How to Deal with Scholarly Forgetting in the History of the Humanities: Starting Points for Discussion

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ABSTRACT

This contribution serves to start a more thoroughgoing discussion about the phenomenon of scholarly forgetting within the humanities beyond disciplinary boundaries. How can one explain the fact that knowledge, at some point circulating in the scholarship, eventually sinks into oblivion and, in some cases, even escapes the attention of the historian of scholarship? The essay argues that each instance of scholarly forgetting should be understood against the backdrop of a complex interplay between the *Vergessenspotential* of the object under consideration and the working context of the forgetting community. It examines how processes of forgetting have coshaped both the humanities and how scholars think about its history. In conjunction with this, it discusses how we, as historians of scholarship, may deal with scholarly forgetting more self-consciously than has been attempted before.

Why don't we know what we don't know any longer?[1]

n *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon argued that there was a need for a universal history of learning as part of his plan to reform knowledge. Apart from "some small memorials of the schools, authors, and books" of jurists, mathematicians,

1. Paraphrasing Robert Proctor and Londa L. Schiebinger, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

THEME

rhetoricians, and philosophers, there was, according to Bacon, no "just story of learning" detailing "throughout the ages of the world" not only the origin and evolution of different fields of knowledge but also their "decays, depressions, oblivions, removes, with the causes and occasions of them" (*The Advancement*, II, 1, 2). Bacon's insistence on "decays, depressions, oblivions, [and] removes" is unusual. There was (and is) no history of knowledge that included, systematically and beyond the occasional appetite for long-forgotten curiosities, accounts of how knowledge sank into oblivion. This is notable in view of the fact that in other domains of the humanities, forgetting, like memory, remains a hotly debated topic. In the history of scholarship, as elsewhere, what is forgotten not only is interesting because it confronts us, as a community of scholars, with bits and pieces of what we did not yet know; it is also important because omissions often shed new light on what we thought we knew for certain.

In her pioneering study on scholarly oblivion in the history of linguistics, Brigitte Schlieben-Lange (1943–2000) observed that it is the principal task of the historian of scholarship to reconstruct the processes involved in the "Veränderung der Wissensbestände einer Disziplin."[2] In this context, she discusses forgetting (*Vergessen*) as one of the most important factors in processes of knowledge change—situating it alongside canonization, censure, repression, restructuring, and particularization, some of which overlap with our general understanding of oblivion. Taking Schlieben-Lange's work as our initial inspiration, we envision the following as a starting point for discussion about scholarly forgetting in more general terms. It is in no way intended as an exhaustive discussion of the subject and will necessarily be selective and schematic in its treatment. We do hope, however, that what follows may prompt a critical discussion about the ways in which scholars forget and how processes of forgetting have contributed to shaping both the humanities and the ways we think about their history. We are specifically interested in the ways these scholars, in the process of scholarly communication, discard or ignore knowledge that historians of knowledge and scholarship might nonetheless consider relevant to their work and that appears to have been accessible to them.

OBLIVION STUDIES IN GENERAL

This is by no means the first investigation into the significance of forgetting. Scholarly interest in forgetting has been catalyzed to a large extent by the increasing interest in memory studies over the last decades as well as by the consequences of digital data storage

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2. Brigitte Schlieben-Lange, "Vom Vergessen in der Sprachwissenschaftsgeschichte: Zu den 'Ideologen' und ihrer Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 14 (1984): 19–20.

and processing.[3] Over this period, attempts to theorize the study of forgetting within the context of memory studies have resulted in some extravagant neologisms, often with different emphases, such as *Obliviologie*, *lethotology*, and *amnesiology* as well as the more sober designation *oblivion studies*.[4] As a natural part of the study of not-knowing, or "the cultural production of ignorance," forgetfulness also forms part of a field of research that was dubbed *agnotology* in a recent programmatic volume.[5] Although there is an ever-increasing literature on oblivion of all kinds, what is lacking is a common terminology to think and speak about the phenomenon.[6] In what follows we will not make an attempt to arrive at such a common vocabulary nor to summarize the general literature on forgetting exhaustively, but we do hope to briefly indicate some general tendencies in oblivion studies, before zooming in on the specific notion of scholarly forgetting.[7]

Given the increasing scholarly interest in oblivion, there is an extensive—not to say unwieldy—literature on the topic. Current scholarship often concerns the nature of oblivion (exactly what is it?) or its appraisal (is it a good or bad thing?). With regard to the former question, we note that several typologies of forgetting have recently been proposed,[8] and we second Guy Beiner's remark that "although these different categories are neither definitive nor mutually exclusive, thinking in more precise terms is a significant step forward towards a more meaningful appreciation of the roles of forgetting."[9] As to

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3. Oliver Dimbath and Peter Wehling, "Soziologie des Vergessens: Konturen, Themen und Perspektiven," in *Soziologie des Vergessens: Theoretische Zugänge und empirische Forschungsfelder*, ed. Oliver Dimbath and Peter Wehling, Theorie und Methode: Sozialwissenschaften (Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 2011), 7–34.

4. A recent discussion of the emergent field is Liedeke Plate, "Amnesiology: Towards the Study of Cultural Oblivion," *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 143–55.

5. Proctor and Schiebinger, *Agnotology*.

6. See Ineke Wessel and Michelle L. Moulds, "Collective Memory: A Perspective from (Experimental) Clinical Psychology," *Memory* 16, no. 3 (April 2008): 288–304, for an attempt to bridge the gap between history and cognition studies.

7. Approaches to forgetting processes adopted by neuroscientists, psychologists, and cognitive philosophers are less pertinent here because they primarily focus on individual processes of forgetting. To mention just a few: Ineke Wessel and Michelle L. Moulds, "How Many Types of Forgetting? Comments on Connerton (2008)," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 3 (2008): 287–94; Christine Abbt, *"Ich vergesse": Über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Denkens aus philosophischer Perspektive* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016).

8. For typologies surveying different forms and modes of forgetting, see esp. Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59–71; and, more comprehensively, Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), which shows many overlaps and similarities. See also Monika Pritzel and Hans J. Markowitsch, "Die Vielfalt der Möglichkeiten des Vergessens," in *Warum wir vergessen* (Berlin: Springer, 2017), 3–31. An extensive discussion of these and more typologies can be found in Abbt, *"Ich vergesse,"* 94–105.

9. Guy Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.

the second question of how forgetting is valued, there now seems to be a consensus among scholars of different backgrounds that forgetting can no longer be simplistically regarded as a negative corollary of memory[10] nor as a passive, accidental, or "natural" deterioration of what was once remembered. In the footsteps of philosophers such as Montaigne and Nietzsche,[11] present-day scholars increasingly tend to appreciate forgetting as something positive and even necessary, at both the individual and the collective level, in an age of chronic information overload due to ever-increasing digital information storage and processing possibilities.[12] Second, it is seen as an integral part of the process of remembering and is no longer regarded as the antithesis of memory. Third, and in conjunction with this second point, it is now more often than not explored as a means of actively restructuring and coshaping memory.[13]

Thus, it seems that scholars have come to look at forgetting processes from the double perspective of a Janus face. On the one hand, forgetfulness is assumed to result in the repetition of fatal errors (hence the imperative "never forget," e.g., in Holocaust studies). On the other, forgetting may also help us to unshackle the burdens of the past and start again with a tabula rasa (compare the notion of "amnesty," or constructive or therapeutic forgetting).[14] From the perspective of intellectual history, or "information man-

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10. The complex relationship, not a purely oppositional one, between forgetting and remembering is reflected in the titles of some recent books; see, e.g., Michael Bernard-Donals, *Forgetful Memory: Representation and Remembrance in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010); Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance.*

11. Sybille Krämer, "Das Vergessen nicht vergessen! Oder: Ist das Vergessen ein defizienter Modus von Erinnerung," *Paragrana* 9, no. 2 (2000): 256–59.

12. See, e.g., Egon Flaig, "Soziale Bedingungen des kulturellen Vergessens," in *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 93–94; Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 196; Monika Pritzel and Hans J. Markowitsch, "Schlussbetrachtung: Plädoyer für ein neues Verständnis des Vergessens," in *Warum wir vergessen* (Berlin: Springer, 2017), 220. More in general, see Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

13. See Dariuš Zifonun, "'Vergessendes Erinnern': Eine Wissenssoziologie des Erinnerns und Vergessens," in *Soziologie des Vergessens. Theoretische Zugänge und empirische Forschungsfelder*, ed. Oliver Dimbath and Peter Wehling (Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 2011), 194; Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*, 20; Elena Esposito, "Tools to Remember and Ever-Changing Past," in *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alberto Cevolini (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 335–44; Matthias Gross and Linsey McGoey, *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015); Dimbath and Wehling, "Soziologie des Vergessens: Konturen, Themen und Perspektiven"; Proctor and Schiebinger, *Agnotology*; Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (1997; Munich: Beck, 2005). For a brief overview of the major titles in oblivion studies, see Plate, "Amnesiology," 144–46; Oliver Dimbath, *Oblivionismus: Vergessen und Vergesslichkeit in der modernen Wissenschaft* (Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 2014), 233–326, esp. 248–66.

14. Christian Meier, *Das Gebot zu vergessen und die Unabweisbarkeit des Erinnerns: Vom öffentlichen Umgang mit schlimmer Vergangenheit*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Siedler, 2010), 9; Assmann,

agement" more generally, forgetting can be seen as a means of eliminating superfluous ballast and regaining creativity.[15] And yet, scholars sometimes also emphasize that to acknowledge scholarship from the past may enhance and rejuvenate their discipline.[16] "We must go into the past of the discipline we profess," Arnaldo Momigliano wrote, "in order to learn something new or to be reminded of something we had forgotten, which is almost the same."[17]

In this article, however, we are not interested in a philosophical discussion of forgetting, or whether it is a good or a bad thing, so much as in the ways in which it worked in the past and how it affects our understanding of our disciplines or fields of knowledge. In the following pages, therefore, we will tap into the general literature on forgetting, encompassing a high number of different disciplines, only insofar as it is relevant to our purposes. We take the notion of scholarly forgetting to refer to the phenomenon of forgetting in scholarship, including the history of scholarship, and the principal question to consider is how knowledge can fade into oblivion and, in some cases, even escape the attention of historians.

THE HISTORY OF FORGETTING IN THE HISTORY OF SCHOLARSHIP

Historians of scholarship and knowledge have mainly been interested in the question of how scholars of the past produced, disseminated, and transformed knowledge, and

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Formen des Vergessens, 57–66. In the latter case, reference is made, time and again, to the act of amnesty proclaimed by Greek democrats in 403 BCE toward those Athenians who supported the cruel dictatorship of the oligarchy. Krämer rightly observes how "amnesty" contributes to creating unity and identity by relying on collective forgetting rather than on collective memory; "Das Vergessen nicht vergessen!," 254–55. See also the distinction between "forgetting" and "forgiving" made by Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 500–506.

15. In this respect, one might recall the multiple attempts that have been made to design *artes oblivionis* besides the traditional *artes mnemonicae*. See, e.g., D. Draaisma, *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 238–39; Lina Bolzoni, *La Chambre de la mémoire: Modèles littéraires et iconographiques à l'âge de l'imprimerie* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2005), 220ff.

16. Writing from the perspective of art education scholarship, Mary Hafeli expressed a concern that the erasure of research history would result in "a fragmented, incoherent disciplinary knowledge base, a condition that," she argues, "ultimately may slow the deepening of our collective insight and deter substantive refinements to the field's evolving theories and practices of art teaching and learning" ("Forget This Article: On Scholarly Oblivion, Institutional Amnesia, and Erasure of Research History," *Studies in Art Education* 50, no. 4 [2009]: 370). For her, however, scholarly oblivion was not so much an object of analysis in itself as a diagnosis of what was going wrong in her field.

17. Arnaldo Momigliano, *Studies on Modern Scholarship*, ed. Glen Warren Bowersock and Tim Cornell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 223.

they study this by exploring scholarly methods, selection criteria, interpretative strategies, and so forth. In recent years, moreover, many cultural historians have started paying increasing attention to the "circulation of knowledge," an interest reflected in many ongoing research projects and publications.[18] The study of individual scholars is, in such a context, mainly relevant insofar as their work forms part of wider webs, or communities, of knowledge. Similarly, when investigating scholarly oblivion (or, alternatively, the *noncirculation* of knowledge), the individual level of analysis is only relevant insofar as it resonates with what we may—perhaps a little stuffily—call "amnesiological patterns": omissions and silences that are reproduced socially, namely, through communication between individuals or networks of scholars, and thus constitute structural "blind spots" that are in need of an explanation beyond the psychopathological level of blocked individual memory. Collective forms of forgetting generally rely on the implicit or explicit agreement among a group of people not to remember specific *Wissensbestände*, with the (either intended or accidental) effect that they will not be encoded in the usual vehicles of collective scholarly memory such as the history of scholarship and knowledge, scholars' biographies, as well as *status quaestionis* and bibliographies. This means that, strictly speaking, individual scholars and historians of scholarship may remember *Wissensbestände* without, for whatever reason, sharing their remembrance with the scholarly community.

The most relevant contributions to forgetting in the history of scholarship have come from cultural history[19] and the sociology of knowledge and science.[20] Notably, in the history of ideas, scholarly oblivion has not found extensive treatment. This is remarkable in view of the fact that most historians of knowledge will probably agree with Daniel Droixhe's observation that "periods and paradigms are also defined by the oblivion or shared refusal of a body of knowledge."[21] To the best of our current knowledge, Schlieben-Lange's seminal article on forgetting in the history of linguistics remains the only standalone assessment of the topic in the history of humanities scholarship.

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18. On recent trends in the history of knowledge (*Wissensgeschichte*), see Johan Östling et al., "The History of Knowledge and the Circulation of Knowledge: An Introduction," in *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations into the History of Knowledge*, ed. Johan Östling et al. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 9–33.

19. Weinrich, *Lethe*.

20. Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: The Post-Italianate Edition* (1965; University of Chicago Press, 1993); Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968). For a more recent work, see Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*.

21. Daniel Droixhe, "La crise de l'hébreu langue-mère au XVIIe siècle," in *La République des Lettres et l'histoire du judaïsme antique, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle: Mythe, Critique et Histoire*, ed. Chantal Grell (Paris: Sorbonne, 1992), 66; translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

Although her work remains fundamental for the topic under discussion, Schlieben-Lange died too early to elaborate her pioneering reflections on the subject (to which we will return below). Her article in many ways anticipates later developments in memory studies, and especially the work of Aleida and Jan Assmann, but it has been overlooked in the more recent literature about forgetting in the natural and social sciences.[22]

The German linguist and cultural historian Harald Weinrich (b. 1927) coined the term *wissenschaftlicher Oblivionismus* ('scientific forgetting', 'scientific oblivionism').[23] Weinrich discussed the phenomenon primarily as a selection mechanism in the natural sciences and illustrated it using the example of the work of Nobel laureates James Watson and Francis Crick (discussed further below). Starting from Weinrich's notion, the German sociologist Oliver Dimbath developed a more widely applicable notion of scientific oblivionism in his sociological studies on the subject. In Dimbath's work, scientific forgetting is theorized not just as a strategy of selection in the natural sciences but also as covering diverse forms of oblivion in modern science, from structural and largely unconscious amnesia to organized attempts to erase scientific knowledge. As a sociologist, Dimbath heavily relied on the work of the "founding father" of the sociology of science, the American sociologist Robert Merton (1910–2003), who among humanities scholars is mainly known for *On the Shoulders of Giants* (1965). His sociological work was not devoted specifically to scientific oblivion but still introduced a handful of useful concepts such as "obliteration by incorporation," "Matthew effect," and "cryptomnesia." We will come back to some of these and other notions whenever they prove relevant for the history of the humanities.

In what follows, we will refrain from producing a fixed typology of scholarly forgetting as one sometimes encounters it, as well as from establishing a static taxonomy based on binary principles such as intentional and unintentional oblivion.[24] In order to open the discussion rather than close it, we offer below a summary of some of the main issues and recurring questions that we discussed with colleagues and students at meetings, seminars, and conferences (see the preface to this theme section). In order to structure our thinking, we address the questions, Who forgets what, and why?; and Where does scholarly forgetting take place?[25]

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22. There is no reference to Schlieben-Lange's work in Weinrich, *Lethe*; Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*.

23. Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 212–18.

24. See especially Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*.

25. These questions are similar to those raised in agnotology; see Proctor and Schiebinger, *Agnotology*, 1–4.

PARAMETERS OF SCHOLARLY FORGETTING

Scholarly forgetting takes place in the stream of communication between scholars and very often between different generations of scholars. What is left of these communications resides mainly in texts. Historians of scholarship concentrate primarily on scholarly sources from the past: specialized articles, monographs, bibliographies, and so forth. Additionally, they take into account what previous historians of scholarship have written on the subject. Both "historical" scholarly texts and histories of scholarship constitute the main part of a scholarly community's collective memory. It is here that the main decisions are made about what is important or relevant and what is not, about what should be remembered and what can be ignored. These are, in other words, the main sites of scholarly forgetting, although they can of course diverge in their decisions over what should be remembered and what not, and why. Apart from these two basic types of sources, there is, moreover, an interesting gray zone of scholarly writing in which scholars actively reflect upon their field or branch of study and their position in it, for instance, in *status quaestionis*, in paratexts such as introductions and prefaces, but also in unpublished sources such as letters, internal reports, (rejected) funding applications, and scholars' diaries, notes, and other unpublished materials, sometimes kept in public archives.

By strictly adhering to such a delimitation, however, we risk forgetting from the beginning those actors who do not belong to the inner circle of academia, but who nevertheless create theories and knowledge, such as amateurs and independent scholars. Some of them will explain the fact that they do not have an academic post precisely as the result of a deliberate act of scholarly forgetting, and it is safe to assume that this holds true in at least some cases.

The question "Who forgets what?" may sound logical and plain. However, as our conversations made clear, it somehow suggests agency on the part of the person "doing" the forgetting and thus implies too much about the reasons behind scholarly forgetting (which can be varied, as we shall see in the next section). It is not without reason that many languages, including Greek and Latin, have medial and passive forms to express *I forget* (i.e., *epilanthánomai* and *obliviscor*), suggesting that, in acts of forgetting, agency is not a clear-cut matter, and the subject of forgetting is, in linguistic terms, more often a patient than an agent. Therefore, it was suggested that we modify this initial question to ask instead, "Which force makes what fall into oblivion among whom?" This question brings into sharper focus the *obliviating force*, which makes a certain object fade into oblivion, the *object of forgetting*, which can be an idea, a method, a book, a name, a broader pattern, and so forth, and finally the *community* in which specific knowledge ceases to be in circulation and is thus forgotten. In what follows, we will shortly work

our way from "the forgetting community" via "the object of forgetting" to "the engines of forgetting," thus moving from *who* via *what* to *why*.

Starting with the community, we may ask whether our case of forgetting pertains to individual scholars, small-scale groups of scholars ("circles"), or entire communities (research schools or even disciplines). As explained above, we are not so much interested in cases of forgetting that are reducible to the psychopathology of individual scholars nor to incidental cases of scholarly oblivion. This implies that scholarly forgetting manifests itself first and foremost—following Dimbath's analytical distinction—on the meso-level of groups and the macro-level of institutions, rather than on the micro-level of the individual.[26] This is to some extent reminiscent of Jan Assmann's distinction between individual, communicative, and collective memory.[27] It is also interesting to observe in this context that what falls into oblivion in one community is not necessarily doomed to oblivion in another (knowledge might even survive in a very limited community, where it is handed over from generation to generation—as with a "grandma's recipe").

The "object" of scholarly forgetting relates to that which slides into oblivion. From a typological perspective, Dimbath derives his views on the objects of forgetting from his theory of knowledge, distinguishing between explicit and implicit ways of knowing, which he calls *deklarativ-reflektorisches Wissen* and incorporated knowledge, respectively. Implicit, tacit, or incorporated (*inkorporiertes*) knowledge (routines, implicit rules, know-how, etc.), for which there is a growing interest among historians of knowledge,[28] is not articulated in scholarly discourse but is silently accepted and operationalized. Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is stated and discussed in the discipline.[29] For a history rather than a typology of scholarly forgetting, we believe a more specific descriptive vocabulary is needed to understand exactly *what* is being forgotten in the production and circulation of scholarly knowledge "throughout the ages of the world," to recall Bacon's words.

Working from the history of concepts and ideas, Schlieben-Lange defines the object of forgetting in terms of *Wissensbestände*. Translated as "stocks of knowing," this no-

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26. Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*, e.g., 220–31.

27. Arnulf Mattes's contribution to this special issue discusses the dynamics of forgetting and remembering in parallel communities.

28. See, e.g., Matteo Valleriani, ed., *The Structures of Practical Knowledge* (Cham: Springer, 2017). See also Paul Connerton's early discussion of the ways in which noninscribed (or incorporated) practices are transmitted, supplementing the more common text-oriented focus on inscribed transmission: *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

29. Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*, 131–46.

tion in her specific usage includes scholarly concepts, assumptions, and procedures (*Begriffe*, *Theoreme*, *Verfahren*).[30] As such, her *Wissensbestände* closely correspond to Merton's ideas, formulations, methods, and scientific findings, all of which may fall prey to oblivion in science.[31] Indeed, these *Wissensbestände* are the regular topics of the history of ideas in general and the history of scholarship in particular. In studying scholarly oblivion, however, we may distinguish some other relevant "objects of forgetting" beyond the usual objects of knowledge under study in the history of scholarship.

First, we would like to draw attention to the relationship between a *Wissensbestand* and its author. Often, an idea, formulation, method, or discovery sinks into oblivion together with the name of the scholar(s) who authored or coshaped it. It is, therefore, important to focus on producers of knowledge, lest important actors be overlooked in historiography. It is safe to say that much progress is being made today and that priority is given to eliminating one major blind spot in traditional historiography, in that increasing significance is attached to knowledge produced by actors other than the typical armchair scholars. Hence, much attention has been given to knowledge produced by laymen, artisans, field workers, non-European, and female actors—that is, producers of knowledge often overlooked by traditional historiography (and not only the history of knowledge). It is important to specify that, in this context, the focus is often on knowledge that cannot be labeled "scholarly" (it often concerns mundane or technical knowledge). Feminist sciences studies, however, has a long tradition of investigating the dynamics of who is cited in the literature and who is not, as well as which scholars are included in dominant historical accounts and which are lacking.

Although there often is an obvious connection between knowledge and its producer in terms of its forgetting potential, this relationship can be of a highly flexible nature. Sometimes an idea outlives the memory of its author, whose name and contribution to the field are then forgotten. In the sociology of science,[32] the term "obliteration by incorporation" (usually abbreviated to OBI) denotes the phenomenon whereby the creator of an idea is forgotten due to the success of her or his idea, concept, or term: the idea has become so established, canonical, and widespread that it has become common knowledge. Thus, when OBI occurs, the object of oblivion is not the idea itself, but rather

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30. It is important to emphasize in this context that Schlieben-Lange's notion of *Wissensbestand* goes beyond one specific unit of knowledge. With the notion of *Verfahren*, in particular, she opens up the field to scholarly praxis, or forms of implicit knowledge, introducing a distinction similar to that made by Dimbath.

31. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, 311.

32. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 28–37.

its author.[33] A related phenomenon is *uncitedness*, elaborated by the linguist Eugene Garfield (1925–2017), who worked extensively on bibliometrics and scientometrics. Among the forms of uncitedness he distinguished is that "of the *distinction* that comes to those whose work has become so well known (and presumably been previously so heavily cited) that one finds it at first tedious, then unnecessary, and finally actually gauche to cite such men [!] at all."[34] In such cases, too, it is the author rather than his or her inventions that may be forgotten. A slightly different but related phenomenon whereby the author of an idea rather than the idea itself is forgotten is *cryptomnesia*, a concept with a rich intellectual history that Robert Merton applied to the history of science. Cryptomnesia—alternatively termed "unconscious plagiary"—occurs when a scholar takes an idea to be new and original while it in fact is the "forgotten residue of what he [or she] had once read or heard elsewhere."[35] It must be stressed, however, that scholars whose works are no longer cited in the scholarship are not necessarily forgotten in the historical accounts of the disciplines to which they contributed. While new scholarship may for various reasons silently supersede older scholarship, the history of scholarship would normally explicate and explain these supersessions—and notions such as *obliteration by incorporation*, *uncitedness*, and *cryptomnesia* may sharpen our focus in this regard.

Apart from a *Wissensbestand* or its (supposed) creator or author, the object of forgetting can also refer to a *location*. For example, a scholarly community may very well remember the existence of a manuscript containing precious information, although its whereabouts have for some reason slipped into oblivion. This kind of scholarly forgetting in particular borders on common conceptions of knowledge loss, when knowledge loses its principal accessibility, for instance, due to destruction.[36] Finally, there are

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33. Tom Zille's contribution to this special issue deals with an instance of OBI. Names and authors can also be erased on a very large scale. Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov (*Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries)* [New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2015]), for instance, aim to show how British colonials appropriated materials composed by Catholic missionaries on a massive scale.

34. Eugene Garfield, "Uncitedness III: The Importance of *Not* Being Cited," in *Essays of an Information Scientist*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Institute for Scientific Information Press, 1977), 413. Apart from this, Garfield also distinguished the "uncitedness of the mediocre, the unintelligible, the irrelevant" and that "of the meritorious but undiscovered or forgotten." The phenomenon is still studied intensively. For a later related study, see Jeppe Nicolaisen and Tove Faber Frandsen, "Zero Impact: A Large-Scale Study of Uncitedness," *Scientometrics* 119, no. 2 (2019): 1227–54.

35. See the principal discussion of Robert K. Merton, "Resistance to the Systematic Study of Multiple Discoveries in Science," *European Journal of Sociology* 4, no. 2 (1963): 237–82, esp. 272–82.

36. On the relationship between loss, or *Wissensverlust*, and forgetting, see Andreas Bruck and Burkhard Fenner, "Erinnern und Vergessen im Forschungsprozess: Ein systematisierender Überblick," in *Erinnern und Vergessen: Vorträge des 27. Deutschen Volkskundekongresses, Göttingen 1989*, ed. Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Rolf W. Brednich, and Helge Gerndt, Beiträge zur Volkskunde in Niedersachsen 5

examples of entire knowledge hubs disappearing and fading into oblivion. An example in case is the spectacular collapse of a high number of German universities around 1800 in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. This raises the question of the extent to which the sudden disappearance of a locus of knowledge impacts the forgetting potential of associate knowledge objects and affiliated knowledge authors.[37]

CAUSES OF SCHOLARLY OBLIVION: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN *VERGESSENSPOTENTIAL* AND WORKING CONTEXT

Having briefly discussed the who (forgetting community) and what of scholarly oblivion (object of forgetting), we now turn to its motors, which we refer to as *obliviating force*. The factors behind scholarly forgetting are manifold and range from accidental, individual oblivion to "technologies of forgetting" or large-scale, organized attempts to make entire groups forget things, from *lapsus memoriae* to *damnatio memoriae* (or, in contemporary slang, "deplatforming").[38] Building on previous work on oblivion in the history of knowledge, we will discuss some of the issues that emerged from our discussions as particularly relevant. In doing so, we hope to raise more sustained attention for the reasons why scholars do not use knowledge that is, as far as can be seen, both potentially relevant and in principle available to them.

Our discussion is premised on the idea that obliviating forces are in most cases highly dependent on attributes or characteristics of the forgetting community, the object of forgetting or both. Generally spoken, oblivion might sometimes be explained by features attributable to specific *Wissensbestände*, whereas other explanations must rather be situated in the specific context of those who forget. Mostly, however, explanations must be sought in the interplay between various factors. In other words, we think that the reasons for scholarly forgetting cannot be understood monocausally. Many historically variable factors are involved, all of which need to be assessed very carefully in each individual case

(Göttingen: Volker Schmerse, 1991), 109–11; Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*, 167–81. See also Anja-Silvia Goeing et al., eds., *Collectors' Knowledge: What Is Kept, What Is Discarded*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 227 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

37. See, e.g., Dieter J. Weiß, "Das große Universitätssterben um 1800," in *Das Athen der Welfen: Die Reformuniversität Helmstedt 1576–1810*, ed. Jens Bruning and Ulrike Gleixner, Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog August Bibliothek 92 (Wolfenbüttel: Harrassowitz, 2010), 78–85.

38. The terms "technologies" and "regimes of forgetting" have sometimes been used outside the history of knowledge and scholarship strictly speaking in order to focalize institutionally and especially state-enforced forms of forgetting. See, e.g., Manduhai Buyandelger, "Technologies of Forgetting, State Socialism, and Potential Memories," in *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Memory, and Gender in Contemporary Mongolia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 62–86. Christine Amadou's contribution to this issue picks up on the notion of "regime of forgetting."

in order to understand the conditions under which something fell into oblivion in a specific scholarly community.

In order to understand why specific knowledge runs the risk of being forgotten, one way to start would be to reconstruct its *Vergessenspotential* (forgetting potential),[39] taking into account the specific historical circumstances of its falling (or being discarded) from memory. In other words, which attributes of the object of forgetting may contribute to its transience? What characteristics are responsible for the ease with which it falls into oblivion? Lack of exclusivity, originality, and accessibility will increase the forgetting potential of a certain *Wissensbestand*. A scholarly introduction to language philosophy without a unique selling position can, for instance, easily fall prey to oblivion, in view of the fact that there are many similar and competing textbooks. However, uniqueness and originality in itself are not enough to ward off scholarly forgetting. Whatever original insights a unique seventeenth-century manuscript may contain, its forgetting potential will be high if it is hardly findable or not easily available.[40] It does not come as a surprise that "forgetting potential" is highly dependent upon material and distributional factors: is the object under consideration conveyed as an open-access article in a highly ranked journal or in some hard-to-get Festschrift? Is it written in a major scholarly language such as English or in a smaller and less widely known one? Is it composed in an accessible and well-structured manner, or is it, by contrast, ill-conceived and hard to understand?[41]

However, the extent to which an object's inherent *Vergessenspotential* materializes also depends on the specific historical contexts of the forgetting community, such as the direct scholarly context and/or the general intellectual or cultural climate. Aleida Assmann has aptly described how noncanonized materials, preserved somewhere in cultural archives, are "in a status of latency between a 'no more' and a 'not-yet,'" thus waiting for their potential historiographical revival through processes of reselecting, reinterpreting, reassessing, and so on.[42] In the history of science, a similar phenomenon is known as a "Sleeping Beauty." In its original formulation by Ton van Raan (2004),

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39. See Bruck and Fenner, "Erinnern und Vergessen," 110–11, 118, for the concept "Erinnerungspotential."

40. For a discussion on the distinction between "accessibility" and "availability" with respect to "forgetting processes," see Jefferson A. Singer and Martin A. Conway, "Should We Forget Forgetting?," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 3 (2008): 279–85.

41. Recent studies of uncitedness, which we introduced above, confirm that multiple factors contribute to a publication's citation rate and, hence, visibility, including citation practices in the relevant scholarly fields, the type of publication and the dominant genre hierarchy, and the publication's temporal citation window; see Nicolaisen and Frandsen, "Zero Impact."

42. Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*, 38. For the notion of *Latenz* (and *Resemantisierung*), see also Renate Lachmann, "Kultursemiotischer Prospekt," in *Memoria: Vergessen und Erinnern*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp and Renate Lachmann (Munich: Fink, 1993), xvii–xxviii.

a so-called Sleeping Beauty in science refers to "a publication that goes unnoticed ('sleeps') for a long time and then, almost suddenly, attracts a lot of attention" as they appear, in hindsight, to be groundbreaking.[43] Applied more widely, the metaphor refers to the fact that, due to a lack of a favorable cultural or intellectual climate, a scientific or scholarly idea can remain forgotten until it is rediscovered in circumstances that have meanwhile changed in its favor.[44] In general, changing historical circumstances are very important for understanding the dynamics of forgetting. If a certain object is in any way regarded as a risk to dominant cultural, political, or ideological concerns, for instance, its *Vergessenspotential* will naturally increase.[45] Knowledge-controlling institutions and political authorities have previously adopted a range of "lethotechnic" strategies to prevent supposedly sensitive ideas and insights from circulating.[46] On the other hand, explicit and open efforts of relegating specific information to oblivion may have the unintended consequence of generating even more interest in it, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the "Streisand effect."[47]

This also brings us to the notoriously complex notion of agency in processes of forgetting. The distinction between unintentional and intentional forgetting is a recurring issue in the literature about (scholarly) oblivion.[48] Echoing the sociological distinction between structure and agency, Dimbath, for example, distinguishes between, on the one

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43. A. F. J. van Raan, "Sleeping Beauties in Science," *Scientometrics* 59, no. 3 (2004): 461. More recently, the term has become disputed for reasons of political correctness. In 2019, the American *Journal of the Association for Informational Science and Technology* asked van Raan to revise the Sleeping Beauty metaphor, as it reportedly regarded it as a violation of sociocultural norms in view of its perceived sexist and culturally discriminatory connotations. See Daniel Boffey, "Scientific Journal Snubs Academic over Sleeping Beauty Metaphor," *The Guardian*, April 26 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/apr/26/scientific-journal-snubs-academic-over-sleeping-beauty-metaphor.

44. See Dimbath, "Das organisationale Vergessen der Forschung," in *Institutionelle Erneuerungsfähigkeit der Forschung*, ed. Thomas Heinze and Georg Krücken (Berlin: Springer, 2012), 53.

45. Gerda Haßler's contribution to this special issue reveals how swiftly a dominant paradigm in a certain ideological framework can slide into oblivion, as soon as its supporting ideological frame comes under pressure.

46. For the Early Modern period, this phenomenon has been studied in Martin Mülsow, *Prekäres Wissen: Eine andere Ideengeschichte der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012).

47. The term refers to the American actress and singer Barbara Streisand (b. 1942), whose 2003 attempt to suppress aerial photos of her mansion inadvertently drew further public attention to them. As a term originating in media and marketing, "Streisand effect" has not found wide dissemination in historical scholarship. For a brief discussion of the notion, see, from a marketing studies angle, Sébastien Liarte, "Image de marque et internet: Comprendre, Éviter et gérer l'effet 'Streisand,'" *Décisions Marketing* 69 (2013): 103–10. The term has not yet been included in the main dictionaries, but see "Streisand effect," *Merriam-Webster: Words We Are Watching* (blog), accessed December 1, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com.

48. See, e.g., Plate, "Amnesiology," 144–46; Dimbath, *Oblivionismus*, 59–65. One could posit that the notion "forgetting" seems to have a more intentional character than the notion "oblivion," although

hand, *Vergesslichkeit* (or structural amnesia),[49] which in his view results either from a discipline's internal logic (which would also include the consequences of paradigm shifts or scientific revolutions) or from political pressure "from outside," and, on the other, intentional forms of forgetting. In his analysis, intentional forgetting results from the active attempts of individuals and groups to forget (*Vergessenwollen* 'self-imposed forgetting') or to make others forget (*Vergessenmachen* 'imposed forgetting').[50] Although the distinction between these types of forgetting is valuable from a typological point of view, some caution is in order. First, distinguishing between the two is not equivalent to saying that the distinction is a binary opposition with no middle ground. As is so often the case, it is easier to separate these notions philosophically than it is to maintain their neat distinction in our analysis of (historical) reality. Second, and more important here, the nature of the agency and the "degree of intentionality" involved must not be determined a priori.

In this context, Schlieben-Lange's approach offers valuable insights. Starting from the object of forgetting rather than the forgetting community, she makes a basic distinction between problematic and unproblematic *Wissensbestände*, that is, between knowledge that is problematized and discussed by the scholarly community and knowledge that is accepted, often tacitly. If knowledge is problematized due to its controversial content, it can be accepted and adopted (*Sicherung*), adapted and integrated in existing *Wissensbestände* (*Aufhebung*), or rejected on rational grounds (*Ablehnung*). When a problematic *Wissensbestand* is felt to be dangerous or for some reason undesirable, its existence may be actively suppressed (*Tabuisierung*), which is in her view an important reason for forgetting in the history of scholarship, although we should also reckon with the inadvertent consequences of such attempts (see, e.g., our previous discussion of the so-called Streisand effect).

The observation that unproblematic knowledge might sink into oblivion may at first sight seem counterintuitive. Schlieben-Lange, however, draws attention to the fact that, under specific circumstances, this is exactly what can happen: when scholars accept the scholarly validity of certain *Wissensbestände* and no longer discuss or debate them in their work, later generations, having moved away from the previous consensus, will not encounter these *Wissensbestände* in the work of their predecessors. In this way, her analysis pertinently reminds us of the qualities historically attached to specific

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we refrain from ascribing specific features and characteristics to these two notions, which most users of English will use interchangeably.

49. Compare the way in which Stefan Altekamp used the notion of "structural amnesia" in his discussion of Third Reich archaeology, as discussed in Helen Roche's contribution to this issue.

50. Lorenz Demey's contribution to this issue focuses on a case of *Vergessenmachen* in the field of logic.

objects of knowledge, which may explain why they sank into oblivion.[51] This also shows the importance of a more cultural-historical approach to the history of forgetting in scholarship beyond the strictly structural-sociological approach, concentrating on structures and habits rather than the content of the knowledge under consideration, and advanced mainly by Dimbath.

In sum, we think that, when scrutinizing the factors behind scholarly forgetting, the main challenge is to understand how the *Vergessenspotential* of the object under consideration and the working context of the forgetting community work together to fuel oblivion. In the next two sections, we will turn our attention to two special motors of scholarly oblivion, which each in their own way further illustrate this important interplay between the object of forgetting and its wider context.

THE OBLIVIATING EFFECTS OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

In his book *Lethe*, Harald Weinrich demonstrated the mechanisms of what he called "scientific oblivionism" by summarizing the rules of thumb developed by Watson and Crick:

> Anything published in languages other than English—forget it!
> Anything published in any genre other than a journal article—forget it!
> Anything published in a journal other than the respected x, y, or z—forget it!
> Anything published more than ca. five years ago—forget it!

As Weinrich observed, in the natural sciences, this form of oblivionism has become common practice; it is, in other words, an integral part of a natural scientist's habitus. Importantly, however, Weinrich also suggested that this specific kind of oblivionism is by no means universally valid.[52] Scholarly communities have their own rules and conventions when it comes to dealing with, for instance, previous scholarship, publications in other languages than English, and publications in other formats than articles in highly ranked academic journals. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that a historian would openly adhere to the same form of oblivionism with regard to the work of predecessors as that which Watson and Crick, with the approval of Weinrich, designed for themselves. This has everything to do with the ideal of completeness and the concomitant *Erinnerungsimperativ* that is more prevalent in philological scholarship than in the natural sciences.

The background against which Weinrich's scientific oblivionism needs to be understood is the phenomenon of "information overload" (a common term for information

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51. Schlieben-Lange, "Vom Vergessen in der Sprachwissenschaftsgeschichte."
52. Weinrich, *Lethe*, 217.

redundancy). Information overload can be understood as the result of, on the one hand, a high number of concurring and similar *Wissensbestände* and, on the other, a community that is unable to process this high number in an efficient way. Weinrich's example of scientific oblivionism thus shows how solutions specifically designed to overcome information overload imply processes of what one could dub "intentional forgetting" (the de facto equivalent of "intentional neglect"). However, the above comparison between the natural sciences and philology shows that even where information overload fuels forgetfulness, exactly how it does so cannot be properly understood outside the specific scholarly contexts under study.

Information overload has been around for centuries,[53] but due to the digital revolution it is now more topical than ever. In his book *Delete*, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger argues that the "balance of remembering and forgetting has become inverted," in that "committing information to digital memory has become the default, and forgetting the exception."[54] This statement, however, can be qualified. It is certainly true that more information is stored and preserved than in the past. The digital revolution has, in other words, led to a considerable expansion of Aleida Assmann's cultural archives; the number of dormant and latent *Wissensbestände*, preserved yet in effect forgotten, is higher than ever before.[55] In addition, it is safe to say that this digital revolution also stimulates new forms of forgetting. Influential internet services such as Google Scholar, for example, generate new modes of the Matthew effect, as much-quoted articles tend to appear at the top of the search results.[56] Moreover, obviously, sources with no Internet presence will have a significantly higher *Vergessenspotential*. In this context, striking shifts seem to be taking place. Printed sources from the Early Modern period and the nineteenth century, previously available only in exclusive reading rooms of specialized libraries, are—thanks to gradual improvements in the field of OCR and thanks to the efforts of both public and commercial actors (such as the Internet Archive and Google Books)—

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53. Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) demonstrates that information overload was already a prominent problem in the Early Modern period.

54. Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete*, 196.

55. In heritage studies, involving physical items, the situation is different. Due to the "heterogeneous piling up of disparate and conflicting pasts in the present," heritage managers will be forced to take "active decisions to delist or cease to conserve particular forms of heritage once their significance to contemporary and future societies can no longer be demonstrated" (Rodney Harrison, "Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: Late Modern Heritage Practices, Sustainability and the 'Crisis' of Accumulation of the Past," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 [2013]: 579). See also Cornelius Holtorf and Troels Myrup Kristensen, "Heritage Erasure: Rethinking 'Protection' and 'Preservation,'" *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 4 (2015): 313–17.

56. Dimbath, "Das organisationale Vergessen der Forschung," 59.

suddenly more readily available than many books and magazines from the twentieth century. In the conclusion, we will show how digitization can be employed to deal with forms of forgetting in the history of scholarship (and knowledge more generally).

Also, the process of canonization (both on the level of primary and secondary literature), which should often be understood against the backdrop of information overload, clearly illustrates how scholarly forgetting can be catalyzed. Once a canon has been established (be it gradually or imposed by an authority), it often functions as a trap from which one cannot easily escape. Egon Flaig, partly drawing on Walter Benjamin, has warned that whoever gratefully relies on the canon of a specific cultural tradition is bound to reproduce and seal the forgetting strategies, more often than not imposed by powerful authorities in this particular culture.[57]

HISTORY OF SCHOLARSHIP AS OBLIVIATING FORCE

The dynamics of canonization also play a role in the history of scholarship. Accounts and narratives produced by authoritative historians may become too authoritative and may prevent readers from asking who or what else would merit to be included.[58] This suggests, somewhat paradoxically, that the history of scholarship itself can be an obliviating force in its own right and that it is subject to the same obliviating forces as the scholarship it scrutinizes and that we briefly discussed above. More often than not, historiographers are themselves practitioners of the field whose history they study. This means that they all have a clear sense of what their discipline is and what its borders are. These ideas are partly preconceived (we have all learned and, to a certain extent, interiorized the received definitions of our disciplines) and partly shaped through personal experience and ambitions (including possible biases, antipathies, the desire to redefine the field, etc.). More than once, historiographers tend to examine sources through a disciplinary lens. In *A New History of the Humanities*, Rens Bod drew his readers' attention to what we might call "disciplinary myopia" in histories of the humanities: even if scholars are included in histories of this or that discipline, it is very well possible that a significant portion of their work that is beyond the scope of the discipline under consideration is left out.[59] Here, then, scholarly forgetting is an effect of

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57. Flaig, "Soziale Bedingungen des kulturellen Vergessens," 92–93.

58. See, e.g., the interesting reflection in J. S. Rusten, review of *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, by Ward W. Briggs and William M. Calder III (1990), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, January 2, 2003, bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1990/01.02.03.html.

59. Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 358–59. C.-J. Schilt's contribution to this issue demonstrates the significance of disciplinary boundaries in the genesis of scholarly forgetting by focusing on Isaac Newton's scholarly works.

disciplinary boundary keeping. But even if historiographers are not also practitioners of the discipline whose history they write, they will necessarily define their subject on the basis of an at least partly preconceived understanding of what it is.

Disciplines are, however, not the sole categories that tend to have an important a priori impact on what is included in or excluded from historical accounts. Several other received classifications and typologies (such as, e.g., the distinctions between professional and amateur production and between "prestigious" and more peripheral history writing) might have a direct impact on the dynamics of scholarly forgetting and raise once again the issue of agency.

Additionally, as with all history, the history of scholarship has its structuring tropes and figures of thought. These tropes coshape historical writing and understanding but might also have obliviating effects. The myth of "heroic creativity," for instance, postulates that a discipline's founder apparently needed no collaborators, which Merton facetiously calls the principle of *parthenogenesis*.[60] Related to this myth is the notion of what Merton has labeled *eponymous fatherhood*: the phenomenon that specific laws, methods, or even entire fields have been named after their supposed "inventor" or "founding father."[61] In classical philology, this is famously the case with "Lachmann's method," a set of criteria for *recensio* named after the German classical scholar Karl Lachmann (1793–1851): it was Sebastiano Timpanaro who, in 1963, demonstrated Lachmann's indebtedness to other scholars and tried to explain "why his fame as a textual critic [had] ended up obscuring that of all the others." Interestingly, Timpanaro found part of the answer in Lachmann's own scholarly rhetoric, especially his "oracular tone," which *en passant* shows the importance of the rhetoric of scholarship for oblivion studies, also noted above.[62] The notion of the founding father itself and the concomitant idea of eponymous fatherhood cast light on other problematic aspects within historiography, as they are inherently and explicitly gender biased, which makes us suspicious of the role of women in the history of scholarship (consider "founding mothers" and "eponymous motherhood").

In some cases, the history of scholarship also uncritically enhances and reinforces patterns of forgetting reflected in the scholarly sources that it scrutinizes. Historians may have fallen into the trap set up by their sources. This is, for instance, what happened in older histories on Renaissance scholarship, which adopted humanist bias

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60. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants*, 101.

61. Ibid., 100–103.

62. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 115–18. On Lachmann's method, see also Glenn W. Most, "Karl Lachmann (1793–1851): Reconstructing the Transmission of a Classical Latin Author," *History of Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2019): 269–73.

vis-à-vis its own roots in medieval (and Arabic) achievements (this is the field of the rhetoric of scholarship).[63] All this brings us back to our discussion of the places of forgetting: scholarly forgetting can take place both in the historiography of scholarship and in the scholarship itself.

Disciplines are, however, not the sole categories that tend to have an important a priori impact on what is included in or excluded from historical accounts: several other received classifications and typologies (such as, e.g., the distinctions between professional and amateur production and between "prestigious" and more peripheral history writing) might have a direct impact on the dynamics of scholarly forgetting and raise once again the issue of agency.[64]

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Scholarly oblivion is like searching for a black swan in the dark. It is not easy to detect. Very often, one stumbles upon it through serendipity. This makes for wonderful incidental discoveries but poses a challenge for sustained scholarly method. Although scholarly oblivion has sometimes been studied before, we are not aware of reflections on how forgetting can be detected in the first place.

From our previous discussion, it follows that some indications should make us suspicious of oblivion when studying scholarly texts, be they pieces of specialized scholarship, the paratexts that come with them, or histories of scholarship. For example, the notion that one scholar single-handedly effected a rupture of sorts, a "paradigm shift" or a "turn," should make us suspect that significant antecedents, or collaborators, have, consciously or unconsciously, been omitted from the story. As Timpanaro's study about Lachmann's method brilliantly exemplifies, it might be rewarding to look "behind" existing historiography and the works of the (sometimes self-proclaimed) "founding fathers" when confronted with claims to single-handed revolution in scholarship, either in the scholarship itself, or in histories of the field under study. This involves a more keen awareness of vocabulary that suggests "shifts," "turns," "revolutions," and "heroic" qualifications of individual merit. We can easily add other such indicators, such as, most prosaically, imbalances with respect to language or time span in cited literature, which enabled Harald Weinrich to reconstruct how the "scientific oblivionism" of Watson and Crick worked. However, it is not our intention to provide a checklist

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63. In his monumental study of medieval Hellenism, Walter Berschin aptly called this persistent humanist bias in discussions of his subject the "Humanistic Prejudice." See Walter Berschin, *Greek Letters and the Latin Middle Ages from Jerome to Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jerold C. Frakes (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 3.

64. Wendy Wiertz's contribution to this issue concentrates on the different treatment of professional and amateur art in art history.

overview here in order to detect instances of forgetting. During the conversations we had in various workshops it seemed more important to raise awareness about the ways in which oblivion has shaped our own understanding of our fields and disciplines and to get a sense of its numerous manifestations.

Thinking about scholarly forgetting invites, generally, reflection on imbalances in the usual narratives of how knowledge is produced, managed, and disseminated in humanities scholarship. Some of the terms we have discussed suggest such biases ingrained in our understanding of how scholarship works. Terms like "founding father" and "eponymous fatherhood," for instance, bluntly indicate an emphasis on the father, rather than the mother, as the "natural" origin of a scholarly idea of model. The history of the "decays, depressions, oblivions, [and] removes" in the history of scholarship is largely a history of forgotten voices, and not only the most obvious ones (such as female and non-European voices). The perceived peripheries of scholarship and science are also populated by the "dead white European males" whose work faded into oblivion but may reward proper examination in order to understand better how the grand narratives and canons of our disciplines were constructed and—perhaps more important—reproduced. The notion that scholarship (as well as the history of scholarship) forgets encourages historians of knowledge to look, more generally, to the perceived scholarly peripheries and to explore how they both sustained and fed—but perhaps also resisted and challenged—the proclaimed, or sometimes self-proclaimed, centers of our disciplines.

The travel routes of ideas and concepts, in particular, may give us hints of unsuspected places and underexplored paths in the history of knowledge. The digitization of increasingly more texts and other material—sometimes referred to as the "million book library"[65]—opens exciting new avenues of research. In the past, historians of knowledge were bound to rely on a limited set of preidentified texts to conduct their research. Needless to say, such an approach entails a considerable danger of circularity, since important sources remain undetectable unless they are explicitly referenced within the initially defined corpus.[66] The million book library allows scholars to at least partly escape from this hermeneutic circle, by examining scholarly discourse from a bird's eye perspective. In particular, textual and collocational searches will help us to get past the usual anecdotes of traditional narratives.

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65. See David Armitage, "What's the Big Idea? Intellectual History and the *Longue Durée*," *History of European Ideas* 38, no. 4 (2012): 493–507.

66. Stephen Pumfrey, Paul Rayson, and John Mariani, "Experiments in 17th-Century English: Manual versus Automatic Conceptual History," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 27, no. 4 (2012): 395–408.

Scholarly forgetting also raises some interesting questions about the role and function of the history of the humanities and about the history of scholarship and science more generally. What should be the place of forgotten precursors in future histories of scholarship? How should historians of scholarship, for instance, deal with models and paradigms that proved unsuccessful or misguided (but that might still be useful for scholarly communities to remember if only to avoid committing similar mistakes again)? What was—and is—the role of diverse funding agencies in processes of scholarly forgetting?[67] Can interdisciplinary approaches effectively overcome disciplinary myopia in histories of humanities scholarship?[68] These are just some of the many questions that remain for historians of the humanities to ponder in the future.

As our previous discussion implied, questions of scholarly forgetting are not always of a purely scholarly nature but pertain also to moral and even political issues. What to do, for example, with the work of scholars whose ideological or political views are irreconcilable with the ethical standards of current scholarly and academic practice, or even with our own personal convictions? This question is all the more urgent at a time when pressures to forget do not just come "from outside" academia and scholarship, but from within—from students and colleagues who seek to "deplatform" students and scholars whose work they regard as incompatible with their community's values as they understand them. What, we may ask, will be the implications of such attempts at academic *damnatio memoriae* for any future history of the humanities?

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67. See, e.g., Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers, *Der Wille zur Relevanz: Die Sprachforschung und ihre Förderung durch die DFG 1920–1970* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010).

68. Conceived as a response to the traditional "Grand Disciplines" inherited from the 19th century, the "interdisciplinary imperative" seems to be premised on the idea that, in order to overcome the boundaries of traditional disciplines, one must combine them. Interdisciplinarity thus presupposes the existence of discrete, combinable disciplines. As such, it paradoxically reinforces disciplinary boundaries and also indicates the continuing influence of the nineteenth century on present-day scholarship.

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