

FORUM

Monuments and Documents: Panofsky on the Object of Study in the Humanities

John Guillory, *New York University*

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue for a reorientation of discourse about the humanities to the objects of humanistic study rather than claims for their value or effect. Returning to an essay Erwin Panofsky published in 1940, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” I build on Panofsky’s rich distinction between “monuments” and “documents” as the two sides of the humanistic object of study. By “monuments,” Panofsky refers to all of those human artifacts, actions, or ideas that have urgent meaning for us in the present. By “document,” he refers to all of those traces or records by means of which we recover monuments. Monuments and documents bring the long time of human existence, past or future, into relation to the short time of human life, a relation that defines the objects of study in all the humanities and confirms the undeniable interest of that study.

And for short time an endlesse moniment.

—Edmund Spenser, “Epithalamion”

If there is one feature that most recent discussions of the humanities have in common, it is surely the rhetorical form of the defense. The prevalence of defense suggests—not without evidence—that the humanities are under attack and have been perhaps since their inception. Perennially declared to be in a state of crisis, the humanities seem to have emerged as university disciplines by a different route than the natural and social sciences, both earlier than these disciplines and left over after the sciences achieved preeminence at the turn of the twentieth century. This is the view of the historian, Lawrence Veysey, who writes that what we call the humanities were in fact “what was left” after the social sciences separated from the American Council of Learned Societies and formed their own organization, the Social Science Research Council, in

1923.¹ The natural sciences had established their professional autonomy much earlier. Veysey goes on to question whether these remaining disciplines can be credited with any coherence at all: “We are left with the possibility that the grouping of the fields of history, English, classical and modern languages, philosophy, art, and music may at bottom be nothing more than a growing convenience—perhaps especially for deans and university presidents in neatly structuring their organizations” (57). This institutional nominalism is bracing, but it leaves the humanities with a very difficult task of defense.

This task has become both more difficult and more urgent as a consequence of the nation’s ongoing financial crisis, which has given some policy makers an excuse to question the value of university degrees in the humanities. A meme has emerged in public discourse, asserting that English and other humanities majors fail to get jobs and that students would be wiser to major in STEM and other practical subjects such as business or communications. Several US governors have even proposed tuition penalties for students in their state universities who major in humanities. Not surprisingly, these attacks provoked a torrent of books, articles, reports, and blogs in defense of the humanities, all attesting to the value of critical thinking and other skills produced by humanities study.² Many of the recent attacks on the humanities

1. Lawrence Veysey, “The Plural, Organized World of the Humanities,” in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 57. The argument of my essay is addressed primarily to the situation of the humanities in the American university system, secondarily to the British system, which is suffering from a similar assault on the humanities on the basis of monetized outcomes (return on investment). The pertinence of my argument to the European system depends in part on how we understand the relation of the Anglo-American concept of humanities to notions such as *sciences humaines* or *Geisteswissenschaften*, which imply at least the possibility of a bipartite divisional structure that would aggregate the social sciences and the humanities to some degree. The problem here is the relation of a hypothetical bipartite divisional structure on the actual tripartite structure of most university systems. This problem appears in the uncertain position of the social sciences, which can be allied sometimes with the sciences, sometimes with the humanities. Veysey’s point is that in the American system, the divisional structure tends to drive social sciences into the camp of the sciences generally, thus superimposing a bipartite structure (science versus nonscience) over the tripartite division of the disciplines.

2. Contributions to the debate are far too numerous to list. Typical among them, and most substantial, is the 2013 report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences titled “The Heart of the Matter,” http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/HSS_Report.pdf, representing a broad consensus of scholars, artists, and policy makers on the value of both humanities and social sciences. Yet despite its vigorous defense and helpful marshaling of statistics, the report breaks no new rhetorical ground. We are told that the humanities “teach us to question, analyze, debate, interpret, synthesize, compare evidence, and communicate”—all of which is true. While it is always worth reiterating these points, it is also worth noting that similar claims can be made for the natural sciences. In order to distinguish

have no doubt been opportunistic, motivated as much by anti-intellectualism as by concern for the employment of graduates. And as researchers have begun to point out, claims about the failure of humanities graduates to find jobs are simply not true.³ Yet these defenses have had little effect in changing public opinion. Universities have seen enrollments in humanities fields drop by significant percentages, confirming the success of the attacks.⁴ I suggest that the strategy of defense has indeed reached an impasse and that it is time to consider a different way of representing the humanities in the public sphere. The weakness of current public defenses of the humanities—the outpouring of articles and blogs that began to appear in 2013’s “summer of the humanities”—arises above all from their failure to describe the objects of study in humanities disciplines, to make the demand of these objects upon our attention vivid and undeniable. Humanities scholars have devoted too much effort to declaring the purpose or value of humanities study—the why—and too little to giving an account of what they study. It is my contention that a better description of what we study will yield a better understanding in the public sphere of why we study these objects.⁵

In this essay, I propose to reorient discourse about the humanities to the objects of our disciplines by putting back into circulation two terms first employed by Erwin Panofsky in an essay published in 1940, titled “The History of Art as a Humanistic

their value, the humanities have often been forced to go beyond the “skills” defense to the more high-minded aims of character formation and citizenship. For a judicious historical survey of value arguments from the nineteenth century to the present, see Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

3. For employment statistics, see the 2014 report by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, “Liberal Arts Degrees and Their Value in the Employment Market,” <https://www.aacu.org/nchems-report>.

4. Enrollment declines in the humanities have been documented in Erica Blom, Brian C. Cadena, and Benjamin J. Keys, “Investment over the Business Cycle: Insights from College Major Choice” (July 2015), <http://ftp.iza.org/dp9167.pdf>.

5. I am not the first to consider the humanities from the perspective of the object as opposed to the value of study. My aim here, following Panofsky, is to offer a theoretical framework for ongoing work in the history of humanities scholarship. In addition to Helen Small, recent examples of this scholarship include important work on the foundational discipline of philology by James Turner (*Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014]), Rens Bod (*A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013]), and William Clark (*Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006]). See also Eleonora Belfiore and Anna Upchurch, eds., *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Utility and the Markets* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). The editors of this volume declare their intention to turn away from the rhetoric of defense.

Discipline.”⁶ These two terms are *document* and *monument*. By the former term, Panofsky means all of those artifacts or traces of human making, action, or thought surviving into the present, the total accumulation of human artifacts, events, and ideas. By “monument,” Panofsky refers to those artifacts, events, or ideas that have the most urgent meaning for us at any present moment and that most demand our recognition or study. Panofsky’s terms do a different kind of work than defense. The absence of these terms from our public discourse reminds us that little effort has been devoted to conceptualizing the object of humanities study across the breadth of the disciplines enumerated by Veysey.⁷ As a consequence, discourse about the humanities typically defaults to high-minded but vague claims about social value, claims that are less effective than they should be in the public sphere because they are so disconnected from individual objects of study in the humanities, from the very things that animate scholars in the conduct of their individual disciplines.

HUMANISMS

Before considering at length Panofsky’s use of the terms *monument* and *document*, however, it will be necessary to clear the ground of the discussion by looking more closely at the presuppositions of current defenses or the underlying reasons for their failure in the public sphere. Almost always scholars rise to the task of defense by making two closely related claims for the value of the humanities. The first is that the humanities are uniquely valuable for their use in making better persons, or more specifically, better citizens. This claim has a long history, which traces the humanities to the program of the Renaissance humanists, who did indeed make such claims for their new ways of teaching. The humanists called their program *studia humanitatis*, or sometimes *litterae humaniores*. The invocation of the “human” signaled their embrace

6. Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” in *The Meaning of the Humanities*, ed. Theodore Meyer Greene (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940); reprinted in Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955; repr., Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1974). I have cited this text from the latter, more accessible volume.

7. The closest argument to Panofsky’s of which I am aware is Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 97–108. “Archive” is nearly identical to what Panofsky means by “document.” Assmann uses “canon” to identify “a narrow selection of sacred texts, artistic masterpieces, or historic key events” for three core domains of cultural memory: religion, art, and history. In the American context, the notion of “canon” is strongly oriented toward texts or other artifacts and would be difficult to extend across the humanities, which must include philosophy as well as history and many other smaller fields. At the moment, the field of “cultural memory studies” has a small presence in the American system (an analogue would be “trauma studies”), but this is not to say that the field does not offer a site for theorizing humanities disciplines. The advantage of Panofsky’s terms, as we shall see below, is his conception of the reversible nature of monument and document, a crucial condition for extending the terms across the whole of the humanities.

of the classical notion of *humanitas*, realized above all in rhetoric, the art of “speaking well.” The crucial connection of *studia humanitatis* with rhetoric reasserted the classical conception of the human being as distinguished from the animal by speech. Thus was born the first version of “humanism,” the conception of a unique human being defined over against the animal.

If their invocation of *humanitas* affirmed the classical conception of the human, Renaissance humanists had another important purpose for this concept: to pry open a space for their teaching in an educational system dominated at its summit by theology—hence the comparative degree of *litterae humaniores*: “the more human letters,” that is, more concerned with human learning than with divinity. At the same time, they did not want to place their *studia* in competition with the truths of revealed religion. Thus emerged a second version of humanism, in which the realm of “human learning” was set over against domain of revealed religion. Importantly, human learning was inclusive of everything that we would call the humanities today, but also of natural philosophy. This too was human learning and, as with moral philosophy, established a version of humanism exalting the achievements of human beings in the realm of learning.

Although the humanism that emerged in the twentieth-century American university and bequeathed its name to the humanities derived its moral and philosophical claims from its Renaissance precursor, it departed significantly from that comprehensive notion of “human learning.” Renaissance humanism was neither secular nor opposed to natural science. The discourse of *Kultur* that emerged later in the German intellectual scene and grounded the *Geisteswissenschaft* of Dilthey expressed quite different investments. That discourse, which passed into the Anglo-Saxon world by way of Carlyle and Arnold, was oriented by potential opposition between nature and culture. This opposition in turn gave rise to the “two culture” debates in the German- and English-speaking worlds and encouraged the identification of “humanism” with the “human” in the Anglo-American university. The American “New Humanism” espoused by Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmore More, Norman Foerster, and others during the Progressive Era was the rallying cry for those who were fiercely opposed to the hegemony of the natural sciences in the new university and, more broadly, to the depredations of industrial civilization.⁸ At the same time, the New Humanists were careful to distinguish their version of humanism as in another respect modern, in the sense that it offered no retreat into religious belief. A secular version of humanism emerged in the gap between fading religious certainties and the confident assertions

8. For the *locus classicus* of the “New Humanism,” see Irving Babbitt’s 1908 essay “What Is Humanism?,” reprinted in Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (Washington, DC: National Humanities Institute, 1986).

of science, and it was this third iteration of humanism that bequeathed its name to the humanities in the midcentury university. In this context, Veysey is right when he insists on the belatedness of the name for the humanistic disciplines: "In fact, not until the 1940s does one discover a sudden outpouring of books and manifestos with 'the humanities' in their titles, using the word with an entirely new frequency and insistence" (57). What Veysey notes as "insistence" betrays the motive of defense, which owes perhaps too much to the third phase of humanism, orienting the disciplines around the opposition of nature and culture. The natural sciences gained the upper hand in this struggle by the end of the nineteenth century, and they retain this position today, long after the reconfiguration of the cultural disciplines as "the humanities."

In retrospect, the invocation of the uniquely civilizing or morally improving mission of the humanities relies on a weak humanism, insufficiently informed by the complex history of humanisms and distorted by a defensive relation to science.⁹ In consequence, claims for the social value of the humanities, however true these claims might be, have unwisely been pitted against the social benefits of the sciences. This was always, so to speak, an unfair fight. So long as there are scientists at work on a cure for cancer, the humanities will have a nearly insurmountable task in making a case in the public sphere for their great, if less obvious social benefits. The difficulty of putting across the reality of these benefits is inseparable, as we shall see, from conveying the value that inheres in the object of humanities study.

The problem that troubles the rhetoric of defense is even more evident in the second major line of defense, the argument that the humanities deal uniquely with human things, or the human world. This defensive theme only emerged, of course, after the dubious partition of "human learning" into the two domains of the nature and culture.

9. By "weak humanism" I refer to the tendency of casual affirmations of humanism to exalt human beings as unique and to praise the actual and potential achievements of humanity. The work of humanists in former centuries is much more complex than is expressed in this tendency or in my schema of the three humanisms. What I would call "strong" humanism would include, in addition to Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus (representing Christian humanism and its many variants down to Milton), Machiavelli (representing civic humanism and its variants), Bacon, and many other Renaissance figures. Among post-Renaissance strong humanisms, we can point to Vico, Rousseau, Kant, Comte, Dilthey, Spencer, Russell, Cassirer, and Sartre (again, many other names are possible). We must also acknowledge the existence of an "antihumanist" tradition that is secular in tendency and asserts the limitations and determination of human being. Here we might cite Voltaire, Hume, Nietzsche, Heidegger and many others. Humanisms can be diverse and complex, but my purpose in offering my schema of three humanisms is to give a sense of humanism in its disseminated, diffuse form, as this generalized humanism feeds ultimately into defenses of the humanities. Finally, I do not take a position on the conflict between humanism and antihumanism, and indeed I would argue that these are both necessary perspectives on the human experience.

This division has never successfully settled the proprietary claims of the sciences and the humanities. The notion that the humanities have a privileged relation to the human world, for example, has never been less true. The social sciences have long since confounded the binary that underlies the weak humanism of current defenses. And the “natural” sciences of psychology and biology have long since taken aspects of human being as their object of study. The humanities cannot ignore the findings of science about human beings any more than humanists can deny that human beings are animals and belong to the natural world. The claim to speak for the human as such is in truth an expression of twentieth-century humanism, weakened by a defensive relation to the sciences. The humanities are concerned with human things, to be sure, but what sort of things, and what sort of claims, are justified on the basis of studying these things? This definitional or ontological problem remains unresolved today, long after the disciplines of the humanities were set adrift in their divisional boat, like Prospero and his books.

If it is true, as Veysey argues, that the humanities have no organic coherence, that they exist as a mere organizational convenience, their status among the disciplines will likely remain as troubled as it is today. The humanities will continue to be an unequal divisional partner in the distribution of resources in the university, repeatedly submitted to existential challenge in the public sphere. But there is no necessity to choose between Veysey’s institutional nominalism and a weak humanism. As we shall see, Panofsky’s meditation on the disciplinary object discloses a coherence that organizes the disciplines enumerated by Veysey according to a logic far more credible than that of convenience. If we cannot give an account of this coherence, there can be no credible basis for a defense of the humanities generally, as opposed to the individual disciplines collected under this category. We have more to gain at this moment by offering a careful description of our object of study than by repeating the usual assertions of social value or by making proprietary claims to speak about the human world. I take it as a given that the humanities are concerned with the human world. But they enter this world from a particular locus of interest; they do not overlook the whole of it as though it were a kingdom. It is time now to discard the weak humanism that motivates defenses of the humanities and clear some conceptual space for another kind of rhetorical strategy. Let us consider the possibility, with Panofsky’s help, that the humanities might possess a coherence that can be described more richly than an aggregation of nonscientific disciplines.

PANOFSKY’S OBJECT

Although Panofsky’s essay is well known to art historians, it will probably not be obvious to readers why a turn to this moment in his oeuvre is demanded by the present

emergency of the humanities. But defenses of the humanities have clearly reached a dead end, and a new framework for discussion is needed. It is fortunate for our purpose that Panofsky's contribution to the discourse of the humanities was written at a time just before the consolidation of the humanities disciplines in most countries, when they were not yet burdened by the resentments and frustrations of the present institutional situation. His description of humanistic disciplines is cheerfully nondefensive.

Panofsky's essay is typically learned, as luminous an example as one might find of the scholarship produced by his generation, writing when the lights were going out all over Europe. The historical interest of the essay is great, but I am concerned mainly with recovering Panofsky's development on the terms *monument* and *document* in relation to humanistic disciplines generally.¹⁰ My inquiry therefore is avowedly unoriginal. It would not serve my purpose if scholars did not recognize what they do in Panofsky's or my description of our disciplines. I propose, then, to explore the theoretical scope and power these terms might possess beyond Panofsky's immediate concern with the visual work of art.

Perhaps because Panofsky did not undertake this elaboration himself, or only hinted at it, his terms have had an intermittent afterlife in scholarship.¹¹ If the concept of monument was not adopted widely, recent scholarship has evinced an extraordinary and productive interest in the category of the document, along with that of the archive. Studies of the document and the archive constitute a lively subfield across a number of humanities disciplines today, as attested by Carolyn Steedman's *Dust*, Ben Kafka's *The Demon of Writing*, Lisa Gitelman's *Paper Knowledge*, and Marizio

10. A *caveat lector*: I have deliberately uprooted Panofsky's argument about monuments and documents from the general framework of his iconology and, to a slightly lesser extent, from his philosophical investments as a neo-Kantian in the orbit of Ernst Cassirer. It is my sense that his development of the monument/document concept, while compatible with these other investments, can stand alone; but that, of course, is a proposition my readers must assess for themselves.

11. The pairing of "monument and document" was employed by Foucault, who gave the terms a rather different sense than Panofsky. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 7. Gary Gutting (*Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 231) notes that Foucault credits Georges Canguilhem with alerting him to the interest of these terms. (Gutting's source is Michel Foucault, "Sur l'archéologie des sciences: reponse au cercle d'épistémologie," *Cahier pour l'analyse* 9 [1968]: 9–40). Foucault's version of the monument/document concept has been taken up by Jacques Le Goff in his account of "*nouvelle histoire*." See Jacques Le Goff, "Documento/monumento," in *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 5:38–48, and "L'histoire nouvelle," in *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1978), 63; see also Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 534.

Ferraris's *Documentality*, among other works.¹² The current interest in the document suggests that the moment is right for a reconsideration of Panofsky's reflection on the relation between document and monument.

Panofsky assumes, like most of his contemporaries, a distinction between nature and culture descending from the nineteenth-century distinction between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften* and correlative terms in the Anglo-American system: "From the humanistic point of view, however, it became reasonable, and even inevitable, to distinguish, within the realm of creation, between the sphere of *nature* and the sphere of *culture*" (5). But this third iteration of humanism is qualified by subsequent remarks, as the "sphere of culture" is identified not with the totality of human experience but specifically with "the *records left by man*" (5). Now this region comprises much more than the accumulation of works of art, but at the same time it is restricted to a particular kind of human activity: "Man is indeed the only animal to leave records behind him, for he is the only animal whose products 'recall to mind' an idea distinct from their material existence" (5). The question of what a "record" is—what kind of thing it is—remains open.

Panofsky goes on to emphasize the function of records in relation to the "stream of time" or the pastness of the past: "These records have therefore the quality of emerging from the stream of time, and it is precisely in this respect that they are studied by the humanist. He is, fundamentally, an historian" (5). By equating the humanist scholar with the "historian," Panofsky locates the humanistic disciplines in the field of a long temporality, not that of memory but of memorialization. Panofsky does not mean to assimilate all humanities disciplines here to versions of the single discipline of history but rather to affirm the origin of all objects in humanities disciplines in the long time of culture, whether or not these objects are addressed in conventionally historicist terms. As we shall see, this long time of culture implies not only a past but also a future time. Only this time beyond the lifespan of the individual can establish the domain of culture: "The cosmos of culture, like the cosmos of nature, is a spatio-temporal structure" but of a different sort than, for example, evolutionary time (7).

12. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: The Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); Maurizio Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, trans. Richard Davies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). See also Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); and Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law, Media, and Technology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). For various studies of the documentary phenomenon, see Annalise Riles, ed., *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

The work of art does not yet appear within this space and time, only records. But again, what are they?

First of all, they are objects in the world, and it is these objects that establish the relevant difference between the sciences and the humanities. Panofsky then delimits this object more precisely in relation to the object of natural science, without resorting to invidious comparison: “When the scientist observes a phenomenon he uses *instruments* which are themselves subject to the laws of nature which he wants to explore. When the humanist examines a record he uses *documents* which are themselves produced in the course of the process which he wants to investigate” (8). Documents are not analogous to objects found in the “sphere of nature”—these objects exist whether or not humans are there to perceive them—but to instruments. Documents are also instrumental. Both documents and scientific instruments are constructed, then, but instruments disclose what is not constructed—the cosmos of nature—just by virtue of submitting to the same laws that govern those natural objects. Documents, on the other hand, emerge from the stream of time as the evidence of something that is not ontologically different from the documents themselves, that is, other works of human beings. Documents can be wrong or even mendacious. Both instruments and documents are artifacts, then, but documents are produced, as Panofsky says, “in the course of the process” the humanist wants to investigate. Their instrumentality lies precisely in the fact of their self-referential construction (if documents existed in the natural world, it would be as though light could report on its own speed), and this means that documents must be investigated themselves before they can yield any reliable knowledge. They do not bear with them the assumption of truth telling, as do scientific instruments, which are designed to say only what they must say.

In our current intellectual milieu, we are accustomed to modes of criticism that make it their business to call into question the truth telling of instrumentalities in general and documents in particular. What I want to pursue in Panofsky is not this critical theme, however, but the pairing of the concept of document with the concept of monument. Neither of these two objects appears within the field of natural science’s objects. Panofsky is led to propose the second concept of the monument because the document, though it grasps a sense of the record, is not in itself an adequate name for the art historian’s object. Here Panofsky offers an example: a German altarpiece of the fifteenth century, found in a small town in the Rhineland, in the Church of St. James. The art historian does not approach such an object as though it had no relation to any other object in the world. On the contrary, the scholar tries first to confirm the identification of the work by means of something else—a document—in this case a written contract, dated 1471, for what appears to be the very same altarpiece. But this document, Panofsky says, “may be an original, a copy, or a forgery” and can

only be validated by a complex inquiry that is itself fraught with uncertainties (8). At this point, Panofsky lacks a term to distinguish between the altarpiece and the contract or to describe the relation between the two. There are two objects to name, then, but as yet only one concept, the document.

To solve this puzzle, Panofsky settles on the term *monuments*, provisionally distinguished here from documents. “Records,” then, can be described as documents or monuments. Curiously, we have already heard an oblique invocation of the latter word three pages earlier, in the sentence that begins this line of analysis: mankind “is the only animal whose products ‘recall to mind’ an idea distinct from their material existence” (5). The phrase “recall to mind,” set off in quotation marks, describes the function of the “record”; but the word *monument* is hidden in this phrase as well, because monument means etymologically “to remind” (*monere*). Both the document and the monument “recall to mind.” So what is the difference between them? It remains for Panofsky to develop this intriguing distinction with and without a difference: “However we may look at it, the beginning of our investigation always seems to presuppose the end, and the documents which should explain the monuments are just as enigmatical as the monuments themselves” (9). The objects we find in the “sphere of culture” can be described by two words, both of which mean “recalling to mind.” Or rather, documents and monuments give us two necessary ways of looking at the same kind of object, the record.¹³

But is it the case that this object, the monument/document, can be described as the same kind of object in all of the humanities disciplines? Panofsky implicitly endorses such an extrapolation in the final two short paragraphs on the monument/document concept, before devoting the remainder of his essay to the object of study in his own discipline, the visual work of art. It is in a way easy to see the path forward to this extrapolation: “I have referred to the altarpiece of 1471 as a ‘monument’ and to the contract as a ‘document’; that is to say, I have considered the altarpiece as the object of investigation or ‘primary material,’ and the contract as the instrument of investigation, or ‘secondary material.’ In doing this I have spoken as an art historian. For a paleog-

13. It is possible that Panofsky is remembering, at least distantly, Nietzsche’s *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, in which Nietzsche develops a typology of historical motivations—the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. The first two would map roughly onto Panofsky’s monument and document, but with significant differences. For Nietzsche, monumental history is a linking together of great heroic moments in history for the purpose of imitation in the present, especially in the circumstance when contemporary heroic models are lacking. Antiquarian history expresses a communal, ethnic, or national motive, the desire to preserve a sense of relation to, and continuity with, with the peoples of a homeland. Nietzsche’s little treatise is too complex to summarize further and, as its title implies, is concerned ultimately with what humans both gain and lose by living historically.

rapher or an historian of law, the contract would be the ‘monument,’ or ‘primary material,’ and both may use pictures for documentation” (10). This observation brings Panofsky to the furthest point of extrapolation: “everyone’s ‘monuments’ are everyone else’s ‘documents’ and vice versa. . . . Many a work of art has been interpreted by a philologist or by an historian of medicine; and many a text has been interpreted, and could only have been interpreted, by an historian of art” (10). The object of study in the humanities can be subsumed to the category of “record,” but to study it means seeing it in a world of objects (Panofsky’s “cosmos of culture”), actualized as either monument or document depending on the relation of objects to one another. This is not merely a matter of perspectival ambiguity but of something much deeper, nothing less than a recognition of the demand that objects of this complex sort make of us.

The object described by Panofsky at once establishes the humanities disciplines on the ground of this ontology and declares open borders between them. Such a geopolitics of the disciplines is possible because the condition of reversibility between document and monument obtains for all of the objects of study in the humanities. Although methodological differences, institutional competition, and intellectual inertia obscure in practice the underlying ontological identity of objects in the humanities disciplines, this unhappy situation does not undo the constitutive and universal duality of the monument/document.

If Panofsky’s line of reasoning is persuasive, the humanities should not be regarded as an arbitrary aggregation of disciplines, united only by the fact of not being sciences, but on the contrary as an organic expression and necessary ramification of the monument/document into different disciplinary enterprises. These disciplines coalesced historically around an objective unity; at the same time the process itself was obfuscated by a residual humanism that failed to grasp the limitation of the disciplinary object, its equivalence not to the human world entirely, but to those objects that make a particular demand of us, whatever in human experience, past or present, that says, “Remember me!”¹⁴ The weak humanism that supplies the rhetorical terms of our defense might now be discarded without taking anything away from the humanities, certainly not their relation to the human world. The seemingly chaotic assemblage of objects that define humanities disciplines—works of art, music, literature, philosophical theories, the vast accumulation of historical events and processes—

14. We have no word in English that would cover all of the instances of the monument/document, but ancient Greek had the concept of *poiêsis*, meaning both “acting” and “making,” reminding us of both Vico and Panofsky.

can all be understood as manifestations of the monument/document, an object of study that has its own irreducible specificity.¹⁵

This clarification offers terms of peace with the sciences too, which are different not because of putatively superior knowledge claims, but because the sciences proceed first from a method, not an object, and this method discloses the object. Physics today, for example, yields a notion of matter that is very different from the notion prevalent in the early modern period, for which matter was small, hard, and inert. Later versions of the same experimental method that gave us Galileo's mechanical materiality give us today a "matter" that eludes natural languages altogether and bears little relation at all to the perception of matter on the macroscale of the human sensorium. The discovery of the Higgs boson particle is a good example of the priority of method to object, as the existence of this object was posited by nothing more than theoretical need.¹⁶ Method, so to speak, called for the object, and after some considerable coaxing

15. Panofsky's use of the words *monument* and *document* is actually modern, standardized only in the nineteenth century. As Charles W. Hedrick Jr. helpfully recalls (*Ancient History: Monuments and Documents* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006], 19), the two words were nearly reverse in meaning in antiquity. The Romans used *monumentum* to refer to any "material objects, including written texts, which recall the past," whereas *documentum* referred to anything that could be considered an exemplary lesson about something (activating the verb *docere* 'to instruct'). So it would seem that the two words themselves more or less exchanged places, in a process that Hedrick suggests was not complete until the mid-nineteenth century: "Thus as late as the 1820s, the great collection of historical texts from various archives in Germany was inaugurated with the title *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*" (19).

16. The concept of "object" in my argument is not intuitive, but it follows from Panofsky's usage and ultimately from Cassirer, in his 1940 study, Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, trans. S. G. Lofts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 85. There, Cassirer speaks of the object of science as "determined." The disciplinary object is by no means equivalent to what we might call the "percept," the object of perception, which is so often confused with the objects of science. This is to say that scientific objects are necessarily constructions. Questions in natural science arise from the observation of a puzzle in the perceptual or experiential field that requires explanation and thus calls into question the manifest intelligibility of the percept. This is why we can say that all objects of science are discovered, even those where the preexistence of the object seems apparent or given, as with, for example, the human body (presumably the object of study in areas of biology and of all medicine). But the body as percept is not the same body as the object of scientific disciplines. If the body disclosed itself sufficiently as object, anatomy would never have emerged as a practice of discovery. Nor does the body as object imply the existence of objects such as pathogens and neurons, which require ever more complex methods for their disclosure. I am conscious, of course, that this account of the relation between object and method in science is enormously compressed, and that nearly every term in the history and philosophy of science is contested. But it is my hope that this account will be adequate for the purpose of positing the difference in general terms between the constructed object of a natural science and the given object of the humanities.

it obligingly appeared.¹⁷ This priority of method is reversed in the humanities, because in these disciplines the object is given, or, better, it is given in time; it is what “recalls to mind” from a past that falls away from us only moments ago and recedes to the very earliest records of human existence. Moreover, we need not understand this past as only behind us; it may be ahead of us, in the notional future that constructs our present moment as the past of some future.¹⁸ Humanities scholars study objects in the present too, because they can make an assumption about the calling of the object to a future present, when the object in question will fully manifest its dual nature as monument and document. It does not matter, finally, that all of these callings can be exposed for their fictional agency, that we must impute to the object its capacity to call to us over a gap in time. What matters is that we experience this calling in the present; what we human beings have made and done and thought returns to us with a demand. We feel it right to answer and that if we fail to respond, the calling will only become more urgent, a warning. This is the other meaning of *monere*: to warn.

Now I must admit that in offering this description of an underlying unity of humanities disciplines and of a noncompetitive relation with the sciences, I have painted in many respects a counterfactual picture. Disciplinary politics both within the hu-

17. It may seem that I have also sidestepped the question of method, but one implication of my argument is that it has been a mistake to argue for the distinction between the sciences and the humanities on the basis of method. Scholars in the humanities often assert the primacy and even exclusivity of “interpretation” as the name of their method (I leave aside the different modes of interpretation and their possible conflicts). But the humanities sometimes make use of scientific methods, as when art historians use chemical analysis or X-ray technology to verify attribution of paintings and even to interpret paintings. The digital humanities offer us another example, increasingly important. On the other hand, there are modes of interpretation that are useful in some of the sciences. The social sciences necessarily exhibit mixed methodologies, employing where relevant or needed quantitative methods such as statistical analysis and interpretive methods such as narrative in ethnography. My point is that the difference between the procedures of the natural sciences and those of the humanities appears not in method but in the object-method relation.

18. The entailments of Panofsky’s argument are difficult to make out on this point. Panofsky’s terms are identical here to Cassirer’s understanding of the “cultural sciences” (*Kulturwissenschaften*), as in this passage from *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*: “The object [*Objekt*] of nature appears to lie immediately before our eyes. To be sure, keener epistemological analysis soon teaches us how many more and more complicated concepts are required in order to determine this object, the “object” [*Gegenstand*] of physics, chemistry, and biology in its particular nature. But this determination proceeds in a certain steady direction: we approach the object, as it were, in order to get to know it ever more exactly. But the cultural object requires a different observation; for it lies, so to speak, behind us” (85). Cassirer goes on to cite Vico, whose version of a strong humanism is a precedent for Cassirer and for Panofsky as well.

manities and between the humanities and the sciences are not peaceful. If it is perhaps too much to ask of Panofsky's terms that they establish the conditions of peace, it would still be desirable to begin negotiations with greater clarity about what we humanities scholars do. Panofsky's virtuoso bit of theorizing offers such a clarification, which I will elaborate further in the remainder of this essay. Such an elaboration is necessary, because Panofsky's paired concepts did not pass into the general repertoire of theory in the humanities; only the concept of the "document" came to circulate widely in the critical reflection of scholars on their practice, a reflection that owes something but not everything to Panofsky. Yet in the absence of the complementary concept of the monument, the document can give only a partial account of what defines humanities scholarship. It makes little sense to say that scholars in the humanities study documents, in and for themselves, when we know that documents are always instrumentalized in the process of scholarship, that they are studied because they tell us about something else. This something else is what Panofsky means by a monument. Art historians would not take notice of the contract for Panofsky's hypothetical German altarpiece if this work of art could not be distinguished from the contract by a descriptor that indicated its relation to the contract. Without actualizing this distinction, both objects—altarpiece and contract—might fall back into the stream of time; both objects might fail to "recall to mind" their complementary relation.

If the disciplines do not cut nature (or culture) precisely at the joints, they might still constitute a practical grammar of knowledge, not just a rhetoric of spurious distinctions, historical accidents that throw us into the situation of defending what we do not truly believe in, the legitimacy of the humanities as disciplines of knowledge. Against the tendency of this nominalism, I adhere to Panofsky's insight into the duality of the object of humanistic study and propose to elaborate this duality further by elevating the terms *monument* and *document* into the qualitative abstractions of monumentality and documentality. This tactic will permit us to distinguish clearly between the conventional objects in the world designated by the words *monument* and *document* and the bundle of qualities that define Panofsky's disciplinary object. We can easily see that by *monument* Panofsky does not mean only a certain kind of metal or stone structure, a memorialization of a great event. Conversely, Panofsky does not mean by *document* a piece of paper only, with writing on it. For a religious historian, the altarpiece itself may be a document, a means of inquiring into some other object of study, for example, devotional practices. For that scholar, such practices possess monumentality, and the altarpiece documentality. The reversible nature of the "records left by man" is a condition of possibility for their study, whatever name we choose to give to this study.

LONG TIME

At this point, I take leave of Panofsky's essay, though still standing, as it were, on his shoulders, and attempt to elaborate the theoretical implications of the monument/document concept, or the unity and duality of the object of study in the humanities. I argue, to begin, that every object of study in the humanities has the two properties of monumentality and documentality, whether or not these objects are material artifacts, like paintings, or immaterial objects, like those historians study: events, processes, tendencies, formations. This specification of the object in its abstract character will permit us to see how even objects of study that are inferred from documents, such as "the fall of the Roman Empire," must possess the qualities of both monumentality and documentality. Whatever material or immaterial form the object of study might take, this object can always be located on an axis of relation between monumentality at one pole and documentality at the other. Objects of study are not fixed at any point on this axis, however, which is why a work such as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* can be understood instantly as both monument (a great work of both literature and history) and document (of Enlightenment thought). The axis of relation might just as accurately be figured as a circle, in which polarity is transformed into direction: in one direction, monumentality; in the other, documentality. This helps us to see how ontological duality characterizes objects such as historical events, objects that exist only as inferences from surviving documents. All of the historian's objects are monuments, recognized in the teeth of ephemerality, the very condition that drives human beings in the first place to memorialize events in monuments of stone or metal.

It is worth insisting too that if all of the objects that humanities scholars want to study come to their attention because they have been "recalled to mind"—that is, they have the quality first of monumentality—these objects can only be recalled insofar as they have been materially embodied in some fashion, a quality we can identify with documentality. Nothing survives over long time that does not leave some material trace. Such material embodiments are of course inclusive of much more than paper documents—documentality encloses the entire world of traces, all the markings and reshapings of the physical world that can tell us about any given object of study. The duality of monumentality and documentality thus characterizes all objects of study in the humanities: Bhuddism, Descartes's *cogito*, the Boxer Rebellion, the Bonfire of the Vanities, the novels of Austen, the Hegelian dialectic, the Civil Rights movement, or an Andean folk song.¹⁹ The diversity of these objects conceals an ontological unity

19. The status of philosophy as a humanities discipline has proved troubling for some, but I have assumed that philosophy belongs to the humanities. For a comment on the problem, see Bernard Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline* (Princeton,

as object of study. The monument can be an abstraction, an event, or an idea, but it cannot reach across long time without a material trace. The document conversely is defined not by its particular substance, paper or stone, but by its materiality as such; it is the instrument by which what is monumental reaches us.

As we have broached the question of materiality, we can now take fuller account of just what is implied by the substances metaphorically associated with Panofsky's complementary concepts: in the case of the monument, metal or stone, and of the document, paper. In ordinary usage, the monument might be a thing of stone, but with the concept of monumentality, stone functions as a metaphor, a figure for defense against the passage of time. Further, the opacity of the monumental surface solicits interpretation but resists its finality, as though every monument were a puzzle like Stonehenge, even those monuments made of words that seem to say only, "I mean what I say." No monument is simply unequivocal, because every monument is historical, immersed in the stream of time. This figure is a commonplace, but not trivial. Panofsky recurs to it when he speaks of the humanities as "enlivening what otherwise would remain dead. . . . Gazing as they do at these frozen, stationary records of which I said they 'emerge from the stream of time,' the humanities endeavor to capture the process in the course of which those records were produced and became what they are" (24).

The metaphorical stoniness of the monument can also convey the opposite effect, a kind of calcified monumentality, the loss of the monument's ability to attract interpretation, inviting rather indifference or contempt. Such monuments mutate into silent surfaces later generations will pass by without a second glance. Robert Musil famously and amusingly commented on this condition in a brief essay on monuments, by which he meant the proliferation of statuary and plaques that populate our built environment: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument."²⁰ If such monuments so often seem to be hopeless attempts to coerce recollection, their failure gestures toward the much larger stakes of monumentality. The metaphoric potentiality of the monument stretches across all of the possibilities of remembering and forgetting and justifies our taking the risk of calling the great works we revere and great

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 180–99. Williams offers a strenuous critique of the "scientism" that supports some philosophers' rejection of the humanities. Williams argues instead for the necessary engagement of philosophy with its history and, therefore, its identity as a humanities discipline.

20. Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* (CITY: Archipelago: 2006), 64. I thank Scott Newstok for drawing my attention to Musil's piece. The condition Musil describes is not exclusively an expression of old Europe's monarchical culture and its fetish for monuments, despite John Quincy Adam's famous quip, that "democracy has no monuments." Democracy, of course, has no lack of monuments.

events we do not want to forget monuments, knowing the potential banality of that compliment.

Documents, by contrast, find their metaphoric association in the substance of parchment or paper, at once fragile and yet surprisingly enduring. Documents also have the purpose of recalling to mind, but they do not necessarily make any demands. They are defined by their instrumentality, their capacity to store up messages, some of which may never be read, or if read, never understood. Documents make monumentality possible, but they speak with many and contradictory voices. They are voluble, chatty, full of information but not always of truth. They aspire to give testimony and even to teach, as the etymology of the word tells us (from *docere* 'to teach'). But if they are so eager to speak, they are often difficult to hear. Their voices can subside to a whisper in the archives.

Monuments, on the other hand, give the illusion of immediate accessibility: many people are able to give the basic definition of Kant's "categorical imperative" or the plot of *Moby Dick* without having read the *Metaphysic of Morals* or Melville's novel. The more familiar the monument, the greater the space it occupies in the cosmos of culture, amounting finally to a specious familiarity. This space swells into equivalence with the sense of the word *monumental* as huge, overwhelming. This metaphoric monumentality gives us a clue to the rhythms of remembering and forgetting that traverse work in the humanities and indeed in culture at large. Writing on the history of philosophy, for example, Randall Collins has argued that at any one time, culture can accommodate only a small number of philosophical systems, possibly only three; monumentality crowds out other contenders to the margins or to obscurity.²¹ A similar constraint obtains with literature: If Jane Austen achieves monumentality, then Alexander Pope becomes vulnerable to a calcified monumentality. Again, the duality of the monument/document reveals itself: monuments impose on any given present, and they are limited in number because they take up so much space. Documents are capable by contrast of infinite accumulation. Even though they are vulnerable to annihilation and are constantly being destroyed—archivists estimate that only about 5 percent of documents find their way to the safety of the archive—they continue to accumulate and do so now exponentially in electronic form.²² As fragile as they are, documents store up power; they hold in reserve the power to alter the order of

21. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

22. For statistics on the rarity of documents, see John Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory* (Duluth, MN: Littwin Books, 2009).

the monuments themselves. Monuments have the heights, but documents have the numbers.

The relation between monumentality and documentality is always dynamic, which is to say, unstable; documents change our understanding of monuments and sometimes even destroy them or, better, demote them to documental status. The latter effect is an unavoidable consequence of the dynamic inherent in the object, which is always responsive to the present moment, to the ongoingness of historical time. The emergence of “history from below,” for example, is itself a historical event, but it has come to possess a certain inevitability in retrospect; we are puzzled that earlier historians failed to see this object. The object called to us, belatedly, from the archive, and in this calling we discovered a new monumentality. The vicissitudes of the object are even more vividly demonstrated in the case of the Holocaust, which did not appear as a historical object at all until some years after the Second World War. This delay seems almost impossible to credit; it is as though the Holocaust generated a shock wave with a deceptively long period, rising up only when it reached the shallows of memory, the threshold of forgetting, and breaking upon the present with immense but ambiguous impact. This kind of monumentality takes a long time to assimilate and might very well strike our successors differently than it does ourselves. Because objects emerge in time and achieve monumentality by many routes, humanities scholarship progresses without closing on a terminal interpretation, in a rhythm determined by the duality of its object.

It is always possible to construct a new object of study, but only when the necessary documents survive that would support such a construction. The great question that faces us at the present time is what difference it will make to our conception of documentality that electronic preservation has vastly expanded the archive of documents. At the least we will be compelled to think much harder about the relation between remembering and forgetting and about the peculiar gains and costs of both processes. If the object of study in the humanities is indeed characterized by a finite monumentality and a virtually infinite documentality, this condition is being experienced today with a new and challenging intensity. The stakes will be raised for what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget. Those contemporary works of art which seem to refuse monumentality, which are destroyed in their creation and survive only as documents, like Christo’s wrapped buildings, struggle with this question. To live in our moment means to be aware of the fact that our society generates vast quantities of ephemeral artifacts and trivial events; we cannot remember them all, even if we could preserve records of them all. The latter goal is of course suppositional and depends on how really permanent electronic documents are. I raise these questions, because it seems to me that they are illuminated by the monument/document

concept and that humanities scholars are well positioned to study the problem of ephemeral culture and its correlate, a short-time monumentality. We do not yet know how to understand the constant churning up and under of cultural monuments that seem to command the horizon only to sink quickly into oblivion. We do know, or should, that every decision we make about what to remember, what to save, has very real social effects. But these effects may also require the long term to become apparent. They are unlike the more immediate social benefits claimed for humanities study, but they are equally important. Just as the humanities find their objects in long time, their effects may be disclosed in long time as well.

Memorialization has many sites, but the humanities have an institutional home. As disciplines, their institutional being is characterized not only by a method (or methods), but more fundamentally by a curriculum, a program of study. The notion that the object of study is a matter of indifference, that the humanities are defined rather by a method, is only a professional deformation of our moment. Whatever else we may want to assert about the methods or aims of the humanities, surely the most important fact for us to acknowledge is that by the humanities, we mean the study of a particular kind of object. This object is realized in a curriculum. The object calls to us across the long time of human existence, exceeding by far the duration of any one human life. I believe that most people, even those who have hardened into permanent suspicion of humanities disciplines, will recognize the responsibility that this long time imposes on the short time of individual lives and that this aspect of being human is not trivial. If it elicits in some the kind of lip service given to pieties that always come up short of resources, that is a pity. But those of us who are scholars of the humanities need not borrow our self-understanding from the words of this lip service. Where has that gotten us? The legitimacy of what we do needs in the first instance a better description. A better defense will follow. A great and arrogant humanist scholar of the nineteenth century famously remarked, "Never apologize, never explain." We scholars can no longer affect the arrogance of a Benjamin Jowett, but perhaps it would now be strategic for us to stop apologizing and to begin explaining what it is that we study.

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