a thin dossier by later standards. Like Hopkins scholars of an earlier era, he aspired to erudition and could hold his own in any number of diverse fields, from mathematics and medicine to classic and contemporary literature (de Vries, "Vocation for the Humanities" 1003–1009). An incurable insomniac prone to composing long letters in the wee hours, and to leaving his Gilman office about the time his colleagues arrived in the morning, Macksey was a gifted and generous teacher who gave away his best ideas, whether in the classroom, around the seminar table in his personal library, or in detailed commentaries written as formal or informal reviews of other scholar's books and articles. Characteristically, he shared his reader's report of Barbara Johnson's *Critical Difference* with the author, a second-generation Yale School member trained by Paul de Man. "I feel like a surfer riding the most exhilarating wave he has ever encountered," she replied. "Your reading of my manuscript is a more intelligent, critical, and penetrating *survol* (pardon my oxymoronic enthusiasm)

than I had ever dared hope for in a reader . . . You understand my book better than I do myself, and your understanding is filled with a kind of intellectual generosity that I have never experienced before. It is no wonder that people speak of you as one of the country's most marvelous teachers" (Johnson, "Letter to Macksey"). Other scholars would give the Humanities Center its international standing—Charles Singleton, its founding director and master interpreter of Dante, art historian and critic Michael Fried, philosopher Hent de Vries—but Macksey embodied its interdisciplinary spirit and kept it alive through defections, budget crises, and administrative neglect.

The founding of the Center in 1966 marked a brief reversal of the ebb tide that had slowly drained the humanities at Hopkins for a decade or more. In his inaugural address in 1956, Milton Eisenhower had stressed that the strength of Hopkins "cannot be in numbers; it must be in excellence" (Spaulding), but by any measure those numbers looked particularly grim for the humanities. A visiting committee for the humanities chaired by trustee Robert Merrick identified eminent faculty in each of the nine humanities departments, though far too few to compete with peer institutions many times their size. History, Philosophy, English, and Romance Languages had just seven or eight faculty each, and the other departments half that many or less. Graduate stipends had slipped well below the offers made by other universities, so that only a "very few at the very highest levels of quality tend to come here" (Merrick, "Letter to Visiting Committee" 2).

As Eisenhower acknowledged, "the stereotype of Johns Hopkins University as a Medical School has been difficult to overcome" as statistics from the admissions office confirmed (Merrick 5). In 1953, just 39 undergraduates applied in the humanities, 311 in the biological sciences, 99 in the physical sciences, and 297 in engineering; in 1959, 163 in the humanities, 697 in the biological sciences, 243 in the physical sciences, and 403 in engineering, a stubbornly persistent demographic. Worse, undergraduates who changed majors from the sciences or engineering to the humanities "showed the weakest averages, by far, both on admission and on graduation" ("Committee on Educational Policy" 2) so that humanities faculty worried that their majors had become the fallback for struggling premedical students.

At the graduate level, too, the humanities had not kept pace with the best departments at other universities, many headed by and stocked with scholars trained at Hopkins. The university graduated no more PhDs in 1956 than it did in 1936, and the growing imbalance in funding and salaries between the arts and the sciences only reinforced

the impression among humanists that they had become “second-class citizens.” They began to question the longstanding doctrine that “the strength of the Hopkins has always been in the work and influence of great individual scholars, each of whom attracts and creates a school,” (Greenfield, “Letter to Merrick”). Could a humanities faculty smaller than Harvard’s English department hope to hold its own, even with some world-class luminaries like Charles Singleton and Earl Wasserman, scholars who represented a holdover from a pre-war Hopkins where a single scholar could stand astride an entire field?

Singleton wrote his dissertation at Berkeley on carnival songs and street culture in Renaissance Italy, later published in Italian, and came to Hopkins in 1937 to begin an illustrious career as the premier English translator and commentator on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (in six volumes) and Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In later years Singleton would publish a study of the theory and practice of interpretation, but clearly believed that the best theory grew out of scrupulous practice. Despite his eminence, or perhaps because of it, Singleton attracted few graduate students, and those he did often came his way indirectly. John Freccero arrived at Hopkins as an undergraduate in 1949, just after Singleton had left for what turned out to be a nine-year stint at Harvard. Freccero did his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in romance languages, and only took up Dante at the urging of Georges Poulet, the Proust scholar. In 1957 Singleton resigned his Harvard chair in 1957 and returned to Hopkins, in protest against administrative meddling in departmental matters: “Johns Hopkins has never lost sight of one vital truth, that the university is its faculty and that the power of promotion and appointment must rest with the faculty itself” (Levy, “Singleton Will Leave”). In Freccero, Singleton found a kindred spirit and protégé with sufficient talent to carry forward his intellectual legacy. The department would not graduate another PhD for five more years. Singleton proved to be a surprisingly popular undergraduate teacher who brought Dante and his world to life for generations of students, including a reliable contingent of lacrosse players for whom classes with Singleton, architectural historian Phoebe Stanton, and classicist Carrie-May Zintl seemed to be something close to a required humanities cluster.

Wasserman too had a soft spot for lacrosse players, and once gave All-American (and future admissions director) Jerry Schnydmann a pass in his course on the romantic poets, explaining that whatever his academic marks, being an A-student in lacrosse should count for something. Wasserman came to Hopkins as an undergraduate in the

New Plan and so moved into graduate work without completing the usual bachelor's degree, writing a thesis on the revival of Elizabethan poetry in the 18th century. When he hit the job market in 1938, the chair of the English department, who prided himself on his frankness, wrote a strong recommendation to the University of Illinois. He could not praise Wasserman's academic credentials highly enough, though he felt obliged to add, as many Hopkins chairs did in those days, that Wasserman was a Jew, though "a fine, alert, clean-cut lad, not swarthy—in fact almost blond—and neither the brassy nor the over-obsequious kind" (Stiller, "Earl of Homewood" 56). The chair placed Wasserman ahead of another Hopkins PhD whom he dinged for poor grooming and hygiene, with the expectation that "he will spruce up when he joins a faculty" (Stiller 58). Wasserman got the job, taught at Illinois, and then returned to a faculty appointment at Hopkins in 1948, although not without extensive discussion of the case by President Isaiah Bowman, wary of adding another Jewish scholar, however brilliant, to the faculty. Wasserman's study of John Keats's major poems, *A Finer Tone* (1953) confirmed the wisdom of the appointment. Praised as "the major event of the year in literary criticism" (Beach 127), and an important turn from New Criticism toward broader contextual reading, *A Finer Tone* established Wasserman as a significant critical voice. A counterpuncher by nature, he once took offense to "the most stupid review I've ever read" and wondered if the author had "written with jaundice instead of a sound mind" (Stiller 58). His quick wit and caustic commentary became legendary among his graduate students. Scholars such as Singleton, Wasserman, Carrington Lancaster in French drama, and Leo Spitzer, as Macksey recalled, "made Gilman Hall an arena for contesting methods and egos" (Macksey, "Singleton and the Hopkins Years" 5), that spilled across departments and disciplines, but did not give literary criticism or theory at Hopkins a collective identity.

Seeking to make virtue of necessity, one member of the visiting committee suggested that Hopkins take advantage of "the easy crossing of disciplinary lines" to compete with "universities muscle-bound by size and over-organization" (Greenfield, "Letter"). As a step in that direction the university proposed a postdoctoral center that "could do for humanistic study what the Advanced Institute at Princeton has done primarily for science and what the Center for the Study of Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto had done for its discipline" (Eisenhower, "Letter to Ernest Brooks" 12). Hopkins, already third in total postdoctoral fellows behind Harvard and Michigan (most of them in the sciences

and medicine), proposed recruiting a cohort of twenty postdocs in the humanities but not assign them to departments, and so encourage cross-disciplinary study. These newly minted PhDs or junior faculty teaching at liberal arts colleges would have the opportunity for an intensive research experience. Intended primarily as a teaching rather than a research institute, the center would “make Hopkins once again the pioneer in graduate studies in this country—now at the post-doctoral level (Macksey, “A Humanities Proposal” 2).

To provide focus, the organizing faculty proposed year-long thematic seminars, sufficiently broad to accommodate a wide range of approaches and methods, “Aspects of the Eighteenth Century” for the first year (1963–64), “The Middle Ages” for the second, “The Renaissance” for the third, and “The Ancient World” for the fourth, each seminar generating a published volume. In addition to Hopkins faculty and the postdocs, the advanced seminars would bring to campus distinguished visitors from a range of fields—Isaiah Berlin (Oxford), Rene Welleck (Yale), and Perry Miller (Harvard) among other notables for the first seminar—to run short courses on topics related to the seminar and to work collaboratively with the post-docs and graduate students. Hopkins faculty, in turn, would subsequently lead seminars at leading European universities.

The President’s office provided startup funds, with the expectation that the university could raise money from private foundations for continuing support. Amidst a perceived crisis in the humanities, the Hopkins announcement hit the front page of the *New York Times*. Singleton, although poorly suited by temperament for administrative assignments, seemed by virtue of his interdisciplinary inclinations the obvious choice to head the Humanities Center, if only in a titular capacity. A group of younger faculty led by Girard, Macksey, and J. Hillis Miller in English, considered seminars organized solely by period too conservative. They proposed instead exploring methodological connections among humanistic disciplines and the study of texts, along the lines of “Theory of Criticism and Interpretation.” In trying to win support for the idea, they had an important ally in Wasserman, and the advantage of benign neglect by senior faculty. Singleton preferred research, writing, and spending time in Florence to running the seminars. His younger colleagues thought it would be “best to abandon the rather helter-skelter ad hoc procedures which had previously been followed” (Girard “Letter”), and took it upon themselves to reorganize the seminars around problems of textual interpretation in the conviction that a reconsideration of theory would

have more impact on the humanities, at Hopkins and beyond, than simply looking at yet another chronological period.

As a start they proposed a "Structuralist Section" as part of the postdoctoral institute. Taking the Sixth Section of the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* as their model, with its interdisciplinary collective of historians, anthropologists, literary critics, and art historians, they set out a structuralist manifesto for Hopkins, with the "double purpose of keeping Hopkins in the foreground of recent intellectual endeavor and of acting as a 'clearing house' for the structuralist studies in the States." If successful, a structuralist section would "contribute immensely to the affirmation of Hopkins as an intellectual center, not only on the national scene but on the international one as well" (Miller, "Project for a Structuralist Section" 2–3). While they hoped the structuralist section would eventually span the scholarly spectrum from anthropology to psychoanalysis, they acknowledged that the emphasis would be on literary criticism, given Hopkins' strength in the field and their shared sense that "literature offers a privileged testing ground for any theories of interpretation put forth in disciplines concerned with the human phenomenon" (Macksey "Letter to Ryerson").

The Hopkins administration, and the faculty, badly misjudged the potential philanthropic support for the humanities. The Ford Foundation declined a \$4.5 million request, as did a depressingly long list of other private foundations—Mellon, Old Dominion, Avalon, Fleischman, and even the newly established National Endowment for the Humanities. Only the idea of a symposium on structuralism, sketched out in the original blueprint for the structuralist section, generated any real enthusiasm. What seemed to catch the eye of program officers at the Ford Foundation was the possibility of moving beyond traditional definitions of the humanities as a matter of individual scholarship—"a man with a book"—to identifying "certain unifying principles of inquiry," whether in the understanding of language, the reconsideration of the conceptual models increasingly important in the social sciences, or rethinking longstanding assumptions about the subjectivity of authors and texts in humanistic discourse, and so moving toward "a genuine 'science of man'" (Evans, "Letter to Koch" 5).

With encouragement from the director of humanities and the arts at the Ford Foundation, the Hopkins humanities group prepared a formal proposal, written by Macksey, asking for \$36,000 to support a week-long international symposium on structuralism, to underwrite the publication of a volume of papers from the meeting, and to appoint a distinguished international scholar in the field as a visiting

member of the Hopkins faculty. Macksey and Eugenio Donato, with advice from Girard, drew up the guest list. Aiming high, they invited some of the most eminent humanists at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris: anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, critic Roland Barthes, and historian George Moraze, and leading members of the Geneva School of literary criticism, Georges Poulet and Jean Starobinski (former members of the Hopkins faculty), along with assorted intellectual French luminaries such as Jacques Lacan and Jean Hyppolite, even though not all of them would consider themselves structuralists. In some respects the B-list members were even more impressive in light of their subsequent achievements. Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault had yet to make their reputations outside of Paris, but Macksey astutely recognized their scholarly promise. To provide an American counterweight, Macksey invited a smaller number of American scholars from the structuralist camp, some long established, such as Harvard linguist Roman Jakobson, others yet to make their mark, such as Cornell literary theorist Paul de Man. Except for Lévi-Strauss, who begged off because of a grueling travel schedule, virtually everyone agreed to come, including Derrida as a last-minute addition.

Given the symposium's absurdly ambitious agenda, "to identify certain basic problems and concerns common to all structural studies in whatever discipline," Macksey prepared a primer for Ford Foundation officials, contrasting structuralist method and its attention to linguistics with two previous paradigms of literary theory and criticism, existentialism in France and New Criticism in America, itself the subject of a major symposium at Hopkins 20 years earlier. In support of his assertion that "Structuralism is the most comprehensive and fundamentally challenging idea on the literary scene at the present time" ("The Development of Structural Criticism" 9), Macksey offered a short sampling of writings and reviews of the genre's greatest hits, and an intimidatingly long suggested reading list that the program officers undoubtedly ignored.

As Lacan pointed out afterwards, the symposium "succeeded in bringing together for significant discussion important figures of French and North American thought who could have met nowhere else under such congenial circumstances—least of all Paris" (Macksey, "Final Report" 59), with too much shared history, too many misremembered slights. Lacan, on his first visit to the US, met Derrida for the first time at the Belvedere Hotel in Baltimore. On neutral ground, younger scholars could challenge more senior colleagues with fewer constraints or consequences. In private moments Macksey

feared the worst—"all I can envision is the fifteen or sixteen possible fistfights that could take place during that horrendous week." Given the intellectual star power of many of the participants, the symposium attracted widespread press coverage from mainstream newspapers and magazines in the US—*Time* and *Newsweek* sent correspondents to cover it—and in France, *Le Monde* and *The Partisan Review*.

In retrospect, who attended the symposium and what they did afterward mattered more than anything they actually said at Hopkins. The standing-room-only crowd, crammed into the Garrett Room in the recently opened Eisenhower Library, with closed circuit television for the overflow, had considerable difficulty even hearing the prepared talks and commentaries, many of them delivered in French or in fractured English. As master of ceremonies, Macksey, among the youngest scholars in the room, did his best to keep the two-day conversation on track. He led with some provocative opening remarks that placed the symposium in a long debate about the importance of method going all the way back to the earliest years at Hopkins, with Josiah Royce and Charles Sanders Peirce, and with a nod to the university's role as a key transatlantic node joining the European and American intellectual communities. With his usual puckish humor, Macksey arranged menus of "native dishes and wines" for the guests—Maryland crabs, Virginia ham, California wines, even an inside joke or two, such as "Asparagus Gilman and "Aspic Lovejoy," served in the Clipper Room at Shriver Hall.

The formal presentations, even after being translated and heavily edited by Macksey and Donato, could hardly capture the raw energy, even chaos, of the moment. No one pulled any punches but it could oftentimes be difficult to tell who was taking a swing at whom over what. People frequently talked past or over one another or engaged with questions only peripherally addressed in the papers. Lacan's much anticipated contribution, "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever"—delivered in a near incomprehensible mix of French and English, set the tone, big questions with no clear answers. The Hopkins contributions tended to be conservative. Anthropologist Neville Dyson-Hudson, pinch-hitting for Levi-Strauss, explored the paradox that in applying the methods of structural linguistics to anthropology, Levi-Strauss's had so far had much greater impact outside his field than within it. Donato pointed to the debt owed by structuralism to the schools of phenomenology and existentialism it sought to supersede. "With the advent of a style of thinking," he cautioned, "it is easy to forget precisely which ques-

tions it answers" (Macksey and Donato, *The Languages of Criticism* 89). Charles Singleton limited his brief comments to authorial intention and the implications structuralist theory had for reading. Can an author ever really be the reader of his own books, he asked? A fair number of scientists and social scientists turned up to see what the fuss was about. A graduate student in sociology said "the conference made me wonder seriously where in hell I've been these past few years and what in hell I've been doing—or rather what I have not been doing," while a plucky undergraduate, whose Hopkins experience had taught him that "nothing was higher in a university than the walls that divide departments," said the symposium had opened his eye to the "relevance of many of the questions about method" and congratulated the organizers on "the subversive aims of your new Center" (Macksey, "Final Report" 58–60).

Derrida turned out to be the real subversive. His paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," the second-to-last presented at the conference, took direct aim at Levi-Strauss and the foundational assumptions of structuralism, and then set out, in the paper and in subsequent discussion, the idea of deconstruction as an alternative. Although Derrida's paper generated heated discussion, no one fully grasped its significance at the time. Peter Caws, representing the Carnegie Corporation, expressed the general disquiet among the participants: "I think that many of us came to this colloquium hoping to find in structuralism the possibility of a methodological unity for what has come to be called in France 'les sciences humaines.' Here, however, we found that what has become primary in nearly all the discussions has been a metaphysical rather than a methodological question" (Macksey and Donato, *The Languages of Criticism*, 314). Only from a greater distance could Macksey and others recognize that they had heard the first draft of Derrida's version of "prolegomena to any future metaphysics." Macksey later called Derrida's paper, "[a] frontal assault on the contradictory commitments and unexamined blind spots of the entire structuralist project. As such, it constitutes a turning point in the discourse of the humanities and the beginning of what is still somewhat clumsily called 'post-structuralism' . . . Thus the symposium was intended as a beachhead for European structuralism; but it concluded rather dramatically with a powerful attack on structural discourse; and, in its reception, resulted in a totally unforeseen further turn of the crucial screw" (Macksey, "Readings for the session on June 19th"). In the year following the structuralist

symposium, Derrida would publish three books that would establish him as a theorist to reckon with.

The discussion broke more along generational lines than geographic or disciplinary ones. Paul de Man, coming to the discussion from comparative literature and literary theory rather than philosophy, chided Barthes in particular for lacking historical depth and context, and placed himself in Derrida's camp in opposition to structuralism. Several young participants whose voices did not appear in the published volume would be heard from shortly, Edward Said for one.

Although the goal of the symposium had never been "to promote a 'school' but to sponsor a dialogue," it nonetheless gave Hopkins instant international visibility as the French connection in literary theory. Donato reported that the symposium had become an important topic of conversation in Paris, incorporated into seminars taught there by Lacan, Barthes, and by scholars who had only heard about it second hand. To maintain intellectual momentum, the Humanities Center subsequently organized a series of graduate seminars led by some of the most prominent participants, Barthes, Derrida, and Moraze, and others like Michel Foucault who had not be able to attend the original symposium. Derrida accepted a half-time visiting appointment, coming to Hopkins in the fall, and de Man joined the full-time faculty. Lionel Gossman, professor and later chair of Romance Languages, who had been part of the organizing committee but stayed on the sidelines during the great debate, recalled how members of his department immediately "found ourselves in the role of mediators between our colleagues in the other disciplines and the French *maitres penseurs* to whom we had direct access and whose aura illuminated us too to some extent. Curious physicists and puzzled English professors looked respectfully to us to provide explanations of the latest trends" (Haven 140). With scholars of the stature of Barthes offering seminars on linguistics and semiotics, Said on theories of fiction, and Moraze on social structure and literary forms, Hopkins had reestablished itself as perhaps the leading North American center of critical theory. In 1968, de Man organized a follow-up symposium in Zurich, featuring some of the original cast but adding Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gerard Genette, and other Europeans who had missed the first meeting.

Could a deliberate "experiment in the intellectual architecture of the University" like the Humanities Center thrive, or even survive, when, by design, it did not fit comfortably into the departmental structure of the university? Intended to encourage "free exchange between scholars across traditional departmental boundaries" and "to

keep alive an interdisciplinary dialogue about methods," it depended on departments for intellectual resources. The Center had just four faculty members of its own—Singleton, increasingly preoccupied with securing the Villa Spelman in Florence as a home away from home for his research, teaching, and writing; Macksey, a junior professor in the Writing Seminars given a tenured appointment in the Center to serve as its *de facto* director; de Man, hired from Cornell but given a two-year leave of absence; and Hillis Miller, half-time, with a primary appointment in English. With just five years of funding from the president's budget, and no success raising its own money beyond the small Ford Foundation symposium grant, the Center's best chance looked to be asserting its independence at the risk of becoming a department without portfolio. It launched a small doctoral program in comparative literature in partnership with other departments, modeled on one de Man ran so successfully at Cornell, and began offering select courses for undergraduates including an honors program in humanistic study, though not a formal major.

Other universities took notice. Singleton sent the president and provost a copy of Yale's 1969 "Visions for the Humanities" along with a short note: "I wanted you to see the Yale attempt at having what we have had these several years. But I guess they have the money for it (Singleton, "Letter to Gordon"). Sure enough, in 1972 Yale literary critic Geoffrey Hartman, who had been on the list of alternates for the symposium speakers along with his then Cornell colleague Paul de Man, hired away de Man, Miller, and Derrida and so "signaled the moment when 'the Hopkins School' became the 'Yale School,'" the place where deconstruction would flourish for a generation (Macksey, "Letter to Suskind"). The Ford Foundation, taking stock of its investment, conceded that financial crisis at Hopkins in the early 1970s and the defections of key faculty had put the Center on life support, but that it nonetheless represented an important model of interdisciplinary inquiry worthy of future support. "An extremely gifted young professor, Richard Macksey, has taken over its directorship and is working to make it an effective instrument within the university structure," its program officer declared (Wood, "The Humanities Center").

Consumed by their own financial plights, most departments stepped back from the Humanities Center, and its interdepartmental oversight committee stopped meeting altogether. Not willing to allow the Center "to drift with the fortunes and attention of other departments," Macksey refocused it on comparative literature and intellectual history, seeking one additional faculty member in each field" (Macksey,

“Academic Council Review”). A scholar with a connoisseur’s eye for talent, Macksey never hesitated to appoint colleagues whose reputations might overshadow his own. For the position in intellectual history he brought in Nancy Struever, a historian of Renaissance humanism whose interest in linguistics and structural theory made her an obvious fit, even if the History department required some coaxing. In an even bolder stroke, he convinced art historian and critic Michael Fried to leave his newly tenured position at Harvard for a joint appointment in the History of Art and the Humanities Center. Fried would prove himself to be as brilliant, prolific, and controversial as some of the top people in art history, philosophy, and history predicted he would be. Like Ronald Paulson, chair of the search committee, Fried paid little attention to the disciplinary boundaries of literature, art, philosophy, and theory. As one distinguished historian told Paulson about Fried: “I believe that he has made such important contributions to so many fields because he has gained mastery over all of them—that is, he works from within different disciplines and yet applies his insights across disciplinary boundaries. This is not a matter of reducing art, literature, and philosophy to their lowest common denominators but of understanding the interplay of all three at a very high level” (Darnton, “Letter to Paulson”). Giving Fried an office with the English department, even though he did not hold a formal appointment there, with neighbors like Stanley Fish and Hugh Kenner, made Gilman Hall an even more intellectually vibrant place. Macksey also supported the later appointment of Neil Hertz, a scholar, like Macksey himself, of immense learning, inspired teaching, unlimited range, and limited publications. One writer praised him as “the shrewdest, wittiest, and one of the deftest practitioners of the mode of criticism known as deconstruction” (Alpers, “Letter to Fish”), while Derrida added “of all the American colleagues that I have come to know, he is incontestably in my eyes one of the most rigorous, the most demanding, solid, open, informed. His culture is immense” (Derrida, “Letter to Fish”).

Macksey could also be opportunistic when he had to be. For many years Garry Wills, renowned for his penetrating popular books (*Inventing America* won the National Book Critics Award and *Lincoln at Gettysburg* the Pulitzer Prize) taught as an adjunct in the Humanities Center, one of best bargains of all time, until Northwestern offered him a chair. Indeed, the roster of former Center faculty, whether full or part-time—gender theorist Judith Butler, literary theorist Samuel Weber, philosopher Maurice Mandelbaum, historian and critic Louis Marin, postcolonial theorist Edward Said, Germanist Henry Sussman—

would have constituted a formidable if eclectic humanities department in any topflight university, just as it did at Hopkins.

As a department, the Humanities Center attracted graduate students “ranging from the weird to the superb,” as Struever once put it, with the balance at the superb end. Hopkins consistently ranked among the best programs in comparative literature, even though it had no department bearing the name. Instead it had a faculty in the Humanities Center who attracted venturesome students like themselves, who understood that in literary studies, “major-league ball is played comparatist” (Struever, “Letter to Macksey”), even if some of the literature departments refused to play ball on joint admissions and graduate fellowships. Students who completed their doctorates did exceptionally well despite a tight job market in the humanities in the late 1970s and early 1980s, some with multiple offers from the best departments, including one student who had to choose among two offers from Yale, one in English and the other in Comparative Literature!

Given the Humanities Center’s auspicious debut with the structuralist symposium, Macksey, the Proust scholar, could be forgiven for some ‘remembrance of things past.’ “From a moment, circa 1966, when Hopkins was clearly the coming intellectual light on the French scene we have suffered some reverses,” he later ruminated (Macksey, “Letter to Longaker”). How much luster would the Hopkins School—de Man, Miller, Derrida, Marin, perhaps Foucault—have added if the university had the financial resources and administrative will to hold it together and build upon it? Most likely it would have become something akin to UC Irvine’s Critical Theory Institute, a retirement home for one generation of theorists. Its Critical Theory Archive now holds the papers of de Man, Miller, Derrida, and Fish, among others, now consigned to history. Better first than last. Hopkins chose exactly the perfect moment to host the famous symposium, at structuralism’s spring tide, when everything still seemed possible and worthy of serious debate, and long before it became fashionable for conservative critics to dismiss the deconstructionists as “foreign junk bond dealers” (Paglia, “Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders” 139).

The Humanities Center became a department at a cost. Its original purpose had been, in Macksey’s words, “opening new questions about the methodology and axiology of humanistic study” and “to encourage a maximum of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ interaction with the Humanities Group” (Macksey, “Letter to Gordon”). Macksey and his colleagues conceived the Humanities Center as a meta seminar in methods and

theory that would inform, and inflect, the larger conversations across the humanities. As just another department, the Humanities Center traded that unique mission for secure faculty lines and an annual budget. In a case of subtraction by addition, the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences effectively split the Center's charge into three entities. The Charles Singleton Center for the Study of Early Modern Europe, funded by the \$18 million sale of Villa Spellman in 2008, keeps alive the spirit of Singleton's own research, and through its Transatlantic Seminars, the international collaborations he long cultivated. The Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, founded in 2016 with a \$10 million gift from the heirs of the Rite Aid drugstore chain, coordinates programming initiatives across the ten humanities departments, provides support for graduate fellowships and exchange programs, and offers its own PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanistic Studies. In 2018, the Humanities Center emerged from a brief but bitter battle over its independent future as the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature, accurately reflecting its twin spheres of expertise but having surrendered its longtime identity.

Macksey had always taken to heart Charles Sanders Peirce's axiom, expressed with such confidence during his brief time at Hopkins: "This is the age of methods; and the university which is to be the exponent of the living conditions of the human mind, must be the university of methods" (Fisch and Cope, "Peirce at the Johns Hopkins University"). For a half-century the Humanities Center embodied that aspiration for, if not a unified theory of the humanities, then at least the search for essential methods and principles applicable across philosophy, literature, intellectual history, and aesthetics. Appropriately, the Macksey Seminar Room in the Brody Learning Commons now honors the legacy of a revered teacher, never more at home than presiding at the makeshift seminar table in his personal library, where undergraduates in the honors program, and faculty and graduate students from many departments challenged one another, and themselves. Whether its successors can collectively measure up to the original will not depend on perfecting any one method (the Center outlasted structuralism and deconstruction after all) but instead on a willingness to embrace the kind of expansive, interdisciplinary, and international vision that inspired that founding of the Humanities Center in the first place.

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