

# Oblivionism



Oliver Dimbath

# Oblivionism

*Forgetting and Forgetfulness in Modern Science*

Translated from German by

Mirko Wittwar



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## Introduction

In 1759, French Enlightenment philosopher and encyclopaedist Jean Baptiste Le Rond d'Alembert stated in a critique of the academic eulogy how eulogies on princes were fundamentally different from eulogies on scholars. Princes, he said, were much more praised during their lifetime than after their death, whereas scholars were criticised, sometimes even forgotten, during their lifetime and praised only after having deceased.<sup>1</sup>

Indications that scientific insights and their originators have been forgotten can be found at many places. For example, we may say that a formerly influential scientist has been completely forgotten in our days, perhaps because his work was not really “sustainable”. In such cases, oblivion appears as a process of “cleaning” the sciences, that is, separating the wheat from the chaff. As another reason, we may refer to the coming and going of scientific paradigms: some research perspectives are pursued, others are not. This does not mean that the work was of inferior quality, but it may simply be due to the stream of scientific progress taking a different course and due to formerly promising orientations suddenly turning into backwaters.

One example of such a kind of oblivion, which is rather popular among science historians, is the fate of heredity researcher Gregor Mendel. In the solitude of his monastery, this Augustinian Father and amateur researcher had created perfect conditions for his experiments and is today considered a pioneer of modern genetics. His discoveries were indeed published but hardly acknowledged during his lifetime; after his death, they were forgotten – even among scientists. Only thirty years later, two research teams working independently of each other achieved similar results and discovered Mendel's works in the course of their research.<sup>2</sup> Since then, Mendel has been considered an example of the Briar Rose phenomenon. His work was a sleeping beauty hidden in the thorn bush, waiting for the prince to kiss her awake. Why such an important pioneer could fall into oblivion has been the subject of different explanations by the history of the sciences. They reach from statements such as “it was a good idea, but the time was not ripe” as far as to conspiracy theories about machinations by the monks of his Augustinian abbey. Considerations on the

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1 Alexandra Zimmermann (1994, p. 222) in her contribution on academic eulogies refers to this statement by d'Alembert.

2 On this see e. g. the deliberations by von Heinrich Zankl (2006, p. 58).

influence of social and political circumstances, such as power structures and thus attention structures of the scientific discourse of those days, compete with presumptions according to which this must have been due to more or less controlled processes of wanting to forget and making forget.

As demonstrated by the Mendel case, there are kinds of oblivion among the sciences, which are obstacles to progress or the gain of knowledge. On the one hand, such a kind of oblivion seems to be dysfunctional; indeed, several institutional mechanisms are meant to prevent such ways of losing knowledge. On the other hand, oblivion is described as being functional. To maintain the stock of knowledge, revising and discarding redundant or obsolete knowledge or knowledge that is neither original nor unique is necessary. One example of such a kind of oblivion revision is the sociological diagnosis of time. Although publications belonging to this genre have sometimes been very important at the interface of science and the public, their “half-life” is comparably short. This is not only because they discuss the societal present, which is particularly momentary. Sometimes, it is also a result of arguing and presenting a topic based on the scientific spirit of the time, which becomes unfashionable. Accordingly, a science-historical study by Walter Reese-Schäfer states:

The forgotten diagnoses of time, from Rathenau to Freyer, are not even of anti-quarian significance any more. Explaining this fact with the help of oblivion may be useful also in this concern, because from this we might derive a criterion for deciding which of the currently produced diagnoses will probably soon be discarded again. In Rathenau's case, the reason is massive and ostensible racism, which makes reading agonising. (Reese-Schäfer, 2006, p. 430)

Other diagnoses are filed under a certain kind of philosophy of history, in a sense or in the tradition of Oswald Spengler, without taking the criticism of the philosophy of history into consideration.

The falling into oblivion of Mendel and the historically-oriented diagnosticians of time produces similar results: in both cases, the knowledge produced by them was – at least temporarily – lost because one did not make use of it, because one did not believe to need it. Whereas such a kind of oblivion is obvious, the reasons these works lost their significance must be left to further research. In Mendel's case, one can presume that he was ignored because of his role as an amateur researcher and outsider. Accordingly, there are presumptions according to which Mendel never developed “professional” publication strategies for his discoveries. Others believe that being an amateur researcher, he was mostly ignored by the scientific community of his time.<sup>3</sup> On the one

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3 See the remarks on the Mendel case in Michel Foucault (1992, p. 24–25) as well as in Eugene Garfield (1970b).



hand, the fact that the diagnosticians of time fell into oblivion is said to be due to outmoded attitudes (racism); however, this explains their falling into oblivion only from today's point of view. On the other hand, there are indications of a change of perspective regarding the construction of historical knowledge, which made these texts look outmoded already at their time. The sciences are capable of ignoring false knowledge from a certain point of time onwards and forgetting every trace of it; also, any decision about truth or falsehood is always only possible among – and thus from the point of view of – the sciences' respective present.

Independent of the textualisation and archiving of scientific knowledge, there are rules and routines coordinating access to this knowledge. In other words: those knowledge contents the production of knowledge is based on as a relevant past are constantly redefined. What must be remembered for further use and what may be forgotten is decided according to the respectively valid socio-historical context. Follow-up communication and referring to knowledge gained in the past, which may also be called experience, happen at the level of individuals by interaction and social relations. However, even social groups – in this context most of all organisations – develop path-dependencies by communicating. Finally, we may look for general regulations that make the selection of knowledge contents either a matter of course or probable.

In this study, we will pursue the question of what the social orders of referring to knowledge look like: We will not analyse the *choice* of what is already known, but what is chosen to be forgotten, that is *oblivion*. Thus, what we are talking about is *obliviology* or a doctrine of oblivion from a sociological perspective. Oblivion is nothing that is newly discovered or can be concluded only now. It is probably as old as thinking itself, and philosophical reflection on this topic is ancient. Given the communicative creation of the past, which is used for providing orientation and legitimating actions, we must assume that oblivion is not only a neuro-physiological-psychological phenomenon but moreover a social phenomenon. However, from a sociological point of view, the way of dealing with oblivion must be different. As sociological research approaches usually do not provide experimental or quasi-experimental ways of proceeding, it is difficult to simulate or reconstruct the oblivion process as a model. On the one hand, we must refer to oblivion in the sense of a blank that always appears when we find traces of past events we do not understand or admit that we do not know something anymore. On the other hand, oblivion may as well be understood both as a topic of communication and as the objective of quite purposeful actions. The insight that something has been forgotten can be concluded from the perception that there are traces or elements of relations referring to any kind of object. Apart from this statement, oblivion becomes also “social” in everyday life when somebody is assumed to have forgotten

something. Furthermore, groups of society, or “we”, are assumed to have forgotten about something sometimes. The allegedly sudden insight that something is *not* part of collective consciousness which, against the background of a shared experience, might also have triggered common expectations and might have provided action orientation, demonstrates that the phenomenon of oblivion, which is initially understood to be a failure of individual brains, may as well be transferred to collectives.

If the thus connected mechanisms may be equated with the neuroscientifically researched processes happening in individual brains or consciousness systems is debatable and requires sociological assessment. In particular, the individual-psychologically tricky question of the possibility of purposeful oblivion can then be pursued by way of focussing on social relations and groups. This way, it will be proven that a sociological concept of oblivion is open to interpretation and must thus be much wider than the amnesia terminology of the neurosciences.

The debate on the connection of amnesia and amnesty happens at the interface of neuro- and sociological sciences.<sup>4</sup> For example, not only the science of history<sup>5</sup> or the political-scientific field of transitional justice<sup>6</sup> provides several indications of the social function of a kind of oblivion that cannot be understood as a misperformance. Beyond any quasi-natural-scientific experimental logic, there is also the problem of reliable data. Only in exceptional cases it is possible to experimentally research or model social or collective oblivion. Thus, the sociological research of oblivion – if it works with traces at all – rather depends on the methods of archaeology, of the science of history, or of criminalistics.<sup>7</sup> It always deals with hints at something that is not (or no longer) present and can thus not be presented as evidence.

The sociological conceptualisation of oblivion points to a problem that itself prevents any solution. Whereas positive findings – in several respects – become the subject of scientific analysis first, the negative or the negated is

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4 On this connection, which can most of all be pointed out in the context of the political science debate on post-conflict societies and, typographically, as amnesia/amnesty, we find overviews and applications e. g. in Helmut König (2008), Aleida Assmann (2007) or Siegmund Schmidt, Gert Pickel and Susanne Pickel (2009).

5 On this see the discussion in Christian Meier (2010).

6 As one example out of many, here we may refer to the overview presented by Jon Elster (2005).

7 This was inspired not only by Michel Foucault's (1972) method of an archaeology of knowledge but also by collecting evidence in the fields of medicine, arts history or literary studies, which has frequently been called “investigative” and is discussed, in view of scientific methods, among others by Carlo Ginzburg (1989), Paul Connerton (2009), or recently also by Luc Boltanski (2014).

frequently ignored. The “knowledge of the victorious” principle, meaning that preferably those being successful are granted with being remembered later, also holds for reporting and documenting in the context of the sciences.<sup>8</sup> In this way, oblivion research deals with the “knowledge of the losers” or with lost knowledge while at the same time being confronted with the difficulty of having hardly any “material” such as empirical sources or evidence at hand and thus producing a kind of knowledge which can only be given “positive” expression with difficulty. To avoid this problem – at least partly – the development of a sociological concept of oblivion mostly aims at what has fallen into oblivion in a “material” way. This requires an extended concept of oblivion, which includes the process of “forgetting” as such but also the problem of having disappeared and the orders of regulated oblivion.

However, due to the unique nature of oblivion as a kind of not-knowing, there is the following problem: how are we supposed to empirically research something which is currently non-existent or at least inaccessible? Everyday-practical oblivion research starts where traces seem to “fizzle out”, and remembrance is needed.<sup>9</sup> However, such constructions of remembrance create the illusion that something gone could be reconstructed. Usually, they do not ask *how* a particular topic could fall into oblivion. By way of sociological analysis, such a task can be completed by another approach, by distinguishing typical kinds of social oblivion and, by the help of categories, by systematically analysing both institutional and practical fields of society. It is typical of such an analysis that it does not require any empirically exploring kind of research first – currently, the methods and techniques of empirical social research are hardly suitable for this, and established approaches are mostly “blind” to such questions. Thus, the first step towards an analysis of oblivion is – abductively and by way of thinking around corners or moving between theory building and the analysis of the topic – to work out a social-scientific understanding of different kinds of oblivion. Once this has happened, the respective topical field can be confronted with several new questions. Only in a second step, it is possible to operationalise and research the problems empirically. However, how far this will be necessary will turn out only after discussing the previously worked out and communicated hypotheses on oblivion.

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8 If there is an ethos of the scientist as described by Max Weber (1946), in order to distinguish him/her from somebody working scientifically just to make a living, then falling into oblivion must be perceived as a narcissistic insult. Then the mystic background of such a motif would be Dante's *Inferno*, from where those having fallen into oblivion call on the wanderer to take care that posterity will not forget about them (see Weinrich, 2004).

9 Thus seen, stating that oblivion must have preceded all remembrance is common place with the research of memory.

This way, it is possible to develop perspectives of a sociology of oblivion that go beyond applying existing theories, as interpretative systems, to a new context. At first, any sociological analysis will produce interpretations extending the interpretative horizon of the phenomenon. Thereby, oblivion is taken out of its connection to neuro-scientific ways of understanding and out of terminologically vague everyday language. As a concept, it will be deconstructed and thus, for a start, become more diffuse. It requires differentiation as a consequence of becoming more multifarious. Based on a description of social connections, a theory of social oblivion will increase the awareness of contingency while at the same time raising questions about allegedly matter-of-course selectivity in the course of socio-genetic processes. Moreover, by systematising the knowledge of the structural features of not-knowing-anymore, it will then be possible to develop a new and different view of how social change processes happen.

The analytics of social oblivion to be unfolded here claim to provide analysis heuristics that can be applied to all fields of the social. It will stay an open question if such a kind of research will produce a general sociological theory of oblivion or if – fundamentally suggested by systems-theoretical thought – we will have to distinguish divergent mechanisms of oblivion in different social functional fields. The unfolded case example of modern science as a “big” social institution serves to test the theoretical-conceptual toolset. The idea is to provide sociology, as far as it deals with this topical field, with a new interpretational framework and provide it with new orientations for further research. Science has been chosen as a particularly distinct field because the problem of oblivion concerns some of its fundamental matters. For example, at least the positivist (natural) sciences must assume a perfect or complete memory<sup>10</sup>; by organising archives, they must take care that nothing will be forgotten if ever possible. Accordingly, the institutionalised system of regulations of modern Western science appears like a predestined subject if the latent, yet undiscovered or concealed kinds of social oblivion are to be uncovered. At the same time, the sciences are not much different from other institutions. Also, their sociological analysis has, for the time being, exclusively addressed the problem of stabilising and maintaining the organisational and procedural knowledge of time. The well-known argument that institutions relieve action from the necessity of constant replanning<sup>11</sup> is inevitably linked to selecting alternatives

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10 This is what e. g. Geoffrey C. Bowker (2008) points out.

11 On this see the concept of institutions according to Arnold Gehlen (1963).

and reducing the number of open possibilities<sup>12</sup>. It concerns all social fields of activity. Thus, the argument is also linked to a kind of oblivion whose awareness is cushioned or hushed by institutions, norms, or values. This reflection bumper may be very helpful for stabilising action routines; however, for sociology, this is no reason to stay away from a – in the broadest sense – functional analysis of oblivion in all contexts of social regulation.

Such clarification is mostly lacking when it comes to the theoretical exploration of phenomena of social change. Furthermore, with its interest in patterns of interpretation applied to thinking about oblivion, oblivion research contributes to systematising the vast horizon of traces. This way, it extends the project of searching for clues, beyond a material analysis, by investigating social attributions of meaning in view of the often enigmatic processes of disappearance. Apart from analysing aspects of oblivion, it is then no longer only about sounding out the automatisms, mechanisms, routines, programmes and plans of the (re)production of structures of social meaning and regulation structures. Instead, there is the possibility of looking at decay and destruction as conditioning structures while at the same time asking which mechanisms and circumstances make things disappear – not only from our eyes but also from our minds.

However, these general questions about aspects of social oblivion are intensified again if we look at the few clues indicating oblivion in the sciences. Roman philologist Harald Weinrich believes that a trend towards instrumental rationality permeates scientific oblivion and, according to his both ironic and critical analysis, directs our attention at new kinds of purposeful oblivion. Weinrich states that the practice of knowledge production, in particular in the natural sciences, is permeated by a culture of oblivion. For example, he states, the scientific publication is oriented at rules of conduct consisting of forgetting

[...] anything published in a language other than English [...]; anything published in any genre other than the journal article [...]; anything not published in the respected journals x, y, z [...]; anything published more than about five years ago. (Weinrich, 2004, p. 267)

The *oblivionism* concept presented by Weinrich appears in the guise of a time-diagnostic discussion and escalation of social oblivion as a cultural phenomenon. His neologism describes a tendency towards oblivion to the extent that far exceeds any kind of oblivion that might be considered “normal”.

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12 The concept of open possibility goes back to Alfred Schütz (1962). It means that action may as well be directed into different directions. Only the action plan reduces this openness and determines a limited number of action alternatives.

If the word *oblivionism* appears as the title of the presented study, this either indicates a sociological diagnosis of our time, pointing out to an urgent problem of society and critically assessing society's fertile ground for such a development. Alternatively, it is a hypothesis that is already laid out by choosing the term and must be pursued. However, the latter approach seems to be more promising not in the sense of test theory but for purposes of exploration and, after all, terminology and categorisation. When observing a group-related or societal loss of knowledge, may we speak of oblivionism? If, how could the phenomenon be described by referring to sociology's toolset of concepts and theories?

Also, dealing with science as an example is only possible by generating hypotheses. It is impossible to cover all aspects of this highly complex social field in this first step. However, the choice of the research topic is not free of being inspired by the alarmism of the diagnostics of our time, according to which a culture of oblivion determines modern society. Nevertheless, it will assess the range of the oblivion concept first. With the help of an improved understanding of the term, it will then fathom out the limits of the plausibility of diagnosing oblivionism when it comes to modern science. Furthermore, the analysis is open towards new kinds of oblivion, as yet undiscovered in this field, so that for a start, a comprehensive assessment of already existing observations and diagnoses of social oblivion is indispensable. The search for oblivion in/of the sciences does not happen in the strictly empirical sense but in view of (self-)descriptions of this societal field of activity. However, the obvious terminological substantiations and systematisations are supposed to apply to other fields of modern societies. In other words: the thesis of oblivionism in the sciences offers a trace that is worth pursuing if phenomena of social oblivion are to be grasped systematically. Still, only a generalisation of the findings, which can be expected, may result in formulating a knowledge-sociological thesis of oblivion, an *obliviology* of society. Once this has been achieved, it may also be possible to – in terms of a diagnosis of our time – decide if modern society is a society of oblivion.

Weinrich's assumption of oblivion is of a normative-critical kind. It is based on the idea of the sciences being free and independent, such as according to Humboldt's university concept. Such a kind of science makes an independent and functional contribution to social progress. However, due to both endogenous and exogenous structural change, this autonomy seems to be increasingly under pressure due to Humboldt's originally "free" scientists bowing – sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily – to imperatives of usefulness, evaluation and control ratios. From a science-historical point of view, it is frequently stated that the assumption of such colonialization by the system

media of power (bureaucracy) and money (resources and reputation) cannot be substantiated in so far as actually, one refers to an ideal type of free sciences which is hardly supposed to have ever existed.<sup>13</sup> As it is common with diagnoses of time, the time-diagnostic aspect of the oblivion assumption construes, when it comes to modern science, the nostalgic illusion of a past in the sense of a beautiful world of the sciences, without any publication competition, third-party funding imperative, tight resources, mass universities, university bureaucracy and university policy or deadline pressure resulting from academic self-government. The success story of modern science, with its impressive growth rates, particularly of staff and funding, and its social recognition, is not considered.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the representatives of oblivionist criticism may be confronted with the accusation of, after all, arguing against the background of their fear of a loss of significance and recognition, whereas the so-called leading disciplines are still flourishing.

On the other hand, why should we deal with oblivion among the sciences if accusing them of oblivionism can be unmasked so easily as an exaggeration or doom-mongering? Maybe oblivion criticism is not just based on the fear of being disadvantaged. Perhaps oblivion in the knowledge society must be reassessed once we have become aware of the technology-induced shifts of the relevance structure.

Against this background, oblivionism appears as an umbrella term for criticising various kinds of intentional or systematic forgetting about traditions and the past in modern society. The consequences of such a turning away from tradition cannot be predicted; that is, turning away from the presentist construction of the past as history, or the increasing focus on situative adjustment and orientation at the future as it must be diagnosed for the sciences in modern Western societies. Likewise, there is no need to mourn the “good old days” which have never existed. Still, it is worthwhile to pursue this criticism to learn more about the adaptability of modern society. This adaptability may at least partly be described as a certain way of reflecting. The disenchantment of the traditional as a result of Enlightenment allows for recognizing, assessing and then either confirming or rejecting it. If rejected, this kind of knowledge may fall into oblivion – a kind of oblivion conservative people are afraid of, and archaeologists encounter as traces of past knowledge.

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13 For example, Max Weber (1946) hints at the precarious careers of scientists already at his time, and the question if today application-oriented or basic research are confounded, is negated e. g. by Donald E. Stokes (1997), who points to the practice-related basic motivation of any science.

14 On this see John D. de Solla Price (1963).

Before the individual stages of argumentation are presented in the following passages, the range of thinking about oblivion must be determined from a sociological perspective. Compared to concepts of both memory and remembrance, oblivion rather appears as an unexplained residual category or as something unknown.<sup>15</sup> Simply due to this marginality, it should not be dealt with without a careful analysis of sociologically connectable concepts of memory and remembrance. A systematic analysis of this knowledge-sociological phenomenon requires a clarification of the relation of the three concepts of memory-remembrance-oblivion. As memory, remembrance, and oblivion always refer to the past, the sociologically relevant concepts of time and continuity should be included in the analysis. Memory -theoretical and oblivion-theoretical motifs are found in many sociological theories, which is why an examination of the sociological offer of theories is necessary. We will abstain from a detailed preparation of the case example by referring to the literature on the history of science, the philosophy of science, and the sociology of science, as those aspects as being relevant for our purpose can be taken into consideration. The preliminary considerations are concluded by a work programme which is structured into three parts.

First of all, the dimensions of the meaning of the concept of oblivion in everyday language as well as in the humanities and cultural studies are examined (Chapter 2). For this purpose, both everyday language and lexical meanings are analysed and combined with concepts and typologies of oblivion from the histories of philosophy and culture first. Following this, light is shed on time and continuity in the course of an excursus, preceding a closer look at the theoretical context while referring to concepts of memory and remembrance. As the social way of dealing with time is mutually conditioned by the triad of memory, remembrance and oblivion, it seems that any discussion of the perpetuation and decline of structures requires the definition of a concept of time as a necessary precondition.

Secondly, crucial aspects of the debate on social memories are collected, which serves as a foundation for working out a concept of social oblivion (Chapter 3). First, this passage focuses on the concept of memory. Sociological approaches are examined and assessed for implicit references in the form of memory equivalents, at the end of which the concept of social memory is defined. Following this, sociological references and interfaces concerning the issue of oblivion are surveyed. On this basis, it is then possible to present heuristics of social oblivion, which help to analyse both “natural-evolutionary” and intentional oblivion, thus providing an analysis tool with the help of which

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15 This is how Ben Herzog (2009) defines the problem of social oblivion.



different kinds of social relations, as well as social facts, can be analysed for their implicit aspects of oblivion.

The third chapter demonstrates which problem and analysis horizons can be displayed based on an oblivion-sociological approach (Chapter 4); this is exemplified by the case of “science”. After a cursory characterisation of the subject of analysis, there is a reflection with the help of the previously developed heuristic tool. Finally, this tool promises to answer whether social oblivion in the sciences is rather oriented at a universal order – such as in the sense of social mechanisms – or if it is subject to a kind of oblivionism that must be attributed to modernity. The analysis is concluded by considering the possibilities of a transfer to other institution-guided action fields of the social and perspectives of a universal theory of social oblivion are outlined.



## Exploration: Ways and Functions of Oblivion

### 2.1 The Problem of Not-Knowing-Anymore

Oblivion is a knowledge problem. Whenever one becomes aware of having forgotten something, one knows that one does not know something. This is not ignorance, as the forgotten knowledge is knowledge that must have existed. Thus, oblivion is concerned with not-knowing-anymore; it is a special kind of not-knowing.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is not possible to unfold the long tradition of considering knowledge here, it still seems helpful to look at some basic elements of the concept of knowledge if the kinds and motifs of the loss of knowledge are supposed to be analysed.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge, we may generally state, is the basis of all action. This general and – after all – culture-specific statement postulates that there is no movement within or into the world that is not based on a prerequisite from the past. No matter how good the movement's chance of being reflected by movers or observers is, it must be possible to place the change of a state of the world into a number of preceding changes.

According to the understanding of the occidental world, the concept of knowledge refers to the possibility of establishing relations of before and after, interdependencies and causal relations as well as causalities. If an observer succeeds with describing the change of a state of the world in a way that is plausible for others, this knowledge is considered true. The concept of knowledge aims at a category of observation or attribution; the entity which causes the movement does not require any talent for observation. Accordingly, thunder does not need to know that it follows lightning. This context demonstrates that any observation is a category of perception. The assumption that thunder comes after lightning results from an everyday observation which turns out to be wrong if the different speed of light and sound is considered.

Knowledge is considered a precondition for working on the world, no matter how much reflected on or assessed it is, after all. The conquest and control of nature may be successful due to making purposeful or programmatic use of

1 Peter Wehling (2006) carried out a comprehensive analysis of the concept of “not-knowing”.

2 By reaching back to philosophical-knowledge-sociological general knowledge, the following elaborations are subject to the phenomenon of cryptomnesia which will be discussed in more detail elsewhere.

knowledge. Thus, it is unimportant if the rain worm moves through the ground successfully and “skilfully” or if the physicist carries out a series of experiments at a particle accelerator. Likewise, it is unimportant if these two beings know what they know in the course of their actions. What is essential is the experience: the effect on the world. The – indeed culture-specific – habit of attributing knowledge to an “organism” rather than any other imaginable object seems much more significant.

From the activator’s perspective, knowledge may be declarative or non-declarative, explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious. These three distinctions, taken from the concept of knowledge, are based on a common motif: communication and endowment with meaning-making. Whereas terming or attributing knowledge is always connected to meaning, there is a difference if such an attribution happens in the context of self-observation or if it does not. Meaning is a category of reason and thus of sense which, after all, comes from referring to things past. Meaning is thus closely connected to memory.<sup>3</sup> If knowledge is a resource for changing states of the world, then meaning is a communicative selection with the purpose of understanding.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it is an observer provided with knowledge, who carries out the meaning-attributing selection; he or she does so at a particular social place within space and time. Thus, any working-on-the world becomes knowledge only by being combined with meaning attributed by oneself or by others; it may be strategic, explicit, implicit, intentional or instrumental knowledge or intuitive, implicit, habitual, routine or practical knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Meaning would thus be a behaviour- or action-related way of explicating knowledge. However, the reference to knowledge as a behavioural disposition or action-orientation is not arbitrary but depends on both situation and path. This means that certain perceived events address a particular experience in each case. When being thrown into the water, one starts making swimming movements – as far as one has learned how to do so – and does not start walking or riding a bicycle. This selectivity is an indication that not every kind of knowledge can be obtained at any

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3 Thomas Khurana (2007) analyses the connection between the concepts of meaning and of memory from a systems-theoretical point of view. Gerd Sebald (2014) has presented a short social-phenomenological treatise on this issue.

4 According to Niklas Luhmann the theory of social systems deals first of all with systems of meaning.

5 Once again, here it becomes obvious that knowledge can only be understood to be a category of attribution – it is not about truth but at best about believing-to-be-true or about veridicality from the points of view of the observers involved. Accordingly, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967, p. 26) keep the definition open, by understanding knowledge to be “that passes for knowledge in society”.

moment. Thus, what appears as knowledge is also much dependent on the context.

It is crucial, however, that knowledge is in principle constituted as experience based on past experiences. Individual experiences become experience only as far as they have left traces – the neuroscientists describe this as a change of the brain's synapse structure. The difference between individual experience and experience in general is that the concept of general experience refers to knowledge in the sense of imprints or traces which stay and may – explicitly or implicitly – affect behaviour or action.<sup>6</sup> Thus, general experience refers to those elements of past events that the “organism” has stored. As soon as this storing may be expected, which is the case in social contexts, the problem of oblivion may occur. Thus, oblivion is not so much an actual loss of knowledge – because then the saying “what I do not know will not hurt me” makes sense – but rather a lack of specific knowledge assumed by a (self-)observer.

After these preliminary theoretical considerations, both measuring the range of the concept of oblivion and thoroughly analysing its sociological relevance by connecting to considerations on the concept of the social memory, it makes sense to look at some time-theoretical motifs. On this basis, it is possible to derive some basic principles about the remembrance of an “organism” referencing things past.

## 2.2 Excursus: Time and Oblivion

The concepts used so far for approaching oblivion have most of all been those of “knowledge” as well as the, up to here rather reluctantly addressed, “relatives” of the oblivion concept: memory and remembrance. This reluctance can be explained by the necessity of a closer analysis of the directions or interactions of memory, remembrance and oblivion. At first, however, it seems to be necessary to go far afield once again. When looking at how the terminology of memory is used, strikingly, the context within which the term is used, is usually not considered at the beginning of scientific reflection on storing knowledge or on retentivity. However, this is done when it is about the issue of the (social) constitution and construction of time. In other words: social-scientific considerations on issues of memory, remembrance and indeed oblivion begin

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6 Experience piles up in the course of experienced events. The experience context consists of schemes of experience, in the context of which some of these experiences can no longer be explicated and serve as habitual basic preconditions for understanding the world (Schütz, 1967).

with addressing time. Shedding light on this connection is the purpose of the following considerations, starting with some philosophies of time which have much influenced sociological thought. Also, it makes sense to look for aspects of addressing oblivion. In a second step, genuinely sociological theories of time will be outlined in the context of which another possible way of grounding the issue of memory becomes evident. This recently practised way addresses remembrance and oblivion and connects to works in cultural studies.

It is remarkable that in the interdisciplinary memory studies debate, the issue of “time” is hardly dealt with, not even among those sociologists dealing with memory. On the one hand, this blind spot may occur because research has not yet achieved the “depth” needed for discussing such a presuppositional and abstract concept. On the other hand, it may also be because research has considered issues of memory split and moved away from the issue of social time already at an early stage. No matter which reason for neglecting “time” we might prefer, some questions remain unanswered, especially when it comes to sociological theories.

Regardless of whether time is understood as an a priori category or as a cognitive-symbolic aid, it makes sense to approach the rarely explicated memory nature of the social with the help of the concept of time. In other words: it seems as if time as a concept of investigating the problem of consistency is more common than the concept of memory. Furthermore, such an approach seems to be necessary to work out another connection point to the phenomenon of oblivion: “Time heals”.

Early evidence of considering time is found in ancient philosophy, from Aristotle to Plotinus as far as to Augustine, who, apart from a memory theory, developed an elaborated concept of time in his *Confessiones*.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, frequently used ways of structuring time are separating before from after; on the other hand, they create the tripartition of the continuum of time into past, present and future. Additionally, there is the distinction of an “objective” natural time – which is e. g. concluded from the movement of the stars – from subjectively perceived time. First of all, the sociological analysis is interested in those kinds of time starting from consciousness and the concluding consequences for the measurement of time or for regimes of time. After all, even an “objective” world time could only be concluded from subjective consciousness. Finally, another approach of considering time is delimiting it from its relation to space and is discussing this relation.

One fundamental problem of philosophising on time is the insight that time cannot be experienced as time – we cannot watch time passing, and also killing

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<sup>7</sup> On this see in more detail Johann Kreuzer (1995).

time or passing time have not much to do with any analytical concept of time. This becomes particularly obvious if we try to experience the present, for any moment we would like to grasp consciously will be over the next moment. Time is fluent, and the present cannot be “experienced as itself within itself” but always only later. As soon as we deal with the present, we can only do so in the mode of a *remembered* present (Lotz, 2001, p. 659). The fluidity of the present results in reevaluating the past or – given subjective consciousness – memory. However, suppose present is just resentment or making something present. In that case, it always includes an aspect of absence because the remembered event which once was present can only be symbolically doubled – as a memorised image, as a linguistic symbol or as a narration – but never reconstructed as the original. Simply because of the difference between the original experience and the memory of this experience and the memory of the memory resulting from repeating the process, a “feeling” of time can develop. It does derive from memory, but it is based on the perception of a difference resulting from the difference between an original experience, its theoretical and always symbolic duplication, and the reduplication of this duplication.

### 2.2.1 *Time and Inner Continuity*

At the beginning of the 20th century, Henri Bergson's works on time and memory gained much popularity.<sup>8</sup> However, soon the Bergson enthusiasm in the sciences faded away, which can be exemplified by the changing perception by Maurice Halbwachs – he fundamentally criticized his former teacher – and by Alfred Schütz, whose initially strong emphasis on Bergson retreats already in his first book.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the criticism of Bergson's biologist irrationalism

8 On the one hand this is due to the fact that his philosophy of life was adopted, continued or commented on by many thinkers of his time. By Maurice Halbwachs and Alfred Schütz, also two very renowned sociologists count among those intensively adopting him. On the other hand, the Nobel Prize for Literature he was awarded in 1927 made him famous far beyond the sciences.

9 In Halbwachs's case, the more or less explicit distancing from Bergson's doctrines is easier to comprehend than in the case of Schütz. Whereas Halbwachs (1992) eventually only reports on Bergson's point of view as a position which must be refuted by help of Durkheim's terminology – his criticism aims most of all at Bergson's psychologism, which can be traced by his use of the frame concept (see Dimbath 2013) – Schütz refers to Bergson's considerations, which were crucial for his early works (see e.g. Schütz 1982), only as belonging to the preliminaries, to then go on working with Husserl's theory of time and memory. It is remarkable that these two sociologists obviously move away from Bergson's philosophy of life independently of each other. It is improbable that this was sheer coincidence; perhaps it is because in the 1920s, Bergson was still part of the philosophical canon but was considered outmoded.

appearing soon was so devastating that the whole “system” was no longer perceived helpful.<sup>10</sup>

If Bergson’s theory of time and memory, which is rightly criticized, will be taken up again in the following, this is not an attempt at its rehabilitation but for a better understanding of some theoretical aspects – in particular when it comes to the sociology of the 1920s and 1930s which is relevant for memory research. After presenting some basic motifs, there will be an attempt to identify connection points for a theory of oblivion. On the one hand, this will be done as their well-known motifs of “explaining” oblivion were developed yet ignored afterwards, and on the other hand, because it is perhaps possible to conclude figures of thought which – with all due carefulness – might lead to new interpretations.

One crucial motif of Bergson’s philosophy is the concept of continuity, resulting from his criticism of “mathematical time”, which is for the first time comprehensively unfolded in *Time and Free Will* of 1888 (see Bergson, 1950). The starting point for this newly introduced distinction of objective and subjective time is the dualism of life and matter. Life as a force and vital stimulation strives for moving upwards and learns how to make use of downward matter – which is understood to be all that the consciousness perceives as being inactive. Furthermore, the field of life may be distinguished according to two manifestations: plants use vital stimulation by storing it; animals transform it into kinetic energy. This may be continued by differentiating between a human and an animal principle according to which animals, when making use of this kind of energy, follow their instincts, whereas humans tend to use intellect. Moreover, for Bergson, the capability of spatial separation as well as chronological fixation is an achievement of intellect.

Bergson understands space as a quality of matter grasped by consciousness. The consciousness segments reality, which is in a continuous and unstoppable flow, thus creating spatial distances – a helpful illusion that results in theoretical difficulties. On the other hand, time is understood to be an essential feature of life – any life inheres time. However, such a time cannot be “natural” or “mathematical” and outside the consciousness. Thus, this inner time is confronted with “objective” or “mathematical” time, consisting of an accumulation of certain features which are taken out of the “flow”. As soon as time

10 See in short: Lorenz Engell (2001). Some early, somewhat sarcastic, criticism came from e. g. Bertrand Russell in 1908, who assessed Bergson’s doctrine – in particular his criticism of intellectualism – for being logical and consistent, revealed a number of erroneous conclusions and, as a consequence, denied it almost any epistemic value (see Russell 1946). Only recently, Bergson is read again differently and his approach is considered fruitful (see Ricœur 2004b).



is understood this way, one will follow the logic of the constitution of space: mental states are lined up or placed next to each other, which develops a well distinguished or distinguishable manifoldness. In other words: this concept of time may just serve as a means for understanding this manifoldness but not for depicting the actual course of time. Among the essence of life, there is also time that is not cut into pieces by way of consciousness processes – particularly the measurement of time. Bergson calls this “true” or “pure” time as continuity (*durée*). “Pure duration [...] is the form which our conscious states assume when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states” (Russell, 1946, p. 796).<sup>11</sup>

Continuity is a format of time in the context of which one attempts to ignore any reflection on the course of time as such. Bergson illustrates this by the example of listening to a melody that is not remembered as a series of notes following one another but as one integrated whole.

Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected? (Bergson, 1959, p. 100)

By continuity, no artificial past is construed; rather, it is a merger of past and present within the continuous flow of the I. By pure continuity, the past exists by a present which is constantly reconstituting itself – everything is in progress. That function of the consciousness by way of which past is transformed into present is what Bergson calls memory.

In his 1896 treatise *Matter and Memory*, Bergson analyses the relation between mind and matter connected to the concept of memory. Firstly, he distinguishes two concepts of memory from each other. The first one consists of motoric processes which have incorporated the past. The other one refers to independent memories of unique, unforgettable events. It is the function of memory to recall past perception contents similar to current perception and thus allow the mind to distinguish before and after (Heinlein & Dimbath, 2010). There is “no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience” (Bergson, 1929, p. 24). The brain is given the task to limit intellectual life to the practically useful:

11 This definition of the concept of continuity according to Bergson is to be found in Bertrand Russell (1946, p. 796).

The interest of a living being lies in discovering in the present situation that which resembles a former situation, and then in placing alongside of that present situation what preceded and followed the previous one, in order to profit by past experience. Of all the associations which can be imagined, those of resemblance and contiguity are therefore at first the only associations that have a vital utility. (Bergson, 1929, p. 24)

With the help of memory, the consciousness is taken out of the flow of things or necessities. Therefore, it becomes possible to make decisions, as in one single moment, it is possible to *intuitively* or – in the truest sense of the word – “comprehensively” grasp many moments of continuity.<sup>12</sup>

According to Bergson, the subject of perception is impressions or “images” selected by the consciousness. However, also perception as such is already organised by this selection process. In images, the subjective side represented by brain and memory merges with the objective side, i. e., material objects (see Engell, 2001).

By positing my body I have posited a certain image, however at the same time also the totality of all other images, as there is no material object whose qualities, whose definitions, in short: whose existence, is not due to the place it occupies within the totality of the universe. Thus, my perception must be part of these objects themselves; it is rather within them instead of them being within it. (...) Perception would thus mean that my body's possible effect on the objects is detached from the totality of these objects. Then perception is nothing than a selection. It does not create anything; on the contrary, its task is to exclude from the totality of images all those I cannot influence, and then to even exclude from the remaining images all that which is irrelevant for the needs of that image I call my body. (Bergson, 1929, p. 304).

Without elaborating on the cognitive mechanisms with the help of which reasons for such a thesis could be given, Bergson offers an explanation in the sense of more recent schema theories. Furthermore, he combines the selectivity of recognition as performed by memory and a general-universal idea of usefulness. In other words: memory is explicitly not understood to be a place of storing but a time-constituting awareness process by way of which things past are dragged into the present according to “natural” usefulness. The totality of all perceptions and moments exists exclusively in the present; those memories which are not recalled and thus made present at a given moment exist in the same way as all objects of the current environment exist but are not perceived

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12 Unlike intellect, which was criticised by Bergson, *intuition* does not dissect the world into objects – to put it in Russel's (1946) words: it is rather synthetic instead of analytical.

at this given moment.<sup>13</sup> According to Bergson, memories are indeed not stored in a specific part of the brain. This insight is found – as stated by Paul Ricoeur – in later habitus theories by Erwin Panofsky, Pierre Bourdieu or Norbert Elias (see Ricoeur, 2004b, p. 441). The kind of reading represents memories; the body functions as memory.

If memories are no longer considered to be stored “by the brain”, also oblivion or other memory disturbances can no longer be ascribed to damaged storage capabilities. Neuropathology knows only the case of aphasia as a disturbance of recognition which must be understood as a motoric disturbance of brain mechanisms – a special kind of oblivion. Although the aphasia disturbance may be connected to injuries of the brain, it is less concerned with a kind of storage. Instead, the brain’s capability of establishing a connection between things past and the present is affected. Consequently, memory must be treated as being independent of the brain so that the brain may be understood to be just a communicator between perceptions and movements. In contrast, the memory is corporeal and must thus be attributed to the perception apparatus. In this context, it is remarkable, however, that the brain is said to have an oblivion function:

In this sense, the brain contributes to the recall of the useful recollection, but still more to the provisional banishment of all the others. We cannot see how memory could settle within matter; but we do clearly understand how – according to the profound saying of a contemporary philosopher – materiality begets oblivion. (Bergson, 1929, p. 232)<sup>14</sup>

Memory lives on virtually – if it is not “activated” by the brain, it stays untouched by intentional access and thus unconscious. It is there where Ricoeur identifies a kind of oblivion which does not consist of deleting stored content but is a phenomenon we “may call forgetting in terms of a reserve or a resource”. Then oblivion is the covered access to bodily imprinted or rather incorporated memories being out of reach – temporarily or forever – of the consciousness (Ricoeur, 2004b, p. 440).

### 2.2.2 *Internal Time Consciousness*

Edmund Husserl’s considerations on the issue of time – like Bergson’s – do not deal with ideas of objective time, of a time of nature or of world time. Just as well, he is not interested in the psychological questions of the subjective

13 Paul Ricoeur (2004b, p. 412–413) places this insight by Bergson close to Freud’s concept of the unconscious.

14 The final half sentence is a quotation by French philosopher Félix Ravaisson.

perception of time, such as under which conditions time seems to pass sooner or more slowly or how the subjective perception of time is related to objectively measured time. Instead, his analysis of the concept of time aims at aspects of perception, memory, and expectation, at *being time* that is no part of the empirical world but results from the immanent time of the course of consciousness.

While connecting to the theory of the origin of time according to Brentano, Husserl illustrates the issue of time as the perception of time with the help of an example: What is astonishing when listening to a melody is the fact that one does not only hear individual notes but that each sound signal still “reverberates” when the next note follows. Without such a “reverberation” of one or even several notes, no “melody” could be experienced.

It is therefore a universal law that a continuous series of representations is fastened by nature to every given representation. Each representation belonging to this series reproduces the content of the one preceding, but in such a way that it always affixes the moment of the past to the new representation. (Husserl, 1991, p. 12)

Both past and future are characterised as modes of time because they change but do not determine. One exception, says Husserl, is the definition of “now”. The present can neither be changed nor determined; nothing adds to a perception made in the “now” mode – it is as it is. Referring to Brentano, Husserl states that both past and future are unreal. Only the present is real. In this context, those unreal definitions of time can be in line with just one real one, and the real “now” can become unreal. Remarkably, any real “now” is connected to a necessary before and after. “For it is altogether evident and obvious that everything that is, in consequence of the fact that it is, will have been” (Husserl, 1991, p. 15).

From a phenomenological perspective, Husserl comprehensively criticizes this theory of time, which follows Brentano. However, he says, it is an important starting point. Accordingly, he rejects the idea that a sequence of interrelated events is stored as a sequence by the memory. Rather, he says, the consciousness is just capable of producing comprehensive content at any moment – and just one content. Accordingly, a melody is remembered not as a “chronological series” but as an overall impression, as a snapshot of the complete sequence. For the phenomenological analysis of time, Husserl thus suggests the term “temporal object”, which is not only a unit within time but also includes a kind of timeliness.

That the elapsed part of the melody is something objective for me, I owe – or so one will be inclined to say – to memory; and that I do not presuppose, with the appearance of the currently intended tone, that this is all, I owe to anticipatory expectation. But we cannot be content with this explanation, for everything that we have said carries over to the individual tone. Each tone has a temporal extension itself. When it begins to sound, I hear it as a now; but while it continues to sound it has an ever new now, and the now that immediately precedes it changes into a past. Therefore at any given time I hear only the actually present phase of the tone, and the objectivity of the whole enduring tone is constituted in an act-continuum that is in part memory, in smallest punctual part perception, and in further part expectation. (Husserl, 1991, p. 25)

This structuring of the audio experience, already announced by the quotation, serves as the foundation for Husserl's theory of inner time consciousness. Each note of a melody – like any other experience of the consciousness – “reverberates” within the consciousness for a short time. The reverberation of an original perception is called *retention* by Husserl. Retention as a form of memory is characterised by soon becoming ever weaker the further away it is from its origin. As long as this phase lasts, we assume that it is still the original sound – thus, the sound, or any other experience of the consciousness, has its own length. “‘Beforehand’ (in the event that was not expected), it is not intended. ‘Afterwards’, it is ‘still’ intended ‘for some time’ in ‘retention’ as having been; it can be held fast and stand or remain fixed in our regard” (Husserl, 1991, p. 26).

After some time, the retentional consciousness is “empty” again when it comes to this event – a construction that resembles the concept of short-time memory.<sup>15</sup> Retention itself must be understood to be a continuum, in the context of which the consciousness may as well aim at the subsiding retentions and then create retentions of these retentions. Thus, after the original impression, there starts a flow of retentions referring to the original event. At the same time, there is the possibility that second-order retentions develop, for example, when considering the still reverberating note – Husserl calls this process *adumbration*. *Adumbration* does not mean that something slowly goes down into the shadows of the past but that an original event, by the process of remembrance, may cast different shadows, each according to the “position” from which light is shed on it via remembrance. Thus, each retention is not just

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15 Concerning this idea of inner time consciousness, along the concept of continuity Husserl also develops the concept of the duration of each respective object – thus, he does not agree with the idealistic position according to which all objects are purely spiritual.

a reverberation of the original impression but may as well become a modification of this original impression.

However, when this first experience is over, the perception experience has not been forgotten. When the note or the melody is over, the awareness of the now-perception comes to an end, and the comet tail of retentions ceases to exist. Now a new phase of remembrance starts. Husserl notes that the memory of a past note is systematically different from retention; in a certain way, it is similar to perception. However, it must be understood as a process of its own that has nothing to do with retentional memory. “Just as I see being-now in perception and enduring being in the extended perception as it becomes constituted, so I see the past in memory, insofar as the memory is primary memory” (Husserl, 1991, p. 36–37). Husserl calls this second kind of memory secondary memory or *recollection*. Whereas retentional, primary memory necessarily connects to perception events, this is unnecessary in the case of secondary memory.

When we remember a piece of music we have been listening to during a concert, the retention phase is over. However, in our thought, we may once again go through the melody. By recollection, the notes we “hear” in our thoughts, which once again create retentions, melt together with our expectations of those to follow or those still missing. The melody played to our “inner ears” was not “really” perceived; nevertheless, it happened – it was reproduced. Also, in this case, a recollection is required, which covers the whole sequence of notes as a whole. Indeed, then we might play the entire melody in our thoughts by playing the sequence chronologically. However, what is needed for this is an idea or “image” of the entire melody. Recollection appears in different ways: On the one hand, it may simply “appear”; on the other hand, it may be visited purposefully. In this context, the memory may grasp elements of the remembered passage of time or a whole context: we may remember parts of a melody – an “earworm” – or remember the entire melody.<sup>16</sup> As soon as a chronological sequence is recollected en bloc, Husserl speaks of perception. This must be distinguished from perceiving individual notes in the course of listening and the developing retentions. Thus, perception happens both by perceiving the original impression and by reproductive remembrance. For Husserl, primary memory must be distinguished from perception. At the same time, however, each perception creates primary memories again.

Whereas primary memory cannot be influenced, reproducing recollection shows considerable aspects of free decision-making. For example, we may recollect things more or less thoroughly or refrain from further pursuing a memory. Another difference is the fact that primary memory is absolutely safe

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16 Also Martina Borgschulze (2001) points out to the “earworm” being a memory motif.

and cannot be distorted. On the other hand, secondary memory reproduces the sequence of events, in the course of which individual elements of the chronological sequence may be emphasized, and others may be neglected or even ignored. However, whereas recollection is still somewhat oriented at the original sequence, a variation that has nothing to do with the primary memory anymore – but may still be imagined – must be called a fantasy.

Another feature of recollection is the fact that it includes expectation intentions that must be met. Husserl calls these expectations *protentions*. They are empty spaces which, in the course of recollection, are “filled”.

Recollection is not expectation, but it does have a horizon directed towards the future, specifically, towards the future of what is recollected; and this horizon is fixed. As the recollective process advances, this horizon is disclosed in ever new ways and becomes richer and more vital. And in this process the horizon is filled with ever new recollected events. Those that formerly had only been indicated in advance are now quasi-present – quasi in the mode of the actualizing present. (Husserl, 1991, p. 55)

Husserl develops a theory of subjective time which is purely based on the individual consciousness. It is characterised by the distinction between sensual perception and inner perception, both of which result in retentions and the possibility to direct contents of recollection in the future even if they are “empty”. Against this background, the future is a pre-memory, as only what is recollected can be imagined as an expectation of the future.

From now on, there is no need to pursue Husserl’s theory of time further. Like Bergson, he bases the experience of time on a concept of continuity. However, past, present and future are still distinguished as independent realms – although the present is reduced to the tiny and fleeting moment of the now. By this theory of time, a theory of memory is formulated en passant – remarkably, Husserl mentions memory only rarely and does so for no theory-systematic purpose. This theory of memory consists of the two components of retention, which is close to experiencing and not to be avoided and reproduction, which only constitutes the sense of time. Part of reproduction is protention, serving as a line of several placeholders which, at the moment of deciding for recollection, are already “budgeted” and are only filled in the course of remembrance. This reproducing recollection is understood to be an independent experience of perception, which again creates primary memories.

For Husserl, oblivion is no relevant subject in the context of his analyses of inner time consciousness.<sup>17</sup> However, even there, we may find some hints.

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<sup>17</sup> The concept of the forgetfulness of meaning from Husserl’s *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1970) will be taken up again elsewhere.

On the one hand, oblivion may happen if there is no reason or drive for recollection. On the other hand, however, recollection includes a certain degree of intentionality or freedom. Oblivion may be calculable by ignoring or leaving out certain aspects of the original experience of the consciousness. However, the reason for reproductions must not be given. This precondition is a paradox, particularly if we make ourselves aware of moments we prefer not to remember exactly. However, protentions are obviously not compulsory and may be filled in quite different ways – with the help of imagination or reduction. As it is a perception experience, possibly purposefully distorted recollection results in new retentions, which again produce foreshadows. Thus, in case of renewed recollection, factually wrong contents are “equally” placed next to factually correct contents. Oblivion is thus a process of the subsequent modification of reality. On the one hand, it may consist of completely refraining from reproduction; on the other hand, it can consist of partial and distorted reproduction. Therefore, the problem of understanding oblivion is not entirely solved, not in the context in which one recognizes something or is told that one has earlier experienced or – in much more detail – known something.

### 2.2.3 *Oblivion as a Precondition for Remembrance*

In contrast to Bergson and Husserl, Heidegger makes use of a clear concept of oblivion. Following Husserl, or rather independently continuing his thought, he develops a theory of time, which is closely connected to the ontological concept of *Dasein*. However, his concept is, firstly, considerably different from everything outlined so far and, secondly, it is also quite different from everyday language. How far Heidegger’s highly abstract approach may be helpful for a sociological theory of oblivion is the subject of the following considerations.<sup>18</sup>

In his theory of time, Heidegger follows the tradition, from Augustine to Husserl. For example, he discusses his teacher Husserl’s distinction between primary and secondary memory and criticizes the idea of linear time this approach is based on. The being of man – Heidegger calls it *Dasein* – is based on timeliness.

*Dasein* is characterised by drafting itself or its future. For this purpose, it can only reach back to what it has already experienced and drafted in the past and to what it currently is. In the context of this reference and connecting to

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18 The concept of self-forgottenness, which here is presented in somewhat more detail, refers to Heidegger’s considerations in *Time and Being* (1967), published for the first time in 1926. Better known from the debate on French deconstructivism is the concept of the forgetfulness of meaning, based on this debate and developed for the first time by Heidegger in *The Anaximander Fragment* (1975).



Husserl's two concepts, Heidegger distinguishes *authentic* having-been from *inauthentic* having-been. Authentic having-been is what *Dasein* is able to retrieve via "repetition".

Inauthentic having-been evades this reflection opportunity of *Dasein* and, concerning those aspects which cannot be concluded on, is called "self-forgotten". In his analysis of the timeliness and historicity of *Dasein*, Heidegger wants to discuss the problem of the "deconstruction of a self-forgotten tradition" (Wansing, 2001, p. 256), by positively appropriating tradition first, and then, in the course of reflection, revoking it. Furthermore, Heidegger's philosophy aims at overwriting things past in the course of an effective response. Thus, it is about the project of a deconstructivist foundation of history that – liberated from tradition and past and exhausting all liberty possible for men – allows for an unprejudiced new beginning.<sup>19</sup>

The distinctive quality of Heidegger's concept of oblivion is that it is not concerned about which topics or contents are forgotten. Rather, oblivion is exclusively referred to as human *Dasein*. Due to remembrance or, as Heidegger clarifies, re-trieval, we tend to imagine the past based on authentic or inauthentic having-been. However, as images are confused and invented in our minds in the course of remembrance when it comes to things past, we forget what originally happened. Thus seen, any memory is a consequential decision "bought" at the price of far-reaching oblivion.

However, oblivion does not refer to any information but the original, the *authentic* state of mind. Hence, according to Heidegger, we have no choice but to forget even about ourselves in the course of remembrance. Still, only a fictitious, seemingly gone past develops, which may be more or less accurate or completely wrong. "What makes oblivion haunting is the fact that it allows for imagining something different, for seemingly experiencing a new, inauthentic life" (Motzkin, 1996, p. 182).

Thus, Heidegger puts the well-known figure of oblivion following remembrance upside down and has oblivion precedes any remembrance. The need for remembrance results only from the insights that one forgets and from the search for an own identity, which seems to have been lost in the course of remembrance. Against this background, subject or identity appear only as fiction or as an idea *Dasein* has of itself. Consequently, it appears as an auxiliary construction by which the creation of the *inauthentic* in the course of remembrance is supposed to be provided with a positive meaning.

However, for Heidegger, such a way of understanding oblivion leads to his own, oblivion-related theory of time. It is possible to establish a relation to

19 So far, compare this to the overview by Rudolf Wansing (2001).

the past in the sense of “authentic” if it is both repeatable and never gone. As soon as the past is understood to be gone and no longer possible, it is indeed no longer relevant. Then, one no longer focuses on oneself and the authentic past but the nearest things in the world. For this, Gabriel Motzkin finds the following interpretation:

We consider the past void because we consider the present something we might lose, thus a lost present. By forgetting the past we have also already forgotten the present, and we have never remembered the future. This indifference towards of the present makes time crack, and instead we consider the world the nearest instead of ourselves. (Motzkin, 1996, p. 188).

However, Heidegger’s philosophical concept of oblivion, which refers to human *Dasein*, appears to be sociologically irrelevant at first sight, for Heidegger himself states that men’s dealing with reflecting on *Dasein* seems to change through the ages and cultures. In modernity, thinking emphasises the present, which is the same as increasing oblivion. When it comes to time and history, Heidegger concludes from this the demand for deconstruction, to control the inauthentic and to keep all possibilities open for the future. The oblivion problem formulated by Heidegger can be “sociologised” against the background of the thesis of a change of mind or how humans think. Sociologically relevant is also the fact that he understands the process of oblivion as an intentional activity, as action. Thus, oblivion does not appear as an unintended side effect of remembrance but is the responsibility of the individual that approves forgetting the authentic, quite purposefully by remembering in a specific way.

#### 2.2.4 *Traces*

Referring to Heidegger’s philosophy, Derrida demands to enlighten everything metaphysical through critique and critique of existing critique. In this context, the method of deconstruction he developed may be considered a process of recalling. What is supposed to be remembered is the historical development of texts which are all too quickly objectified.<sup>20</sup> Deconstructivism uncovers formal logical contradictions by considering and judging a subject, taking different perspectives or a thorough analysis of the context (Weinberg, 2001).<sup>21</sup>

20 By *text* Jacques Derrida does not only mean anything written but any kind of linguistic statement or statements changed into language. A further analysis of the of the trace is presented by Jean Greisch (2004), among others.

21 This is not, like in Heidegger, about destruction – Ze’ev Levy (2007) points out to the syllable “con” providing a hint at decomposition and dissolution, from which a trace becomes visible. It is not the task of the trace to reproduce that what the trace has left behind. “The same holds for science: a fossil is a trace, but who has left it has completely disappeared” (Levy, 2007, p. 150).

The method of deconstructivism accepts no presupposition concerning any problem – usually a philosophical one. Even the presupposition is nothing other than a trace indicating the subject under consideration. Any subject results from the difference it creates regarding everything to which it might be related. However, this difference is not only produced as a distinction from spatial or factual perspectives but also as a reference to the timeliness of a subject. Thus, even earlier states are nothing other than traces indicating a current state.

For the deconstructivist, any assumption of equality is suspicious. Most of all, when it comes to theories of timeliness – in particular the phenomenological ones –, deconstructivism points to the problem that a subject's present cannot result from the retentions and protentions concerning it. In the case of a synthesis of retentional and protentional traces, part of the being under consideration is necessarily overlooked, which is demonstrated by Derrida by referring to the concept of the unconscious in Freud. The unconscious, he says, is no horizon of changed presents but a “past” that has never been present and will never be present (see Derrida, 1982). It differs from the present by postponing itself, overcoming the alternatives of presence and absence while at the same time, however, sending out representatives to attract attention.

Deconstruction is a method for “working on” the problem of the oblivion of being as formulated by Heidegger. However, the oblivion of being, that is, forgetting the difference between being (Sein) and essent (Seiendem), between being present and that what is present, can only be experienced as having been forgotten if it reveals itself in a trace. Otherwise, the essent stays hidden within being – which is, after all, a problem of reification or inauthenticity.

There is no need to pursue Derrida's thought further, especially as the deconstructivist analysis refers first of all to the philosopher's work. However, in his work, we find another development of Heidegger's considerations that may be useful for a sociological analysis of oblivion. At the heart of his theoretical work, there is the concept of trace, which is commonly considered a reference to a subject belonging to its context but comes with the problem that expiring is part of its structure. The trace is ephemeral, yet, of crucial significance: The present “is a trace, and the trace of the erasure of the trace” (Derrida, 1982, p. 24). In other words: it is possible to conclude on a present or current subject only if it is considered by its difference to its context. Each of the possible differences is a trace that falls into oblivion again as soon as having been grasped. In this context, the remembrance work of deconstructivism happens beyond the sheer meaning of the term, as all that might be “reconstructed” this way is being but not the authentic essent which is “real” in the current context.

Before the following genuinely sociological theories of time will be discussed to identify starting points for an analysis of oblivion and clarify the concept of

social memory, the thus far collected philosophical hints are briefly assessed. The first philosophy of time discussed in more detail is Bergson's philosophy of life. Bergson is the most prominent representative of more recent theories of subjective time. It was most of all he who introduced the concept of inner continuity, which was so influential for subsequent sociological works. The then presented approaches belong to one developmental context, as they all come from Husserl's phenomenological school. Husserl's theory of inner time consciousness – time is grasped as a transcendental phenomenon resulting from remembrance processes – is their starting point. For the philosophy of Heidegger, who was Husserl's disciple, time is a crucial topic of his philosophical work, which, however, can only be cursorily touched here. Nevertheless, in Heidegger's work, we find an oblivion theory of its own kind, which can also be sociologically interpreted as the issue of the oblivion of being. This is where Derrida takes up Heidegger's thought and attempts to explicate the latter's deconstructivist way of proceeding. Also, the only constituted school of deconstructivism may be understood in the context of memory-theoretical signs. However, for an analysis of oblivion, it is most significant when it comes to the concept of trace – a concept we are going to come back to elsewhere.

For a start, our look at philosophical theories of time has provided some insights into the close connection between time and memory or remembrance. The time of consciousness develops from the capability of remembering something. In this context, time appears as a theoretical aid for transcending thought, hence, becoming capable of making drafts and being capable of action. However, the reason for developing a time consciousness is – at least according to the current state of the unfolded positions – maintaining and organising experiences as a general experience that is always immediately over. On the other hand, oblivion appears as a vast "shadow" absorbing any kind of experience that cannot be temporalized as an experience. Thus, we would have to say that not only remembrance but most of all temporalisation constitutes the reflecting of the consciousness on the past. Only this way it is possible to prevent some knowledge from falling into oblivion entirely.

### 2.2.5 *Time in Sociology*

There are only a few approaches to a sociology of timeliness, both in the theoretical arsenal of general sociology and in the vast field of special sociologies. Given the ontological "status" of the concept of time, this does not come as a surprise. Whereas for sociologists, action theories are as essential as structural theories, theories of time are marginal when it comes to the fundamental orders of the discipline's concepts and theories. At a closer look, however, one must admit that almost any sociological theory deals with the issue of

timeliness. Most of them more or less consider time to be given, and often the representatives of theories or those applying them are not able to elaborate on time.<sup>22</sup>

At first sight – and in line with approaches to the philosophy of time of the humanities – one agrees that some mathematical, natural-scientific or objectivist concepts of time are mostly unsuitable for sociological purposes,<sup>23</sup> as each of the different phenomena of the social unfolds its structure of time.

However, the impression that sociology is not very sensitive to dealing with time theoretically can only be confirmed for certain fields of sociology. Both among the “classics” of the discipline, general sociology and sociological theory, we frequently identify relevant considerations. For Durkheim, who refers to Aristotle, time is one of the fundamental categories of thought. Accordingly, he says that it is impossible to grasp any subject theoretically without fixed regulations of time.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes even sociological theories in the context of which no independent concept of time is constructed include at least hints at “classical” theoretical references providing approaches to a clarification. We seldom find references to the issue of time in studies on social change or in the context of the diagnostics of the time.<sup>25</sup> Precisely in this area in which sociology must be crucially based on timeliness, there seems to be a reflection deficit; perhaps it has simply been forgotten that also the chronological frameworks of their diagnoses must be based on reasons.

If there is a stock-taking of sociological theories of time in the following – of both those theories explicitly formulated and those implicitly assumed –, the focus needs to be on the function of a concept of time for the theory of social memory remembrance and oblivion. For as soon as one speaks of stability or dynamics, of structural maintenance or structural change – no matter in which ways – this includes questions of social memory, remembrance as well as social oblivion.

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22 It is this way in which Armin Nassehi (2008, p. 35–36) starts his analysis of the issue of time in sociology, by pointing out that sociologists readily agree with the statement “All time is social time”. During conversations, however, he says, one frequently encounters helplessness when addressing the issue of time.

23 This insight was formulated already by Pitirim A. Sorokin and Robert K. Merton in 1937.

24 Exemplarily, Émile Durkheim (2008, p. 11–12) proves time to be a social issue through and through, which helps thinking with regimenting individual memories into a collectively binding scheme or image of continuity. The structuring of time by a civilisation – such as the calendar – constitutes from the rhythms of collective life.

25 For example, Stefan Bösch and Kurt Weis (2007, p. 23) point out to the fact that such an “inspiration” is obviously not the “rule” although, due to the temporariness of conflicts between institutional fields or fields of action, it is imperative.

Through the previously sketched philosophical theories of time, it has already become evident that there is a close connection between time and memory or remembrance. Also, those pioneers and founders of sociology, which are considered classics, were inspired by these models. However, there is a particular difficulty in transferring concepts of time that were developed in the context of the individual consciousness and its cognitive faculty to the realm of sociological empiricism. Perhaps the necessary reorientation of the issue of time at sociological questions marks the beginning of the “separation” of the issue of memory.

Flipping through sociological works for their specific ways of dealing with the category of time brings us to the early works of US American Pragmatism and sociological systems theory (1). Peripheral areas of sociological thought, mainly circling the constitution of the present, are the special sociologies of historical sociology and the sociological research of the future, which here can be discussed only marginally (2). More visible is the sociological interest in measuring time and grasping time and the resulting consequences for social relations (3). Then one last point is dedicated to time in the context of theories of social change (4). Each of these approaches provides hints at the issue of oblivion. Thus, in the following, it will not be about general considerations on a sociology of time.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the focus will be on a reconstruction of the issue of time, based on the theoretical canon of sociology, in the sense of an intermediate stage on the way towards a general stocktaking of possible perspectives of social oblivion.

The first one of the unfolded theoretical sociological perspectives on the issue of time is more or less immediately inspired by the philosophical insights on inner continuity or on inner time consciousness and comparable analyses from the context of US American Pragmatism. The starting point is the question about the mutual conditionality of past, present, and future from the individual's point of view. The genuinely sociological contribution refers to how these insights have a *social* effect and may constitute intersubjectivity and sociality. Still, the analysis will be based on a diachronic, process-oriented perspective or understanding based on continuity. The social philosopher George Herbert Mead bases his considerations about the nature of the past on the theory of time developed by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and Bergson's theory of memory. For him, the past is represented by memory images contributing to constituting the present. Thus, the place of the past is

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26 Sociological considerations on the topic of time and time-sociological transfers onto research fields of sociology are to be found in the works by Werner Bergmann (1983), Günter Dux (1992) and Helga Nowotny (1992).

not in the past; it is – by making oneself aware of it – an element of the present. The experience of time results from the continuous flow of experiences, in the context of which the consciousness faces the difficulty that this continuity must at first be produced. Thus, it “questions” each new impression for its identity or its difference from existing memory images. “That which is novel can emerge, but conditions of the emergence are there” (Mead, 1964, p. 236). That imaginations – of things past – may be chronologically organised cannot be explained by the laws of natural-scientific space-time. It is a sheer achievement by the consciousness.

For Mead, ideas are imaginations that can be organised continuously. Everything else he calls a fantasy. To perform the constant comparison of what is remembered and new impressions, Mead extends the phase of the present as far as to a constant overlapping of the current and the past. However, the assessment of continuity always identifies discontinuities. Then the consciousness starts with constructively reconstructing continuity. In this context, the past is usually adjusted to the present. “The past is what must have been before it is present in experience as a past” (Mead, 1964, p. 238). By this insight, Mead criticizes Bergson’s theory, according to which the administering of the constantly rising flood of stored memory images belongs to memory functions. Rather, Mead says, continuity is produced as an achievement by the consciousness. This way, he connects to Kant’s considerations, according to which an unorganised sensual content becomes experience as soon as it has been transformed into categories of reason. Accordingly, the transition from present to present – in the form of difference – may always result in something new. The inclusion of the past does never produce anything new. On the other hand, the past connects the subsequent presents by making one present dissolve in the subsequent one.

Future develops when the consciousness tries to prolong, as fantasies, the continuities it believes to identify in the present – however, thereby, it stays hypothetical and can at best place the new of each respective present in a row it has already “anticipated” in such a way as to cause the impression of causality. As a consequence, there results that even scientific insight is merely a construct. For example, the historical sciences construe continuities based on historical sources. Then these sequences of events are ascribed to certain people living at certain ages. However, they have not necessarily got anything to do with how the historical actors perceived the sequence of events. This construct assumption also holds for natural or natural-scientific time. Mead demonstrates this by an example: just a minor change of the spectroscopy may add to or take away some millions of years from the lifetime of the stars (see Mead, 1964, p. 240). This makes him state that the validity of a seemingly

objective past is based on the continuity of its structures. In other words: there is no history of presents. Always the past develops – artificially – under the impression of a new problem. It is essential that the continuities this is based on are discovered by what has recently developed. However, they will be valid only as long as some novelty demands another history. “The past thus belongs to a generalized form of experience. It is the arising of relations between an emergent and a conditioning world” (Mead, 1964, p. 242).

Mead’s time-theoretical position is in stark contrast to the essentialist idea of an objective or natural time. It is wholly tied to structures of the consciousness and emphasizes the constructed nature of memories. This insight, which is at first an egologic-psychology-of-consciousness one, may well be transferred to the realm of the social. For example, the same principle of continuity as a construct may also be assumed for supra-individual remembrance – a both relativistic and at the same time presentist position which abstains from any way of fixing the past in the past as a basis of both the subjective and the social genesis of knowledge. While doing so, Mead does not rule out that there might be experiences that are stored by the consciousness. However, only by being updated, they become an interpretation of the present, and they are activated only to create continuity. Moreover, it seems to be evident that the already proven patterns are used for this continuity production.

If memory is just a construction when it comes to continuity – and thus connectivity – in the sequence of presents, the issue of oblivion seems to stay in the dark. However, from the presented arguments, we may conclude that oblivion happens either where it is impossible to construct continuity and where existing experiences prove to be no longer adequate. Alternatively, it happens where the experience of the new includes more than necessary for the construction of continuity. Thus, oblivion either happens if the past is no longer sufficient or if the stock of things past is satisfied all too soon.

Even if certain cycles of time exist both outside the psyche and outside the social, humans create their own time, which usually corresponds with the aspects of “natural” time. Social time, however, only develops by the institutionalisation of certain regularities as binding patterns of orientation. The individual may indeed live entirely according to his/her ideas of time; still, he or she must expect to disappoint the expectations of others and perhaps be sanctioned. This social time diktat is systematised and increased by the measurement of time. Thus, what is sociologically relevant – and there Halbwachs stays obliged to Durkheim’s thought – is only the organisation of time as developed from social evolution. By this concept, Halbwachs at first distances himself from Bergson’s understanding of inner continuity, which is of a subjectivist nature in his opinion. Only with the help of time conventions,



it becomes possible for different individuals of different ages to reference their actions to a time – otherwise, a baby and an old man would refer to completely different subjective perceptions of time, and no adjustment would be possible. However, this step towards institutionalised time results in further consequences. For example, also different social groups reach back to different concepts of time. The time of each group results from its stock of artefacts its memory is oriented at, thus creating time. Groups or cultures with only a few objects to be attributed to their past are thus provided with only a smaller window of time. Halbwachs states that social time as historical time can only grow from memory. A time which cannot be “hinged” to memories is – and here he is in line with Mead’s concept of time – either non-existent or irrelevant. Also, historicising reflection happens according to this mechanism. However, explicitly dealing with traces of the past construes a time of its own which has no longer much to do with the social time of its culture. Vice versa, time becomes itself a memory aid by serving for visiting specific memories as soon as it has been intersubjectively fixed: we may make the time of a group our own time by e. g. remembering a conversation with classmates – in our minds, we are back at school again.

Time is real only insofar as it has content – that is, insofar as it offers events as material for thought. It is limited and relative, but it is plainly real. Moreover, it is large and substantial enough to offer the individual consciousness a framework within which to arrange and retrieve its remembrances. (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 127)

According to Talcott Parsons, the structuralist-functionalist theory is about reconstructing universal structural aspects that are thus valid for any society or necessary functions. This theory does not aim at any clear concept of time; however, it requires explaining how social structures succeed with surviving over time. For this, Parson’s systems theory provides the field of culture or latent pattern maintenance.<sup>27</sup> If, however, a sub-system of its own is needed, which guarantees or legitimates the continuous existence of a structure, this system must be constantly irritated, which does not suggest stability but rather change. In other words: the function of pattern maintenance implies an understanding of the process or assumption of change which cannot do without an idea of time.

Social systems are subject to a continuous adjustment process. Parsons describes this process as evolutionary change happening most of all by functional differentiation. The aspect of time characterises a process in which a

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<sup>27</sup> In the context of the concept of social memory see Marco Schmitt (2009), among others.

simple state of the system results, due to change, in a more differentiated state of the system. The present annuls the past, the new proving to be differentiated and now well distinguishable functionality.

Regarding social progress, Parsons explains this with the help of three evolutionary steps (Parsons, 1966). The transition from a primitive to an intermediary level first consists of the development of language. However, only as a result of introducing written language, the social system can be distinguished from the cultural system. "Only literate cultures can have a history in the sense of an awareness, based on documentary evidence, of past events which are beyond the memories of living persons and the vague hearsay of oral traditions" (Parsons, 1999, p. 38).

The step from the intermediary to the modern level happens in the course of developing institutionalised codes within a legal system of normative order. The particular step to modernisation consists of the law becoming independent of the normative components, such as political or economic interests.

In contrast to theories of a specific historical development, Parsons is interested in developing a general theory of social evolution. Accordingly, he states that "historicism has characteristically denied the possibility or relevance of generalized analytical theory (which systematically treats the interdependence of independently variable factors) in explaining temporally sequential socio-cultural phenomena" (Parsons, 1966, p. 127) at the end of his comparative study on "societies".

Time emerges as a variable of general evolutionary differentiation processes abstractly formulated and stripped of the concrete aspects of past events. These processes do not even stop at the cultural system, and pattern maintenance should not be understood as a solidification of structures, which is a matter of course against this background. In his theory of patterning, Anthony Giddens combines the action level and the structural level. According to his accusation addressing functionalism and structuralism, this theory paints a much too static picture of society without sufficiently reflecting on the problem of time and timeliness. He states that through synchronous structural analysis equating time with change, it is impossible to reflect on the aspect of time, which is constitutively included in any action and any social system. Whereas Giddens's temporalisation of structure is criticised as an attempt to fix an outer frame, the evolution-inspired revision of structural functionalism, which Giddens perhaps ignored, is said to allow for a higher level of reflecting on social time and timeliness.<sup>28</sup>

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28 These ideas are also to be found in Werner Bergmann (1983) who refers to Heimirio Martins in this respect.

An interpretation of the issue of social time, which is completely different, perhaps not concerning its theoretical points of reference but in its theoretical architecture, is offered by Niklas Luhmann when it comes to the development of a systems-theoretical concept of time. At first, he states, as a feature of the social construction of time, that on the one hand, time must not be confused with the computation or measurement of time. On the other hand – and this is a diagnosis-of-time view –, social time is characterised by, the present shrinking to being just one point or being the difference between past and future in modern society. In contrast to Aristotle's concept of time, Luhmann states that this development is due to the discovery that there cannot be any origin of the past and, by consequently transferring this insight to the future, also no "end of time". In other words: past and future are extended into infinity, and at the same time, the present is reduced to marking the turning point between the two. Accordingly, topicality must be imagined as immediate change, and time itself as an "interpretation of reality with regard to the difference between past and future" (Luhmann, 1976, p. 135).

This originates from the idea that any system always only operates in the present by being different from its environment. However, if time develops from the difference between past and future, the system observes its reality with the help of this distinction. It is about the difference of the system's current state from possible alternative states of the system. The change from one state of the system to another, which happens in the course of observations, takes time. At the current moment, the system reflects on past and future, which appear as two horizons demanding selection – or a decision. When construing past in its present, from various possibilities of what has been, it selects those possibilities as relevant for the system and construes its own history. Moreover, the projection to the future happens according to this pattern: only what is currently relevant for the system is construed as the future. Thus, time is just imaginary for the system and has nothing to do with any material environment or objective time. "The passing present allows for the reversibility of the selections and most of all for the contrast to the punctual present which allows for experiencing continuity and a feeling of time passing by" (Baraldi et al., 1991, p. 216).<sup>29</sup> In this sense, time consciousness develops as an answer to the necessity of imagining consistency and change simultaneously, as the precondition for selectivity in the relation of system and environment (Luhmann, 2009, p. 136).

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29 See the glossary on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems, keyword *time* (Baraldi et al., 1991, p. 216).

Elsewhere Luhmann points out the close connection between time being construed by the system and the system's memory. In this context, memory is defined as a reflection authority that is free to make disappear what is happening or to connect it to schemes in the mode of observation. However, also the event nature of time itself must be understood as a scheme in this context (Luhmann, 1996).

If Luhmann's concept of time is stripped of the motifs he believes to be necessary for the development of the theory of the social system – such as the problem of the permanent development of differences or the co-presence of simultaneity and non-simultaneity – it becomes evident that his concept of time is conventional beyond the genuinely systems-theoretical problem. Like Schütz, he deals with creating continuity from a (systems-)egological point of view. As his theoretical perspective excludes the category of the subject, he can circumvent the problem of intersubjectivity. If time is always constituted from the perspective of a closed and self-referential system, no chronological horizon of a system must be analysed by referring to other systems. The social system creates its own time, just like the scientific system, the organisational system or the psychological system. Accordingly, the problem of synchronicity is shifted into the system – such as into figures of co-presence. A “true” parallel to the question of intersubjectivity develops only if two social systems, which are open towards the world yet operatively closed, start interacting. First, Luhmann discusses this as interpenetration; however, he replaces this term with structural coupling later. Now structural coupling – e. g. as the interaction between a consciousness system (consciousness) and a social system (communication) – is not understood as a causal relation of mutual determination but in the mode of simultaneity. However, the simultaneously produced results are processed by the involved systems according to the appropriate system-immanent logic so that no “material” intervention of one system in the other happens.<sup>30</sup>

30 It is remarkable that supporters of the theory of social systems in Husserl and most of all in Schütz make the lack of a theoretically-systematically satisfactory solution for the intersubjectivity problem one of the main arguments of their critique, to then, by making use of a number of abstractions and reformulations of concepts, introduce the concept of structural linking. Such a concept can then be discussed by help of the same arguments as the positings and general theses of the phenomenologists. “If communication and consciousness are each imagined as autopoietic systems, both the results gained from Husserl's and Schütze's insights on the structure of inner continuity can be adopted and the necessity, explicated by Mead, of imagining an operative unity for the description of social time whose elements are social entities and not elements of the consciousness can be fulfilled” (Nassehi, 2008, pp. 178–179). Quite obviously, what is presented here is not an independent answer but just a reformulation.

In particular, in the context of French sociology – again, while connecting to Durkheim’s attempts to establish sociology as an independent scientific discipline further – there were attempts at delimiting from the historical sciences. For example, the debate between Halbwachs and historian Marc Bloch on the difference between social memory and history as a crucial inspiration for the sociological reflection on time may be considered in dealing with the past.<sup>31</sup>

Already here, it becomes apparent what Luhmann is going to state at a later time: in contrast to historians, sociologists are not interested in the contents of the past but in the selection or structuring performances connected to the past. In this sense, Rainer Schützeichel states in his characterisation of the tasks of historical sociology: “Sociological information about social situations by way of reconstructing their historical genesis” (Schützeichel, 2004, p. 9).<sup>32</sup>

One binding motif of sociological theories of time is the analysis of how individuals and society are related to the future. On this, Werner Bergmann states that sociology has increasingly been discussing the problem of orientation in the future, most of all against the background of its significance for social behaviour and decision-making. For a “classical” motif in the context of social stratification, he points to the research of the group-specific readiness for deferred gratification (deferred gratification pattern). Particularly in social planning, sociologists have been dealing with time orientation and timeliness (Bergmann, 1983).

Luhmann, who understands future as a horizon of the present, concludes that future cannot start, referring to Husserl’s phenomenological concept of time. Just like we will never arrive at the horizon, the future will always move away from the observer and has only an orientation function, after all. In contrast to the philosophy of time in antiquity, Luhmann states that the possibilities of the future, which is now basically open, must be reduced by moving towards it.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the evolution of time-consciousness must first be understood, by futurization, as an extension of the future towards a horizon of open possibilities. The alternative – that is, the resulting necessity to reduce open possibilities – is called de-futurization by Luhmann. Under conditions of growing complexity, there is a growing need for temporal integration. This is where Luhmann introduces a modulation of the concept of future: the current future and the future present. The current future is a projection surface

31 Halbwachs (1980, p. 57) comes to this conclusion: “Our memory truly rests not on learned history but on lived history.”

32 Now, starting out from this definition, Rainer Schützeichel (2004, pp. 9–13) expands the task field of a historical sociology onto all fields of sociological research which are in any way associated with the chronological categories of past and present.

33 On this as well as on the following see Niklas Luhmann (1976).

for utopian and dystopic thought, whereas the future present is determined by technology and planning. Utopias are characterised by “pushing” the present future ahead of itself; the future cannot begin because it is always imagined from the point of view of existing structures. These structures must be changed before utopia may become a reality. Planning and technology de-futurize the future horizon; this happens by interpreting the present as the past of a future present through statistical calculations and predictions. Defuturization bereaves the future of its openness and uncertainty (Bergmann, 1983, p. 469).

Defuturization results in *forgetting about possibilities*, as most basically plannable scopes for design are ignored and no longer recognized. Given the contingency concept, which includes all possibilities of future actions in the form of the lifeworld horizon, the problem of oblivion covers only those possibilities which have been taken into consideration as drafts but have never been realised.

A sociological theory of time which understands itself to be a sociology of knowledge was developed by Norbert Elias (1992). For Elias, not the question of how consciousness constitutes time is at the fore. Instead, he is interested in the ways in which societies practice time over the changes of history by consequently delimiting from the concept of time of the natural sciences. In Elias, time as an orientation category is connected to power, and power – which we learn from his analysis of the process of civilisation – must be considered a historical process (Elias, 1981). He pursues the goal of a historical analysis of social ways of dealing with time due to the assumption that developed or civilised societies tend to forget about their time being a construction, of orienting at natural-scientific ideas of time and of even hypothesising the latter as a universal idea. Reification happens due to the individuals orienting at standardised time continuums such as time on the clock – at first by external compulsion, then as self-constraint: in progressed societies, the capability of being socialised as a self-constrained is an element of adult life. Elias, who understands time as a symbolic order based on power, after all, is interested in comprehending the development of social knowledge. In this context, time has “only” the status of a concise case example in the context of which no man is the subject of knowledge but the flow of generations in the course of the development process, i. e. humankind as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

At the heart of Elias’s analyses, there is no explanation of time as producing a continuum and not explaining simultaneity. Rather, his starting point is a synchronicity to demonstrate the integration of a socially construed and, over

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34 We may thus – and this was probably inspired by his teacher Karl Mannheim – speak of a synchronicity problem in the sense of a simultaneity of the un-simultaneous.

the centuries, incorporated symbolic order. Issues of memory, remembrance or oblivion are hardly touched – except for the question of what is forgotten if social life is exclusively oriented at standardised continuums of time. The time symbolism of measured time, however, is imagined as a power-induced principle of social selection which, on the one hand, guarantees integration by way of producing simultaneity and liberating interaction from the immediacy constraint – for example, one can make appointments. On the other hand, standardisation makes us forget that some social subjects cannot be organised according to standardised time.

As a result of establishing the practice of time measurement, individuals and collectives are confronted with new problems when it comes to reflecting on things. Units of time and time schedules indicate experience gaps, in particular in retrospect. The experience of having lived through rhythmised time without being able to remember several individual moments indicates the fact that obviously, one has forgotten about certain experiences. A time consciousness that is exclusively constituted via experiences and does not have to relate to “objective” methods of time measurement is less confronted with this problem. It may be that the day planner is not just connected to *de-futurisation* but that it is also an invitation to reflect on – perhaps socially relevant – empirical knowledge in the context of appointments in the past.

It has already been pointed to time being the precondition for any consideration on social change; however, it is also the precondition that theories of social change rarely refer to time and timeliness theoretically. Max Heirich carried out an early analysis of the straightforward yet frequently implicit ways of understanding time as found in models of social change. Heirich identifies four ways of reading time, the first of which is understanding time as a social factor or bearer of social significance; the second one is understanding time as a link to other variables in the context of social sequences; the third one is understanding time as a measure in the context of the measurement of changes; finally, the fourth one is understanding time as a qualitative indicator for the change of social structures.<sup>35</sup>

One prominent representative of action theories, who presents an implicit concept of time, is Max Weber. As it is well known, Weber’s meaning-adequate sociology looks for answers to how social phenomena have developed historically. Accordingly, Weber derives his thesis of the connection between the Protestant ethic and modern capitalism from historical analyses. Understanding comes from comprehending possible developments resulting

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35 On this see Werner Bergmann (1983), and also Max Heirich’s (1964) essay on time and social change.

from certain social phenomena of the past. Such a historically reconstructing method at first suggests – in particular by its condensing perception – a reduction of the process-oriented argument to two points in time: a past, in which everything was different, and a today.

In Weber's works, the construction of the reasons for action delineates an implicit developmental logic. For example, instrumentally rational action as a feature of the modern world may be confronted with the value-rational and traditional behaviour of a past world. In the latter case, the wording alone – indeed Weber does not speak of routine-guided action but purposefully emphasizes tradition – indicates the time-diagnostic intention of the typology. Also, the ideal types of authority relation may be interpreted similarly. The rational, legal, bureaucratic rule results from a rationalisation process starting from older ways of rule. For his pessimistic predictions concerning the consequences of modernisation and rationalisation processes, Weber uses catchy formulations, such as the "shell of bondage" or the dystopic characters of the "specialist without spirit" and the "sensualist without heart". When it comes to dealing with time, he applies a practice that, as far as so-called diagnoses of time or the present and adequately formulated predictions, does mostly without any definition of a concept of time. The fact that sociological predictions may be successful even without such clarification does not justify giving up on it, as one or the other statement would certainly become more precise with the help of an elaborated concept of time.

Concerning time-based ideal types, precisely in view of the modernising shift of emphasis, e. g. from value-rational to instrumentally rational behaviour, an oblivion process may be diagnosed, which first of all covers the subjective meaning of action but not practical action as such. The this-worldly asceticism of the Protestants, which may at first be based on value-rationality and may indeed be interpreted according to instrumental rationality, is forgotten in the course of secularisation processes. The only remaining legitimate reason is that of instrumental rationality – in this case, the action practice survives the motivation for action. Finally, this results in a situation of forgetting about the meaning, which is not necessarily perceived in practice and is first of all of interest for the conceptual historian. In this section, after having presented an overview of philosophical theories of time, some always related concepts of time coming from sociological theories have been analysed. For an analysis of oblivion with sociological concepts of memory and remembrance, the concept of time is fundamental, in so far as it provides a frame for the possibility that a stock of knowledge can be taken out of the consciousness or simply disappear. In particular, a look at the continuity problem of social timelessness makes it obvious that in each case, time is a current tool for orientation



or aid for combining the currently new with what has been and for creating identity. In this context, oblivion is always mentioned if the interpretation of the present does without certain schemes representing the past. The insight that something has been forgotten can only come from being confronted with an incomplete representation of the past. And obviously, this happens only in a situation of communication or interaction, that is, when participating entities interpret the present simultaneously and refer their interpretations to each other – we may say: individuals. Also, concerning the ways of understanding timeliness implied by sociologists, we may state that the use of time as an orientation scheme frequently refers to the problem of remembrance or the selectivity problem coming along with oblivion. In how far, after all, oblivion just refers to the waste products of selections or must be understood to be an active element of constituting the present in this context will have to be clarified in the further course of the here unfolded considerations.

When comparing the philosophical and sociological concepts of time to theories of memory, it is striking that both are much dependent on each other. Without memory, time can neither be experienced nor construed and vice versa. It would be pointless to imagine memory if we had no time consciousness which at least marks the difference between a before and an afterwards. The concept of time is as essential for memory and for the problem of remembrance, as little as it is connected to oblivion. Even figures of speech such as that of the “ravages of time” rather address memory, to which a currently perceived decay is contrasted. However, as demonstrated by the considerations on the connection between time and oblivion so far, eventually, time is constitutive also for oblivion – in how far this works vice versa cannot be discussed here.

### 2.3 How Does Oblivion “Work”?

In the brief considerations on the connection between knowledge and oblivion presented at the beginning of this book as well as in the detailed excursus on the issue of time, the concept of oblivion has already been comprehensively applied. However, what is still lacking is the assessment of the concept – fundamental for any knowledge-sociological approach – along with the range of its everyday language and scientific meaning. The second step of approaching the concept of oblivion will be a meaning analysis in different contexts. What do we mean when speaking about oblivion?

Forgetting an appointment, the keys, your PE kit, your homework, losing your train of thought – all of these too familiar situations, which we are sometimes reproachfully reminded of, are deeply rooted in our everyday lives.

Sometimes, however, we are also told to “forget about something”. This is either meant to say that the concerned subject is unimportant or unachievable for the time being. These two everyday ways of making oblivion a topic of discussion both offer an unexpected insight into non-availability. It is about something we believe to need *now*; however, it has either been lost in the past or is prohibited by its future use.

Having forgotten a name, relatives, the way home, to drink, to dress – against the background of improved medical supply and thus growing life expectancy, the fight against the pathological loss of the knowledge of vital performances and social relations appears as a new challenge to modern society. The growing significance of dementia makes the problem of oblivion socially relevant. At the heart of these phenomena, there is the unacceptable loss of knowledge. Oblivion is understood as a deficit; what has been forgotten is considered something that may be expected under normal conditions.

Having forgotten the culture, the tradition, the origins, and the purpose – also motifs of cultural criticism are connected to lost knowledge. Usually, processes of modernisation, rationalisation or differentiation are said to be responsible. Sometimes, however, oblivion is longed for: if criticism does not refer to dangerous knowledge but traditional knowledge or to the fact that sometimes we must even be able to forget something: Forget it!

Already a brief look at different situations of making oblivion a topic of discussion makes evident that the loss of knowledge is mainly perceived as a deficit – this applies even to the lonely moment at the door at night. Given the many problems oblivion seems to cause, we tend to forget that oblivion has important functions both in the neurophysiological, psychological and social context. It helps to ignore what is unimportant and thus stay capable to act.

Thus, what is the meaning of oblivion? Must oblivion be fought? What would be the consequences of a victory over obliviousness? Or should we rather try to understand the phenomenon of oblivion better, to be able to estimate the advantages and disadvantages of the loss of knowledge or of giving up on it? Hence, it is nearby to provide information about the contexts within which oblivion is discussed first. This will be done in the next section, starting with an assessment of hints at oblivion as they are formulated in encyclopaedias and found in everyday language. Then, a more detailed assessment of spotlights on the cultural-historical way of dealing with oblivion will add to this passage. Finally, a classification of the ways and functions of oblivion will be presented.

### 2.3.1 *Oblivion in Everyday Language*

In a German dictionary, under “vergessen” we find the phrase “losing something from our (intellectual) property” (Duden, 2007, p. 1805). The formulations offered by the related terms dictionary by the same publisher on the

one hand refer to the concept of memory: “losing all memory of something”. On the other hand, we find the formulation: “Not (no longer) thinking about somebody/something” (Duden, 2002, p. 978). Oblivion is connected to loss, in the context of which the disappearing of something existent is both generally understood and connected to being incapable of keeping it. Thus, it includes an interpretation offer concerning the not process of oblivion, which cannot be experienced, and the possibility of forgetting a subject by leaving it out of consideration. In this context, it stays open if this “no-longer-having-in-mind” happens purposefully or unconsciously. A look at an etymological dictionary may help with opening up the dimension of meaning even further. For example, the German root word can be pursued as far as the Nordic word *geta*, “to achieve, to obtain”. The prefix “for” reverses the meaning of a verb, so that Dutch *fergeten*, English “forget” – “get” can as well mean “obtain” or “receive” – and German *vergessen* refer to the negation of “getting something” (Duden, 1989).

The etymologic analysis reveals the close connection of “to forget” and “to lose”. However, the words cannot be used as synonyms, for obviously losing something precedes forgetting it. Only in the case of “intellectual property”, the two terms seem to mean similar things.<sup>36</sup> In this case, however, the problem is more complex. Whereas in the case of a forgotten key, one may go back and fetch it, the case of lost knowledge – at least from the subject’s point of view – raises the question if it is possible to remember a complex intellectual content that is identical with that of an earlier time. Applied to “knowledge”, oblivion increases the loss: once something is gone, it cannot be retrieved in its past state. If the definition of a term has to do with cognition or knowledge, the forgotten object is also concerned. In contrast to the forgotten key, which is available again with the whole range of its functions after being fetched, the connected cognition or the subjective meaning of a key is different. The loss described by “oblivion” must be structured according to levels of possible reconstruction, in the context of which oblivion includes both aspects of total loss and those of “re-”coverability.

Apart from such an analysis of the meaning of a word, other facets can be identified, indicating different readings of the term in everyday language. For example, there is a difference between the process of forgetting and its result.<sup>37</sup>

36 The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* [German Dictionary] by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1956, p. 415) provides that “since its earliest appearance in the Germanic language, *vergessen* [to forget] can only be found referring to an intellectual activity, thus it refers to unintentionally losing something out of one’s mind.”

37 In the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* [German Dictionary] by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1956, p. 422) we find a similar distinction. However, the process of *vergessen* [to forget] is called an action, and the result of this action is called a state or *Vergessenheit* [forgottenness].

In the former case, it is about if and how one may lose something one used to know, and in the latter case, there is some knowledge that is currently not available.

The process of losing knowledge cannot be experienced as such – we cannot watch ourselves while forgetting. Although this way of losing something can hardly be intended, the knowledge of having lost something develops from a process of becoming or making aware. If something, such as an appointment, has been forgotten, one does not refer to a process but a current deficit. The moment one becomes aware of having forgotten something, one may ask oneself how this was possible; one may thus draw one's attention to the underlying process. Thus, common thinking at first refers to the forgotten object – no matter if it is a physical object or a cognition – to then, and only in exceptional cases, deal with reconstructing the circumstances.

Usually, oblivion is negatively connoted. Furthermore, everyday language provides the possibility to distinguish between the tendency of forgetting something and knowing about the fact that oblivion is possible. Whereas in the case of a knowledge bearer, the tendency of forgetting something may as well be described by the term *obliviousness*, the *forgottenness* of a knowledge content describes, in the context of a forgotten object, the state of forgottenness. In this sense, Friedrich Georg Jünger defines forgottenness as a precondition for oblivion:

The nature of forgottenness, however, is that [...] our forgetting “something” becomes part of it and is capable of becoming part of it. Without forgottenness there would be no oblivion and no memory. By considering that everything imagined has been, is and will be taken charge of by forgottenness, we consider the “incredibility” of forgottenness. (Jünger, 1957, pp. 12–13)

Another distinction concerns “organising” oblivion by the knowledge bearer and separates purposefully controlled from unconscious oblivion. This is a metaphorical extension of the concept of oblivion towards other fields of not-knowing. As the process of forgetting cannot be subjectively experienced, we must assume that it does not happen consciously in the case of oblivion. Nevertheless, there are manifold ways of telling people to forget something. Volitional forgetting is connected to giving up on something – object or knowledge content. For example, the phrase that we may forget about something refers to denying the concerned object its relevance for a specific social context. The demand must be understood as a call for ignorance.

Also, connecting “to forgive” and “to forget” refers to consciously giving up on knowledge content. Settling the conflict about guilt and injustice is supposed to come with forgetting, consisting of also preventing the memory of a

bad past, apart from the unregulated attribution of guilt. By withdrawing the process of forgetting from the individual consciousness, which is incapable of intentional oblivion, and by transferring it to the longer processes of social change, it becomes politically controllable via reconciliation and through tabooing strategies and silencing.

The here presented stocktaking of “oblivion” in contexts of everyday life and the written language shall be concluded by another cursory look at an older encyclopaedia. Also, we find hints at dimensions of meaning there. Zedler offers the following characterisation of oblivion:

We have forgotten something if either we are no longer capable of imagining it at all, although in the past we used to recognize it: or at least we do not recognize it when encountering it again, or if other people remind us to the fact that in the past we used to recognize it. We will soon forget something again if either we are careless about it or if we do not often think about it, or also if the mind is occupied by this in one moment and by another thing in the other. [...] Thus, oblivion is typical of the old aged, either if they are too busy with other things or if, because of carelessness because their minds are weak, they are no longer capable of thinking about this or that they used to deal with in the past. (Zedler, 1746, p. 666)<sup>38</sup>

This older definition includes further aspects, some of which have not yet been dealt with. For example, the problem of attributing meaning is emphasized, in the context of which, firstly, the loss of intellectual property refers to facts. Secondly, there is an authority, which informs the forgetting person that he or she forgets something – this may refer to both traces and fellow humans. Once again, preconditions or circumstances of oblivion are mentioned: forgetfulness due to old age, overstimulation, distraction, inattentiveness, or weak apprehension. There is obviously a social problem at the heart of things in the context of dealing with individual consciousness. To sum up, oblivion refers to the fact that the observed behaviour of consciousness is different from the expected normal state based on an context of experience or stock of knowledge. Interpretations of these differences more or less address the field of the pathological – obviously, the social group provides itself with explanations for why somebody unintentionally behaves differently, although he or she should *know* better.

After an overview of the term’s usage in everyday language, after a look at encyclopaedias, and after having reconstructed three dimensions of the

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38 This is only a short excerpt from a longer section in which Zedler’s encyclopaedia (1746, p. 666) sheds light on the phenomenon of oblivion in a number of different action fields such as religion, law or medicine.

common use of language, the search for further aspects of meaning will be continued within the stock of cultural tradition.

### 2.3.2 *Oblivion Within the Circle of Life*

Written documents discussing the issue of oblivion are already found in texts on Greek mythology. *Lethe*, the goddess of oblivion, grows from the race of the night. She is the counterpart to *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the muses and goddess of memory. *Lethe* is furthermore one of the rivers of the underworld. It provides the deceased during their transmigration of souls with oblivion, liberating them from the memories of their lives and preparing them for being reborn in a new body (Weinrich, 2004). It is this figure of thought which provides the background for Plato's considerations on recollection.

For Plato, whose thought is based on the idea of the transmigration of souls, human cognitive faculty is based on universal ideas. However, this universal knowledge is forgotten at birth and can be recollected – we might as well say: learned – in the course of a life.<sup>39</sup> However, this is not complete oblivion, as otherwise, it would be impossible to have ideas or be pointed to them (Weinrich, 2004, pp. 19–20). To illustrate this figure of thought, Plato refers to the example of the wax tablet. As papyrus was expensive, one used wax tablets for everyday notices, into which one could carve or “impress” everything one wanted to remember for a short time. Thus, the wax tablet was a recording possibility with an oblivion function, as after using it, it was smoothed again and could then be reused, overwritten. According to Plato, also the human soul must be understood to be a wax tablet. At the time of his/her birth, any person is a “blank paper” (*tabula rasa*) which is written on or impressed throughout his/her life (Weinrich, 2004, pp. 20–21). True knowledge is created if impressions coming from sensual perception are congruent with the ideas of higher reality.<sup>40</sup>

39 In Plato, this aspect of the ancient oblivion doctrine is found in the the *Menon* dialogue. It is Plato's protagonist, Sokrates, who provides evidence for humans being incapable of inventing new things and only being capable of recalling already existing ideas. With the help of skillful questions, Sokrates makes a young boy who is not familiar with mathematics aware of how to calculate the area of a square. The theory of recalling is further elaborated in the *Phaidon* dialogue, also the classical insight according to which oblivion as the starting point for insight is to be found there (see Kreuzer, 2010).

40 The idea of equality is inherent to the souls: sensual perception may be referred to ideal models one has seen not in lifetime but before birth (see Yates, 1999, pp. 36–37). This figure may be understood to be a predecessor of the scheme theory of psychology, although the latter does not provide for a transmigration of souls. In Plato's *Theaetetus* dialogue (Plato, 1921) this is given as the reason for the difference between knowledge and opinion. Whereas true knowledge consists of perception content and idea being congruent,

Plato imagines the capability of memory, which he believes to be necessary for rhetoric art – in the sense of leading the soul – as consisting of three parts: firstly, this performance of the consciousness consists of the mental storing of data (*hypomnesis*), secondly of the copy function (*mneme*), and thirdly of remembering the non-identical (*anamnesis*).<sup>41</sup> With the help of this distinction of different concepts of memory, he demonstrates that the idea of a memory that functions as a data store is absolutely insufficient: if impressions could simply be conserved and stored, false memory would be ruled out. However, the memory is no mental container from which data stored through the act of remembering could be retrieved. The possibility of a copy that is absolutely congruent with the original event is thus ruled out. Remembrance is a constructive process.

Closely connected to the remembrance theory formulated in contrast to all-comprehensive oblivion due to birth and death are the considerations on literacy. In an allegory, Plato uses the ambiguous word *phármakon*, which means an aid on the one hand, but poison on the other. Writing as an aid for storing memory contents relieves memory; however, it entices us to only rely on this invention and neglect remembrance entirely. Plato states that due to the possibility of fixing something in writing, the souls are fed with oblivion. Furthermore, writing could never replace remembrance (Kreuzer, 2010), as it does not make a copy of the thought which is stored in it; once again, reading requires memory. In this context, reading is always recognition – if not of information, then at least of the structure of meaning and semantics.

Finally, another figure of Plato’s memory theory is the insight that the process of remembrance cannot be equated with its subject. That what is impressed into the wax tablet consists of impressions but not of events. Aristotle, who – while giving up on the idea of the transmigration of souls – connects to Plato’s considerations, later states that what can be remembered is always an image *of* something but not its impression or imprint nor a copy of the original. Now remembrance presents itself as the presence of the non-present; it refers to things past. This symbolising and symbol-understanding faculty distinguishes humans from animals (Kreuzer, 2010, pp. 263–264). Whereas Plato established a connection between oblivion and death or birth, with Aristotle at the latest, the focus must have shifted on forgetting the original sensual perception

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opinion is a perception content without such a comparison. In this context it may be that the comparison is not based on an idea but just on a perception made present – the result is a wrong opinion (see Janssen, 2001).

41 Plato has Sokrates explain this in the *Phaidros* dialogue.

in the course of imprinting and remembering, in the course of producing a reconstruction.

In Aristotle, however, oblivion is hardly discussed in detail; it becomes much more important for the considerations by the Aristotelian Plotinus. There, remembrance must be equated with storing, which results in piling up a vast stock of memory contents. The soul – consciousness – is interested in escaping, via oblivion, this manifoldness into amnesia, a state of having no memories, into simplicity. Remembrance, which creates variety and difference, temporalizes thinking. Plotinus finally connects it to the temporal dimension of the past. Then oblivion contrasts remembrance as an “ecstatic unification beyond the temporal” (Kreuzer, 2010, p. 264). Johannes Kreuzer demonstrates that Plotinus formulates a figure of thought which conceives remembrance as the “method and tool of intellect taking-the-inward-turn”; however, oblivion is conceived as the “negation of all remembrance”, which is preferred over remembrance. Only oblivion allows the mind to leave the sphere of the finite behind (Kreuzer, 2010, p. 265).

Oblivion, which is positively addressed in Plotinus and helps the consciousness defending against too many memories by striving to go back to the simplicity of the modesty of thought, may be connected to current ideas of the tendency towards complexity reduction and also to the question of the (social) consequences of compiling too much knowledge.

A philosophy-historically influential continuation of the theory of remembrance and oblivion as started in Greek antiquity is found in the work of church teacher Aurelius Augustinus who, in the Tenth Book of his autobiographical confessions, unfolds a theory of memory which is based on Plato and Aristotle. In the first part of *Confessiones*, Augustine reflects on his life as a pagan and sinner. Why finally he found his way to the Christian faith is an unanswered question for him which – by reaching back to the doctrines of mnemotechnics he was familiar with as a former teacher of rhetoric (Yates, 1999, pp. 46–50) – then leads him a subject-centred philosophical-psychological theory of memory.

Based on ideas of the transmigration of souls and recollection, Augustine replaces Plato’s doctrine of forms – according to which every insight is already inherent to the soul and was only forgotten at birth – by the insight that God as the creator of the world has His place in human memory.<sup>42</sup> However, the humans have forgotten this closeness to the Divine, which is why God sends

42 Here Augustine develops a complicated conclusion: as God cannot be encountered at any topographical place – and certainly not in the form of an image – and is thus immaterial, also memory must be immaterial. “The discovery of something that is nowhere is, for Augustine, the realization of the reality of immaterial being; an adaptation of Neoplatonic method is again evident. If God is everywhere and nowhere [...], and ideas are nowhere [...], then both are immaterial, if distinct” (O’Daly, 1993, p. 32).



out signals to them and lays traces to lead them to the sometimes windy paths leading (back) to Him. Augustine describes the road to conversion and the confession of God as a remembrance. In other words: the search for God – which was also the search of the author of *Confessiones* – consists of looking for indications of God in the forlornness of “godforsakenness” (*oblivio dei*), to finally join the “community of memory of Christian belief” (Weinrich, 2004, p. 22).

Thus, there is a connection to the insight that sinful oblivion is not the antithesis to remembrance but memory. Oblivion is never total – the memory always triggers remembrance *because* something has been forgotten. Thus seen, oblivion is the precondition for remembrance, for only if and because something has fallen into oblivion, there is the necessity of reflecting consideration. To put it in a nutshell: stimulating memory as well as the inward attempt at a reconstruction of what has been forgotten is what triggers and makes memory.

On the other hand, also the process of remembrance has got nothing to do with storing contents in the memory. Neither is something preserved nor is it imaginable that something which once has been remembered could not be forgotten again. If everything remembered was stored, this would be a traumatic limitation in the sense of not-being-able-to forget. Thus, remembrance is a permanent process, happening because of constant oblivion over time. Moreover, as the consciousness is not timeless, also the process of remembrance is part of memory. Thus, as remembrance is omnipresent and infinite, the remembering subject cannot be an a priori shaped, given and stable I, but it constantly creates and changes its identity by combining references to chronologically different events.

In his work on Trinity, Augustine develops his theory of memory further. Although there is hardly any emphasis on oblivion, he works out influential models for later philosophising on memory, remembrance, and oblivion issues. Based on the Divine Trinity of Godfather, Son, and Holy Spirit, he identifies a parallel to the mental faculties of memory (*memoria*), reason (*intelligentia*) and will (*voluntas*). If these two trinities are placed next to each other, a connection between Godfather and memory becomes obvious. The Creator God created the world. In His memory, all the blind spots coming from sinful human oblivion are included (Weinrich, 2004). Remembrance comes from the interplay of all three mental faculties. Thus, it has nothing to do with just activating or obtaining some data stored somewhere, but it follows reason and, most of all, will.<sup>43</sup> In other words: willingly one recognizes an internal process, and apart from being oriented at certain topics or subjects, this process refers

43 Here as well as in the following, see Johann Kreuzer (2010).

to itself again. By referring to something else, memory always also refers to itself.

As remembrance happens constantly, it may be assumed that not every process of remembering is consciously reflected on. Much happens by so-called *minor memories*, producing the effect that humans have much more things in mind than they are currently aware of. Accordingly, Augustine understands thinking to be self-remembrance, the will and desire to update that what has already been laid out in the depths of consciousness to become insight.

However, if remembrance is understood this way, the consequence is that remembrance cannot exclusively refer to things past. As it is a mental process always happening only in the here and now, remembrance may refer to the past, the present and the future at the same time. This results in the complicated construction that the present is always already remembered. Everything is grasped by the consciousness in the present moment and only refers to *memoria*, *intelligentia* and *voluntas*. Remembrance as a cognitive process always happens primarily and must not be understood as a secondary process in the sense of “considering-once-again” (Kreuzer, 2010). In other words: Augustine’s theory of time communicates the insight that there is no objective difference between past, present and future but that there is only the present which is related to past and future. The experience of time results from the consciousness switching between these categories of time (Saar, 2001). Thus, also the process of oblivion always happens in the present. Then, through the problem of time, irritation caused by traces, for example, allows for becoming aware of both oblivion and what has been forgotten.

### 2.3.3 *The “Nature” of Oblivion*

If we start from the knowledge bearer, for an interpretation of oblivion, we will first turn to the loss of knowledge of the individual. It is then about “natural” or “automatic” oblivion. The basic assumption, which was already Augustine’s, is that any consciousness constantly forgets. This may be attributed to the nature of man, or it may be due to the consciousness being dependent on its environment and the latter’s continuity. This is in line with the Augustinian motif of any remembrance referring to remembrance while at the same time influencing the current perceptive faculty. Consciousness is thus a chronological process with a permanent share of remembrance – everything beyond this communication process between subjective present and past is forgotten. Thus, an aspect of human nature would be forgotten, which could be controlled. Accordingly, the initial problem for a broad tradition of memory and remembrance techniques is that humans cultivate their nature and construe their history to learn from it.

Apart from the neuro-scientifically explainable problem of oblivion and the research of ways of making use of this knowledge both in the sense of avoiding an unwanted loss of knowledge and purposefully preventing unwanted remembrance, in the field of allegedly “natural” oblivion aspects must be taken into consideration which may be called culture-induced oblivion. Ways of losing knowledge, which evade everyday reflection and are thus a subject of scientific analysis, are both in the “nature” of the brain and the “nature” of the social or the cultural.

If sociological study deals with a subject on which other disciplines have already presented research results, these should be appreciated because, firstly, the semantics sociology must reach back to have been influenced by this research tradition. Secondly, it is obvious – most of all concerning knowledge, remembrance, and oblivion – to reach back to the subject’s consciousness, even more as, after all, the individual must be considered a knowledge bearer also because of the collective consciousnesses it belongs to.

When searching for answers to memory or oblivion, psychology and brain research are prime addresses, also from a sociological point of view. Whereas neurophysiology is about exploring the brain’s biochemical way of functioning, in the context of which issues of memory and oblivion are addressed, psychology is about gaining insight into thought operations and thus about reaching back to and the effect of experiences on current behaviour. Despite these differences, particularly when it comes to methods, the two research disciplines have always been mutually dependent. For example, young Sigmund Freud oriented himself at the neuro-physiological insights of his time,<sup>44</sup> and neuro-biologist Eric Kandel explains his research motivation by his desire to biologically substantiate the insights gained by Freud’s psychoanalysis (Kandel, 2006). It is remarkable in this context that, when it comes to finding explanations for the ways of functioning of memory or oblivion, one always starts from the thus connected problems. One main interest of brain research is the analysis of brain damages; psychology focuses on the analysis of malfunctions of the consciousness – in this case, one frequently starts from what in everyday language is meant by the term oblivion.<sup>45</sup>

44 See the encyclopaedia entry on *Freud* by Birgit Boothe and Jürgen Straub (2001).

45 Daniel L. Schacter (2001) calls the failures of the brain the *Seven sins*: *Transience* refers to the memory becoming weaker over the course of time, *absence of mind* refers to a weakness when it comes to information being stored by the memory, and *blockade* refers to the difficulty of recalling existing information. Apart from these three sins of omission, Schacter identifies four sins of commission: in the case of misattribution a memory is attributed to a wrong source. *Suggestibility* refers to the instability of memories as a result of influences. *Distortion* happens if memories of past events are reinterpreted against the

Nevertheless, these research disciplines generate several terms for memory, some of which, such as the distinction between ultra-short-term, short-term and long-term memory, refer immediately to the issue of oblivion: how long and under which circumstances is perception content or information stored?

Both brain research and nomological psychology started at the end of the 19th century. The following will not be about chronologically sketching the history of these two research disciplines – with a particular focus on oblivion. Instead, light shall be shed on essential concepts and theory offers of neuroscientific oblivion research to develop the stock of terms by help of which it is possible to understand or explain the process of oblivion. The first of these approaches are the studies by psychologists Ebbinghaus and Bartlett, which must be called classical works. Then essential aspects of the amnesia concept of brain research will be presented.

Many consider the study by learning researcher Hermann Ebbinghaus a very early work experimentally dealing, from a psychological point of view, with the issue of oblivion (Ebbinghaus, 1998). He consolidates the state of research of the psychology of his time by three positions. The first one consists of the assumption that each perception leaves an impression, a trace, which is always weaker than the original perception. These memory images are *eclipsed* by newly arriving perceptions. However, in the dream, when perceptions coming from the environment are lacking, recent memory images are sometimes very present. Older images are frequently eclipsed by newly arriving ones. Once these layers have been broken up or pushed aside, the memories stored there appear again in the original quality. The second position assumes that with growing chronological distance, memory images become ever darker, lose conscience intensity and are replaced by more recent images. However, these slowly *sinking* images cannot be imagined as a permanent yet qualitatively minor stock of memories but as a starting point for possibly recreating the slowly fading imagination contents – thus, it may be that the “apparently forgotten idea arises again in perfect clearness” (Ebbinghaus, 1998, p. 64).

The third concept of oblivion which was common in those days is based on the opinion that memory contents slowly *crumble* – over time, memories become ever more incomplete, and increasingly the links between them are lacking. In this context, the problem arises that possible mental links between memory fragments become equally probable and that, when remembering, one must decide about what things have probably been like. Ebbinghaus assumes that all three variants of explaining the process of oblivion are only

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background of current knowledge, and *persistence* addresses the problem of simply being unable to forget certain things, a problem which is also relevant for trauma therapy.

partly true, as each of them suggests just one valid interpretation of the subject of memory. It cannot be taken for granted that it is possible to find out how many and which memory elements are still there or which degree of darkness has been achieved in the given moment.

Ebbinghaus is not first of all interested in formulating an oblivion theory. Rather he wanted to find out according to which laws the brain functions when we try to keep something in mind in the long run by repeatedly memorising something. However, he succeeded in finding a formula also for “natural” forgetfulness. His self-experiment consisted of creating many systematically construed combinations of syllables that did not make any sense to the observer. He learned them at heart, by again and again reading and then speaking individual rows of syllables. This procedure was repeated at regular intervals, and the efforts made during memorising were modified. At first, he found out that in the beginning, oblivion happens very fast and then more slowly.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in the beginning, the oblivion curve rises steeply, to then become even flatter. Thereby, it can be demonstrated that complete oblivion happens only after a very long time.

This way of proceeding – learning abstract rows of syllables – was met with strong resistance by British psychologist Frederic C. Bartlett. After applying Ebbinghaus’s method, he found out that the memory does not work exclusively reproductively but actively construes memories. Oblivion, he stated, does not happen as a decay progressing over time; instead, remembrance happens depending on the situation and creatively reaching back to existing experiences. Memory is meaningfully structured, and remembrance happens primarily by creating, updating and changing mental schemes. In his experiments, Bartlett did not make the test persons learn nonsensical rows of syllables. Instead, he presented them with stories coming from cultural spheres which were alien to them. Then, one test person had to tell the respective story to another one and so on. As a result, Bartlett not only found out that the story became ever shorter, but he also discovered that it was more and more adjusted to the narrators’ cultural sphere – less familiar aspects and those the narrator believed to be unimportant were left out. Obviously, the narrators remembered most of all aspects they were familiar with, and thus those elements of the respective story could refer to schemes that were available for

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46 Ebbinghaus describes the formula according to which the oblivion function works as follows: “the quotients of the amounts retained and the amounts forgotten are inversely as the logarithm of times” (Ebbinghaus, 1998, p. 78). Time is measured in minutes, starting with one minute after finishing a learning phase.

them.<sup>47</sup> Schemes are permanent knowledge structures that serve for organising experiences and may be understood as starting points for both remembrance and oblivion.

In brain research, amnesia refers to the phenomenon of the loss of memory, the emphasis being on abnormal memory disorders. Like neuro-physiological-psychological concepts of memory, also the field of amnesia knows several differentiations. One crucial distinction refers to the time axis of memory. The remembering access may address the past, the remote memory, or the short-term memory, which refers to the future. If there is damage to the remote memory, one speaks of *retrograde* amnesia. It concerns contents that were coded before the disorder – and this means: changed into storable information<sup>48</sup> – and the access to which is now disturbed. An injury of the brain, on the other hand, may affect the recording of newly arriving perception contents. Accordingly, one speaks of *anterograde* amnesia if the formation of the short-term memory is affected.

Some of these different kinds of amnesia can be located in certain areas of the brain; however, they are commonly attributed to certain kinds of memory, in the context of which the memory is not understood as a place in the brain but according to its memory function. The latter can be differentiated according to conscious, communicable contents or routine, “automatised” and exercised knowledge one is not aware of during everyday use. Conscious knowledge is attributed to *declarative* memory; knowledge incorporated in a learning process is found with *procedural* or implicit memory (see Roth, 1996). Declarative memory can now be further differentiated into semantic and episodic memory, in the context of which the latter is understood to be a “decoration” of the former which has genuinely developed in the course of human

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47 On this see the short portrait of Bartlett by Carlos Kölbl and Jürgen Straub (2001a), who elsewhere also offer a definition of the scheme concept as a “comparatively stable knowledge structure which is resistant against oblivion processes [...] and guides perceptions while allowing for cognitively integrating known and unknown facts, the expected and the unexpected” (Kölbl & Straub, 2001b, p. 520). The study *Remembering. A study in experimental and social psychology*, in which Bartlett (1932) introduced the scheme concept into memory research, was published for the first time in the same year as the treatise on the *Phenomenology of the Social World* by Alfred Schütz where a similar scheme concept was defined: “A scheme of our experience is meaning-context which is a configuration of our past experiences embracing conceptually the experiential objects to be found in the latter but not the process by they were constituted” (Schütz, 1967, p. 82).

48 Storable information is also called an engram or memory trace. The coding as an engram may also be described as being filed by the short-term memory. Storing in the long-term memory happens only if the engram is connected to other engrams which have been coded earlier. This process is called consolidation (see Piefke & Markowitsch, 2010).

evolution.<sup>49</sup> Only episodic memory allows humans to have mental access to their past. Indeed, also animals are capable of acquiring knowledge that is independent of themselves and of time. However, no awareness of the self in subjective time can be determined.

The neuro-biological research of the first heuristic concept of episodic memory is based on distinguishing two kinds of amnesia: *temporal* amnesia refers to a “loss of the memory of personal experiences”, *categorical* amnesia, on the other hand, refers to a loss of “the memory of learned facts” (Tulving, 2006, p. 60). Both kinds of loss of memory have been proven in the context of brain damages, but not always does obvious damage of the brain result in amnesia. On the one hand, it may be that the memory is intact despite damage to the brain area. On the other hand, it may be that there happens a loss of memory although the brain is undamaged; consequently, the latter cannot be identified with the help of neuro-physiological examination methods. Such disturbances of memory may appear e. g. as a result of traumatic experiences; these disorders are called *psychogenic* amnesia (Piefke & Markowitsch, 2010). There is also the insight that amnesia may be caused by access being blocked due to stress when the release of stress hormones results in nerve cells being occupied. Then the occupied cells are no longer capable of absorbing newly arriving transmitter substances. Information is not only processed at one place in the brain – there is not just one nerve cell for the picture of grandma – but connects to many areas; in such cases, we may not assume a total blockade. Rather, one recognizes a kind of selective perception that would happen differently under different circumstances. Thus, the respective information and a complete network of connected pieces of information constantly change its shape, particularly if it is about complex biographic-episodic issues such as love.

If, however, such a structure is disconnected at one place, one speaks of the *disconnection syndrome*. Then the individual does no longer succeed with “generating the access to information or [with] recalling memories which allow for connecting newly acquired and already existing information to each other (‘association’)” (Markowitsch, 2001, pp. 238–239). If information cannot be newly inscribed, the memory is blocked or suppressed. This may then be experienced as oblivion when wondering why the so hurriedly and intensively “drilled” information is so poorly kept in mind. What is confusing is that this

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49 The concept of episodic memory was essentially developed by Endel Tulving. The here presented information comes from a short overview of the history of the concept (Tulving, 2006, p. 57).

is no problem of access to information (*retrograde amnesia*) but a problem of storing information (*anterograde amnesia*).

Sigmund Freud dealt with oblivion on a large scale in his work *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* of 1901. In the course of the individual chapters, he analyses how it is possible that in the course of a conversation, one frequently forgets personal names, words in foreign languages, or combinations of words as well as intents, that again and gain one remembers an event which does not seem to be particularly worthy of being remembered.<sup>50</sup> Freud is not ready to accept that the only reason could be insufficient knowledge of the respective term. Instead, he attempts to derive oblivion from the context of the conversation and concludes that, apart from simply forgetting things, oblivion may also be motivated by suppression.

Suppression is a crucial concept of psychoanalysis. It refers to a mental process in which the access to coping with affect-laden, emotional desires or aspirations is prevented because they are kept in the unconscious. However, as the thus connected emotions strive for finding expression, they break out by way of being converted into somatic phenomena (Freud, 1949, pp. 128–129). In other words: suppression describes a state in which the consciousness, but not the unconscious, has forgotten a drive. As this drive can neither be consciously controlled nor successfully suppressed, it takes another road towards “articulation”. Such a “jailbreak” may happen in the form of mental illnesses or anomalies, but it may as well find expression as a minor suppression of moments of displeasure in everyday language, by way of Freudian slips or indeed by way of “coincidentally” forgetting terms or names.

Thus, oblivion which is not controlled by the consciousness, becomes an indicator of mental illnesses and justifiable displeasures concerning past biographic events. Accordingly, Harald Weinrich states:

With Freud forgetting loses its innocence. From then on, anyone who has forgotten something or wants to forget something has had to defend himself and face the possibly painful and embarrassing question Why? The more firmly he is convinced that his forgetting requires no justification and that he has simply forgotten. (Weinrich, 2004, p. 134)

Oblivion must thus be understood as being, if not intentional, then at least functional. In case of such an attribution, the decision to forget something may be supposed to usually not be intentional, intending to forget moments

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<sup>50</sup> So-called screen-memory is a substitute memory – what is forgotten is other, more important impressions which, for reasons of infant amnesia or traumatic experiences, are hidden behind memories which seem to be trivial (Freud 1901).



of displeasure. It results from the confrontation with an uncovered oblivion event: “Why did you forget this?”. This question compels to a retrospective attribution of meaning – to the construction of a reason for this “blackout”.<sup>51</sup>

By reaching back to the Freud disciple Pierre Bertrand, Weinrich asks about the value of oblivion for psychoanalytical therapy (Weinrich, 2004). At least, specific kinds of traumatic memory are evoked in the context of psychoanalytical treatment. This allows for recognizing and lifting a suppressed trauma as well as the neurotic disorder resulting from it due to sublimation. However, now the patient is provided with new, possibly burdening knowledge. How to deal with this new knowledge, if he or she is supposed to keep it in mind or forget it, is not answered by Freud. It is assumed that it is possible to live an ordinary life after successful therapy and that the cause for renewed suppression and sublimation has disappeared.

The method of psychoanalysis aims at the treatment of psychoses and neuroses, which are said to be due to suppressed drives or traumatisations. It follows the remembering-repeating-coping-with principle (see Freud, 1914), the uncovering of the cause of the disorder and the then following coping with the disorder itself happening in the mode of rationalisation. Thus, it is about forgotten things that are supposed to be remembered again, to then again forget everything – that is, traumatisations, neurosis and therapy – if necessary.<sup>52</sup>

In view of therapy for mental disorder appearing due to traumatising experiences – posttraumatic stress disorder, e. g. after war or catastrophes – two basic orientations become apparent. Whereas psychological approaches – such as in the context of behavioural therapy – aim at the treatment of pathologic symptoms, psychiatric research attempts ways that start from remembering traumatic events and aim at undoing the causes for a disorder with the help of pharmacologic therapy. The focus in this context is on the development of medication with the help of which a traumatising memory can be purposefully deleted from the memory. Whereas for the time being, such a punctual therapy is still only found in science fiction literature, medication is already

51 On this see the German title of Daniel L. Schacter's book on the Seven Sins from 2005: *Aussetzer – wie wir uns erinnern und vergessen* [Blackouts. How we forget and remember].

52 Already at an early stage, Theodor Reik (1920) extended the suppression concept on collectives. Under the title *Über kollektives Vergessen* [About collective oblivion] he extends the concept of individual oblivion which Freud had developed in his psychopathology of everyday life, assuming a cognitive failure caused by suppression. Reik's considerations start out from watching a group of young adults talking about a book whose title none of them remembers – although all of them have read it. From the psychoanalytical reconstruction of the case there concludes that there exist “forbidden thoughts” and topics which, dependent on each respective culture, are taboo and, by being associated with words or elements of words, inhibit speaking or even remembering certain terms.

used, which is capable of not blocking the memory but indeed a specific kind of neuronal nodes. For example, medication use allows for preventing incoming information from docking with those nerve cells as being in charge of emotional processing. For instance, the *Propranolol* beta-blocker reduces – similar to alcohol but without the thus connected changes of consciousness – emotional perception as a whole. Thus, taking this medication before an expected traumatising event reduces the later development of a posttraumatic stress disorder. However, it may also be retroactively used for trauma therapy. As any reaction by the consciousness to a trigger stimulation connected to a traumatising experience causes a new memory of fear, it is possible to inhibit the connection of neuronal stimulation and emotion with these “oblivion pills”. Consequently, the fear connected to trigger stimulation and traumatic memory ceases; now, the experience can be reflected “soberly” and perhaps even be forgotten entirely (see Brunet et al., 2007).

Already the availability and use of a means with the help of which the damage risk connected to probably traumatising events can be reduced may be understood as making instrumental use of oblivion. For the time being, possible effects on society’s way of dealing with traumatising-relevant hazards as far as to the everyday, mass use of legal oblivion drugs and the resulting processes of cultural change are a subject of controversy.<sup>53</sup>

Another approach is provided by the psychological research of guided or controlled oblivion. Studies on directed forgetting focus on the experimentally analysed question about an improvement or deterioration of memory if lists of words are learned, sometimes – or sometimes not – connected to the demand to memorise or forget them. With the basic form of the experiment concerning the short-term memory research, the condition for directed forgetting is that the number of words to be memorised and to be forgotten is the same – twelve each. Now, this condition is contrasted to two logical examinations – a list of exclusively twelve and a list of 24 words to be memorised. Under the condition that also words to be forgotten are marked, the test person is told that later only those words will be examined he or she is supposed to memorise. The directed-forgetting effect measures how well the test persons remember the twelve “critical” words if they are confronted with different test conditions – only twelve words to be memorised, twelve words to be memorised, and twelve

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53 This was already discussed at an early stage, in the report by the President’s Council on Bioethics (2003) initiated by US President George W. Bush – for a sociological point of view see Christoph Lau, Peter Wehling and Oliver Dimbath (2011).

words to be ignored, 24 words to be memorised etc.<sup>54</sup> It turns out that words that were supposed to be forgotten are more frequently forgotten than those supposed to be memorised. Information, we might generalise, which is declared unimportant, is indeed not stored for future remembrance.

From these spotlights on intended oblivion, we may conclude that the loss of knowledge may be connected to the neuronal organisation of reaching back to “imprints” and to external control of absorbing information. Both psychoanalytical and psychological approaches seem to be based on the assumption that the brain guarantees practical capacity to act. Knowledge that seems to be an obstacle for coping with current situations is suppressed or simply not recalled, whereas, in the case of disorders, this system may get out of step. Accordingly, it may be that important information is blocked due to stress or that unwanted, obstructive information is an obstacle to an adequate course of action. However, these approaches are different from each other concerning whether unused knowledge really disappears or if it still influences the operations of the brain. From these differences, there derive the various strategies of using the brain’s way of working if things are supposed to be purposefully forgotten.

If we do not understand the individual as the bearer of knowledge but the social group and the culture it unfolds, we also state aspects of forgetfulness. These are only partly derived from a metaphorical transfer of the oblivion concept from the psychic to the social. In this context, Aleida Assmann speaks, among others, of “automatic oblivion”,<sup>55</sup> which may be said to be due to disappearance in the material, biological or technical sense. In the context of the presented overview, some kinds of socio-cultural forgetfulness that are usually not in the focus of everyday understanding will be shortly presented.

One kind of social forgetfulness is the decline of knowledge due to changing meaning structures or semantics of society. The ethnologist Julian. A. Barnes unfolds the concept of structural amnesia in the context of family relations – and thus connected: entitlements – in tribal societies.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to a written

54 A comprehensive overview of different aspects of directed forgetting is presented by Colin M. MacLeod (1998).

55 Also Aleida Assmann (2012) calls oblivion the “normal case” in culture and society, in contrast to which remembrance is connected to efforts. Even objects which have been carefully kept by individuals are destroyed or distributed after these individuals have deceased and are attributed with new meanings in new contexts. Automatic oblivion happens in the course of material disposal as well as according to the biorhythm of the generations in the course of which the experiences of the older generation are at regular intervals devalued and replaced.

56 In Paul Connerton (2008), structural amnesia according to Barnes constitutes the fourth type of oblivion.

fixation of kinship structures, he reports that ancestry is proven on the village square by presenting witnesses. It is remarkable that in this context, some inhabitants do not appear under family relations. Structural oblivion as a forgetfulness principle is based on the fact that members of a community remember only those relations which are relevant for them. This becomes structural, for example, in the case of sharing names. According to the studies quoted by Barnes, those ancestors are still remembered who shared their names with certain families. On the other hand, in British society, which functions as a comparison, the inheritance of names happens patrilineally, in which female names are forgotten. Whereas a Maori male can tell up to twenty generations of his ancestors to legitimate his status, in societies where ancestry is of little relevance, the kinship structures are most of all forgotten or only rudimentarily remembered.

Combined with a high degree of geographical mobility, the state of affairs may be reached that is typified by the possibly apocryphical story of the American living in Denver, born in St. Louis, whose Mother was born somewhere in the Eastern States, whose father was born somewhere in Europe, and who doubted if he ever had any grandparents. (Barnes, 1947, p. 53)

Forgetfulness, this we may conclude from Barnes's study, is closely connected to social relevance structures: what is unimportant or may become unimportant is not remembered. Jack Goody and Ian Watt take up the concept of structural amnesia and find that organisational change – we might say: social change – influences structural forgetfulness.

They can do this more constantly because they operate within an oral rather than a written tradition and thus tend to be automatically adjusted to existing social relations as they are passed by word of mouth from one member to the society to another. The social element in remembering results in the genealogies being transmuted in the course of being transmitted; and a similar process takes place with regard to other cultural elements as well, to myths, for example, and to sacred lore in general. Deities and other supernatural agencies which have served their purpose can be quietly dropped from the contemporary pantheon; and as the society changes, myths too are forgotten, attributed to other personages, or transformed in their meaning. (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 33)

These dynamics of structural amnesia are slowed down only with the introduction of writing. Literacy reduces the strong relation to the present, whose relevancies determine the structure of narrations referring to the past. In illiterate society, myth and history melt into one, “[a]nd as the individuals of each generation acquire their vocabulary, their genealogies, and their myths, they

are unaware that various words, proper names and stories have dropped out, or that others have changed their meanings or been replaced” (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 34).

However, structural amnesia is no exclusive feature of oral cultures. Some structural patterns are preserved even after societies have long become literate. For example, the patrilinear inheritance of names has long been preserved even in modern Western societies – and was even legally substantiated by way of written laws. Aleida Assmann even concludes on a general principle of structural amnesia and even structural remembrance from the patrilinear inheritance of names. For example, families whose names are dominated by male names come along with forgetting the female aspect of identity as far as it is connected to the family’s ancestry. At the same time, the male line is remembered “automatically”. In other words: women are forgotten, and men are remembered.<sup>57</sup>

Any remembering reference to past events is selective, in so far as the emphasis on one subject leaves other subjects out of consideration. Regarding the communication situation, any shared memory incorporates oblivion in so far as certain aspects are not communicated and passed on as a narration. Thus, any relation creates its own specific, narration-based identity by basing its “consciousness” only on specific aspects of personalised memory. What is irrelevant in a given narrative situation remains to be ignored and does not produce any follow-up communication. In this sense, oblivion as a result of leaving things out is not meant in the destructive sense but as part of the construction process – also when it comes to social reality.<sup>58</sup>

Construction-related selectivity does not exclusively develop from the communication between two consciousnesses but is – following Halbwachs’s framework theory – guided by social reference frames. Communication is oriented at relevant social patterns.<sup>59</sup>

The selection motif is also found in organisation research. Organisational routines are most of all understood to be aspects of organisational memory and are sometimes criticised for being obstacles to adjustment. However, some

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57 Aleida Assmann (2006) continues this object-related differentiation of structural oblivion and remembrance at the level of the subject. There, by reaching back to Nietzsche, she states that women rather cultivate memories, whereas males are rather interested in forgetting.

58 In Paul Connerton (2008), this kind of oblivion is in line with his third type of oblivion.

59 Halbwachs’ frame concept will be discussed in more detail elsewhere. Aleida Assmann (2012) files this kind of selective while at the same time culture-specific oblivion under her seven types of oblivion.

opinions understand routines to be triggers of organisational oblivion. For example, they form a specific selection of serially combined regulations from a vast space of possible actions, thus representing a highly selective practical memory of the organisation (see Casey & Olivera, 2011).

Oblivion, happening imperceptibly given the creation of the new, happens e. g. also in2 the reorientation of individual or collective identities. Connerton gives adopting the name of a spouse as an example. One's own original name is no longer used, and the family ancestry is made invisible. In a partner relationship, furthermore forgetting about earlier sex partners is expected. In certain kinds of families, personal identity may be oriented at the partner relationship, and when such a partnership begins, it may require renovation. "Forgetting then becomes part of the process by which newly shared memories are constructed because a new set of memories are frequently accompanied by a set of tacitly shared silences." (Connerton, 2008, p. 63). The situation is similar with professional careers – for example, moving from the worker's position to that of the foreman may result in forgetting about the problems connected to the worker's position (see e. g. Ashforth & Meal, 1989). In the field of collective identities, such a kind of oblivion may happen if companies are taken over. Sooner or later, the members of organisations bought up by others will forget their ties to the old company's name and the connected relationship structures or make continued relationships part of the new organisational frame.

If consciousness is overwhelmed by sensual impressions, we speak of a sensory overload. Coping with such an overload consists of an increased selection of relevant information. In the field of cognition science, one then speaks of informational overload. However, a preselection happens not only through selective perception but also because of memory retention. If too much information of equal value is perceived, this may also result in oblivion. In social groups, information overload appears as soon as social acting also depends on archived knowledge and the archive's storage capacity is extended, for example, through technological optimisation. Then it may be that for decision-making processes, an amount of relevant information is provided, which can hardly be coped with. Concerning the exponential growth of scientific knowledge, we may state election automatics that – in the sense of not always intended oblivionism – come along with certain path dependencies of remembering and comprehensively forgetting about "irrelevant" information.<sup>60</sup> Also, in Niklas

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60 A hint at such a kind of oblivion is provided by Paul Connerton (2011) in a more recent edition of his essay on the seven types of oblivion. Under the "cancellation" type which, against the background of the distinction made here, must rather be attributed to culturally-intended oblivion, he shortly addresses the scientometric distribution of

Luhmann, whose considerations are going to be discussed elsewhere, we find the motif of an oblivion function of the social system, which is supposed to prevent an overload of the system's capacity of processing information.

Another kind of social oblivion is identified by Connerton (2009) in his book *How Modernity Forgets*. The focus is on the assumption that change is accelerated under conditions of social modernisation and that in certain fields of the social we must expect an increasing appearance of oblivion processes. Basically, this holds for any innovation. Whenever something new is created, it replaces the old. Innovation must – also in the sense of political economist Josef Schumpeter – be understood as creative destruction. However, such creative destruction does not only happen in research and development but most of all also in the field of everyday consumption. Connerton demonstrates this with the example of modern media consumption, which, in his opinion, leads to cultural oblivion par excellence. Connecting to Walter Benjamin, he considers the daily reading of newspapers a kind of memory loss, as the thus perceived fragmentary information can no longer produce affectional experience. The focus on the new and fragmentation are increased in the case of TV consumption, in the course of which one reaches back to images and no longer to objects that can be experienced. Thus, he says, one function of the mass media is not production or consumption but making the experience of recent historical events fall into oblivion as soon as possible (Connerton, 2009, p. 84).

Then, however, Connerton has a particular focus on the topography of oblivion, which he makes plausible by the example of the development of the cities and the speeding up of traffic. Referring to the development of the cities, the initially fencing-off, centralising or functional-focussing function of traditional townscapes – around centrally located functional buildings such as churches, fortresses or town halls which were relevant for the collective – are forgotten as a result of the settlement growing beyond the city walls. The auto mobilisation of cities results in forgetting how to perceive them, which happened by way of experiencing them on foot. Connerton's argument sounds somewhat cultural-pessimistic when he states that spatial memory requires a certain degree of stability and that this stability of the local system is destroyed by the production of speed and the use of mobility machines. Experiencing space through the windshield is something like watching a film. After all, Connerton's considerations on oblivion are influenced by Benjamin's arguments – always, it is

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references as well as the motif of the paradigm change as unfolded by Thomas S. Kuhn. Paradigms proliferate as long as, due to their complexity, a completely new paradigm can push through. Kuhn (1962) calls this a scientific revolution. Both aspects will be discussed in more detail later.

about the loss of what can be immediately experienced, the haptic and thus the aura of the object.

If we leave away those aspects as looking cultural-critical and conservative, there remains the diagnosis that innovation in and the growth of societies result in changes in their culture. This creates the preconditions for traditional structures or generally for what is old falling into oblivion – such a simple statement does not require justification, after all.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, it comes hardly as a surprise that such ways of automatic oblivion are welcomed or are at least approved in modernisation-oriented contexts. In organisation and management research, sometimes the old is associated with organisational memory as an obstacle for open-mindedness towards innovation and organisational adjustment processes. However, there are also attempts to focus on the costs resulting from processes of automatic oblivion. One aspect that is considered a problem is oblivion due to a loss of human capital, such as experienced staff members leaving the company.<sup>62</sup>

To sum it up: we may state that these kinds of oblivion – filed under “natural” or “automatic” – may also be applied intentionally or instrumentally right when being identified. The list is incomplete; however, it demonstrates that the disappearance of knowledge accompanies any access to knowledge. The idea that each individual act of not making use also rules out any further access is not helpful in this context. In certain fields of knowledge, oblivion rather looks like things slowly sinking or being wiped out. How swiftly this sinking down happens depends on connecting this knowledge to the interpretations and actions required by each respective context or situation. The process may happen sooner here or later there; in any case, it goes on unnoticed, which suggests the conclusion that even oblivion will be forgotten.

### 2.3.4 *The “Culture” of Oblivion*

The following review is not supposed to be another cultural history of oblivion – which has already been presented by Harald Weinrich (2004), by the

61 In a similar way and also not without cultural-critical undertones, Konrad P. Liessmann reports on the card index system of the Austrian National Library being replaced by an electronic index system. “Where the new declares itself to be the new, the hold must disappear – and this means at once. Otherwise the new would not be new but only an alternative possibility” (Liessmann, 2000, p. 8).

62 Organisational oblivion is on the one hand understood to happen automatically, on the other hand as happening intentionally-volitionally in the context of the theory of organisational learning. Due to its closeness to the tradition of sociological-social-scientific theories, this topic will be taken up again elsewhere. For the start we may refer to the overview by James P. Walsh and Gerardo Rivera Ungson (1991), in which some problems of organisational memory are discussed.



way. Instead, it is about extending the scope of meaning, grasping the mythical or historical roots of certain meaning dimensions of a kind of oblivion that has been applied purposefully and has become an element of culture. This allows for working out the foundation for interpreting the various oblivion problems against a social-theoretical background.

At first sight, it becomes evident that oblivion was not only discussed in the context of a specific historical age – as a problem of antiquity, the Middle Ages or the modern age. Accordingly, a high number of hints are to be found since Greek antiquity. After a short overview of some early perspectives on oblivion, the review will be extended to the fields of historical science, literature, psychology and the neurosciences, and political sciences. However, the thus resulting manifoldness of different approaches allows for identifying other basic patterns of oblivion. Individual attempts at a classifying compilation have already been presented, except the excellent compilation of sometimes very disparate motifs – these are not satisfying, as they are just variants of cultural phenomena associated with cultural oblivion.<sup>63</sup>

The discussion of culture-specific kinds of oblivion starts with the exuberant memory performance of social groups, which appear as “nature” and require assessment. The motif has already been presented in terms of the oblivion command of Athenian democracy and the considerations by Nietzsche. The preceding cultivation of memory may well have happened through remembrance policy or forgetting remembrance or – and this is perhaps the most frequently described case – by announcing an “hour zero” or “leaving for fresh fields”. In any case, the function of oblivion means becoming open-minded towards future options by relieving oneself from a burdening history. Those activities triggering or even enforcing oblivion can be attributed to individuals, social groups or collectives, in the context of which it would have to be decided if collective oblivion happens due to the tacit agreement of the many or due to the rulership of a few people.

The first group of culture-specific kinds of oblivion results from a tacit agreement among many. Reaching back to an established ethnological-culture-anthropological concept is close at hand in this context. The taboo “institutionalises” a “critical situation” in the sense of levelled distances until an absolute distance has been achieved: “do not touch!” (Gehlen, 1986, p. 213). It controls attention and names things that must not be done. Taboos serve for distinguishing the sacred from the profane and consolidate power relations.

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63 These are first of all the two typologies by Paul Connerton (2008) and Aleida Assmann (2012).

By setting guidelines – as Arnold Gehlen states – in critical situations, taboos prevent the social order from being irritated.

One way of silencing is collectively not discussing shameful deeds of the past or past defeats. Remembering something that cannot be changed is perceived as a burden and, most of all, an obstacle to coping with current problems.<sup>64</sup> The period after World War II is – most of all in Germany – connected to such silencing.

In the West German post-war society, communicative silencing allowed for a retreat from the political public; the immediate past disappeared from the awareness of society, discussing the past was left to the ‘soakaway’ of coping with it in private life. (Assmann, 2007, p. 179)<sup>65</sup>

Remarkable with this phenomenon is that it caused considerable outrage in the course of social-scientifically reflecting on Germany’s post-war society. Nevertheless, it was identified as being culture-specific and thus supra-individual. Accordingly, Theodor W. Adorno does not accept the psychological mechanisms of suppression as the sole cause and identifies silencing as a strategic-instrumental nature – however less against the background of adjustment logics than rather against the background of maintaining traditional power structures.

The effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all to alert consciousness than its weakness when confronted with the superior strength of unconscious processes. In the forgetting of what has Gary scarcely transpired there resonates the fury of one who must first talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well. (Adorno, 1998, p. 92)

Frequently, oblivion by way of silencing proves to be deceitful – however, it may be connected to the hope of being redeemed from the memory of a bad past.<sup>66</sup> By discretion, Hermann Lübke recognizes a kind of communicative silencing (Lübke, 1983). Such a kind of silencing is characterised by all participants consciously keeping a topic out of public communication. Thus, it is a superficial kind of oblivion, in the context of which it must generally be asked if it is a process of or preparing for oblivion or if there is a “telling” silence in

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64 Being silent about the past comes along – at least when it comes to the German post-war era – with some present-related actionism as described by Helmut Schelsky (1975) in his study on the Sceptic Generation.

65 Aleida Assmann calls being silent a strategy of oblivion.

66 Accordingly, Connerton (2008) lists also being silent under types of oblivion, attesting each specific ways of being silent to victims and to perpetrators.

certain situations. In this context, Helmut König defines silencing, in contrast to being silent, as purposeful action:

Thus, the loss of memory is actually a refusal to communicate, at least if communication is tied to language. But speaking of communicative silencing maintains that this kind of excommunication is at the same time a way of communicating. (König, 2008, p. 525)

If, as König assumes, this silencing is based on purposeful behaviour or if it happens automatically by tacit agreement, it is difficult to say.<sup>67</sup> True – tabooing may also be caused by a power relation, but this aspect shall be discussed in more detail below.

Another way is the victims being silent towards the perpetrators. It is considered an expression of ongoing powerlessness and may be counted among oblivion, at least on the surface. At first, it is obvious to suspect communicative silencing also there. Such a kind of communicative silencing serves for avoiding sanctions while at the same time tacitly keeping memories alive, which is something like pseudo-oblivion. However, such a discussion taboo need not necessarily be enforced by rulers.<sup>68</sup> It may as well result from a diffuse mixture of individually or collectively perceived shame, uncertainty and insult.<sup>69</sup>

67 In view of Germany's NS-past, so far, the motif of psychoanalytical suppression has frequently been transferred to the collective – however e. g. Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich (1975, p. 28) understand the “collective denial of the past” to be a mass-phenomenon which has its origins with the subject, after all. In this concern, this strand of social psychology rests on a connection between individual and collective in the sense of Freud's mass psychology (see Freud, 1975; Mitscherlich, 1975). Just the same, however, we may assume that collective silencing comes from values-based discretion or, in other words, from a way of being silent which is, in a diffuse way, mutually anticipated. Then the taboo would rather have to be understood as having “grown” and not as having been “created”.

68 Being forced to be silent, as it is practiced by the Italian Mafia under the name of “omertà”, serves for preventing persecution. Oblivion is normatively enforced – by the state – by way of preventing communication. That under the surface this does not mean real oblivion becomes obvious from the necessity to enforce this practice rigidly, usually by way of murder (see Bestler, 2003). Leida Assmann (2012, pp. 33–37) further differentiates the oblivion type of being silent as complicity by pointing out to the connection between the perpetrators being silent for the sake of their own defence, the symptomatic way of being silent of the victims, and society being silent as complicity.

69 The victims being silent is frequently discussed in the context of (sexual) abuse and violence and connected to suppression on the one hand, however to shame and thus duplicating the crime due to public attention on the other. The victims fear to suffer even more from accusing their tormentors. They must expect to live through what happened in the past once more while at the same time being stigmatised as victims. Nevertheless, the victims e. g. of mass rape being silent has a social background because of this inexplicability,

Ideas of relieving oblivion, of a *tabula rasa* or annulment sometimes result from the problem of being confronted with an abundance of information. The introduction of writing was such a relief, to begin with, as it relieves the necessity of keeping certain things “in mind”. Apart from the necessity of being relieved of a “too much of information”, the art of oblivion (*ars oblivionalis*) is as old as the art of memorising, the former coming from the desire to be no longer in need of remembering. Indeed, the success of the art of oblivion is frequently doubted; however, perhaps due to the spread of the science of history – from the mid-19th century on and in the context of the demand for comprehensive oblivion, it gains renewed popularity. In the following, we will shortly discuss the two motifs of this relieving kind of oblivion.

The insight that the introduction of writing may suspend the storing of knowledge in the mind is already found in Plato. By writing, whose benefit is storing knowledge that is not necessary for everyday life, he recognized a tool for oblivion.<sup>70</sup> The principle of the systematic storing of knowledge as a symbol may also be transferred to archives, the archive organisation, the catalogue, being symbolically organised, and the archived objects being put out of the way when it comes to coping with everyday life. While connecting to Friedrich Georg Jünger, Aleida Assmann calls this kind of oblivion by archiving custody oblivion.<sup>71</sup>

Then, in the context of digital ways of archiving, the problem becomes evident that already information gained with the help of search engines by far overtaxes our perception and processing capacities: Manfred Osten points out a fundamental change of the memory function: “The memory, as yet well trained for dealing with self-generated associations and insights into connections, suddenly finds itself to be a habitualized user of storage capacities with technologically determined formal operations and being dependent on digital ‘search engines’” (Osten, 2004, p. 78).

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as it is not only about the subject having been violated but most of all also about the risks connected to the fight for recognition under the given social conditions.

70 In *Phaedrus*, Plato has Sokrates say: “For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practise their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are not part of themselves will discourage the use of their own memory within them.” (see also Frances A. Yates, 1999, p. 38).

71 See Aleida Assmann (2012) as well as Friedrich Georg Jünger (1957). A dystopia which is in line with this phenomenon was presented by Jules Verne who, in his story *Paris au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, sketches the image of a technocratic world being hostile towards art, where poetry and fiction are stored at a library whose ordering procedures are highly bureaucratic and lengthy. There, as stated by Dietmar Rieger (2004, p. 21), the library is both a place of storing and a “cemetery”.

Indeed, search engines themselves already offer their solution for the surplus of information. Elena Esposito describes Internet search engines as

data-processing machines producing information as their product – and indeed not because they remember information but because based on the user’s commands, which in each individual case generate a unique search path and thus a new memory structure, they newly constitute it each time. (Esposito, 2002, p. 357)

In line with the satisficing concept,<sup>72</sup> according to which a too complex search for information stops with the first satisfying result, they control the organisation of search results by way of algorithms.<sup>73</sup> The rules according to which each search request is dealt with and how this is done is a strictly kept company secret.

Relief by way of writing and archive is two-faced. On the one hand, it must be understood to be a relief through which complexity is reduced. On the other hand, however, these achievements are connected to a reflexive effect, for their realisation makes certain qualities and liberties disappear.

In philosophy, memory, remembrance and, thus connected, oblivion has frequently been discussed since the beginnings of written records. Often the starting point is preventing oblivion with the help of an *ars memoriae*. Remarkably, in this context, the worthwhile capability of keeping as much as possible in mind triggers a feeling of being burdened by an all too exact memory at the same time. When antiquity singer, poet, and memory artist Simonides of Keos offered the general Themistokles to teach him the art of memorising, the latter put him off by saying that he was rather interested in being taught the *ars oblivionalis*. His memory, he said, was already in a painfully good state so that he would feel well with being able to forget things once in a while.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the art of oblivion is understood to be a relief of a surplus of knowledge that has resulted either from an exceptional talent, long-standing practice or

72 See Herbert A. Simon (1956). Even satisficing as a strategy of problem solving is a kind of oblivion.

73 On this see the elaborations by Wolfgang Hagen (2011).

74 Among others, Cicero reminds to Simonides as the award-winning inventor of the art of memory – at about the year 264 BC Simonides of Keos had been honoured for having developed a system of memory aids. The source, a stone tablet, also mentions the invention of the flute or the introduction of grain (Yates, 1999). However, another story is also told. According to this, given the disaster of a collapsed hall, Simonides as the only survivor helped identifying the disfigured dead – before leaving the building he had memorised each seating place. Hans Haverkamp (1993) comments on this story as the birth of the art of memory from disaster which is understood as an oblivion event. The anecdote on the art of oblivion is told by Harald Weinrich (2004).

optimisation of memory. Thus, throughout the history of philosophising on oblivion, we find the idea of informational overtaxing resulting from too much remembrance or knowledge.

Also, the idea of reliving oblivion given a surplus of memory has its roots in Greek mythology. For example, in Virgil's Aeneas legend, we find different motifs of remembrance and oblivion. After the Trojan War, the Trojan hero Aeneas leaves his home and sails to Africa, then to Italy. The story may be interpreted as a flight from the memory of the traumatic experience of fighting, being wounded and death. The journey is read as an allegory of an overwhelming memory fading all too slowly, of a "memory attack" coming along at first with paralysis and slowly developing prospects of a new future. Here, oblivion appears as being successively relieved of remembrance, which also happens in the form of "attacks" and, most of all, blocks the capacity to act.<sup>75</sup>

In his *Untimely Considerations*, 30 years old Friedrich Nietzsche discusses, under the title "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life", indeed polemically, the question of how useful historical research is at all. To him, the science of history is the ideal type of the propensity of remembering the past and thus preventing it from falling into oblivion. To him, the problem is that too much remembrance is an obstacle to practical life. Nietzsche presents a typology of historicising interest consisting of three kinds: the *monumental* historian grasps the outstanding achievements of humanity to learn from them and teach and advise other people. The flip side of such a kind of memory is that only certain events are selected, whose exaggeration makes the "courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 71). The *antiquarian* historian keeps and adores the past – and this mostly indiscriminately. Everything past is worth being remembered. Thus connected is the danger that the antiquarian builds his "nest" in the past and either no longer perceives the present or does not know how to appreciate it – then scholarly routine circles around itself. Finally, in the context of critical history, the past is remembered to be broken and dissolved. According to Mephistopheles's words in Goethe's *Faust*, this kind of historicism characterises itself by the motto: "And rightly so: Since everything created, in turn deserves to be annihilated." Sometimes, says Nietzsche, life demands things to be forgotten. However, then the danger is that the critical historian sets himself or herself the judge of the past, even though he or she comes from a past he or she could not choose.

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75 On this see the elaborations by Reinhart Herzog (1993); the motif of the surplus of information was also included by Connerton (2008), under the name of "annulment", for his typology of oblivion.

Nietzsche's focus is on the antiquarian type, the person hostile towards education as the godfather of modern man. He describes him or her as being ill and weak due to historical education. Accordingly, Nietzsche says, occidental and in particular German modernity is characterised by a (lack of) culture obsessed with successorship which, given a too much of remembering the great past, wastes its time with archiving knowledge of the past, thus not only forgetting creative life but moreover consciously suppressing it. Nietzsche says that educating the youth consists of educating not free, educated minds but scholars – by communicating historical knowledge. Thus, when it comes to the most important aspects of youth, too much history is capable of “deracinating”:

We know, indeed, what history can do when it gains a certain ascendancy, we know it only too well: it can cut off the strongest instincts of youth, its fire, defiance, unselfishness and love, at the roots, damp down the heat of its sense of justice, suppress our regress its desire to mature slowly with the counter-desire to be ready, useful, fruitful as quickly as possible, cast morbid doubt on its honesty and boldness of feeling; indeed, it can even deprive youth of its fairest privilege, of its power to implant in itself the belief in a great idea and then let it grow to an even greater one. (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 115)

Nietzsche's critique of history as a de-educating institution, by which man is characterised, addresses both the individual and the collective. He implies a concept of memory that is limited to a (pseudo-)cultural-educational memory. However, even in the everyday lives of individuals, this cultivated historical memory is powerful enough to affect both their attitude and their opportunities to shape their lives actively. With the help of the metaphors of ill/healthy on the one hand, he propagates a well-measured amount of past which is worth preserving and passing on – with a certain degree of sympathy for the great however that may be defined – while on the other hand speaking in support of comprehensive oblivion.

According to Weinrich's interpretation, no clear statement on remembrance or oblivion can be identified in Nietzsche. Whereas in earlier works, he still propagated the relieving function of oblivion, he later discusses the question of when things are inextinguishably kept in mind. His mnemotechnic, which he explains in “Genealogy of Morals”, may be reduced to the sentence “One burns something in, so that it remains in the memory: only what never ceases to hurt remains in the memory” (Nietzsche qtd. in Weinrich, 2004, p. 131). Weinrich concludes that thus obviously, we have to do with two Nietzsches, one of them demanding art of oblivion, and the other one revoking it partly.

For a sociological interpretation of these fundamental insights on memory, remembrance and oblivion, we may state that Nietzsche does not present any

analysis of (social) memory functions. Instead, he unfolds a diagnosis of his time which rests on a particular (de-)cultivation of memory while at the same time speaking out in support of cultivated – and that is organised and thus intentional or conscious in whichever ways – oblivion. He criticizes the historical sleeplessness of modernity which is an obstacle for salutary oblivion. In this sense, we may refer to Hans-Georg Gadamer here, who comments as follows on the kind of oblivion to be found in Nietzsche:<sup>76</sup>

In a way that has long been insufficiently noticed, forgetting is closely related to keeping in mind and remembering; forgetting is not merely an absence and a lack but, as Nietzsche in particular pointed out, the condition of the life of mind. Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into many leveled unity. (Gadamer, 1979, p. 15)

However, in times of digital archiving and impenetrable archives being impenetrably controlled by logarithms, there is sometimes the call for comprehensive oblivion. The myth of the millennium bug, a programme error that would put every computer to a halt at the turn of the millennium, was not only a scenario of fear but just as well a redemption fiction. Accordingly, in 1999 Hugo Loetscher suggested relieving oblivion concerning all digital data in the tremendous deleting party.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, the concept of relieving oblivion has two sides. On the one hand, it is about being relieved from painful remembrance as an obstacle to coping with life in the presence. On the other hand, an exaggerated orientation towards the past is addressed – we might call it nostalgia – whose effects on coping with the present are similarly dysfunctional, which is why a return to oblivion as a selection function and relief is recommended.

Some of the concepts presented so far represent ideas of conscious and intended – that is, volitional – oblivion. In a short essay titled “An Ars Oblivionalis? – Forget it!” philosopher Umberto Eco asks if intended oblivion is possible at all.<sup>78</sup> For his critique of oblivion, he assumes that the art of oblivion would have to be the opposite of the art of memory. The art of memory is a semiotic practice making the absent present with the help of signs. The use of signs is – different in each case – accompanied by the “inner eye” becoming

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76 This quotation is also used by Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner (1996) who, other than Weinrich, does not identify any ambivalent attitude with Nietzsche but deconstructs the latter's oblivion recommendation and assesses it for being contemporary.

77 Manfred Osten (2004, p. 83) in his critique of digitalisation adopts this suggestion by Hugo Loetscher.

78 See Umberto Eco (1988) as well as the summarising comment by Sybille Krämer (2000).



aware of what is represented by the sign. However, now, asks Eco, are we supposed to use a sign to forget what it stands for? Oblivion, he says, is a “natural” phenomenon, whereas remembrance is a cultural technique. This argument is logical and explains why it is practically so difficult to forget something, such as an unhappy love purposefully. Nevertheless, it seems as if there is an art of oblivion using “natural” oblivion by purposeful, selective remembrance, pushing certain experiences out of what is relevant. This is possible both for the subject, by consciously providing for distraction, and in social relations, if external hints at memories are taken away or if memory communications are banned.

After the agreement of the many to be silent has been presented as at least temporary oblivion, and after both the potentials and the limits of desired oblivion in the social context have been presented, culture-specific kinds of oblivion which are explicitly established by a political will within groups remain. Also, in this concern, the documentation reaches as far back as the practices of conflict solving in Greek antiquity. Whereas the philosophical theory of memory deals first with ways of thinking while considering an idea of time, this now is most of all about the political-philosophical question of how far peaceful living together – particularly after conflicts – depends on mechanisms or imperatives of oblivion.

An early source of such a politically motivated kind of oblivion refers to Athens in the fourth century BC. The dictatorship of the *Thirty Tyrants* had been ended by the victory of an army of expatriates: the period of persecution and expulsion had resulted in a deep rift among the city’s population and had unhinged their relationships. A new beginning seemed to be necessary, based on an oath of amnesty: the citizens were supposed not to bear each other any ill will – exclusively, the tyrants were to be held accountable and to be persecuted, but not their supporters. It is remarkable that, despite the massive injustice they had suffered, the victorious democrats even gave up on the possibility of legitimate retribution and made themselves subject to a ban on remembering the past. This oblivion imperative required forgetting both victory and anger and the desire for retribution – an enterprise to which not every involved party did contribute to the same degree. Subsequently, frequent executions happened in the course of which those being obstinate, who would not stop calling for retribution, lost their lives.<sup>79</sup>

Also, we find the development of oblivion imperative in the *New Testament*. Weinrich interprets the story of the adulterous woman (John 8) and the

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79 On this see e. g. Nicole Loraux (1996), Christian Meier (2010) and also the second type of oblivion in Paul Connerton (2008).

command “Go. From now on, sin no more.” not only as an immediate connection of forgiving and oblivion. Rather, there he also identifies the beginning of the Christian practice of confession and atonement. God may forgive the Christian all sins if he or she is ready for atonement (Weinrich, 2004, pp. 165–166). In the Christian faith, there is the possibility of a new beginning at any time, which finds expression not only by God’s amnesty but most of all by telling the community of believers: not only the sinner is supposed to change his or her ways; also his or her social environment is told to make this possible.

In the philosophy of the 20th century, by French existentialism there develops an interpretation of the idea of the possibility of a completely new beginning which focusses very much on the subject. Accordingly, *homo existentialis* drafts his/her identity exclusively given future actions. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, what is to be ignored is what the others think. Weinrich interprets this existentialist moral, which calls for forgetting what has happened and for drafting oneself only out of one’s existential actions, against the background of post-war Europe with its collective “hour zero” amnesia or the “leaving for fresh fields” discourse. In contrast to this, it must be doubted that it is possible to hedge in the memory as the driving force of and criterion for action.<sup>80</sup> After all, history demonstrates that already the next generation, that of the year 1968, had a strong interest in lifting this amnesia resulting from collective silencing (Weinrich, 2004, pp. 164–165).

Against the background of guilt and retribution in social relations, an agreement on oblivion appears as a way out of the threatening spiral of violence. The examples given here demonstrate that amnesia and amnesty may happen on the level of collectives, groups, or constitutions of social subjects. In this context, the focus is always on the question of coping with a “bad past”<sup>81</sup> and about the preconditions for a new beginning against the background of the insight that remembrance may be an obstacle for reconciliation and forgiveness.<sup>82</sup>

In this context, Paul Ricoeur distinguishes two kinds of oblivion: deep oblivion and visible oblivion. In the field of deep oblivion, relentless oblivion, which irretrievably deletes the traces of experience, and forgetting the immemorial contrast each other. Immemorial is what has become sedimented in the stock of knowledge and is thus not available for the reflective-remembering grasp of the individual. The variant of visible oblivion concerns everything which

80 However, there are indications that such suppressions might be necessary – Freud will be discussed elsewhere – in post-conflict societies. On the situation in post-war Germany see e. g. Hermann Lübke (1983).

81 This refers to a book title by Christian Meier (2010).

82 See Avishai Margalit (1997) – oblivion effects resulting from truth and reconciliation commissions are discussed by Christoph Lau (2012).

might be recollected. Among this there count both the psychoanalytic concept of suppression and escapist oblivion as a strategy of avoidance as well as, finally, selective oblivion, which happens automatically at the moment of any narration of the context of life: one is incapable of remembering everything and thus incapable of including everything into a biographic narration.

Transferred to organisations, the manifestations of deep oblivion may help with understanding organisational change. The analysis of visible oblivion, on the other hand, may uncover both experiences and taboos which cannot be narrated, and – when considering selective oblivion – it may point out inconsistencies of the great narrations of organisations.<sup>83</sup> Already Ricoeur’s considerations provide us with a differentiated classification of different kinds of oblivion which may also be generalised and transferred to other fields. The background of his oblivion theory, however, is conflict and the thus resulting trauma. Accordingly, his analysis does not result in the phenomenology of oblivion; instead, it amounts to a philosophical discussion of the question of how forgiveness and thus a new beginning might be possible.

Another kind of intentional oblivion is legitimately forgetting about a criminal act. Amnesty is not only a kind of reprieve or a way of remitting a penalty. It represents some “being-supposed-to-not-remember” (Simon, 1997, p. 29) at the level of society.<sup>84</sup> Thus connected is the prospect of not being persecuted, however then rehabilitation in the sense of being accepted by society again. Great amnesty programmes are carried out, for example, in post-conflict societies, which are supposed to be enabled beginning anew. As organised oblivion, amnesty contributes to a process of reprocessing – each according to cultural-political specifics. Like in the example of the 30 Tyrants in ancient Athens, persecution happens only symbolically and aims exclusively at the “heads” of the old system – the bulk of “minor” perpetrators are granted amnesty.

Political scientist Gesine Schwan points out that such amnesties are the price to be paid for social peace by decoupling law and morals. Thus, the idea of “leaving for fresh fields” is risky, particularly for democratic structures (Schwan, 1997). In the present, amnesties are frequently connected to establishing so-called truth or reconciliation commissions which are also meant to give the victims recognition and a say.

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83 A comprehensive analysis of the possibilities of forgiveness by way of oblivion is carried out by Paul Ricoeur (2004b). An outline of the phenomenological classification of oblivion is to be found elsewhere (see Ricoeur, 2994a) – a short overview is provided by Oliver Dimbath (2014).

84 In more detail Christian Meier (2010).

Even if oblivion is supposed to be cleaned from any negative undertones, the concept of oblivion policy is rather a concept that seems suitable for uncovering political mischiefs – a combat term. If rulers issue a decree of oblivion, this raises the suspicion that an authoritarian system is fighting for survival (Connerton, 2008; König, 2010). Too obviously, any oblivion imperative looks like a hopeless enterprise connected to a high degree of suppression, which is much more likely to keep undesired memories alive in the underground. However, it has already been pointed out that, on the one hand, an oblivion decree may serve to bring peace and make it last. Philosopher Ernest Renan even assumes that any national identity must result from massive oblivion processes (Renan, 1995). On the other hand, history demonstrates that oblivion imperatives need not necessarily be “top-down” but may as well reflect a collectively shared desire of a social group.<sup>85</sup> Also, this is a culture of oblivion that may also be analysed for its way of functioning. Thus, how a process of oblivion might happen or how it could be described if oblivion is understood to be functional for social cohesion and social peace is outlined in the following.

One variety of purposeful oblivion coming from antiquity is the oblivion punishment (*damnatio memoriae*). In a period of swiftly following radical changes of power relations, nobody could be sure to be on the “right” side. Any overthrow was connected to the possibility of overnight falling from being an office bearer and dignitary to being a public enemy. Perhaps it was due to general instability that a loss of reputation, for whatever reason, was not only punished by killing the protagonist. Rather, it was common practice to completely extinguish even the memory of the concerned person as far as ever possible by removing all reference points to possible memories (Weinrich, 2004). On the one hand, this produced the result that the concerned person’s family and servants were killed or exiled. On the other hand, one erased all other hints at the person’s existence – inscriptions of names and sculptures. The new beginning, however it was supposed to happen, was supposed to start as being unburdened and total as ever possible.<sup>86</sup>

Sometimes, the *damnatio memoriae* is interpreted against the contrast between old and new or traditional and modern. For example, historian Jacques Le Goff, when discussing the difference between new and modern, states as follows: “*New* signifies more than a break with the past, a forgetting,

85 See Paul Connerton’s (2008) seventh type.

86 See the compilation by historians Gerald Schwedler, Sebastian Scholz and Kai M. Sprenger (2012).

an erasure, or an absence of the past.” (Le Goff, 1992, p. 26).<sup>87</sup> Moreover, this motif may be completed by quoting Konrad P. Liessmann:

The old cannot simply disappear. Of course: in less cultivated environments it is destroyed and survives only by the traces of its destruction. Given more delicate ways of life, however, it suffers the fate of being aestheticized. Having lost any function, now the old reveals its beauty which, as long as it was in use, could not be noticed. [...] It has lost its function, on the other hand it has gained a meaning. (Liessmann, 2000, p. 10)

If the old is bereaved of its function and functionally replaced by the new, it is no longer punished by purposeful oblivion. Nevertheless, the bulk of the old is destroyed, only individual items are preserved – for reasons of nostalgia or delight. Forgotten are the many levels of meaning it showed when still fulfilling its original functions.

One last kind of oblivion to be mentioned here also consists of an instrumental loss of knowledge. Also, in this case, the actions of an oblivion actor cause oblivion with others. At last, the modern capitalist consumer society depends on making the life cycles of products ever shorter. This applies to being fascinated by the new and the thus connected ephemerality. At the same time, also the good or product can, right from the beginning, be programmed for limited durability. Against this background, when household appliances stop working shortly after the warranty period has expired, this is not only a modern myth but may as well be intended.

In the context of his considerations on the topography of oblivion, Connerton, who refers to Friedrich Engels, points to the fact that e. g., the decay of working-class quarters was intended right from the beginning, to be able to rebuild forty years later. Connerton finds his assumption that urban change – and thus the urban topography falling into oblivion – may be interpreted against the background of building construction and civil engineering confirmed by a study of 1936. There it is demonstrated that most buildings in London, as far as they were not subject to monument protection, were renovated thirty years later and demolished sixty years later – in the United States, he says, this life cycle is even shorter (Connerton, 2009, p. 117). In the context of intended obsolescence, the loss of knowledge refers to utilisation knowledge applied to the use of tools connected with a particular fetish character of the products. Through sales-strategically motivated innovation cycles, there happens a forced change of utilisation patterns and tools. This begins with fashion

87 See also the “Manifesto of Futurism” mentioned by Connerton (2008).

and ends with innovations that increase the change value but not the utility value.

#### 2.4 The Ambivalence of Oblivion

Oblivion, we may say after having sounded out its different kinds and (dis-) functions, is judged on ambivalently. On the one hand, it appears as a deficit and a threat to origin, continuity and identity. On the other hand, one does not only accept that it happens more or less “automatically” and can at best be controlled to a certain degree. It also becomes apparent that sometimes it seems to be highly desirable to be able to forget about certain things. The desire to forget refers to a bad past, the memory of which is perceived as a burden, and unnecessary knowledge that, if taken into consideration, distracts from allegedly relevant aspects of coping with current situations – always regarding a future to be shaped. In this context, it becomes evident that oblivion must be considered from different points of view. Among others, we must distinguish between subject relations, aiming at the more or less “natural” forgetfulness of the individual or collective consciousness, and object relations. Object relations refer to the social ways of dealing with objects which – even as persons – may (be forced to) fall into oblivion.

The discussion of social time has demonstrated that knowledge must be understood according to the categories of past, present and future. Knowledge results from past experiences that – like experiences made by the consciousness – are kept available to define a current situation and plan future activities. Thus, oblivion, which becomes recognizable only by encountering traces, consists of the one hand of the consciousness's (or a consciousness system's) retrospective insight that it had knowledge in the past, whose reconstruction is not possible without effort (remembering). On the other hand, the process of oblivion may be reflected on, or we may consider the conditions under which keeping knowledge contents ready is useful or rather an obstacle under respectively different cultural conditions.

In the next section of this study, reaching back to sociological theories will shed light on the subject of such differentiated oblivion, which also refers to social reference frames. Doing so is meant to achieve a concept of social oblivion and see where the questions about the connections of time and action are already discussed in the context of sociological theoretical work.

# Systematisation: Social Memories and Social Oblivion

The second part of this study focuses on locating the concept of oblivion in the context of memory and remembrance in a genuinely sociologically way. Furthermore, there is a focus on oblivion as the problem of a social or general loss of knowledge. Firstly, this section will present an overview of sociological theoretical perspectives of social memory and its equivalents. Then sociological theories will be assessed for explicit and implicit oblivion motifs. As the concept of time plays a role also for sociological theoretical work, we will look for stimulations by and connection points to sociological concepts of time in the course of a second excursus. Then in the final section, a synthesis of these perspectives will be made, resulting in developing sociological search heuristics for phenomena of social oblivion.

## 3.1 Structural Aspects

Thus far, when exploring oblivion, the concepts of memory and remembrance have frequently been discussed. However, a closer look gives the impression that contrasting oblivion and memory, as it is common both in everyday thought and encountered with several scientific concepts of memory, is not helpful. Perhaps it is more obvious to imagine memory and oblivion as the poles of a dialectic relation. Remembrance may then be the synthesis of the opposition of memory and oblivion. Comprehending this seems counter-intuitive, insofar as in everyday language, memory is rather associated with the idea of space. Accordingly, memory is usually understood to be the storage place of the impressions of past events. Oblivion, on the other hand, refers to a process (such as in the sense of losing something, being cancelled, disappearing, deleting).

Also, within sociological theories of memory, we find hints at a spatial understanding of memory. In contrast to everyday thought, in which memory is often understood to be a structural or functional concept. Memory constitutes and coordinates remembrance, but if and in how far it is also in charge of oblivion is a good question and requires terminological-theoretical clarification.

However, from now on, it will no longer be helpful if we try to specify any universal conception which is also connectable to everyday language. After reaching a certain level of differentiation, understanding will become different according to each specific orientation of individual disciplines. Similarly, the terminological specifications of the respective technical languages will be made, which are no longer in line with everyday understanding. Whereas up to here, the analysis has been focusing on generally assessing the material on oblivion. In the following, the relation of the concepts connected by the triad of memory, remembrance, and oblivion shall be analysed. In this context, the arrangement of the three concepts is neither something like integrating remembrance and oblivion under “memory” as an umbrella term nor is it a dialectic which might contrast remembrance as a “thesis” to oblivion as its “antithesis”, to then come to memory as a “synthesis”. Instead, we will assume a tensed relationship between memory (as the “thesis”) and oblivion (as the “antithesis”), as the synthesis of which there happens remembrance.

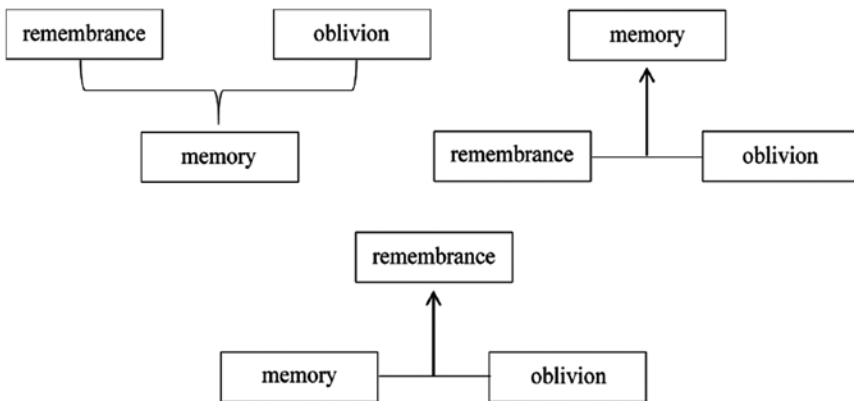


Figure 1 The triad of memory, remembrance and oblivion – memory as a “clamp”, synthesis and supplement

In considering different theoretical perspectives, it will become evident that there are individual terms that have more or less fulfilled the function of memory concepts among the toolset of sociological concepts. In comparing these concepts and extracting typical features in each case, it is possible to specify a sociological understanding of memory. Then, such a concept may serve as a foundation for deciding about the “place” of memory and developing an independent sociological concept of oblivion.

Many references to memory are to be found among sociological theories; still, they have only basically been presented since the introduction of collective



memory by Halbwachs. Some well-known sociological approaches may be called explicit; though, no independent approach connecting to these pioneering works has been worked out yet. Rather, explicit concepts of memory have the status of documenting how sensitive each respective theory is towards issues of time and persistence. In the following, a basic concept of Halbwachs's theory shall be presented: the concept of the social reference frame. Then the memory-theoretical foundation of the social-phenomenological basic concept of the "social stock of knowledge" will be discussed in the context of the theory of social systems.

### 3.1.1 *Collective Memory*

The concept of collective memory, according to Maurice Halbwachs, rests most of all on the concept of the social reference frame. In the German debate, this is less striking because the original title, "Le cadres sociaux de la mémoire", in which the frame concept is central, was changed into "Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen" [Memory and Its Social Conditions] for the German edition. Halbwachs makes use of the frame metaphor as a basic element of the theory of collective memory. As a result, there are two different yet mutually related perspectives: initially, Halbwachs uses the frame concept, which he found in Bergson and Durkheim, only to label a specific kind of social relations. Elsewhere, the frame concept is then used as a dimension of social orientation by reaching back to the basic categories of time, space, language and experience.<sup>1</sup>

The social reference frames of family, religion or social class are only exemplarily presented by Halbwachs. His considerations are based on the assumption that specific ways of associating are also connected to certain social orders. These social orders do regulate not only behaviour but also structure the individual's remembrance. In other words, as a result of some thought impulse or sensual stimulation, we have no choice but to relate our remembrance to our knowledge of social orders. Thus, the family frame does not only represent all related individuals as well as their relations to each other. It covers all the typical meanings of e. g. the different genealogical relationships.

The framework of family memory is made of notions – notions of persons and of facts – that are singular and historic in this sense but that otherwise have all the characteristics of thoughts common to a whole group and even to several groups. (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 83)

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1 A detailed analysis of the memory-specific use of the frame concept was carried out by Oliver Dimbath (2013) angestellt.

The situation is the same for the frame of religion or religious community and for that of social power structures and power relations as they find expression by the class or strata structure of society. Social order as a habitual, sometimes intensively learned and exercised knowledge is available for the individual as a basic framework for being provided with orientation in current situations. The perception content, which under situative conditions happens by way of sensual impressions, can only be processed in the context of this social knowledge structure. Whatever we experience – we automatically compare it to what we have already been knowing. If this comparison happens consciously and for the purpose of being attributed with meaning, we understand it as remembrance.

The second perspective of social reference frames covers culture-specific ways of articulation. It is about language and interpretation guidelines along the orientation dimensions of time and space, which are fundamental for many cultures, or about the categories of experience. These analyses make Halbwachs conclude that “[n]o memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43).

If the frames of language or space cannot be addressed, no memory is possible. Accordingly, our memories fade away after the house where we have spent our childhood has been demolished. However, not the house itself provides the frame, but this is done by the perception and knowledge of the house as well as by the system of meanings the house of the childhood days may have for any human. The frame of space – only exemplarily mentioned here – is a stable form or knowledge structure, functioning as a constantly renewing projection surface of remembrance.

Thus, collective memory must be understood as a group memory which, being very close to Durkheim’s concept of collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1984), represents a group-specific knowledge structure and, thus not least, the coherence principles of these groups. In contrast to Durkheim, for whom collective consciousness is an evolutionary order structure, Halbwachs is interested in remembrance and memory being construed from those social structures whose genesis can be better explained by attributing them to specific group arrangements.

### 3.1.2 *Context of Experience and Stock of Knowledge*

In the social-phenomenologically oriented sociology of knowledge – in particular, in Alfred Schütz – we find several passages hinting at a sociological theory of memory. Schütz’s considerations start with the project of specifying Max Weber’s understanding of sociology, which Schütz attempts to achieve

by including Edmund Husserl's theory of "inherent consciousness of time" and Henri Bergson's concepts of "continuity".<sup>2</sup> This allows for reflecting on the timeliness of action, for which biographic having-become is given as a reason and drafted by pre-memory in the sense of a future action that is imagined by reaching back to one's own experience, as being completed. In the course of his considerations on the "place" of the knowledge available for action plans, Schütz works out the concept of the subjective experiential context, which, in view of the social group, can be aggregated into a social stock of knowledge. Finally, the concept of the lifeworld – also adopted from Husserl – marks the horizon of all imaginable experience and thus the limits of the world.

Similar to the social reference frames, which constitute collective memory in Halbwachs, the acting subject in Schütz reaches back to a stock of existing knowledge that is pre-structured. Thus, knowledge is not necessarily explicable but may become habituated as a routine and may evade reflection by the individual.<sup>3</sup> The subject's experiential context comes from his/her immediate experiences and the culturally sedimented experience of everyday or general knowledge communicated by others. Even such a kind of knowledge is at first perceived through experiences – still, these experiences may consist of stories and narrations by others.

However, Schütz's considerations become memory-theoretically significant elsewhere. In the context of his attempt to understand action, Schütz also tries to give an answer to the question of why only certain aspects of knowledge are chosen from the experiential context and why these aspects do not only predetermine the action to be planned but also subjective perception as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Schütz finds an answer with the help of the concept of relevance,

2 On this see Schütz's (1967) fundamental work on *The Phenomenology of the Social World* as well as the preliminary studies on *Life Forms and Meaning Structure* (Schütz, 1982), which were published posthumously. These early works were commented on in detail in the newly edited complete edition, edited by Matthias Michailow, Gerd Sebald and Ilia Srubar (2006). A short overview of the theory of memory presented in "Lebensformen" is to be found in Oliver Dimbath (2009).

3 On this see also Michael Heinlein and Oliver Dimbath (2010).

4 A similar memory theory which is certainly oriented at Schütz, although his name is not explicitly mentioned, is worked out by Anthony Giddens (1984, pp. 48–49) who, in line with the phenomenological tradition of theory, distances himself from utilitarian-rationalist action concepts. He structures the action-guiding consciousness into three levels, the first of which is called the "discursive" one because it encompasses all facts which can be expressed by words. He calls the second level the "practical" one, as it addresses those schemes which guide perception. These schemes develop from the body moving through time and space, without any possibility to explicitly name this knowledge. Finally, the third level represents the "unconscious", where – quite in the sense of Freud – an inhibition prevents that something is addressed and emphasized into the consciousness. From this consciousness concept

which describes a socially constituted selection mechanism. Accordingly, for any culture-specific relevance, structures can be stated which, hierarchically organised, provide the actor with orientation in each current situation.<sup>5</sup> However – although occasionally Schütz gives the impression – such a way of determining the situation cannot be exclusive of a declamatory-reflective or cognitive nature. By the example of the concept of the because-motifs, which are derived from lived experience and are usually not reflectively accessible, Schütz demonstrates his awareness of the great weight of habitual knowledge (Schütz, 1967). Transferred to the concept of the social stock of knowledge, any identification with the cogitable, linguistic, and thus symbolic knowledge of culture would reduce the range of this idea. The social stock of knowledge – including those relevance structures as making it relevant for actions – serves as an orientation system that has developed from individuals' past experience and is modified by each further experience. We may not assume that this stock of knowledge grows or becomes ever further differentiated. Instead, via the connected relevance structures, it is a selection system always present while constantly changing when it comes to practical being-in-the-world. It covers drafted actions as well as pre-reflective action according to habits, routines and practices.<sup>6</sup>

First, this reference to experience has just been piled up. Still, it is further complicated by systems of symbols such as language, whose development happens mostly independently of the individual and becomes evident as being institutionalised in particular because of the changed chronological perspective resulting from scribality. Indeed, the meaning of linguistic signs is inseparably connected to the interpreter who attributes meaning to them; however, the durability of the medium of writing suggests – at least if compared to oral communication – the possibility of preserving some elements of meaning. In other words: through language and, most of all, writing, individual aspects of the relevance structure may be preserved over more extended periods, which

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Giddens concludes a memory concept which understands the consciousness to be “sensory awareness”, the memory to be the “temporary constitution of consciousness”, and memory to be a “means of recapitulating past experiences”.

- 5 Considerations on the problem of relevance became part of the late work *The Structures of the Life-World* which was completed by Thomas Luckmann (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). From Schütz's literary remains, however, also a voluminous manuscript titled *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance* was published posthumously (Schütz, 1971). The relevance concept has been dealt with from memory-sociological points of view by Mathias Berek (2009), Michael Heinlein and Oliver Dimbath (2010), Marco Schmitt (2009) as well as Gerd Sebald and Jan Weyand (2011), among others.
- 6 See the considerations by Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1973) on habitual knowledge in *The Structures of the Life-World*.

is why we must assume that a change of memory-specific selectivity happens at a different speed. Occasionally this results in irritation because sometimes meanings change faster than semantics.

Crucial for the social-constructivist theory of memory as implicitly laid out in Schütz's work is connecting the development and change of collectively binding relevance structures to the subjects, in the sense of a methodical individualism. However, these subjects' ways of experiencing past experiences and their communication about these experiences result in structures of meaning that the individual cannot control. The social stock of knowledge resulting is no gigantic hard disc where everything which has ever been known is archived and kept available. Rather, it is the horizon of the lifeworld which constantly or in each moment newly constitutes itself.<sup>7</sup> The stock of knowledge becomes memory only with the help of its immanent relevance structure, which, analogously to the synaptic structure of the brain, performs selections according to certain rules and path-dependencies. These selections become apparent only through observable behaviour or actions, after having constituted perception and the preconditions for those experiences as being transformed into experience.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it becomes furthermore apparent that memory may be understood as an aspect of the stock of knowledge that deals with the present and determines each currently running selection. In each present, the social stock of knowledge constitutes itself by reaching back to past events or to their sedimentation and takes care that they are changed into experience.<sup>9</sup>

The works of Alfred Schütz provide several reference points for the development of a theory of social memory, remembrance and oblivion. It is currently only about an overview of essential motifs; hence, we will turn towards other theory offers. We will have to come back to Schütz several times anyway.

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7 Schütz adopts the concept of the horizon from Husserl and differentiates it further – most of all in the context of memory – by e. g. distinguishing a horizon of the future and a horizon of the past. In this context, lifeworldly thought aims first of all at the horizon of the future (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 22).

8 In Alfred Schütz (1967, p. 79), experience has got nothing to do with practical or routine knowledge. Rather, it is the meaning-component of the experience. Only after, against the background of previous experiences having been transformed into experience, an experience has been classified, it becomes meaningful and thus experience.

9 Thus, it does not matter if now historical or future issues become a topic of the stock of knowledge. The stock of knowledge consists of nothing else than of things past and is the foundation of any orientation in the present, no matter if this orientation aims at current behaviour, action, or at the future. This contradicts Mathias Berek (2007, p. 71) who understands memory to be the past-related element of the stock of knowledge.

### 3.1.3 *Social Systems*

The development of a structural-theoretical sociology of memory goes back to Niklas Luhmann, who rests on the same phenomenological foundations as Schütz when it comes to grounding his theory of social systems: also for Luhmann, whose early works still document his intensive reading of Schütz, Husserl's phenomenology is the starting point. For example, he reaches back to the concept of the horizon; however, he takes it out of any cultural or societal context and reduces it to topical communication contexts. Thus, Schütz's stock of knowledge is parcelled into systems of meanings according to the functional needs of communication. Furthermore, such a diminution of the stock of knowledge is in line with a radical reduction of the selection needs represented by the relevance structure: the system recognizes as relevant only that what is relevant for its continued existence (autopoiesis) from its follow-up communication. The system's memory continuously assesses if new environmental impressions are coherent with existing processing structures. In other words: in Luhmann, Schütz's social stock of knowledge becomes a topical communication structure growing out of its history yet continually operating in the presence. At the same time, the system-specific relevance structure is topically reduced to a horizon that is determined by the social function of the system of meaning and whose selectivity can be depicted by way of a binarily coded fundamental distinction. If the basic distinction of the scientific system is determined according to true/untrue, communication is continued only where it is possible to communicate under this premise.

Now Luhmann, who vehemently tries to distance himself from a social phenomenology à la Schütz in his later works, introduces the concept of memory to reshape the selection aspect by reaching back to his time theories as an element of his phenomenological "roots". In the context of the analysis of different communication systems, this concept is used in many recent works to understand the independent history of antipoeitic systems.<sup>10</sup> However, using the concept of memory as an auxiliary construction is inconsistent, after all – mainly if the phenomenological classification system is wholly left and the memory of the social system is defined as discriminating against remembrance and oblivion. By the social memory determining what a system must remember and what it must forget, after all, it is reduced to the function of the

<sup>10</sup> One work where Niklas Luhmann deals explicitly with these issue is his essay "Zeit und Gedächtnis" [Time and memory] (Luhmann, 1996). Since the end of the 1980s, however, a number of publications present short considerations on the memory of the social system.

system's self-historicisation, without the crucial yet reductionist memory function of binary coding still being in focus.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the considerations by Niklas Luhmann provide a number of starting points for a theory of social memory, remembrance and oblivion. However, as not even Luhmann developed any explicitly sociological theory of memory and some aspects seem unconnected, these lines are not meant as a comprehensive appreciation. However, where it is appropriate, we will reach back to the many memory-sociological inspirations from the field of the theory of social systems.

#### 3.1.4 *Sociology Without "Memory"?*

Given the Durkheim-based works by Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, it would be inappropriate to assume that sociology mostly lacks a concept of memory. Not only Halbwachs but also Schütz or Luhmann are provided – as demonstrated – with at least basically worked out concepts of memory or remembrance.<sup>12</sup> Although it is likely to result in misinterpretations if any structural concept from the field of sociological theories is associated with memory, we cannot help but add a memory function as organising the reference to things past to any structure or any explanation of structuring or structural formation. Many theoretical drafts of structure implicitly mention memory equivalents, or the latter appear under different names – however, a terminological integration into the concept of memory, which is then, dependent on context, in need of differentiation again, might help with creating a more distinct and most of all universally applicable terminology and with getting rid of the hardly helpful multilingualism in this field. In other words: we might ask how the reference to the past is conceptualised in processes aiming at structure formation – may it be structuring, institutionalisation, self-organisation (autopoiesis) framing, routinisation, classification, culturation, habituation, objectivisation, reification etc. Furthermore, the motif of memory is found with sociological diagnoses of processes and times, which brings us to the question of the premises the construction of certain pasts as connection points for stating new developments of theories of social change is subject. Thus, the focus is on modernisation, rationalisation, differentiation,

11 On the many ways of making use of the memory concept in Luhmann see Oliver Dimbath (2011a).

12 For an overview see Marco Schmitt (2009) or Michael Heinlein and Oliver Dimbath (2010). For the time being, probably the oldest draft of a sociological theory of memory, which belongs to the pragmatist tradition, by US American social activist and social researcher Jane Addams of the year 1916 has been met with little response (see Addams, 2002).

pluralisation, disciplining or civilising, each of which has its own specific ideas of social past and future.

What is remarkable with the memory equivalents developed in sociological theory is that they are rather structural concepts than storing metaphors. In other words: these theories hardly refer to “places” where past events are stored or archived. As the structure of the social order continuously updates itself – that is, it adjusts to its respective present – reaching back to manifestations of the past seems to be hardly relevant. Then, a sociology that presents itself as being presentist may be satisfied with describing or reconstructing principles of social order,<sup>13</sup> whereas speculations about their development may be left to historically interested sociologists or historians.<sup>14</sup> It is thus a natural question why sociology needs a memory concept at all. In terms of social theory, the structure of social order would have to be understood as the storing place of evolutionarily “grown” regular knowledge, which is imprinted into the structure of social institutions – a metaphorical reference to a place.

Another reading understands memory as a function and implies it with any structure. This is meant to say that any social structure provides certain selection mechanisms for the production of each current memory. Aspects of social structures address subjective experiential contexts with actors and, this way, attract attention. At the same time, once having been perceived, they provide classified categorised orientations for action, the meaning of which results from the history of each structural aspect. Thus, we may say that culture-specific order structures seem obvious for standard situations for a start.

However, individuals do not act blindly according to allegedly clear guidelines, but they interpret them by themselves and according to their further proceeding. Consequently, social memory provides them with specific selection possibilities both to define a situation and to attribute meaning in view of further action. In this context, violating the order is a possibility that may be considered and may result from subjective experience being confronted with sometimes internalised or objectivist social patterns of behaviour. In such a case, however, the memory function does not work in the sense of referring to facts. In whatever way they may be stored and fixated, it rather results from a combination of two knowledge-related selection mechanisms: a biographic one and a situation-specific one at the level of constituting meaning. It is beyond dispute that both kinds of selectivity cannot be understood other than in the social sense – that is, as the results of socialisation and learning processes. However, it is doubtful if this kind of memory should be called functional memory, as it is common in the cultural studies debate on memory.

13 On this see e. g. Jan Assmann (2002).

14 See Rainer Schützeichel's (2004) characterisation of the task field of historical sociology.



According to Aleida Assmann, functional memory consists of the present stock of things past that is constantly in use and must thus not be forgotten – a kind of memory necessary for the functioning of cultural life.<sup>15</sup> Concerning a sociological concept of memory, however, memory functions by certain contexts of meaning which have been construed or constituted in the past, selectively orienting the contingent interpretation of current situations – in view of further action and further communication. Thus, the function of memory may instead result from imagining a selection performance in the course of which it is decided what is supposed to be relevant in a given situation. It is thus not about knowledge being “stored” at a particular place.

### 3.1.5 *Memory Equivalents*

Based on the distinction made so far, a look at some basic concepts of the conceptual toolset of sociology makes it evident that each of these concepts may be considered a memory equivalent. It is particularly revealing to ask about the functional aspects of each of these specific selection mechanisms. On the one hand, such an analysis will reveal systematic-conceptual differences between concepts which, at least partly, refer to the same. On the other hand, we may identify further aspects of different memory functions. In the following, only exemplarily and to demonstrate the equivalence assumption, the concepts of frame and interaction structure (1), identity and narration (2), taboo, ritual and myth (3), practice, field and habitus (4), network (5), discourse and dispositive (6), and institution shall be made subject to a necessary cursory assessment. This list could be extended by other concepts, such as social role, norm, value, custom, and more. However, here we will be satisfied with assessing the former concepts, as already by them, the crucial motifs of the reference to the past can be demonstrated.

The, at first sight, at least terminological similarity of Goffman's frame concept and Halbwachs's concept of the social reference frame has frequently been stated, particularly by the cultural studies looking for being social-theoretically grounded.<sup>16</sup> Probably the first and, given its shortness, topically

15 Aleida Assmann connects the canon to functional memory. “For canonisation means additionally the trans-historical self-obligation to repeated reading and interpretation. Accordingly, despite accelerated innovation, the stocks of functional memory are still part of the curricula of educational institutions, of the playlists of theatres, are presented at museum halls, are part of concerts at concert halls and of the programmes of publishers. What has its place in the functional memory of a society may claim to be again and again newly presented, exhibited, read, interpreted.” (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 56)

16 Hints which are not meant as a comparison of theories but which are first of all about terminological convergence are to be found e. g. in Dietmar J. Wetzler (2009), Harald Welzer (2008) who, however, interprets Goffman as a memory-relevant theoretician in a different way, and Jan Assmann (2011).

most distinctive analysis is to be found in Jan Assmann, who points out to the fact that “Halbwachs runs along surprisingly similar lines to E. Goffman’s theory of ‘frame analysis’” (J. Assmann, 2011, p. 22).

Without any further comparison of the framework concepts of Goffman and Halbwachs,<sup>17</sup> light shall be shed on some crucial aspects of the frame in Goffman in the following. First, we will discuss to what extent it is a memory equivalent – despite any references to Halbwachs. Goffman, who adopts his frame concept from Gregory Batson (1972), presents the following definition:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements I am able to identify. (Goffman, 1986, pp.10–11)

However, this definition does not result – as might be suggested by the Thomas theorem, which Goffman criticizes<sup>18</sup> – in any subjective-decisionist routine of defining a situation. Instead, the result is supra-individual principles of order – and here, this is expressed by “we” – with the help of which the individual can orient him or herself in a given situation. Consequently, the frame answers the question “What is going on here?” and the question about action patterns, that is, “What am I supposed to do?”. That Goffman is less an interactionist but rather a Durkheimian in this concern has been stated several times (Lenz, 1991): frames are – although being sociologically construed – sociological facts which in certain situations are perceived as being given and in case of ignoring them result in sanctions. The behaviour is inappropriate or does not fit the frame. On the one hand, the frame as a structural concept would be a supra-individual stock of knowledge being only partly open to reflection and suggesting situation-appropriate interpretations and ways of behaviour and organising everyday experience. On the other hand, based on considering experience the schematisation or classification of experiences, both a concept of social time and memory has been presented by the frame concept. If we want to understand the interaction order represented by frames<sup>19</sup> in historical terms, we would first have to reconstruct the frames and pursue their references to other frames until no more reference to any modulation could

17 On this see Oliver Dimbath (2013).

18 The Thomas theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1973) says that concerning its consequences a situation is real if it is considered to be real.

19 In a speech summing up his scientific work, Goffman gives a hint that his research interest was first of all in understanding the interaction order – against this background, the frame concept must be understood as a structural-theoretical element (see Goffman, 1983).

be found. According to Goffman, then we would have arrived at the primary frames.<sup>20</sup> Such a reconstruction is at the same time a presentist construction of a past in the sense of frame history and an analysis of the social memory, in so far as experience-constitutive, classified interpretations or combinations of interpretations are investigated.

We may thus state that – according to the micro-sociological analysis of interaction structures unfolded in Goffman – the frame concept must be understood as a structural concept providing the individuals, which are entangled in interactions with adequate rules of conduct. These rules are valid for interaction types, are “habituated”, but the actor may reshape them at any time. That is, frames provide a memory of social behaviour in the context of interaction relationships by providing culture-specific predictabilities. These predictabilities can sometimes be sanctioned, but they may as well be disappointed or evaded. In so far, Goffman’s framework concept is a micro-variant of Halbwachs’s framework concept as unfolded according to Durkheim’s and Bergson’s earlier use of the concept.

The identity concept of sociology refers less to consistency and consubstantiality or synchronicity in the sense of simultaneity and diachronicity as they are discussed in philosophy (Straub, 2001). Rather, here the knowledge of the individual, which most of all refers to him/herself and his/her own history, is at the fore.<sup>21</sup> From a sociological or social-psychological perspective, this is connected to playing social roles or – in Simmel’s word – participating in social circles.<sup>22</sup> Identity as a socially and socialisation-communicated concept of oneself becomes manifest by autobiographical narrations. However, when looking beyond the individual, we may find similar narrations also among groups. Also, collectives create narrations referring to themselves and their histories – then we speak of collective identity. For both identity references, there holds that, in the sense of synchronous identity, the coherence of “moral and aesthetic systems of maxims” and, as diachronic identity, of continuities is usually created through narration (Straub, 2001, p. 270).<sup>23</sup> In any case, the narration appears as the practice of constituting social time. Thus, identity means

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20 See Erving Goffman (1986) who assumes primary frames as the basic patterns of social interaction which are permanently modified in the course of the everyday organization of social action – such situatively adjusted or derived frames are what he calls modulations.

21 Accordingly, one may suffer from a loss of identity – caused by a damage of the brain or in the form of retrograde amnesia. Then one does no longer know who one is.

22 As it is well-known, Simmel (2009) conceives identity as the intersection of social circles.

23 Here we must particularly consider the idea of the collective unconscious according to C. G. Jung (1975).

the construction of the personal and collective present by selectively reaching back to experience coming from past and “processed” experiences and events.

Self-referential knowledge is versatile due to its implicit presentism; nevertheless, it is perceived as being relatively static. The reason for this is the implicit, path-dependency-based, continuation programme – one stays “true” to oneself. This is why any memory-interested analysis must deal with processes of identity formation and changing identity and must ask which selection mechanisms are at work when a consciousness (narratively) makes sure of its own identity. Notwithstanding any narration-communicated attempts at self-consistency, we may hardly speak of any consistent and coherent self-narration. Rather, the latter seems to depend both on the perceived situation and the social living conditions.<sup>24</sup>

Concepts of collective identity are closely connected to the concept of collective memory. Collective identity refers to the group identity of social groups as it is articulated through narrations. Among others, this is based on the assumption that collective identity comes from collective memory. Accordingly, Lutz Niethammer understands the concept not only in the sense of Halbwachs and the idea of collective consciousness in Durkheim but also in view of identity being an artificial product of political agitation in view of the idea of the unconscious in Freud’s psychology (Niethammer, 2000). However, collective identity is not the only memory-relevant concept for the description of group-related identities. Also, there is research on group cohesion or national characters as well as on mentality point in this direction.<sup>25</sup> It seems to be little help to discuss a static image, a “snapshot”, instead of asking about those constitution or selection mechanisms to be found with any collective culture as creating collective self-descriptions.

Sociological considerations on knowledge structures such as taboos, rituals and myths start from the research by Durkheim (2008) and are continued most of all by his disciples Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss. From the perspective of sociology, making use of these concepts seems to belong to the “scope” of anthropology and ethnology. However, by sociology adopting the works by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Claude Lévi-Strauss or Mary Douglas, who refer to Durkheim, these concepts are being “reimported”.

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24 The basic idea is an old one: existence determines consciousness. Yet still, it is the foundation of post-modern identity concepts as being negotiated in the context of patchwork identity (Keupp, 1989) or the quasi subject (Beck et al., 2003).

25 See e. g. the contributions in the volume on *Transformations of Shared Identity* edited by Reinhard Blomert, Helmut Kuzmics and Annette Treibel (1993).

Durkheim extensively discusses the concept of taboo.<sup>26</sup> By a taboo, he understands – like later also the anthropologist and ethnologist Mary Douglas – specific ritual bans which secure an existing order by banning certain actions. At first sight, the taboo, due to which entering certain places as well as touching, looking, addressing or just speaking the names of holy persons and sacred objects is banned, looks like a predecessor of the concept of silencing. This impression becomes stronger when in everyday language, the taboo is understood to be a ban on making something the subject of discussion, meant to prevent the memory of events associated with shame and disgrace – “it is not mentioned anymore”.

In the context of religious rituals, however, the function of the taboo looks different: taboos separate the sacred from the profane or purity from impurity. Accordingly, in the religious context – which constitutes the group’s cohesion, after all – nothing profane is allowed, and in the context of everyday life, nothing sacred is allowed. In everyday life, precisely the strict boundary between the sacred and the profane constantly reminds to – and indeed also because it makes life complicated – the religious, so that the taboo has a memory function that is oriented at the group’s collective identity. At the same time, the taboo has an oblivion function when, due to its high sanctioning power or to realised self-constraint, it has such a highly selecting effect that even apparent action alternatives are always suppressed and thus left to oblivion.<sup>27</sup>

Mary Douglas calls the ritual an “action and beliefs in the symbolic order” (Douglas, 1996, p. 2), in the context of which it stays out of consideration if those participating in the ritual feel obliged to do so.<sup>28</sup> For a sociological understanding of memory, the concept of the ritual is fruitful in two ways: at first, the ritual with its sequence of traditional, routinized symbolic actions, which are supposed to make a group’s coherence last, functions as a material, social

26 Although in the first, French, edition of his work of the year 1912 Durkheim (2008) made an outstanding contribution to sociologising the concept of the taboo, it must be pointed out to the fact that in 1912 and 1913 Sigmund Freud published his works on *Totem and Taboo*. Although the two authors come to different conclusions, the basic assumptions and starting points – in particular the working out of the concept of taboo – are very similar to each other.

27 Here the paradigm change from a religion-oriented interpretation of social situations to a language-oriented interpretation (*linguistic turn*) appears as an oblivion function, as the concept of silencing is clearly less differentiated than than concept of the taboo. The taboo includes also non-linguistic actions. Only the *practical turn* catches up with it.

28 In her considerations on the concept of ritual Mary Douglas (1996) is first of all interested in justifying the social phenomenon which, in her opinion, is under threat. For this purpose, she delimits it from everyday and most of all also from sociological readings of her time. Today her works are mostly met with agreement, also in sociology.

knowledge structure in the long run. Remarkably, however, this is not about meaning as explicit or explicable knowledge but, on the contrary, about highly symbolic actions which may nevertheless not be challenged. The function of these actions is the continuation of collective identities, even if the original meaning of this socialisation has long been forgotten. Thus, there is the second aspect: rituals are “stored”, collectively schematic knowledge structures with a specific oblivion function. They can do without perpetuating meaning just by continuing the social practice.

Also, the roots of the concept of myth go back to the research of so-called “primitive” cultures, which started in the 19th century. However, as the myth is tied to linguistic expression, it is somewhat close to the concept of narration. Being a legitimating narration about institutionalised contexts, for a long time, it referred to magical or religious contexts and has returned to the sociological debate only by way of new contexts of meaning, such as that of everyday myths (Barthes, 1972), or the mythologised formal structures of organisations.<sup>29</sup> When representing the institutional structure of socialised social structures, myths appear as narrative or symbolic ways of expression and thus as linguistic manifestations of the selectivity of social memories. At the same time, they also serve as oblivion generators<sup>30</sup> that, due to their legitimation function, systematically suppress alternative interpretations and are thus capable of taking care that “violations of the norm” are soon forgotten.

We may understand the concepts of ritual and myth as being closely connected, oblivion – or better: making forget – being a crucial feature of both. By reaching back to René Girard’s *meconnaissance* theorem (Girard, 1986), it is possible to demonstrate that the forgetting of perhaps traumatising or otherwise annoying or subversive narrations as well as their overwriting by relieving, stabilising narrations, which is purposefully inherent in the myth, also holds for the concept of ritual. *Meconnaissance* may be translated as making forget, concealing or ignoring. For example, greeting rituals make those participating in this interaction forget their mutual aversions of hostilities, at least for a short time or temporarily. As it is sometimes stated in the public debate and is also diagnosed by Douglas, the criticism of rituals aims at their stabilising while at the same time affirmative effect in the sense of covering up the “actual” situation. Nevertheless, it may be stated that a “certain degree of *meconnaissance* is part of society” (Korte, 2011, p. 156) and is necessary to

29 See John Meyer & Brian Rowan (1977), although concerning these authors, in the context of the theory debate of German sociology we would rather speak of ideology instead of myths.

30 Martin Endreß (2011) coins this term in the oblivion-sociological context.

maintain the social order. The other side of *meconnaissance* is that rituals celebrate a certain memory over more extended periods, a commemoration. According to Durkheim, religious festivals are – in a ritual way – reminders of the coherence of the community as it has been communicated by myth. However, in everyday life, it is sometimes more practicable, or not even necessary, to temporarily forget the remembered values – that is, only until the next festival.

The question of how far the theory of practice – as supported by Pierre Bourdieu, particularly the concepts of the social field and *habitus* – may be understood as social memory has already been discussed by several authors.<sup>31</sup> We may state that both the concept of practice and the *habitus* concept address the aspect of an incorporated, i. e. imprinted into the bodies of the individuals, social structure. Without applying the tool set of social-scientific interpretation, this is hardly accessible for reflection by the individual or the group. Nevertheless, the here discussed routines and behaviour patterns are socially recognized and understood routinely or mostly without reflection. That *habitus* is structured and structuring structure (Bourdieu, 1986a), makes it at first look like a structural concept in the sense of a knowledge store, its structuring and perpetuating effect mainly staying in the dark.

However, even practices and *habitus* are subject to permanent change, which raises questions about the selection processes being at work there. In contrast to many other theory offers, by Bourdieu, by the concept of the social field, we find a systematic tool for precisely analysing those selection processes as constantly shaping practice and *habitus*. Furthermore, the possibility of the actor in the field calling these structures into question and perhaps changing them is taken into consideration.<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu states, that *habitus*

[...] is the presence of the past in the present which makes possible the presence in the present of the forth-coming. It follows from this first that, having within itself its own logic (*lex*) and its own dynamic (*vis*), it is not mechanically subjected to an external causality, and that it gives a freedom with respect to direct and immediate determination by the present circumstances (in contrast to what is asserted by mechanistic instantaneism). (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 210)

31 Extensive considerations which might reconstruct crucial aspects of the memory concept which Bourdieu himself does not explicate have been made e. g. by Alois Hahn (2010), Jörg Michael Kastl (2004) or Marco Schmitt (2009). Remarkably, Paul Connerton (1989) unfolds a theory of body memory which mentions Bourdieu only in passing and also makes use of a *habitus* concept and a concept of practice.

32 In the course of an extensive study, Herbert Willems (1997) works out the obvious parallels between Bourdieu's *habitus* concept and Goffman's frame concept.

The two concepts of field and habitus describe an interaction in which habitus develops from incorporating specific features of the field while being reproduced and modified repeatedly. Thus, the resulting and perpetuating structure is not inflexible, not at least because of this, the analysis of the constituting processes is revealing. How and via which selection mechanisms are social powers inscribed into the bodily practices of individuals?

The incorporation of practices, the development of habitus, is determined by the requirements of the social field and happens by way of continuous repeating or practising. In other words: one incorporates or “automatises” ways of behaviour that are promising within a social context. Because one can behave this way “in his/her sleep”, after all, only the body is the storage place – and not reflecting intellect. At the same time, these ways of behaviour are tied to the field and are practised by the individual and also by many. The persistence of habitus becomes obvious, e. g. when a school class that was led by an authoritarian or charismatic teacher over a longer period meets again after many years. Although the former students, being adults now, are at eye level with the teacher, they may reactivate old ways of behaviour towards their teacher – when the teacher starts speaking or raises his/her voice, everybody is silent.

Apart from incorporating habitus, there is another aspect of memory in the social field: social capital. In Bourdieu, each field is characterised as the stage for a fight for recognition through capital in the broadest sense (Bourdieu, 1986b). That is, in each social field, certain “currencies” are valid, which find expression not only through money but may also consist of relationships (social capital) or competencies and symbols (cultural capital). In the social field, a specific selectivity towards “being valuable”, which the actors believe to be objectively given, develops evolutionary. This can be illustrated notably by the institutionalised and objectivist kinds of cultural capital: in specific fields, holding an educational grade or owning a collection of paintings is a symbolic expression of power and influence. This is based on a specific selectivity which is also in line with the relevance structures of this field, while this kind of selectivity may also determine any definition of a situation. In a specific way, the field’s past is present in each new situation. In contrast to habitus, the past, which is maintained in the field as power-bestowing knowledge or knowledge for the sake of domination, is tailor-made only in the particular case of incorporated cultural knowledge. Even if they are mutually dependent, the two aspects of memory appear mostly independent. For example, in the case of an actor having been absent for some time, the field-specific knowledge may have changed so that the



“old” habitus is no longer appropriate to the requirements of the field and may be perceived as old-fashioned.<sup>33</sup>

Since the invention of writing, printing and new communication media and means of transport, the constitution of social relations has ever less been dependant on the interaction among those present. Perhaps this is – in combination with corresponding diagnoses of times such as those stating the information, knowledge or network society – one of the reasons why the basic sociological concept of the group has been gradually replaced by that of the network.<sup>34</sup> However, the fact that the network is less tied to topographic spaces makes a considerable difference. Whereas the interaction relations between physically present group members can still be analysed as dynamic processes among members, the “virtual” network may right from the beginning be understood as a communication system where information runs through nodes or nexuses. If the structure of interpersonal relationships is still very complex in a group, the communication-centred structure of the network only seems to be complex but is located at a small number of different relationship levels. Here, the network concept is derived from the metaphor of the network as it is used for neuronal structures; it is about associations, connectivities and nexuses. Accordingly, the selectivity of the network depends on the extent to which its nodes and connections are activated, whose weight determines both the strength and the direction of the flow between two nodes. These weights may be understood as selection mechanisms as they have either a positive-enhancing (excitatory) or a negative-inhibiting (inhibitory) effect. Furthermore, network models are provided with a theory of associative learning, which aligns with our understanding of schemes or scripts. This theory says that the connecting weights may change according to certain learning rules. Given the network structure, memory is not understood as a core but as a representation of knowledge within the each specific and changeable pattern of its connecting weights (Goschke, 2001).<sup>35</sup>

Whereas the theory of social systems leans strongly towards the network models of the neuro-sciences and integrates the thus developed learning

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33 In Marco Schmitt (2009, pp. 68–69) we find a description of this phenomenon which Bourdieu calls the hysteresis effect – practicing the habitus is connected to a certain degree of sluggishness; in fields being subject to much change sometimes the actors with their adjustments cannot keep pace. However, also the above-mentioned example of the class reunion gives expression to a similar pattern.

34 On this see the considerations by Jan A. Fuhse (2006).

35 Semantic networks are not discussed – they consist of semantic relations of symbolically represented concepts.

theories as memory functions, we find other implicit concepts of memory in other sociological adaptations of the network concept. For example, Marco Schmitt points out the relationist tradition of sociology based on Simmel's "formal sociology" and figurational sociology, according to Elias, in his network-focused study on social memories. He believes the concept's great popularity is due to Manuel Castells's thesis of the network society. "Now networks are the most flexible, most robust while most extendable kind of social organisation, as technological innovations, neutralise the thus connected disadvantages of the increased need for coordination and the difficulty of centralising resources" (Schmitt, 2009, p. 191).<sup>36</sup>

The core of Schmitt's analysis is the actor-network theory, according to Bruno Latour, as well as the phenomenological network theory, according to Harrison C. White. For both approaches, he works out each implicit memory function. Crucial for the position of actor-network theory is the insight that relationships of influencing – such as actions – may be complex and that not only living actors but also material objects – actants – must be considered. Thus, Latour rejects the insight, supported by Durkheim, that the social can only be explained by way of the social.<sup>37</sup> In terms of memory theory, such a figure allows for imagining the influence of material objectification – buildings, computers, libraries etc. – as the reference unit for communication or social acting. A social-theoretical grounding of the idea of the network is found by Harrison C. White's (1992) theory. Without being able to discuss the differentiation-theoretical development of the constitution of social networks in detail, crucial references to the concept of the social memory shall be pointed out by reaching back to Marco Schmitt's considerations. Fundamental for the structure of networks is the development of identities, derived from needs of social control and then perpetuated, of those entities as participating in the network. Here, the somewhat wider concept of entity seems to be appropriate, as networks may consist of actors and positions and groups or "blocks" – that is, entities that are themselves networked.<sup>38</sup> Identity develops within any network arrangement and is further developed also there. In the course of networked communication, there happen performances that consist

36 Marco Schmitt is referring to Manuel Castells's (2000) *Rise of the Network Society*.

37 Bruno Latour (1993, pp. 51–52) tries to further establish the objects, which in Durkheim are only reference points of the social, by introducing the concept of the quasi-object.

38 We are going to make further use of the concept of entity when it is about referring to social phenomena which are individual and collective at the same time and may be routine-guided. Concepts such as individual, group, consciousness or consciousness system, system of meanings, subject, actor or acting person are all subject to restrictions by way of which an active social entirety cannot sufficiently be described.

of an exchange of information and continue and, if necessary, change the identities of the participating authorities. Two crucial processes in this context are integration on the one hand and distinction on the other. This way, the network defines who belongs (or not). Here Schmitt identifies a parallel to Luhmann's memory theory: due to the flexible identity concept of the network theory and by constantly comparing situative influences and the interaction history of the network relations, a mechanism of opening and closing is implied. Thus, the memory of the network develops from the running communication within the network and, by way of a constantly changeable entity and identity arrangement, decides what can or cannot be made congruent with the network's past. It is thus a memory-related mechanism of integration or exclusion (Schmitt, 2009).

We have already pointed out the fact that power-communicated knowledge orders are a structural equivalent to memory. When interpreting everyday situations, the arrangement of objects and classifications appears to be the given order which need not be called into question any further. Michel Foucault's achievement is having exposed the problems of this allegedly irrevocable and eternal linguistic order by asking in an "archaeological" and "genealogical" way. Discourses organise what we are allowed to speak about as well as how we are allowed to discuss. By inscribing not an evolutionary aspect into the development of discourses but also a power mechanism, this order is recognized as being "made" and thus as changeable. By his archaeology of knowledge, Foucault is interested in the historical changes of the meaning of phenomena of social order (Foucault, 1972). His genealogy asks about the conditions and circumstances of these changes. In other words: Foucault moves away from taking static "snapshots" of past orders and discusses the question about the selection mechanisms the constitution of these orders is based upon and which – beyond any historical interest – may be understood to be social memory.

By extending the scope from the discourse to the dispositive,<sup>39</sup> which represents not only its manifestations by "administrative, infrastructural mechanisms and measures" (Keller, 2008, p. 92), an empirical analysis of the conditions under which the present constitutes itself is provided with another connecting point. With the dispositive's help, other material elements of the discourse can be grasped, can the social memory be made visible in all objects. Reiner Keller's example of the control dispositive of the police, with its traffic lights, traffic signs, police officers or speed cameras, may be understood to be

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39 On the concept of the dispositive as well as on the dispositive analysis see also Andrea D. Bührmann and Werner Schneider (2008).

an empirical approach at the selection mechanism of the social memory. Thus, for a power-communicated definition of a situation, only selected objects are of relevance – others are not taken into consideration (Keller, 2008).

If we consider Emile Durkheim's sociological fact (*faire social*) the "rightful" predecessor of the concept of the social institution, connecting it to a primarily static model of memory seems to be obvious. Institutions are understood to be relatively stable structural phenomena whose slow change evades the experience of the individual. Nevertheless, they have grown "evolutionarily" and may thus be attributed to the habitual memory of society. It is disputed to which extent they can also be explicated, as there are institutions such as law, which can be clearly named, and others that are rather "unwritten" yet directive, socially effective and sometimes capable of sanctioning.

The sociological development of the concept of institution is characterised by a stepwise distancing from all too inflexible concepts.<sup>40</sup> Arnold Gehlen believes institutions relieve man from the burden of being a deficient being with weak instincts; by way of repeatable, socially sanctioned rules of behaviour, man is saved from having to decide about everyday necessities to act (Gehlen, 1957). Institutions have a binding effect and are part of the matter-of-course and mostly undisputed leeway to act of everyday reason. By the concept of institution, the effect of social memories becomes imaginable, whose selectivity consists of objectivist criteria for action.

### 3.1.6 *Memory and Social Change*

Not only conceptual-analytical tools of sociology refer to the problem of social memories. Also, sociological figures of diagnosis resulting from the analysis of social change can hardly do without at least implicitly referring to memory issues. Both in the context of sociological diagnoses of processes and in the context of diagnoses of times and the present, it is constantly about time as well as about the issue of the social past. As usually a process of social change which is construed as being typical is in the focus of interest, sometimes differentiated analyses of starting and endpoints retreat to the back, so that after all simple dichotomies such as old and new or traditional and modern are applied. How specific features of both the new and the old are worked out and in which hypotheses about processes of change are developed and discussed can be understood against the background of a social memory function. As already illustrated several times, each thesis can be traced back to a selection

<sup>40</sup> In this context, Parsons's concept of institutions must be mentioned. For Parsons, the institution is one of the different "classes and types of governing action [...] because of its special functional significance to social systems" (Parsons, 1994, p. 153).

mechanism. Moreover, this is true in two respects, as a typical process is investigated and a specific past is construed or invented on which the analysis of the new rests.<sup>41</sup>

That usually such a reflection is lacking may be due to sociology understanding itself as “the” science of modern society as such. Then modernity is contrasted to tradition; social change is understood to be a new beginning. In this context, it is sometimes not considered that the new develops from the old, along path-dependencies. To illustrate this, in the following two older and recently discussed motifs or “driving forces” of social change shall be considered and interpreted in terms of memory theory: generation (1), modernisation (2), acceleration (3), and globalisation (4).

The sociological concept of generation comes from the sociology of knowledge or thought of the school of Karl Mannheim (1952). Connecting to Marx’s concept of class consciousness and reaching back to older concepts of generation, he discovers that social change starts out from definable social groups under specific socio-historical conditions. At a particularly sensitive age, the members of generations – here Mannheim assumes an interval of youth or young adulthood – do not only experience similar political socialisation; from the same socio-historical point of view, they similarly perceive social events. Under their respective conditions of growing up, generations develop their own life goals – which, however, are not necessarily shared by the whole age cohort but unfold among individual milieus, groups or generational units. From this, we may conclude that certain groups of about the same age, looking back to similar experiences and thus memories, also develop similar memory-communicated selectivities for their worldview and choice of action.<sup>42</sup> The life goals of these different groups may compete with each other – however, their starting point is the same. If one group succeeds with achieving its goal and making it authoritative for the entire generation, the competing drafts may fall into oblivion. Then one generational unit determines the thinking and selectivity of social remembrance until it is replaced by another, younger group and its ideas.<sup>43</sup>

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41 This is in line with the insight by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1992), according to which traditions have partly be “invented” in retrospect. Here, however, a tradition is invented for the purpose of classification, to be able to distinguish new developments from a yesterday.

42 Very much to the point, Martin Endreß translates Mannheim’s term “unconscious vital inventory” with “latent horizon of implicitness” (Endreß, 2011, p. 67), which goes back to a “manifest common remembrance training”.

43 Accordingly, Ron Eyerman identifies with the concept of generation an interaction of social oblivion and remembrance: “Here collective forgetting is as important as collective

That experience goes with age is in many ways an advantage. That, on the other hand, youth lacks experience means a lightning of the ballast for the young; it facilitates their living on in a changing world. One is old primarily in so far as he comes to live within a specific, individually acquired, framework of usable past experience, so that every new experience has its form and its place largely marked out for it in advance. In youth, on the other hand, where life is new, formative forces are just coming into being, and basic attitudes in the process of development can take advantage of the moulding power of new situations. Thus, a human race living on for ever would have to learn to forget to compensate for the lack of new generations. (Mannheim, 1952, p. 296)

For Mannheim, generation is not just a switch by way of which a specific selectivity, resulting from age cohorts becoming distinct, of maintaining as well as of losing experience and knowledge can be described. Also, the concept of generation provides a systematising understanding of social change resulting from being confronted with the traditional, in the sense of a memory-specific change of society resulting from the coming and going of age-homogeneous groups.<sup>44</sup>

More recent modernisation research usually structures the transition from a traditional to modern society, described by the process concept of modernisation, into sub-processes.<sup>45</sup> When, just exemplarily, considering the common

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remembering for a society's self-reflection; it is in fact the role of the youth or the new generation: to provide society with a fresh look at itself" (Exermann, 2004, p. 71).

44 Aleida Assmann (2002, pp. 185–186) adopts Mannheim's formative power connected to age and even identifies Mannheim as the "ounding father of the research of social memory", without discussing his theory of social change. For her, age cohorts develop group memories depending on location, which then indeed allows for a better understanding of certain historical processes. However, in this context it is overlooked that generational units draw different conclusions at the same time from their past, that they start enforcing them against the preceding generation and, in the course of competing with their fellows, unfold the dynamics necessary for social change.

45 Here we are dealing exclusively with a sociological interpretation of modernisation as a process of a transformation of society – and this just exemplarily. That sometimes the modern age as a cultural epoch is called an age of oblivion cannot be taken into consideration here. Accordingly, David Gross (2000) states that the pre-modern age was dominated by remembrance and that oblivion was negatively connoted. In the modern age, he says, this was reversed, and memory-related values lost their relevance. The function of remembrance, which in earlier times was highly appreciated, lost significance – the reminder him/herself was pathologised as suffering from hypermnesia or as a person without flexibility and being entangled in routine. The authorities Gross refers to, by whose works, he says, this development can be traced back differentiatedly, are Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Walter Benjamin and Marcel Proust. Barbara A. Misztal (2003) describes a similar development towards a culture of oblivion in modern society, beginning with the invention of the encyclopaedia and the nation but coming to an end after

distinction of rationalisation processes, differentiation, domestication and individualisation (van der Loo & van Reijen, 1992), it becomes evident that each of them shows memory-specific aspects.

Suppose we understand rationalisation as action in all fields of society being guided by reason or usefulness. In that case, it seems as if there is a selection mechanism of its own kind: rationalisation is characterised by a given state or action context being supposed to require improvement. The use of reason refers to a memory-communicated stating of the deficient, from which there concludes a need for optimisation. Once the innovation has been completed, the old state may be forgotten. What is remembered is only the way of improving, which may be transferred to other fields. Whether there is also a shortcoming might be irrelevant for applying the method. In other words: the trigger for rationalisation processes is determined by identifying a shortcoming, from which there concludes the method of remedying the shortcoming. These methods are then, in the course of remembering their feasibility, applied to other fields. However, the selection effect of social rationalisation can only last if sanctions no longer protect an existing order or if the status quo is no longer preserved by a lack of alternatives.

In this context, the sub-process of differentiation represents an ever more progressing branching out and split of social fields of action. The development happening over time corresponds to a change from original unity to new diversity. Here, the knowledge of the possibility of differentiation can be proven as the memory-relevant selection mechanism. Like in the case of rationalisation, the structural aspect of memory consists of changing the given or of establishing the new; then what is memory-like is the principle of differentiation, coming along with the tendency of forgetting the previous unity or totality of a subject or of considering it to be outmoded. In this context, differentiating thought also includes the construction of the past, which also happens by way of memory, for also the differentiation principle generates a specific kind of memory while at the same time providing the precondition for an associative transfer to previously undifferentiated or only insufficiently differentiated fields.

The process of domestication describes the conquest of nature. Also, it can be stated that savageness and being subject to nature are forgotten. However, this kind of oblivion corresponds with the memory of natural disasters which have not yet been mastered or coped with. As soon as the damage caused by them has been repaired, the memory of disasters becomes a cultural

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World War I. Concerning the latter development, she reaches back to Benjamin, among others, who diagnoses an inability to discuss the past for those returning from the war.

achievement that rather seems to live on as a traumatic memory than as a reminder or warning.

The fourth sub-process of modernisation to be exemplarily mentioned here, the process of individualisation, is not understood as separation or solitariness but as attributing responsibility to the individual.<sup>46</sup> Both the ambivalent process of empowering the individual – ambivalent because it is both liberating and overcharging – and the thus connected loss of the relevance of collectively binding guidelines for action can be memory-specifically analysed. The concerned individuals forget about their time of being institutionally embedded and from now on remember that social order can in principle be questioned.

The diagnosis of a time being accelerated consists of the assumption that the constant pushing through modern rationality comes along with saving time, which will necessarily result in, first of all, technological processes and social processes running faster. Accordingly, a shortening of presents is diagnosed, finding expression by an “increase of action and/or experience episodes per time unit” (Rosa, 2005, pp. 129–130). The result is a shortening and condensation of action episodes and the subjective perception of time becoming ever tighter (Nassehi, 2008, p. 13). As the diagnosis of the time emphasises the present becoming shorter, we may ask how significant then the reference to things past or to experience as an element of defining the current situation is. Does the present become shorter because an abundance of experiences needs more “space”? Or have the technology-induced constraints to reshape society grown so much that there is no more time for reflection? Thus, the shortening and condensation of action episodes would be a confirmation of Heidegger’s assumptions on the oblivion of being or obliviousness.

Analysing acceleration in terms of memory theory means considering the technological possibility of saving time and its effects on everyday action. Then – also there – new relevance structures become apparent, which, as selection mechanisms, create precisely those processes as observed by the diagnosis of the time. This is, first of all, a technology-induced experience of condensation. Thus, the present is shortened not because of a simple topical focus, but it must first be understood as a technology-induced process that is external to consciousness. The social memory, we might assume by reaching back to Elena Esposito, is “telematically” changed by technological communications media to assume a change of the adjustment of perceived and processed information (Esposito, 2002). Against this background, selection mechanisms appear as being partly and increasingly determined by machines

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46 On this see the debate in the wake of the individualisation thesis being newly formulated by Ulrich Beck (see Beck, 1994; Wohlrab-Sahr, 1997).



so that in many cases, all that is left to “man” is reacting to the product of the no-longer-trivial machine. Similarly, the way or acceleration of movement influences the selectivity of perception. Thus, for example, movement via the automobile changes the perception of the topography of a place. When driving an automobile, one perceives the environment in a way that is different from being on foot; other aspects of the space one has been moving through remain as expressions.<sup>47</sup> We might now assume that the technological developments work in favour of a changed adjustment of the experience of time, continuity, and perception – a development that might be connected to losing the aura, e. g. of a place.<sup>48</sup>

The process of globalisation refers to the dissolution of both cultural and national segregation as a result of new information technologies and transport means.<sup>49</sup> We may consider the decline of the significance of spatial distances or national borders a crucial motif. In this context, globalisation appears as reversed differentiation, as existing separations are lifted. However, at the end of this process, there is no new unity but the plurality of the monopoly-based pushing through a particularly influential position. The memory-specific selection mechanism of this ambivalent process addresses the overcoming of existing limits, which is why we may also speak of delimitation, and it must be understood as a universal principle, as this principle, triggered by technological globalisation, can be transferred to different border regimes. Accordingly, the constitution of the present derives from reflecting on the successful overcoming of borders. Also, the delimitation principle may be a structural aspect of the social memory and generate specific ways of remembering, which again can be associated everywhere where existing borders are perceived as obstacles.<sup>50</sup>

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47 Paul Connerton (2009) discusses this aspect as well as others as the oblivion phenomenon of modern society.

48 Felix Denschlag (2014) points out to the connections between Helmut Rosa's acceleration thesis and the works by Walter Benjamin.

49 As an example of the extensive debate see the overview by Ulrich Beck who characterised globality as follows: “Globality means that the unity of national state and national society comes unstuck; new relations of power and competition, conflict and intersection, take shape between, on the one hand, national states and actors, on the other hand, transnational actors, identities, social spaces, situations and processes.” (Beck, 2000, p. 21)

50 Remarkable in this context is the debate on globalisation phenomena and transnational connection points for remembrance or remembrance regimes in the context of the process of European unification. There, the overcoming of connection points for remembrance or remembrance regimes limited to the national state results on the one hand in the search for new memory formats in the “old” sense of the national state (see the contributions in Feindt et al., 2014) and in considerations on kinds of a reflective particularism

### 3.1.7 *Elements of a Sociological Concept of Memory*

When placing the collected elements of sociological theory next to each other, each element provides an explicit or implicit reference to or an interface for a theory of social memories or social remembrance. Also, this is done in contrast to equating memory with a material-spatial store of things past, as it is common in the cultural studies debate. Finally, it becomes evident that sociological thought is based on two motifs. One of them deals with why, against the background of open possibilities to act and interpret, only certain selections are made. The horizon of existing possibilities constitutes itself from a context of experience or stock of knowledge that is accessed according to rules or relevance criteria. The other motif comes from the separation of meaningful and non-meaningful practical, habitual or routine knowledge. Meaningful knowledge finds expression in communication about past events and is changed into an experience and transformed into action orientation through remembrance or comparison for congruence or coherence. On the other hand, non-meaningful knowledge is kept effective by habitual behaviour without being explicitly referred to and perpetuated by constant repetition. Such a perpetual knowledge structure cannot be located outside the social – such as subjective consciousness or cultural artefacts. The stock of knowledge consists of a supra-individual stock of regulative, normative, connective and routine knowledge, the bearers of which are individual consciousnesses.

One further aspect is that the reference to the past or the path-dependency of the individual or collective action or behaviour may also always be power-induced because of the social relation. Power may be habituated and then appears as an unquestioned, indeed almost unquestionable, opportunity, or it must, again and again, be legitimated by way of communicative acts which sometimes reach back to things past. This synthesis of aspects of social memories in the theoretical arsenal of sociological thought hints at the complicated ways in which meaningful and habitual influences affect the further development of social structures. It provides the foundation for systematising the dimensions of a concept of social memory, which is now going to happen.<sup>51</sup>

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on the other (see Levy et al., 2011) which tolerates different and sometimes incompatible views at past events or integrates them as a new formatting principle of the collective memory.

51 Speaking of social memories in the plural and the next time of social memory in the singular is due to some theoretical undecidedness. If the concept of memory is implemented into different sociological theoretical systems, it must be decided case by case if the concept of memory must be expressed by the plural or the singular. In the context of the theory of social systems, for example, it seems to be appropriate to use the plural. If,

### 3.1.8 *What is a Social Memory?*

The two motifs which have been worked out above have in common that they deal with social memory in terms of sociology; still, it is unclear how far these perspectives may be transferred to a concept of social memory or if they are different attempts at an explanation which cannot be further integrated as yet unanswered. If that were the case, the social memory would stay as poly-paradigmatic as sociological theory building as a whole. However, the variety of perspectives concerns primarily the various selection mechanisms of social memory and not its structure. Therefore, if we ask about a social-theoretical concept of memory in the following, we may expect to be informed about what is understood by social memory. It seems that questions about the “place” and “existence” of such a kind of memory are easily answered and combined. However, more disparate and thus also more difficult to bring together are the different principles of the “way of working” or the functionality of social memories – they change over history or, to have it in the language of knowledge sociology, they are “stationary”.<sup>52</sup>

The structure of the social memory – and here it looks obvious to construe an analogy of neuronal network structures and the culture-specific knowledge structure in the sense of the concepts of the social system, a society’s stock of knowledge or the lifeworld – must be understood by connecting to scheme theories. What is understood as a cognitive scheme, on the one hand, appears – and here we may adopt the “sociologisation” of the scheme concept as performed by Schütz – as a socially constituted type or as a practical routine on the other.<sup>53</sup> The function of memory is not the storing of information. Rather, it is that the memory organises the production of action- or behaviour-oriented knowledge in the context of each current way of dealing with situations. In other words: social memory takes care that actors will behave as culture-specifically expected by combining their (subjective) perception with socially classified knowledge. Under this aspect, the social memory is equivalent to the individual memory, as, through lifelong learning processes, it has not stored but shaped and imprinted socially relevant interpretation patterns, types or routines of behaviour in the form of cognitive schemes. Beyond this

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on the other hand, one is looking for universal principles of memory, rather the singular seems to be appropriate.

52 The logic – however not the empirical references or manifestations – of the argument to be developed is in line with Jan and Aleida Assmann’s distinction of a storing memory and functional memory in the context of their theory of a cultural memory (see A. Assmann 2001).

53 Both the concept of scheme and his concept of social type are developed by Schütz (1967) in his book *The phenomenology of the social world*.

equivalence, however, almost everything which, as a social experience, is based on socially constituted experience consists of learned “connectivities” or associations in the individual’s brain structure. As social life/experience happens only mutually and not in an exclusively dyadic way; however, most of all among changing groups, the social creates a material imprint into the neuronal structure of the individual consciousness: successful behaviour is imprinted into schemes and scripts and can, by way of repetition and adjustment to each different situation, be ever more refined.

Another kind of “sociologisation” consists of detaching social memory from the subjects or individual consciousnesses. At this level, it is possible, with the help of the various variants of sociological structural analysis such as systems theory or the analysis of institutions, to reconstruct the intersubjectively valid classifications. Even then, social memory is still placed in the individual consciousness, as nowhere else knowledge as the network structure of associative and mutually associated schemes or types can be located. Accordingly, knowledge is located at or in consciousness systems; however, it develops from different interactions or communication structures. Thus, access to a so-called externalised or cultural memory – such as books or memorial sites – happens by making an informative communication experience that has already been caused by a selection achievement of the individual memory. In other words: looking for an expert term in an encyclopaedia would not mean having access to memory but would only be the purposeful search for a particular experience which then – as an experience – could modify a certain cognitive scheme. According to the terminology of the social sciences, rather than the concept of remembrance, the concept of “experience” must be associated with memory, as remembrance can always only be the current and perceptible result of reflecting on schemes of experience.

Time being an experiential aspect or a sub-scheme of its kind is inscribed into any scheme so that it is possible to construe a chronological distance to certain experiences. However, the time index is always applied to the scheme when modified by a recall. That is, time consciousness develops only by the process of remembering, which is why time must not be understood as a category of memory but rather as a product of remembering.<sup>54</sup>

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54 Halbwachs’s (1980) answer to Bloch’s critique includes the example of a former student who, during conversation with his former teacher, reminds the latter to certain events which were meaningful for him. However, the teacher does remember neither these events nor when exactly they happened – in the course of the many generations of students passing by his schemes of experience were so much saturated that he was able to sink events which, from the points of view of his students, were significant and influential

However, sociological theory offers taking up – implicitly or explicitly – the issue of memory sometimes provide wildly divergent approaches which cannot easily be categorised under the same concept. If we are not satisfied with pointing out elements of a memory theory, it is advisable to look for the dimensions of social memory. Given the up to here considered approaches, three different trends may be pointed out; some of them are found not just in one but in several dimensions. Insofar, these dimensions serve as ideal-typical attempts at classification, by way of which the range of memory-specific connection points to the offer of sociological theories can be systematised. Thus, it seems obvious to reach back to already existing concepts of distinguishing types of memory as they are used in other contexts and by other disciplines. The dimensions – declarative-reflective (1), incorporated-practical (2) as well as objective-technical (3) – are laid out as structural dimensions, as they are always manifestations or “places” of memory providing an actor orienting in the present with an idea of reality which is no longer contingent but – given possibilities to interpret it – already selective.

The first dimension, based on psychological theories of knowledge and memory, refers to memory structures that can be derived from non-explicable reflective knowledge. Declarative-reflective is the term for all semantic knowledge contents which, as ideas or in the course of communication, can be experienced and transformed into experience.<sup>55</sup> Purely semantic-cognitive knowledge theories are satisfied with this dimension<sup>56</sup> which includes active, episodic and activatable knowledge. Habwachs pointed out that this kind of knowledge, although processed by a consciousness, cannot be changed by the latter into an experience without referring to a (social) environment. He explains that without inner or outer perception and associative connections to socially available frames, the subject is incapable of creating meaning.

The social institution par excellence which, like social memory, coordinates the attribution of meaning, is language. The symbolic representations of language – words and terms – are connected to cognitive schemes to identify and communicate a scheme of experience. At first, the scheme of experience stays to be exclusively a matter of the individual consciousness. Furthermore, through linguistic exchange or communication, it is turned into

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in his perception routines. His schemes of experience were no longer modified, which is why also no new time index was inscribed into them.

55 Concerning some of its aspects, this concept is in line with what Giddens (1984, pp. 41–42) calls “discursive consciousness”.

56 This holds both for the philosophy of language connecting to Ludwig Wittgenstein (1999) – in particular for the famous seventh sentence of his *tractatus logico-philosophicus* – and for approaches by way of analytical philosophy or also for the theory of social systems.

an intersubjective experience that attributes symbols to the schemes, which then again serve as intersubjectively intelligible classifications.<sup>57</sup> However, the connection of linguistic and written symbols to schemes of experience comes with interpretations that exclusively refer to social adjustment success.

Furthermore, associating certain experiences with a context of meaning or discourse may happen as a pattern of cognitive processing or as a chain of associations. Such a view is also in line with communications theory the theory of social systems is based on. The idea of a subject or subjective consciousness is excluded – however, the process of constituting a system through follow-up communication (autopoiesis) is based on a structure of the semantic association. This may also be transferred to the concept of the narrative or narration. Accordingly, narrations may be grasped as network structures on the one hand and as schematised experiential contexts of their kind on the other. Then the identity of the individual appears as a schematized self-narration serving for providing orientation in certain situations. The situation is similar in the case of the different kinds of collective identity. Also, the group members are provided with symbolically generalised and schematized patterns of their history of attributions that have been imprinted into the group in the course of mediate and immediate collective experiences. In any case, however, the emphasis is on linguistic-symbolic representations of cognitive schemes. Accordingly, the declarative-reflective memory is a socially constituted, while at the same time cognitively schematised association structure serving for finding orientation in a current situation. This happens by reaching back to experiences as a subjectively construed past and the thus connected creation of (inter-) subjective legitimation for the following action. Action – as we may say by connecting to Schütz – is meaningful as it is drafted or pre-remembered based on memory. Thus, the consciousness “reflects on” the field of the theoretically – and thus semantically concluded knowledge – which, due to the time indexes also inscribed into the schemes of experience, is experienced as one’s own layered past re-experienced.

The social-scientific reconstruction of the declarative-reflective social memory makes use of the analysis of symbolic manifestations as it is performed in the context of knowledge-sociological discourse analyses<sup>58</sup>, analyses of interpretation patterns or narration analyses, such as in the context of biography

57 On this, once again see the scheme theory unfolded by Schütz (1967).

58 Referring to the special case of the knowledge-sociological discourse analysis (Keller 2005) is due to the programmatic connection to the present of the knowledge-sociological approach while delimiting from discourse analyses which are based e.g. on historical sources.

research or the research of collective identity with the help of empirical methods. The result is the reconstruction of semantically generated patterns of meaningfulness that may claim to be intersubjectively or “objectively” valid and are to be found, e. g., where social groups assure themselves about their cohesion or where traditions as past-related narrations – such as the narration of the nation or other founding myths of a collective – are purposefully invented to give reason to order-relevant ways of behaviour.

The second dimension of social memory refers to concepts formulated by explicitly delimiting from cognition-related knowledge theories. These are perspectives covering phenomena such as routine knowledge, habitual knowledge, implicit or non-declarative knowledge. Thus, incorporated-practical knowledge shall be the term for that kind of knowledge which, like declarative-reflective knowledge, is the precondition for successfully coping with a situation but is not attributed with a specific meaning or need not become an element of defining a situation or of drafting an action.<sup>59</sup> As much of everyday life is coped with by way of routine, this is possibly by far the widest field of practice-relevant knowledge. Walking, swimming, riding the bicycle, the way to work – all these are activities which once have been learned with more or fewer difficulties. However, in the course of making regular use of them, they have been incorporated to such a degree that they can be performed without the reflecting consciousness being involved. On the contrary, their smooth operation may even be disturbed by immediately activating the consciousness. There is no doubt that this is a kind of knowledge that is based on structure or the structuring and selection function of memory. This kind of knowledge is socially or culturally communicated since even basic movements have been learned through imitation. Moreover, as even allegedly automatized behaviour is theoretically contingent, we may assume that vast parts of this knowledge are culture-specifically influenced.

Given the individual, we must assume that incorporating such a kind of practical knowledge also happens according to the schematisation principle. However, here it is natural to use the concept of the script as it is common in psychology for processes. Via the script, certain movements and perception sequences are defined. Like the scheme, also the script can be shaped. As soon as a disturbance occurs, there is a functionality assessment – entirely automatically and in passing – due to which it is updated and “rewritten”.

These scripts may be incorporated because sometimes they are habitually imprinted into the physiognomy and the movements of the young

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59 For this memory-relevant aspect Giddens (1984, p. 41) uses the term “practical consciousness”.

person – skilfully playing a musical instrument is only possible by way of appropriately training the muscles and switching off any reflection on each individual movement. Also, connecting such a kind of habitual incorporated-practical knowledge to the relevancies of a social field goes back to Bourdieu. The social is imprinted into the individual by youth-specific differences in typical competition situations the individual is frequently confronted. Accordingly, the class habitus is an empirical indication of social belonging and social power relations. Thus, the incorporated-practical social memory has its place inside the individual, in which the subject's or the consciousness's reflecting must be mostly ignored. However, this kind of memory is also socially constituted, as there are only a few reasons for internalising and incorporating scripts not triggered by the model of other relevant, culture-specific ways of behaviour.

Furthermore, there are routinized relationships in the sense of collective behaviour, which are based on path-dependencies without necessarily being legitimated by individuals or by the group giving reasons to them. Among them, there are habitual movements in the context of family relations as well as expressions of sympathy or triumph. However, empirically working out such kinds of memory cannot be based on semantic material and thus depends on data collected by way of observation or on comparisons. Asking the person under observation why he/she shows a particular way of behaviour is pointless right from the beginning, as it would reveal rationalisations in the sense of declarative-reflective patterns of reason-giving, which would rather be an obstacle for an understanding reconstruction of behaviour. The analysis of this kind of social memory must aim at the practices themselves, insofar as by practices – or traditions of acting – we mean processes of social behaviour which mostly evade reason-giving by individuals.

Objects or artefacts represent an “objective” or objectivised reality from which results in not only an immediate need for action but also provides prior orientation. Many objects the individual encounters are more or less familiar to him/her because they are connected to specific schemes of experience. The brain associatively processes these impressions by comparing stimulus information with corresponding patterns of processing. The selection principle is that of similarity. Insofar, we might understand objects as the bearers of social memory, as usually they refer to socially habituated ways of using them and meaning contexts. Schematisations – that is, the experiences a subject has made with objects – are highly socially communicated. Schemes do not only consist of cognitive processing structures connected to a standard expectation of usefulness. They also result from a wide field of socially communicated meanings that are not necessarily based on immediate experience<sup>60</sup>

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60 See Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1973) – experiences communicated by others.



connected to possible adjustments to social expectation horizons. Given the memory dimension of objects, this raises a question: on the one hand, the orientation achievement induced by objects refers to declarative-reflective knowledge developing from immediate and mediate-socialisation experiences and stored via the experience scheme – in the sense of cognitive-neuronal structures of the processing of information. On the other hand, the routine use of objects may also be interpreted in the context of incorporated practical knowledge. Given these objections, the memory of objects must be considered an offspring of the other two kinds of social memory.<sup>61</sup>

Given the development of communications and information technology, however, exceptional cases can be identified where memory aspects can partly be separated from the consciousness by which they have been initially constituted. As soon as a machine generates information the related person does not expect, schemes and scripts become irritated. Telematic information as knowledge content, as it is produced, e. g. through data mining, is capable of determining a selectivity of its kind (Esposito, 2002; Hagen, 2011). Only in such a case, a technological process, such as in the context of a network of actors (Latour, 1993), becomes a quasi-independent key player, and only then it may be justified to speak of an objective-technical memory. Nevertheless, it is still a special kind of social memory, as it is constituted in the mode of relation: under specific conditions, even machine-produced content may provide the individual with orientation in specific situations and may result in action plans. A structurally similar situation results from the phenomenon of the unexpected incident. Also then a technological device produces unexpected information and confronts the individuals dealing with it with interpretation and possibly also action problems. However, in contrast to the non-trivial machine, when the production of unexpected information is foreseeable, the incident is an exception the way of coping, which leads to a modification of the scheme or script connected to the artefact.

Many of the memory approaches negotiated so far may be systematised according to these three kinds – declarative-reflective, incorporated-practical, and objective-technical. However, it has already been pointed out that some evade this classification insofar as it may be attributed to several dimensions of memory – such as the sociological concept of institution. On the one hand, it appears as explicable structural and regulation knowledge which becomes manifest solely in the connected system of sanctions. On the other hand, the sociology of knowledge understands institution to be the objectification of

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61 Paul Connerton (2009) discusses the memory nature of the medieval urban structure in the sense of orientation which the visitor can derive from exposed buildings. However, it is always left to the orienting social entity how it deals with the topic of place.

routine knowledge. Then the explicability of the institution is only based on myths or rationalisations.

A second concept that evades any clear attribution is the connection of subjective experiential context and social stock of knowledge. The subjective experiential context is a combination of declarative-reflective and incorporated-practical memory, as it is based on schemes or scripts of experience and habitual knowledge. It is the basis and starting point for intersubjective understanding, from which there derive mutual classifications which are usually connected to gestural or linguistic representations. The total of these classifications within one cultural space constitutes the social stock of knowledge, which includes incorporated-practical memory, due to routines and habits of everyday-unquestioned knowledge being sedimented. Thus, the social stock of knowledge would be suitable as a memory equivalent. Although Schütz and Luckmann phrased it in a more differentiated way, the formulation suggests spatial storing. Accordingly, it seems more understandable to associate imprinting and selection with memory instead of a stock.<sup>62</sup>

The third concept which cannot easily be attributed to one of the three dimensions is that of the frame. Indeed, Halbwachs's frame concept may be understood against the background of declarative-reflective memory, and it may be attributed to the different, interrelated schemes of experience – in the case of family, religion or social structure, this would be unproblematic. As concerns the second aspect, addressing the basic social categories of space, time or language, the latter may be attributed to the declarative-reflective realm. Halbwachs's concept of collective time refers to conventions of time as a social frame for subjective time consciousness. However, in the context of his time-theoretical considerations, Halbwachs starts from Bergson's concept of inherent continuity as a dimension of experience that cannot wholly be put into words. The situation is similar when it comes to his concept of spatial framing, which, after all, constitutes from the schematisation of modes of exploring space, which depends on being updated at regular intervals. However, the undoubtedly cognitive classification of spatial framing shows a not circumventably practical aspect. Space is not explored in a cognitive-understanding way, but it is paced, experienced and thus incorporated.

The frame concept can be crucially extended by including the frame of the interaction order in the sense of Goffman. However, not even this solves the problem of a clear attribution to one of the dimensions. For, even after

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62 Thus seen, the concept of archive, where storing and cataloguing are brought together, seems to be appropriate. However, the concept of archive suggests material storing, which way the stock of routines and habits would be left out of consideration.

Halbwachs's frame concept has been completed by Goffman's, it is an open question if it is first of all declarative-reflective stocks of knowledge which provide each current and mutually designated definition of a situation by the individuals with orientation or if the perception of and dealing with frames happen intuitively or routinized. Thus, the here involved social memory is both of a declarative-reflective and an incorporated-practical nature. The frame is – similar to the habitus concept, which must also be clearly grasped as an incorporated-practical memory – both structured and a guideline for structuring.<sup>63</sup>

In view of sociological structural concepts, it has become apparent that they address different dimensions of a social concept of memory. However, they consider only sub-aspects. Among those concepts that may be referred to several dimensions, no concept could be identified that takes the orientation of acting by reaching back to the past into consideration to such a degree as social memory. Such a concept of memory has no “reality” of its own – it is “located” both in the consciousnesses and bodies of the individuals and habituated social orders, arrangements of behaviour and relations. There it is represented by associated and associative scripts and schemes. Thus, the memory-theoretical deficit of sociology is that it does not comprehensively reconstruct and examine all aspects of memory as abstract contexts of meaning and structure.

The structural aspect of social memory as a symbolic and practical order comes along with what initiates the addressing of certain schemes. Memory constitutes itself by schemes, scripts, and types; however, we must assume a selection equally as not all of them are recalled equally every moment. Thus, whereas given the question about memory structure, we may understand the social function of memory as being similar to the individual's brain. Because of the problem of selectivity, we can identify another function that has occasionally been described here as “true” memory. As concerns social memory, it may be stated that precisely the specific selection function is “objectively” determined by social learning in groups and by the thus developed cultures.<sup>64</sup>

Then, however, to such an objectivist view of the selectivity of social memory – or, if like with the theory of social systems, networks of actors, discourses, or realms of the social, we assume several memories – adds the analysis focus of the analysis the memory researcher. Then an analysis of the

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63 On the parallels between these two concepts see Herbert Willems (1997).

64 Against the background of group-specific selectivity it becomes obvious that, no matter in which way we might read Luhmann (1995), culture cannot be anything else than a social memory.

relevance structure<sup>65</sup> of the social memory provides analytical access to this selectivity which itself, on the one hand, already controls perception by reaching back to habituated perception routines and meaning-attributing or reasoning interpretation on the other.

In the context of the declarative-reflective dimension of memory, we must assume ways of selecting which refer to communication selectivity. In this context, the focus is always on which elements of knowledge accessible to consciousness are reached back to for each current definition of a situation.<sup>66</sup> In view of Halbwachs's frame theory, one gets the impression that, after all, the hints at the society that exist in the environment also provide the stimulations preparing the cognitive act. The individual perceives things that it interprets by help of those schemes as offered by and grown in social adjustment processes. Vice versa that what cannot be attributed to any appropriate scheme cannot be understood – and usually, it does not become relevant, so it is not perceived and not remembered. Yet, it is unanswered which one of the frames existing in many situations is concise enough to be perceived as relevant not only by one but by several individuals. One possible explanation is the assumption – on which perhaps also Halbwachs based his considerations – that there must be group-related relevance structures attributing higher priority or conciseness to certain frames in any culture. When it comes to European societies of the first quarter of the 20th century, this holds for both levels of the frame system. Accordingly, from a sociological-social-structural perspective, family, religion, and social status are as essential as the basic categories of time, space, and semantics from an epistemic one.

Further aspects of selectivity are provided by the social-scientific discourse theory and the theory of social systems. Discourse theory answers the question about the perception problem only indirectly. It is much more specific when it comes to analysing the circumstances under which things are considered relevant. The linguistic order of things is power-induced, so a particular meaning is inscribed into their names and a structure of importance. This is boiled down best by the concept of the hegemonic discourse.<sup>67</sup> There the selection

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65 It is no coincidence that Schütz completes his spatially connoted concept of the storing of the social stock of knowledge by the concept of the relevance structure (see Schütz, 1971; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973), to be able to take the problem of selectively reaching back to knowledge into account.

66 Here, the concept of defining situations according to William I. und Dorothy S. Thomas (1973) seems to be imprecise, as it does not distinguish between behaviour and action or between automatic-instinctive and meaningful action.

67 By a hegemonial discourse, Siegfried Jäger (2011) understands a ruling or predominant discourse.

performance of the social memory, that is, the relevance structure determined by the power structure is so predominant that any emerging object can only be interpreted in a certain way if specific power interests communicate it. This may go as far as to make it impossible that even “authentic” memories, based on individual experiences but not being in line with the discourse, are articulated without the danger of being sanctioned.<sup>68</sup>

The selection mechanism has become very accentuated and elaborated in the context of the theory of social systems. As systems are autopoietically constituted from interrelated or interconnected communications, it must be constantly assessed which communication belongs to the system and which not (Luhmann, 2012; Dimbath, 2011a). This assessment, which necessarily must refer to the structure – or memory – of the system, happens along the system-specific binary coding.

Thus, the hints at a declarative-reflective social memory given by social-theoretical positions allow for concluding different selection mechanisms. On the one hand, these conclude from culturally-evolutionarily “grown” relevancies whose orders are immediately action-guiding for any individual. Not only meaning-creating remembering as a phenomenon whose occurrence Halbwachs attempts to understand by reaching back to the motif of collective memory, but any definition of the present refers to social patterns of order right from the beginning when current perception, as well as the processing of what is perceived, are organised. Then this classification also determines the view of other perceptions and how to deal communicatively with them. Although it does without a processing subject, a similar motif is found by a more topical manifestation, with the selectivity of system memory. The selection principle may vary when it comes to determining relevance due to functional differentiation. In both cases, however, the selection principle is based on the motif of evolutionary adjustment or evolutionary development. As it happens slowly, the involved individuals or most observers are not immediately aware of the change of selectivity. In contrast, the discourse-theoretical position is not satisfied with assuming a “primordialism” of whatever kind and explicitly emphasises the relevance structure being shaped by power interests. Admittedly, here one does not assume any rule going beyond particular interests; instead, it is about securing power or later affirmation that is supposed to secure the current situation by way of selection guidelines. Thus what is left – this is how we may sum up the selectivity trends in the context of the

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68 Relevant hints are to be found with remembrance cultures, such as the socially developing memories of war children (see e. g. Heinlein, 2010).

declarative-reflective social memory – are only two basic lines. The selectivity of memory refers to the remembering situative attribution of meaning:

Firstly, it refers to an evolutionarily grown social order. This allows for dealing with the given and may perhaps result in changing it. However, it usually only results in structural maintenance and perpetuating the structure.

Secondly, it refers to an order which is determined by power interests. Then it seems as if the goal of maintaining and continuing certain structures is instead achieved by way of radicalising this order. Also, only in exceptional cases, interpretation happens independently of selectivity. Other situations requiring attribution of meaning are right from the beginning considered from the previously taken point of view. Due to the existing being meaningfully rooted in an ordered past, the world is considered to be “in order”.<sup>69</sup> However, by researching modernisation processes and social change, sociology has worked out a position from where the required reference to the past is systematically questioned.

As concerns the incorporated-practical dimension of social memory, selectivity must be grasped by way of routines of the behavioural disposition. The stability of these routines is due to the practical action context usually not being disturbed.<sup>70</sup>

The concept of habitus, oriented at the competition structure of the social realm, makes it evident that past-induced selectivity is different according to the position of the individual. Accordingly, it is determined on the one hand by the exchange relationships relevant for the field and by successful long-term, habitual action strategies as well as ways of behaviour and presentation on the other. Although Bourdieu points out that the rules of the field may be changed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99), habitus still is attributed much persistence. As the kinds of habitus develop by way of interactions with the exchange practices of the field, also there we may assume a quasi-evolutionary constitution. Selectivity is indeed habitus-specific – change can be experienced only if an actor has not been in the field for some time and presents an outdated habitus<sup>71</sup> – however it is not necessarily connected to a power-maintaining or status-maintaining tendency. Rather, this might be based on a master-servant dynamic, in the context of which the power structure has two

69 Schütz (1967) bases his sociality theory on this fundamental insight, without explicitly calling it a memory theory. The idealisations of I-can-do-it-again-and-again as well as and-so-on appear as necessary assumptions for basic trust in the world being organized.

70 As soon as this is the case, however, usually there does not happen unreflected relearning but at first a *declarative-reflective* interpretation.

71 A short description of the hysteresis effect, by way of which the persistence of habitus is described, is given by Peter Wehling (2011b, p. 176).

sides that must constantly be balanced. Thus, the selection principle refers to respectively valid rules of behaviour of social classes, strata or milieus. This becomes evident for everyday life, for example, by phrases such as “somebody cannot escape his/her skin”, “cannot swallow his/her own pride”, or otherwise would have to behave “contrary to his/her nature”.

In the context of the incorporated-practical dimension, memory-specific selectivity does not pose any orientation problem. Questions such as “What is going on here?” or “What am I going to do?” are irrelevant as long as there is no irritation. According to established and typical, situations are gone through practically due to the social disposition – routines. According to Bourdieu, coping with basically contingent situations happens according to those routines as having evolutionarily developed in a field for a specific type of actor. If we leave away the field-relatedness emphasized by Bourdieu, after all, there only remains the scheme-theoretically explained selection figure – a selection by way of associating with similar schemes or routines.<sup>72</sup>

That routine-guided behaviour is based on past experiences can hardly be doubted. According to socially constituted imprinting, the memory “invisibly” coordinates intuitively appropriate processes. Now, however, remembrance has been attributed exclusively to the realm of the declarative-reflective memory aspect. In everyday language, however, we also find a way of understanding remembrance which rather aims at incorporation. There is no doubt that, when it comes to routines, the selectivity of memory refers to something “inherent” – to schemes and scripts. Notwithstanding the clear idea that the body, when falling into the water, “automatically” re-calls swimming movements, remembrance would be equated with memory, resulting in a loss of precision. Thus, as concerns the incorporated-practical dimension of memory, it seems to be rather fruitful to give up on the concept of remembrance. In other words: remembering as a process of consciousness remains reserved to the declarative-reflective dimension.

In the context of the objective-technical dimension of the social memory, it has already been pointed out that this is a special or mixed type of the two other dimensions. However, it seems as if this third dimension of memory shows a particular kind of selectivity. Most of all, in the context of communications and information technologies, it is possible to reach back to information in a way that wilfully generates information. In the course of this, the technological device copies – for the time being in a very limited way – the constructive selection work of the memory and combines it with algorithmic

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72 Here, further stimulations may be expected from reaching back to Gabriel Tarde's theory of attracting and imitating similarities (2013).

procedures and technological-instrumental associations. In exceptional cases, it may then be that such a technological actant is attributed to the status of an actor within a network. In such a case, the social memory is provided with technological selectivity, resulting in the network orienting its behaviour at technologically constituted selections.<sup>73</sup> The social memory, we may now state, is a socially constituted structure of reaching back to things past. However, the past is not available in the form of stored – in whatever way – information but as an always present structure of schemes and scripts which in the realm of intersubjectivity and as type and practices may constitute mutual horizons of expectation. The primary function of this kind of memory is the selection of ways of behaviour in respect of each current situation. The rules, according to which this selection happens, may depend on different structural dimensions described as declarative-reflective, as incorporated-practical and objective-technical. Given existing sociological theories, four kinds of selectivity can be identified: the evolutionary kind, the interest-guided kind, the field-relative kind, and the telematic kind. After these systematising considerations on the concept of social memory, it should now be possible to analyse the conditions for social oblivion in more detail.

### 3.2 Oblivion Motifs in Sociological Theory

So far, the few explicit examples of discussing the phenomenon of “oblivion” to be found in sociological literature have been excluded from our elaborations. In the following, we will pursue both explicit and implicit oblivion motifs found in sociological literature.<sup>74</sup> All the already discussed sociological concepts provide answers to how the thus described social structures are

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73 That such a selection refers to the past appears as a necessary precondition, as hardly any social entity could be satisfied with ahistorical, or better: coincidentally provided, information. The processing of data collected in the past appears as a precondition for an *objectivist-technical* social memory. It is remarkable, however, that it seems as if here no reaching back to a meaningful past seems to have happened – this way the construct nature of remembering is emphasized even more. At the same time, however, reaching back to databases may be subject to delete functions, so that technology contributes to forgetting information which may be expected. Astonishment about allegedly unimportant data being stored for a long time corresponds to astonishment about the routine destruction of allegedly important information – although usually this happens only with hindsight. On the problems of automatized memories see Viktor Mayer-Schönberger (2009; 2011), Christine Plass (2005) or Oliver Dimbath (2008).

74 A first inspection of the oblivion-theoretical potential of the canon of sociological theories has recently been initiated by Oliver Dimbath and Peter Wehling (2011). The following



maintained or changed in the long run. Each “and-so-on” presupposes reaching back to the past, and each modification – no matter how minor it may be – of resulting activities is accompanied by aspects of oblivion. Like the previous ones, the following considerations will be about a conceptual overview or stock-taking. They will be oriented at structuring the sociological field of work alongside social theory questions, social theory in the context of social order, and theories of social change. By doing so, we will be satisfied with collecting explicit elements of a sociological theory of oblivion. In the context of sociological considerations, the distinction made so far between forgotten social entities (“subject perspective”) and forgotten objects (“object perspective”) seems to be irrelevant, insofar as it is stated that objects may fall into oblivion. Then, however, the research interest will be in the social conditions of oblivion; in other words: the forgotten object is of interest only concerning its trace, which will then be the subject of communication.

By looking for indications of oblivion in the sociological debate, the research interest will at first be in this topic and not in the concepts and theories probably implying this phenomenon. In this context, it must be taken into consideration that sociological theories (do not) negotiate in particular the issue of forgetfulness as a feature of social entities in each different ways, each according to dealing with oblivion in the context of sociality and social theory, of the theory of society or social change.

Stocktaking in sociology is at first interested in sociological statements on the socially communicated possibility of the forgetfulness of the – always socially integrated – individual. In particular, the considerations by Alfred Schütz, which can be completed by theoretical aspects from the field of the sociology of the body, will be in focus; Bourdieu’s practice theory will be crucial in this context. Then, and given social orders, it will be about the normative-conventional organisation of oblivion in the context of social relations. There, the analyses by Halbwachs, the sociological interpretation of the discourse theory according to Foucault as well as stimulations by the theory of social systems according to Luhmann will have to be taken into consideration. Finally, we are going to ask about the historically changed possibilities of oblivion, in the context of which Elena Esposito’s systems-theoretically inspired analyses will be taken into consideration, just like Paul Connerton’s modernisation-theoretical considerations and the analyses made by Rainer Keller from the point of view of the knowledge-theoretical discourse analysis.

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considerations pursue a thus based claim to systematization, however at the same time they are more selective.

### 3.2.1 *Social Relations*

Research work in the field of social theory as a theory of social or sociality deals with answering how social relations are possible. Considerations in this concern start with the capability of the individual (ego) to relate to others (alter), communicate with them, and raise mutual expectations, which, after all, provide the basis of every social order. A phenomenological perspective much determines this approach; nevertheless, approaches from other thought traditions provide answers concerning this field. Examples are methodological individualism in the sense of sociological action theories or the theory of symbolic interaction and structural theories such as the theory of social systems. However, all these approaches must be extended by assuming that perception is always socially shaped or co-determined. The meaning a consciousness attributes to its perception is the result of subjective interpretation. The constitution of meaning does not require all information perceived in a given situation but only a selection depending on socialisation or experience. In other words: each subject generates meaning based on selections which can be reconstructed by their relations to relevance structures.

Up to here, this assumption has only concerned the individual. Because of the individual's relations to others, the assumption results in the problem of double contingency: if the meaning is exclusively a product of selective perception, the possibility of mutual understanding must be fundamentally put into question. The individual consciousness produces meaning – both when attempting to understand the behaviour of its counterpart and when planning its actions – by reaching back to past experiences. Also, these are addressed in a highly selective way, however. What is provided with meaning by humans, what these humans believe in doing, intending and understanding while doing so can be reconstructed given their biographically supported definition of each situation. However, an alternative approach is to understand which experiences or knowledge contents they must have ignored or forgotten to come to their specific definition of a situation.

The most elaborated offer of social theory to answer this problem is found in the works on the structures of the lifeworld presented by Schütz and continued by Thomas Luckmann (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). In the context of social behaviour, however, we may as well exclude the conscious attribution of meaning and ask about automatisms, routines, or practices that determine the individual's actions. Schütz and Luckmann also make suggestions in this concern; however, some considerations further specify this solution in sociology. In particular, the theory of practice, which was made available for sociology by Pierre Bourdieu, provides answers. Thus, in the context of a social-theoretical analysis of social oblivion, the social-phenomenological approach, according

to Schütz, will be analysed first. Then Bourdieu's contribution will be analysed for explicit and implicit connection points for a knowledge-sociological theory of oblivion.

### 3.2.1.1 The Relevance Problem as a Selection Principle in Alfred Schütz

In his works, Alfred Schütz is primarily interested in understanding the structuring of the social, which is communicated through subjective meaning. Connecting to Max Weber's considerations on meaning-communicated reason-giving for (social) action, his work is characterised by the attempt to reconstruct social order or social structure, starting from the individual's possibilities to attribute meaning or the problem of mutual understanding. However, as subjective meaning is not based on transcendental criteria, Schütz works out a complex theory of the piling up of structures of meaning, starting from individual experience via the idea of an experiential context as far as to the social stock of knowledge.<sup>75</sup> In other words: the individual generates meaning from the history of his/her experiences, which is why Schütz must integrate concepts of time, past and remembrance into his theory. In the following, some of these aspects of Schütz's action theory will be presented as far as they deal with these problems (1). This is followed by an inspection of the ways and contexts in which Schütz makes use of oblivion for his architecture of theories. As Schütz explicitly mentions the term "forget" several times, it will at least be possible to collect and assess indications of a concept of oblivion (2). Then by a final step, we will search Schütz's works for a social-phenomenological-knowledge-theoretical theory of oblivion (3).

The starting point for Schütz's thought is the consciousness of the individual. Before turning towards the analysis of the social, Schütz clarifies the individual preconditions for the perception of inherent and environmental objects. Bergson's philosophy of life, particularly the latter's concept of inherent continuity and his concept of memory,<sup>76</sup> provides answers to how individuals develop a time consciousness by looking back to past experience. Connecting to Bergson's critique of a spatial-chronological concept of experience as the basis for scientific understanding, Schütz adopts the idea that an analysis of consciousness and perception must start experiencing the world. In contrast to general experience, he states that individual experience is not

75 On this see most of all the fundamental work *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Schütz, 1967), where he attempts to substantiate the concept of "social action" in Max Weber.

76 These considerations by Schütz were comprehensively worked out in his *Phenomenology* (1967) – however many of these motifs are also to be found in the manuscripts on *Life Forms and Meaning Structure* (Schütz, 1982).

yet distorted by theoretical reflection processes and spatial and chronological classification. At quite a fundamental level of consciousness, says Schütz, there is neither an idea of space nor time. This concludes from Bergson's concept of inherent continuity (*durée*). Continuity consists of continuous becoming and unbecoming and is thus irreversible in principle. As concerns, pure continuity, at the first level of consciousness experience is followed by experience, without the thinking consciousness being able to establish explicit connections. The only thing these experiences have in common is the fact that they are perceived by consciousness. Only at the next level, which Schütz calls continuity gifted with memory, the individual experiences are related to each other – only by remembering a past, it is possible to identify the qualitatively different now. Thus, memory must have recorded aspects of past experience, of what has been experienced, to make them available for the comparison with new perception experiences: it creates a connection between a just recently recorded perception image and a corresponding, imaginative idea of a past experience which has been stored by the memory.

At the same time, the memory itself is subject to continuity by adding current impressions to each memory image, thus continuously renewing them. Thus, by memory, we must understand the reproduction of a memory image that is emphasised in continuity. The memory connecting the already existing memory image to new perceptions allows for establishing connections that might be called images of meaning – it thus creates meaning.

The as-yet described processes have been rather inherent; only through a second visualisation is it possible for the individual to perceive objects in time and space. This way now, the inherent image of continuity gifted with memory is connected to the physical emotion, which is current at the moment of processing it. By the body's movement, action, now the I makes itself capable of experiencing space by understanding the latter's continuity as time. The continuous, manifold succession is transformed into a discontinuous and homogeneous simultaneity. Now action appears as a reinterpretation of an inherent volitional act within an outside space. However, this is only possible if the I understands a running movement as a finished movement. "The reinterpretation of ongoing into finished movement, which occurs in and through the acting I, destroys inner duration. It breaks through it and simultaneously renews it in a different and higher sense" (Schütz, 1982, p. 105).

However, for the I, the new kind of movement no longer consists of the becoming movement but of the unbecoming movement; that is, past movement. Every action, every movement in space, every object can be imagined by the acting I only based on the unbecoming.

However, there are also things the I is capable of experiencing without sensual stimulation or movements: the fellow humans. Any relation to the you is

only possible if the I assumes that it is provided with a basically similar way of dealing with its continuity. The consequence – and also this is only possible by way of memory – is the assumption that the experience made by the I and triggered by the you comes from the you. I assumes to be understood by you while at the same time assuming to basically be capable of understanding you. Thus, Schütz names a basic precondition for any kind of social memory in passing.

These consciousness-theoretical primary considerations, inspired first of all by Bergson, are the starting point for Schütz's action theory.<sup>77</sup> Also there, he introduces the concept of continuity first and points out the difference between running action and completed action. The I turning back to its continuity being finished, which is only possible by giving up on experiencing the current continuity, is what Schütz calls reflection.

For only the fact that an earlier phase preceded this Now and Thus makes the Now to be Thus, and that earlier phase which constitutes the Now is given to me in this Now in the mode of remembrance (*Erinnerung*). The awareness of the experience in the pure stream of duration is changed at every moment into remembered *having-just-been-thus*; it is the remembering which lifts the experience out of the irreversible stream of duration and thus modifies the awareness, making it a remembrance. (Schütz, 1967, p. 47)

In Husserl's work, Schütz finds similar solutions that he believes to be more promising. Accordingly, he states that Bergson's distinction between running and finished continuity is given more thorough reason by Husserl's analysis of the inherent consciousness of time. Husserl's distinction between primary memory in the sense of a still lasting consciousness of the original retention and secondary memory as a reproduced re-memory completes the understanding of continuity gifted with memory. On the other hand, his explanation of the perception of movement as permanently establishing things as-being-now is similar to Bergson's elaborations on the updating of memory images. Whereas the retentions fade away or are forgotten with growing distance, the reproductive re-memory can be updated by immediate access or reproduction. The first impression – Schütz calls it the original impression – is subject to continuous adumbration, consisting of already the memory of the original impression changing it as a memory image. In other words: the original impression is enriched with a memory of the memory and so on. In the case of re-memory,

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77 It is perhaps underestimated how much Schütz's thought was influenced by Bergson's philosophy, as Schütz, after having exploited Husserl's works for himself, "changed over" to a theoretical perspective which was in many aspects similar and sometimes even more precise. For analyzing Schütz as a sociologist of memory, however, the appreciation of his Bergson period seems to be very important.

on the other hand, there is no reaching back to original consciousness. It is always unclear and has thus no evidence of absolute certainty.

Apart from original retention and reproductive re-memory, Schütz also adopts the context of protention from Husserl. Protentions are empty expectations that are derived from memory but aim at the future:

Therefore, what was empty expectation for the actor is either fulfilled or unfulfilled expectation for him who remembers. That which, for the actor, points from the present into the future, for him who is remembering points from the past to the present moment, while still retaining the temporal character of the future. The intentional glance, then, is concerned only with the act (*Handlung*), not with the action (*Handeln*); and acts are always fulfilled, never empty, protentions. (Schütz, 1967, p. 59)

Any purposeful shaping of the world by the I must before be imagined based on memories. Thus, memory is reflected towards the future by the present. In the course of this, protentions develop as empty expectations, which are then filled in the course of action. We may thus state that purposeful action as fictitiously completed action must always be drafted or pre-remembered.

As concerns the relation of I and you, the same holds as for the considerations connecting to Bergson. Also, an action referring to a you, if it is supposed to affect the you, is drafted and thus based on memory. However, it must be based on the uncertain assumption that the you refers to preconditions that are similar to those the I refers to.<sup>78</sup> Thus, social acting happens according to an attitude Schütz calls modulation by others. One must guess the course of the continuity of the you, by making the consciousness experiences probably happening there the precondition for one's plan for action one has imagined by the pre-memory.

By his memory-based considerations, Schütz demonstrates that sociality comes neither from any "natural" drive nor from any spontaneous, rational decision but that the social relation consists much of actions drafted by reaching back to experiences. These action plans are based on adopting the assumed perception of the other, which is a fundamental element of one's plan for social action. All this, however, is based on one's continuity gifted with memory whose corresponding consciousness experiences are assumed to be similar to those of the other. No matter if I and you understand each other at all, they will – insofar as they discover any opportunity based on similarity – start to act by referring to each other. The observed results create memory images of this more or less successful relation from which expectations result concerning

<sup>78</sup> This corresponds with Schütz's (1967) general thesis of the alter-ego.

further pre-remembered drafts. From the dyadic relation between I and you, it is now possible to conclude the development of social relations structures.

The subjective memory images may also be understood as schemes of experience. Through the social relation, they are provided with a particular nature, as some aspects of memory images developing from a relation can be fixed as again and again applicable aspects of successful communication. It is possible to derive the development of a system of symbols – such as a common language – just like a complex structure of mutual expectations by way of which social relations are provided with a reliable order. In particular, by tradition, passing on such stocks of knowledge to follow-up generations, the intersubjective classifications, which are initially based on subjective experiences, assume the nature of unquestionable objectivity. Thus, later generations need not make all basic experiences, as from earliest childhood, they are provided with a culturally grown linguistic-conceptual and rules-based behaviour.

However, knowledge may also be lost. What Schütz calls “restorable knowledge” is some earlier knowledge that has been lost or eclipsed by other knowledge (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 215). On the one hand, it is possible that the “development history” of a certain knowledge element may be forgotten because memory is satisfied with the result of its constitution process – the core or goal of an action is maintained, whereas the way towards it is not kept in mind. On the other hand, the context of the meaning of a knowledge element may be lost while individual aspects of its interpretation are maintained.

When looking for the term “oblivion” in Schütz’s work, it is striking that in the early publications, the term hardly appears at all. Then it appears in individual sections in the book on the *Structures of the Lifeworld*, which Thomas Luckmann completed, to allow for assumptions concerning its use for a theoretical concept. It is furthermore remarkable that – insofar as it is not used as a phrase in the sense of “we should not forget” – sometimes it is put into quotation marks. Such a reference to “inauthentic” language demonstrates that concerning this term the authors were aware of different levels of meaning.

Perhaps, Schütz and Luckmann always put the term “oblivion” into quotation marks when they point out a failure when recalling “actually” available knowledge.<sup>79</sup> However, the word usage also shows two levels: on the one hand, it is about an actor forgetting to execute a once drafted action. “In everyday language”, this failure is equated with “oblivion” if the relevancies or preferences

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79 Here Heidegger’s somewhat awkward term “ready-to-hand”, which is used by Schütz himself, is helpful insofar as it addresses a kind of knowledge which is concrete and thus “to hand” – an objectified, objectivised kind of knowledge.

for action have changed. After all, the focus is thus on giving reasons for rationalising a certain behaviour.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand – and this is more important in terms of a theory of oblivion – it is stated that the inherent structure of knowledge contents shows different aspects for which the opportunity of oblivion is more or less likely. Sometimes somewhat vaguely, Schütz and Luckmann distinguish between a core and a periphery of knowledge elements. Whereas the core is maintained for a longer time, peripheral aspects are sooner forgotten.<sup>81</sup> Here, oblivion is defined in the context of restorable knowledge. It is about “knowledge which has either been lost or hidden by other knowledge” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 176). The loss of knowledge may be due to “that certain aspects of an element of knowledge have been ‘forgotten’, although its ‘kernel’ remains” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 176). For example, one tends to forget about the complicated reflection processes while creating an experience – the modification of appropriate schemes – and only to remember the result of the process. In other words: not only the many perception contents of a current experience are forgotten, which after all are consolidated by one experience, but also the whole “story” of changing each respective scheme in the course of a learning process. When seeing a bonsai for the first time, one wonders and checks if this is “really” a tree. For all other experiences with bonsais, however, then the scheme of our experiences with trees has been extended by the impression of the small yet old tree. Usually, we forget about our astonishment, like about the stimulation to not make any attribution to the scheme of “tree”.

In concrete terms, Schütz and Luckmann discuss the oblivion concept in constituting the social stock of knowledge. If – in the course of social change – the attribution contexts between knowledge elements are interrupted, entire fields of knowledge may fall into oblivion. In this context, they indeed speak of the fact that “[t]hese then sink into oblivion” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 297). Schütz and Luckmann connect the possibility to recover such lost

80 Such a figure is found e.g. in case of not consulting a book on mushrooms after having collected mushrooms, to which Schütz and Luckmann (1973, p. 198) refer in the context of classifying the stock of knowledge for the value of the indications it provides. However, the desire to check once again something one is somewhat familiar with may disappear again if other things become more important – then one forgets what one intended to do in the first place. The situation is similar in the case of the also addressed use in the context of adjustment oblivion: one is so much captured by a situation that one forgets to adjust to the new situation (see Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 236) – thus, absentmindedness has, in the wider sense, something to do with “oblivion”.

81 It is remarkable in this context that it seems as if only forgettability constitutes the distinction of core and periphery. Thus, there are aspects which are more likely to be forgotten and others which are less likely to be forgotten.



knowledge to fix it in writing. By reaching back to sources, it is possible to reconstruct knowledge that has become irrelevant – in oral societies, however, such a kind of oblivion results in an irretrievable loss. Some of these explicit references to an oblivion concept correspond with the frequently implied indications one may refer to for suggesting an oblivion theory in Schütz and Luckmann. Indeed, Schütz's detailed analysis of the sense of action, the experiential context and the social stock of knowledge provides several stimulations and connection points for a theory of social oblivion.

However, apart from sometimes explicitly mentioning, as just discussed, the topic of oblivion, Schütz offers quite some implicit aspects of discussing the giving up on or the loss or decay of knowledge. Among these, there are the questions about the selectivities of a) the sense of action, b) the social stock of knowledge, and c) the relevance structures.

If both the subjective meaning any draft for action is based on and the meaning attributed to any observable behaviour – that is, when attempting to understand or interpret – is communicated by experience, it seems evident that precisely the process of attributing meaning is highly selective. This is connected to perception being always selective – a problem that will be discussed subsequently. However, Schütz initially answers this question differently. By stating that the consciousness spontaneously pays attention to everything which may be perceived around it (*attention á la vie*), he reaches back to a motif in Bergson. This attention is attracted by reality par excellence – reality as it must be experienced immediately. As the consciousness cannot split, its attention at a given moment always inevitably refers to just one part of reality; however, apart from the reality of everyday life, it may also be attracted by other realities; but the reality of everyday life has top priority.<sup>82</sup> So then, experiencing each respective reality “automatically” – by way of addressing schemes – comes with creating an experience as a modification of the concerned schemes.

This idea may also be checked for oblivion, as both the turning towards currently addressable fields of reality and the recalling of suitable schemes always require more or less intended selection. Such a way of ignoring other possibilities of immediate experience as well as of the reflective genesis of experience, as it comes along with turning towards anything, will then result in the process of oblivion. Those schemes as not being addressed are not further developed, and recalling them is no longer part of the routine. Lack of concentration, distraction and weak retentiveness can be explained this way: if the view of the lively consciousness is preferably on everyday events, it becomes difficult to

82 Here Schütz (1972) adopts William James's concept of *paramount reality*.

focus one's concentration – such as on the lecturer giving a lecture.<sup>83</sup> Looking out of the window at the construction site nearby recalls different schemes than those of the reality of the academic genesis of knowledge. And indeed, the latter's schemes are no longer addressed and modified the moment one is distracted. Furthermore, it takes some effort to turn away again from the reality of everyday life and back to academic teaching or to “take up the thread” again. However, as the schemes have only sporadically or insufficiently been “connected” to each other or developed, it requires more effort to catch up with what has been missed. Otherwise, what could not be wholly integrated into the subjective experiential context will be forgotten again due to not being frequently recalled.

If this psychologically-sounding theory of the subjective experiential context is applied to the field of constantly interacting subjects, we will arrive at the construction of a supra-individual or social experiential context with Schütz. As also this experiential context has historically “grown”, it is called the social stock of knowledge. Apart from each respective experience, it serves as the socialisation, process-communicated, basis of experience for the individual consciousness – each depending on a specific society or culture.<sup>84</sup> The structural principles of the development and continuation of social knowledge are roughly like those of the individual. This means that contents may fall into oblivion also there. Schütz and Luckmann put this into words by reaching back to the German term “*Nichtwissen*” (negative knowledge):

Negative knowledge as *hidden knowledge* arises out of formerly positive determinations, which have been annulled and replaced by new positive determinations and hidden, so that they are no longer given in the familiar horizon of the element of knowledge. (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 176).

Here, oblivion is described as a process coming along with any modification of the social stock of knowledge, only that Schütz and Luckmann have it in other words. Remarkably, Schütz equates *negative knowledge* with knowing-no-longer. Obviously, he is not interested in other kinds of social *negative*

83 That ancient mathematician Archimedes of Syracuse ignored such an *attention à la vie* perhaps cost him his life, at least according to the anecdote. All he had to say to the enemy warrior who caught him when he was making his calculations was “Do not disturb my circles!”, subsequent to which he was slain (see Stein, 1993, p. 3).

84 However, equating the thus developed social stock of knowledge with social memory would suggest a space metaphor which understands memory to be a material store. But not the storing of knowledge is in the fore in case of the stock of knowledge. It serves for directing the attention of the attentive consciousness according to its specific having become.

*knowledge*, such as well-known *negative knowledge* in the sense of not-yet-knowing or unknown *negative knowledge*.<sup>85</sup>

Being a social memory, the social stock of knowledge is not only a store providing schemes – or types – to solve everyday life problems. It is also a self-continuing, that is changing over time, selection principle which decides to which memory image or scheme a consciousness reaches back. It has already been pointed out that in this context, Schütz introduces the concept of relevance. As an element in charge of controlling the subjective stock of knowledge, relevance structures determine the acquisition of knowledge – and thus the process of memory as connecting current perception contents with the schemes of the subjective stock of knowledge. The three kinds of (ca) thematic relevance, of (cb) interpretative relevance, and of (cc) motivational relevance must be distinguished.<sup>86</sup>

(ca) Thematic relevance is further structured into imposed or enforced, chosen, and hypothetical relevance. The former relevance consists of a previously unfamiliar subject of perception being forced into a familiar topical core. In this context, the crucial question is why, in a familiar situation, one is interested in certain aspects and not in others. This selectivity is due to the previously habituated perception habits. The second variant of thematic relevance is voluntary attention. In particular, when preparing for allegedly unfamiliar situations, with the help of expectations, one reaches back to classified knowledge. Thus, the memory prepares for perceiving a situation by pre-structuring the necessary definition of the situation by way of existing classifications. By the third sub-group, that of hypothetical relevance, Schütz describes how perception is structured by action routines which are imperative in certain typical situations. The goal is then to transform hypothetical relevance into valid relevance. An unknown sound in the house will be a reason for checking out by what it has been caused, in the course of which different consequences will be considered. Finding out about the cause determines the frame of defining the situation and transforms an unknown situation into a situation where the memory provides schemes and scripts.

(cb) In contrast to thematic relevance, in the case of interpretative relevance, the interpretational context is already given. This type of relevance can be tackled from two sides: certain aspects of a perceived object or certain elements of the stock of knowledge are used for interpretation. Interpretative

85 On this see the studies on the research of negative knowledge (in particular Wehling, 2006).

86 On this see Alfred Schütz (1971) as well as, providing the basis of this overview, Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1973, pp. 224–229).

relevance is a function of the biographically imprinted subjective stock of knowledge. At the same time, the environment determines which knowledge elements are activated.

(cc) Motivational relevance is connected to reasons for action. On the one hand, a perception may be characterised by an action goal the situation is based on – and which is pre-remembered. Such ways of perception are culturally shaped, as social groups have institutionalised certain ways of considering action courses and motivational contexts for typical, similar situations. Here any empirical assessment is complex, as the motivations must be expected to be meaningfully transformed as soon as the action has been completed: “What is ‘teleologically’ relevant when seen from the beginning, is presented from the end as ‘causally’ relevant” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 214). However, relevance may as well be biography-induced if a situation seems to be freely shapeable in view of the future but is limited in view of the past. However, we must not understand biographic influence as a specific knowledge element, but it is a syndrome of different elements stimulated by a subject of perception.

The different relevance structures cannot be considered in isolation from each other. Together yet to different degrees, they cause the constitution of experience by activating certain aspects of the existing stock of knowledge in the given situation. Closely connected to this, relevance structures thus change the stock of knowledge in specific ways. This change, however, can only be interpreted in retrospect and thus only by the resulting relevancies; devalued relevancies fall into oblivion.

The application of the result of explication as an element of knowledge in the mastery of an actually present, typically similar situation is determined only by those relevance structures which concern the end result of the explication, its monothetic meaning, and not by all the structures which are more or less at the basis of the polythetic process of explication. (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 228)

From the many connections to issues of memory, of remembrance, as well as to oblivion to be found in Alfred Schütz’s work, we may derive a genuinely sociological theory of memory. Starting from the egologic perspective of the experiencing I, Schütz demonstrates that any social action is basically tied to memory. Accordingly, any action as drafted behaviour is based on a pre-memory and is thus characterised by the individual stock of knowledge. Analogously to the stock of knowledge of the individual, which develops from memory-related schemes, the social stock of knowledge constitutes itself as the total of objectivised knowledge all individuals of a group are provided with. However, the social stock of knowledge as such cannot be equated with

social memory, as according to Schütz's concept in the case of memory, there always happens a comparison of similarities, in the course of which the new is compared to the known, which way how perception contents and stocks of knowledge are related to each other are determined.

The question of which (classified) memory images or schemes of experience becomes topical in specific situations, thus of how the situation-specific selection of stocks of knowledge is organised, is answered with the help of the concept of relevance structures. There Schütz provides a differentiated theory of different kinds of partly individual-biographic and partly culturally communicated selection mechanisms which is helpful when it comes to an understanding of situative perception according to its social conditionality on the one hand and to action consequences which are typically derived from it on the other. Therefore, in the shadow of this constructive process of developing social knowledge, at the levels of the subject, the collective, and the social order structure, there happens a structurally similar process of permanent oblivion. With each updating of the individual or social schemes happening within the frame of defining situations resulting from comparing a status quo to new impressions, everything currently does not seem relevant is step by step deleted from the current relevancies. Thus, oblivion in the sense of Schütz develops in the course of the process of the classifying constitution of schemes, of attributing perception experiences to existing schemes as well as of their permanent adjustment to a perception which at the same time is selective according to the socially communicated relevance structure.

Connecting to the oblivion motifs worked out in Schütz, Gerd Sebald distinguishes five kinds of oblivion that refer to the changing schemes – which are also classified with intersubjective communication (Sebald, 2011). Three variants of oblivion – the intersubjective one, the generalising one, and the structural one – derived from what has been said so far. Then, perspectival oblivion is what he calls the fact that attention can always use only one currently addressed relevance system. Everything beyond this structure of attributing meaning is either ignored right from the beginning or forgotten at once. Finally, the fifth kind of oblivion is transmarginal oblivion. This variant, oriented at Schütz's concept of the transmarginal consciousness experience, aims at the problem of what can be reproduced and anticipated, in the context of which the question about the reference to once existing – thus forgotten – knowledge is raised. Also, this is about the phenomenon of experiences being eclipsed in the course of transforming them into schemes, in the context of which it is assumed that there is knowledge of *what-has-been-known-in-the-past*. This suggests the assumption that configurations of schemes are provided with a time index allowing for the insight that "it" must have been known

earlier – in a different or better way. Access to this kind of oblivion is possible most of all when finding a trace and thus starting pursuing it.

### 3.2.1.2 Oblivion by Way of Incorporation

Incorporated, implicit or practical knowledge is characterised by having become habitual or a matter of course. Any declarative reflection, any intention or detailed action plan is no longer necessary to trigger or give reason to applying and using such a kind of knowledge. The orientation of sociological research at so-called practice theories has produced the insight that vast parts of social and societal order consist of implicit arrangements. Both Alfred Schütz and Peter L. Berger, as well as Thomas Luckmann frequently pointed out the great significance of this implicit, habitual, matter of course and thus unquestioned everyday knowledge.<sup>87</sup>

Working into the social world is based on assumptions and processes whose acquisition and occurrence have been forgotten. Sometimes the behaviour resulting from such a habitual knowledge has been practised and incorporated into the body so that we may speak of incorporation whose consequences are obvious for phenomenologically trained observers but not for those individuals or groups as being concerned by this behaviour. A crucial motivation for oblivion by way of practising and imprinting is to relieve the systems of information processing and the reduction of decision-related selection requirements. In other words, one can forget any reflection on the meaning of one's behaviour and explanations for its original meaning. As a result of giving up on reflecting, due to routine, the fact that movements and gestures and body features may be meaningfully questioned. By systematically ignoring possibilities, this simplifies everyday practices, as simply there seems to exist just one possibility to act, and that is the chosen one. This way, any change of habitual behaviour is prevented. Only by relieving oneself of the everyday-practical

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87 Accordingly, Schütz – as already stated – does not only recognize the problematic access of reflective knowledge at motivations for action coming from the past; he also assumes a wide field of routine and habitual knowledge which has become a matter of course. This insight is already to be found in *The phenomenology of the social world*, when it is about Weber's type of "traditional action" which is presented as incorporated, habitual, standardised action or behavior (Schütz, 1967, p. 197). The concept of habitual knowledge is discussed in detail in *The Structures of the Lifeworld* (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). Berger and Luckmann (1967) include this into their fundamental principles of a sociology of everyday knowledge. Their concept of institution, which is based on habitualisation and objectivation and furthermore connects to the concept of collective consciousness according to Durkheim, is nothing else than a kind of social and societal order which is not discussed anymore and, in its given form, is taken for granted by the respective social group.

pressure to act, routine as an inflexible order can be put up for renegotiation. One way of achieving this is a kind of awareness that remembers the inhibition of oblivion – although even this is necessarily always a permanent construction of memory.

However, the first theoretical addressee for such considerations in sociology is not social phenomenology but the theory of practice connecting to Pierre Bourdieu. There, motifs of implicit action and behaviour are unfolded, similar to those mentioned above. For example, habitus is nothing else than an incorporated, structuring structure in the sense of the memory concept. Then it seems to be obvious to raise the question of which oblivion processes are at work when sometimes extendedly practised knowledge has finally been incorporated to such a degree that one does not at all reflectively “remember” how it was acquired. The entire realm of everyday routines is based on comprehensively, subjectively forgetting about how it was realised. In his analysis of oblivion in Bourdieu’s works, Peter Wehling points out that not the knowledge contents have been forgotten but the situations of acquiring this knowledge – they have been deleted from the memory of events. It is remarkable in this context that the individuals have forgotten not only this. They have also forgotten that they have forgotten the learning situation as such. While connecting to a corresponding insight by Hahn, Wehling calls this the oblivion of oblivion (Wehling, 2011b).

Alois Hahn illustrates this motif by the example of forgetting about language acquisition. By “learning” he understands the imprinting of culturally relevant distinctions. He understands remembrance – in contrast to the here unfolded declarative-reflective interpretation – as being possible both explicitly and implicitly. Accordingly, any implicit, routine or automatized reaching back to learned knowledge is called “operative remembrance”. Accordingly, Hahn says, unlearning as a special kind of oblivion happens if such an automatic way of reaching back does no longer work.

Of course, in the context of language and being able to speak, this does not only hold for the operative memory of phonetic differences but just the same for as spontaneously mastering grammar and vocabulary. [...] Language acquisition starts with oblivion: The baby’s babbling and so called deaf-dumbness (understanding or speaking) prove that there is neither a lack of motoric capabilities nor of acoustic impressions, and yet most of the sounds are suddenly lost again. Thus, learning how to speak is a ‘selection of sounds’. (Hahn, 2007, pp. 41–42)

Which of the baby’s original sounds are remembered and which are forgotten is different according to culture. Thus, it is “operatively forgetting other possibilities”, which might be used in other cultures (Hahn, 2007, p. 42). Apart

from alternative possibilities to articulate also the once-happening selection is forgotten.<sup>88</sup> Only the distinction itself is maintained as a knowledge structure.

Thus, regarding oblivion through incorporation, we may state that by practising, exercising, and imprinting, there happens an acquisition of knowledge that is then unquestioned, practically available and indeed applied. Oblivion is a specific feature of this kind of knowledge, as usually the entire acquisition process is not remembered – then one is simply “capable of”.

In Bourdieu, however, practising such behaviour does not happen “purposefully” but in line with the practice of the social field within which each respective actor acts. Both in social reality and the reality of individual fields, the individuals “notice” how to behave successfully.<sup>89</sup> Sometimes the group-specific view at success is imprinted into gestures, attitudes, taste and other ways of social expression and social distinction without further being explicitly reflected on. That habitus serves for stabilising the respectively predominant power relations is well-known. By way of a memory-theoretical reading, however, this understanding can now be extended: much more important than remembrance, that is habitual behaviour, is oblivion as well as corresponding oblivion of oblivion; in this context, oblivion appears as an instrument of domination which can be a subject of discussion.

### 3.2.2 *Social Theory*

If, on the one hand, we may inform ourselves about how oblivion happens in the context of individual consciousness or collectives, given identifying subjects of oblivion (oblivion subjects), we may ask what is typically forgotten. Concerning this aspect, however, the focus is not on what has objectively been forgotten but on that what, in the form of perceiving traces, is recognized as having been forgotten. This is based on the assumption that what a consciousness (system) is capable of identifying as having been forgotten is only a small part of what has actually been forgotten.<sup>90</sup> In other words: the now following considerations will be about socially reflecting on oblivion which, however, does not derive from noticing that constantly something is being forgotten. Rather, it is about the efforts made by individuals and collectives to keep forgotten things present or to re-update them. The concern about the danger of

88 Very similar considerations are also to be found in Paul Connerton (1989, p. 101).

89 For an overview see Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992).

90 If this argument is applied to the memory research of cultural studies, one encounters the well-known contradiction between history and (collective) memory. Collective memory covers the social reference frames triggering individual remembrance as a precondition for meaningful action. History, on the other hand, deals with a sources-guided (re-)construction of meaning by help of past events and contexts.



oblivion must be equated with the concern about leaving a vital experience out of consideration when drafting future actions and, against better knowledge, about missing adjustment opportunities. And these adjustment aspirations do not only conclude from the experience of the “burnt child” but also include documenting the family history as proof of status, the keeping of documents on far-reaching company decisions or the writing of national histories to give historical reasons for territorial claims on the one hand and as a contribution to a collective identity on the other. Thus, archiving is the first protection against the fear of forgetting knowledge that has been recognized as relevant, and the retrospective construction of historical contexts is the second protection against this fear. To have it somewhat more extendedly, we might as well speak of more or less explicitly controlling the maintenance of the structure, on the “flipside” of which there always happen processes of oblivion. Parsons’s sub-system of latent pattern maintenance, for example, describes a function of social memory which, as a side effect, constantly produces oblivion – everywhere where no deprivation is experienced.<sup>91</sup>

If we understand the topical field of social theory as a perspective dealing with the analysis of social order, theoretical approaches in the tradition of functionalism and structuralism seem to be the first choice. In the following, approaches shall be discussed which deal with oblivion. In this context, the approaches by Maurice Halbwachs (1), Michel Foucault (2), and Niklas Luhmann (3) seem to be promising. All in all, it is about the question of how far oblivion is constitutive for societies against the background of an order-theoretical or structural-theoretical perspective.

No explicitly formulated theory of oblivion is to be found in the works by Halbwachs. Nevertheless, frequently he contrasts frame-guided memory to oblivion – and he seems to prefer a certain concept of oblivion. Oblivion is first a process of a loss of knowledge given the lack of each specific social reference frame. This explains the difference between perfect memory – imaginable only as an ideal – and the trace as stimulation for memory provided to retrospective thought by the individual memory. According to a metaphor by Halbwachs, such a trace is like a crystal core which is put into a saline solution and which then, in a way in a context of suitable material, may grow again (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 25).

Total oblivion means that no trace is to be found. In this context, Halbwachs refers to being reminded of a common experience of which does not remember the slightest trace – one knows that one must have been there, but by no

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91 Some elaborations on the issue of social memories in Parsons are to be found in Marco Schmitt (2009).

stretch of one's imagination, one remembers the situation. However, this phenomenon is not explained in terms of neuro-psychology but of sociology: the capability to remember situations is connected to the opportunity to renew these memories with certain groups sharing the same memories. According to Halbwachs, oblivion as a natural process always happens when there is no reason to remember – and this may, on the one hand, be connected to lacking emotional ties to these experiences and, on the other hand, to the social context of memory having been lost. Leaving a group for good, for example, results in forgetting about the experiences connected to it.

[T]o the extent that the dead retreat into the past, this is not because the material measure of time that separates them from us lengthens; it is because nothing remains of the group in which they passed their lives, and which needed to name them, that their names slowly become obliterated. The only ancestors transmitted and retained are those whose memory has become the object of a cult by men who remain at least fictitiously in contact with them. (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 73)<sup>92</sup>

Oblivion is triggered by the disappearing of reference frames as well as the frames changing or being changed over time.<sup>93</sup>

Another example of such a frame is language, which changes slowly and may disappear with a culture or group. In this context, words are not just attributions but contexts of attributions accompanied by manifold memories. Not the past is stored by the memory; “it is language, and the whole system of social conventions attached to it, that allows us at every moment to reconstruct our past” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 173).

At first sight, the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, who is also of significance for the sociological debate, does not look like an authority of a social-scientific theory of oblivion.<sup>94</sup> He is interested – we have already referred to this – in an “archaeological” and “genealogical” reconstruction of social discourses. Discourses are “bearers of the positivity of statements” (Keller, 2011, p. 125) – thus, associating them with concepts of social memory or

92 This may be completed by the statement that the memory of a society reaches as far as the memories of the groups it collects. In this context, oblivion does not happen intentionally but by individual groups – as the bearers and initiators of each specific memory – simply disappearing (see Halbwachs, 1980).

93 On oblivion as result of leaving and changing social reference frames see also Jan Assmann (1991).

94 For Foucault, “oblivion” is no theoretical element, although – like many other theoreticians – he frequently points out to this phenomenon. In his reconstruction of the oblivion issue in Foucault Reiner Keller (2011) states that, apart from scattered indications of oblivion, strong implicit references can be identified.

remembrance is more evident than connecting them with issues of oblivion. However, oblivion comes into focus when becoming aware of the selections he discusses in his theory of discussed selections. One crucial motif of Foucault's discourse analysis is that discourses, as orders of how to speak about something, always depend on the social power relations of a given time. Suppose the social construction of knowledge and truth depends on power and power mechanisms, with Reiner Keller. In that case, we may conclude the assumption that given the organising "running" of discourses, selections are made firstly in the form of bans, taboos or etiquette, secondly concerning the distinction between madness and reason, and thirdly concerning the distinction between true and false.<sup>95</sup>

Another way of selectively structuring discourses are procedures with the help of which discourses become self-controlling: principles of classification, organisation and distribution. In other words: it is about how the "language" used for the discourse organises, consolidates or, in the form of comments, connects to something existing. Discourse-inherent mechanisms of sanctioning – e. g. in the context of the sciences, Foucault refers to disciplines that decide who is allowed to comment on what and when – take care that the rules developed in the course of the discourse are kept. Such a limitation for possible contributions is mainly realised by way of specific qualification guidelines.

These selections are the preconditions for oblivion which then happens by the constant becoming and vanishing of discourse formations. The psychological idea of the cognitive scheme is transferred to the socio-historical idea of a social topic for which everything becomes irrelevant which is not updated. The internal control of the discourses appears as preparation for such a kind of oblivion, as not least there it is determined who is heard or seen and who not. Thus, a damning review is less problematic for an author than his/her contribution being ignored, as in the latter case, the discourse does not appreciate the trace he/she has pointed out but makes it fall into oblivion by ignoring him/her.

For the time being, the theory of social systems may be considered the only sociological approach for which the concept of oblivion has an explicitly theory-architectural value: there; oblivion is taken as the crucial aspect of the systems-theoretical concept of memory. In the following, some aspects of the systems-theoretical concept of social oblivion shall be taken into consideration more closely (Dimbath, 2011a).

Social systems prefer certain condensates of meaning and this way become capable of observing the identical and the similar in their environments. This

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95 See Reiner Keller (2011, pp. 122–123), who connects to Michel Foucault (1971).

way, it is possible to identify information as “already known”. If it can be meaningfully connected to an already existing condensate of meaning, Luhmann uses the concept of scheme or script – the processing of information has been completed, and the communication process is forgotten. However, if the consistency assessment produces an incomplete congruence, the information-processing structure, which is understood to be a scheme, must adopt the new impression and adjust accordingly. Thus, any communication that adopts new information, resulting in a change of meaning condensates, supports the system’s inner differentiation. However, a piece of information that cannot at all be related to already existing structures is “too new” and can thus not be “processed”: the system “sees” only what it can “see”. In this context, memory appears as a highly selective exceptional operation. It is a reflection process aiming towards the “inside”.

Thus, memory in the sense of social systems theory is no storage place but a mechanism performing a consistent comparison with the systemic communication structure “condensed” by the scheme. This way, the system produces an always updated idea of its own time and past – sometimes, it even adds its own time index to certain schemes to provide orientation within “historically relevant” contexts. In the further course of the system’s memory-induced operations also the memory itself changes. Thus, it is no static “switch” but has a channelling function that is frequently adjusted to current conditions. If remembrance happens in exceptional cases, this is a suppression of “automatically” giving up on memory which Luhmann frequently calls oblivion. “The main function of memory, therefore, lies in forgetting, in preventing the system from blocking itself by concealing the results of earlier observations” (Luhmann, 2012, p. 349).

What is remarkable with such attribution of function is that here oblivion is taken out of the realm of passive-unwanted situations and is presented as an active task. This is based on the idea that the system is constantly confronted with an overwhelming mass of information to be processed, which cannot be assessed for suitability for autopoietic follow-up communications, then sometimes be transformed into the system’s history. Memory is helpful in this context because it rejects all information being irrelevant in this sense, which keeps information-processing capacities available. It is the fate of the “rejected” information to fall into oblivion.<sup>96</sup>

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96 However, this raises the question of in how far information which is not stored to be further processed may already be counted among the “intellectual” property of the system. After all, however, it is inherent communication which has resulted from an impression which is counted as being environmental. Even if the system is not yet “aware” of it, still it

In the further course of information-processing, there frequently are renewed consistency assessments using the respectively updated structures of information-processing: this means a comparison with existing schemes. The information which can be made congruent with existing structures or can be “subsumed” under them is not further processed and forgotten.

The two variants of oblivion in social systems presented thus far must be considered selections – similar to the selective perception by individual consciousness. In everyday life, we might speak of “overlooking” and “ignoring” in one case and of “recognizing” and “attributing” in the other. Luhmann calls this making capacities of information-processing available because the system can decide very soon if it must deal more closely with information from its environment and, if necessary, “adjust”.<sup>97</sup>

Another function of oblivion – also discussed in systems theory – is preventing memory. Memory must be an exception because otherwise, the system would face the task of mostly dealing with its own “memory information”. A system exclusively dealing with its past would neglect current impressions from its environment and would thus no longer be capable of performing vital adjustments. This is what Luhmann means when speaking of the system blocking itself. In Luhmann, we do not find any information on how this suppression of the “inner voice” happens exactly; but we may speak of oblivion insofar as it ignores, does-not-take-into-consideration does not connect existing information.

The third variant of oblivion refers to the structure of information processing itself. The memory decides which structural field or which scheme is used for consistency assessment. Meaning condensates that have not been used for some time have fewer opportunities to be reactivated. Thus, oblivion happens by today both “attention” and the “attribution of meaning” looking different from some time ago and because today it cannot be understood why then a specific follow-up communication could be successful.

The systems-theoretical concept of oblivion shows different variants of oblivion which are also to be found in the “cultural history” of the concept of oblivion. Probably Luhmann did not have time enough to work out the theoretical element of the social memory, with oblivion as its main function, in more detail, so that this aspect of his late work stays incomplete.<sup>98</sup>

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is already there. Thus seen, the system forgets something of which it does not yet “know” that it exists, as no production of meaning has been started.

97 The theoretical terminology of social phenomenology deals with this as “relevance”.

98 In Luhmann's works there are comparably many passages referring explicitly to oblivion or memory. The most elaborated concept is presented *Theory of Society* (Luhmann, 2012);

In short: object-related and culturally triggered oblivion happens along with topical selection decisions. This not only holds for sub-systems but also for the categories of discourse or the province of meaning or world of meaning. Excluded is what does not belong; in the context of religion, this is everything non-religious; in the context of legal issues, it is everything not belonging to the legal sphere and so on.

On the one hand, the systems-theoretical view at knowledge, memory and oblivion is, in a knowledge-sociologically reflected way, provided with a degree of sensitivity to implicit assumptions concerning the kind of applied knowledge. On the other hand, this position underlines the fundamental doubt that oblivion could, in different contexts, always happen according to the same principles. However, it is an open question if this scepticism, based on the assumption of differentiation, does not go too far. The assumption of context-dependent kinds and practices of oblivion, which are thus basically different from each other, protects from an all too universalist approach; however, if oblivion processes must be considered so much disparate requires further assessment be done here.

### 3.2.3 *The Diagnosis of the Present Time and Social Change*

After having collected sociological findings on oblivion in the context of theories of sociality on the one hand and social order on the other, sociological theories dealing with the description and explanation of social change remain.<sup>99</sup> Sociology, a “product” of modernity, shows a simple yet crucial motif of reflecting on history. Usually, it construes social change between two epochs: the “classical” distinction is between tradition and modernity, whereas since several years ago, it distinguishes between post-, late, or advanced modernity or between first and second modernity. Both sociologists and historians assume that memory or oblivion might have changed their nature in the course of the transition between these epochs. In this context, modernity is usually considered the age of oblivion. In the following, four of these positions – oblivion becoming stronger due to the change of storage media (1), oblivion becoming stronger due to acceleration (2), oblivion as a result of becoming insignificant (3), and discourse-communicated oblivion as a result of power effects (4) – will be shortly presented, in the context of which any distinction according to disciplines is not considered to be relevant for structuring.

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a critical overview of the many hints at memory- or oblivion-theoretically relevant issues is provided by Oliver Dimbath (2011a).

99 Here it is about contributions which are exclusively sociological – both the humanities and cultural studies provide a wide range of interpretations of modernity as the age of oblivion. Some of these aspects have already been pointed out to in the first part of the here presented study.

Elena Esposito offers an evolutionary approach to the development of social memory. Although reconstructing periods of memory practices undergoing epochal change to different degrees, she focuses on the transition from industrial modernity to the IT age. Her cultural-historical analysis of memory starts with oral, illiterate cultures dependent on remembering through constant repetition: what is considered culturally relevant is frequently presented in different ways and thus passed on from generation to generation. In those times, the distinction between remembrance and oblivion is a fluent contradiction. In early literate cultures, textualisation is understood as fixation, which does not produce any new insights in contrast to living memory. Information one believed not to remember was fixed with the help of documents. With the establishment of functional differentiation, culture is equated with memory. Now priority moves from remembering to forgetting – with printing, no longer the aspect of producing memory aids is in the fore, but relieving the memory: stored which need not be kept in mind. Knowledge is outsourced into books, like “relieving the consciousness by liberating the presence, i. e. making oblivion easier” (Esposito, 2002, p. 240). The mass spread of information technologies makes Esposito assume that a new kind of memory, a kind of network memory, might establish. However, telematic memory does not show any fundamentally new memory practices resulting from the change of differentiating. It is only that the computer joins the archive and the books as a faster and, most of all, globally networked medium. The change of memory happens as a reaction to an ever more accelerating logic of intensification. Thus, we may say that information and communications technology radicalises the archive material by storing certain contents while deleting others. Additionally, increasingly reaching back to stored data happens automatically or by way of algorithm-controlled access. We may thus say that the machine produces answers to questions that up to then had been non-existent.<sup>100</sup> Parallel to such radicalisation of the store and its administration, there develops a new technique of structuring oblivion. Those information contents as not being stored as data and appropriately catalogued are forgotten. The electronic archive always refers only to a certain kind of information, and given the exuberant amount of this information and the thus connected utilisation opportunities, other information about the world increasingly appears as being irrelevant.

Very much like Halbwachs, Paul Connerton orients the social memory at the dimensions of space and time (Connerton, 2009). He is interested in pointing out the many association and remembrance opportunities connected to streets, squares, and memorial sites. In his answer to how modernity forgets, he attests a kind of systematic oblivion to Western industrial modernity, which,

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<sup>100</sup> On this see Esposito's (2002, pp. 291–303) considerations on computers and telematics.

he says, is most of all due to acceleration. Modernity has produced a culture of oblivion in the context of which much of what has up to now been maintained is quite purposefully left to rot. Examples of this are the politically expedient renaming of streets and squares, the rapid growth of cities, at whose fringes there develops something new in the shortest period without any claim to “historicity”, or the change of perceiving space as a result of accelerated means of transportation. The stroller experiences the space he/she crosses on foot differently from that of the car driver.

Eviatar Zerubavel unfolds a narration-theoretical interpretation of the memory of modernity in his considerations on the cyclic nature of group-related self-descriptions or narrations (Zerubavel, 2003). This is based on the insight that it is a fundamental feature of the human memory to embed unstructured series of events conceptually into allegedly coherent narrations. The structure of such narrations is subject to clearly identifiable patterns, such as the narration of progress or the narration of decline. One of the narration figures reconstructed by Zerubavel is characterised by distinguishing the mountain from the abyss. There, the distinction is between historically more significant and less significant events. By the different intensities of labelling, it is possible to understand why some events are perceived as widely visible, like peaks, and are thus kept in mind, whereas others sink into the abyss of being narratively insignificant. This way, collectively binding presentations of history produce “dark ages”, which, as periods that are said to be poor of events, fall into oblivion.

“History takes up the shape of a topographic map where memory-relevant events of the past and those to be forgotten are marked like mnemonic hills and valleys” (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 27). A variety of such narration figures identified by Zerubavel can only develop in modern society in which dealing with the past is no longer authoritatively but collectively organised.

Analyses of the consequences of social change can also be made against the background of the discourse perspective unfolded by Foucault. In the context of a “discourse economy of oblivion”, Reiner Keller identifies five changes:<sup>101</sup> Due to increasingly focusing on the exploitability and utilisation of knowledge, he says, firstly, a trend towards an economised will to truth becomes apparent. According to this priority, everything which is not convincing in the light of evaluations and rankings may be forgotten. Against the background of increasing globalisation, Keller secondly states that anything regional and

101 Reiner Keller distinguishes six lines of change, of which one – the “transformation of the comment” (Keller, 2011, pp. 129–135) – can be referred to two others, which is why here only five processes are mentioned.



local is pushed aside. Only that is considered relevant for being continued or restarted, which is recognized as global knowledge or knowledge which might be globalised. Thirdly, the attribution of relevance in discourse – as Esposito also states it – aims at digitalised knowledge and knowledge which can be digitalised. Everything which cannot be digitalised may fall into oblivion. Fourthly, the disciplines of the sciences are subject to change which, may be described as de- and re-disciplining, says Keller. Against the background of the call for inter- or trans-disciplinarity, the “grown” disciplines are pushed to the back so far as attention and cognition are granted to new XY studies. Finally, Keller states a shift in attributing attention towards specific media formats. Due to increasingly preferring the visual, there develops a trend of avoiding less accessible information such as texts. This way, Keller says, also the non-visual and that what cannot be made visual is neglected and falls into oblivion, after all.

When discussing oblivion in sociology, a difference to cultural studies perspectives can be identified: with sociological approaches, we rarely find the idea of memory as a store from where data are lost, which could be equated with oblivion. Sociologists – particularly those feeling obliged to constructivist ideas – rarely adhere to the idea of knowledge stored elsewhere than in the psychic or social consciousness. For them, knowledge is an always present structural aspect that is imagined as a structure of schemes and scripts organised by memory. On the one hand, oblivion happens in the course of information processing through superimposition and decay. On the other hand, it happens in the course of the evolutionary change, though activation and deactivation – i. e., selection – of situative patterns of processing. Reaching back to consciousness structures is crucial in this context to allow for experiencing similarities. Any continuation and, at the same time, self-transformation of the structural context happen along path-dependencies. Oblivion becomes marginal, that what is not needed or that what is not functional.

However, there is still the chance of oblivion being initiated by taking away one object. In this case, oblivion has nothing to do with this object as such but rather with the loss of possible orientations for follow-up communication and remembrance, which may quickly happen due to the loss of such an object. At the same time, however, there is still the possibility – although it is dwindling over time – that this object, precisely because it is missing, gives reason to remember it if context-related traces or empty spaces are perceived. Thus, social oblivion cannot only be understood as structural determinism or automatism. It may also happen as a result of decisions to delete, destroy or clean.

Sometimes, preconditions for oblivion are discussed in sociology if memories are purposefully avoided by intended selection – sometimes by third

parties or in the course of discourse or also in the social field. This produces the effect that the social knowledge structure or classification of social phenomena may further develop so that certain facts are purposefully forgotten. Although everyday consciousness is incapable of forgetting on purpose, this may indeed happen in the realm of the social. The “nature” of oblivion – and this is well comprehensible in connection to sociological theories – may be transformed into a “culture” of oblivion. Such processes are described most of all in the context of the analysis of creating and maintaining social order. However, against the background of discussing social or institutional change, it is assumed on all sides that oblivion has even become the fundamental driving force of restructuring processes since the transition to modernity, due to acceleration processes as well as the rapid growth of the amount of information to be processed in many realms of the lifeworld. Thus, modernity would be much more forgetful than any preceding age.

### 3.3 Basic Traits of Social Oblivion

When it comes to the phenomenon of oblivion, we are provided with several starting points: at first, the range of the concept in everyday language has been measured, and afterwards, ways in which the concept has been cultural-historically interpreted have been assessed. Then, some dimensions of the concept were distinguished by reaching back to the root word. Finally, we started looking for explicit and implicit motifs of an oblivion theory in the context of sociological theories. If we assume the issue of oblivion to be connected to timeliness, memory and remembrance, it must be clarified how these concepts are interrelated. This has been done in the immediately preceding sections; hence, the preliminary work for developing a sociological concept of oblivion has been completed now. Furthermore, the collected elements will be organised, opening them up for sociology and combining them with the already delineated sociological concepts of time, memory and remembrance.

#### 3.3.1 *Two Dimensions*

As it has already been pointed out several times, the loss of (intellectual) property may be described by different concepts. Three of these concepts are also common in the social sciences and the cultural studies debate. The loss of stored information, which is usually also counted as oblivion, should be more appropriately called deletion, disappearance or destruction. In contrast, the overlooking or neglecting of obviously existing information, which is sometimes even described as “deliberate” or “intended” oblivion, may be defined

as ignoring. Although it does not seem to be reasonable to exclude both the variants of the material loss of information and of giving up on information from a sociological concept of oblivion – this would produce unnecessary misunderstandings – there is nevertheless a kind of oblivion which may be described as “pure” oblivion in particular regarding the far unfolded memory-theoretical aspects. In the following, oblivion will be distinguished in the wider (1) and the stricter (2) sense.

By oblivion in the wider sense – or oblivion (1) – we mean those ways of losing or giving up on knowledge that do not concern the process of oblivion as such but are its preconditions. This is of importance particularly from a sociological point of view because the fact that knowledge, or better: information, is existing can always be stated only from an observer’s point of view. Thus, it is assumed that there is information that may be considered relevant in a certain situation. Now, that content is not recalled can be because the nexus indicates it is no longer existent and that access is blocked or unwanted. In all three cases, however, it is not that the concerned information has already disappeared. Instead, inter-subjectively comprehensible or classified traces indicate its existence. Thus, the expectation that the concerned information exists can be based on objects.

Several times, it has been pointed out that a social memory cannot be understood as a store. However, in everyday language, it is sometimes difficult to not connect the destruction of archives to oblivion, for example. Still, there is one crucial difference. When the library of Alexandria<sup>102</sup> or the Anna-Amalia Library in Weimar in 2004 was destroyed by fire, or when the Cologne City Archive collapsed in 2009, a significant number of valuable documents were destroyed or lost. Both their contents and those impressions which can only be gained from the material presence of an object run the danger of falling into oblivion.

From the perspective of a sociological concept of memory, however, archived knowledge is of no presence-constituting relevance as long as it is not used to identify, define, and assess current situations by actors or systems. Thus, even the stocks of any archive are forgotten until they are needed and recalled: even at a library, a work may fall into oblivion.<sup>103</sup> Deleting a hard disc,

102 The fire of the library of Alexandria – also shortly mentioned by Harald Weinrich (2004, p. 19) – is a myth. There are several historical reconstructions of the disappearing of this archive, but also the assumption of its destruction by the Arabs in the 7th century has probably proven to be wrong (Lewis, 1990).

103 See Aleida Assmann (2012) who reaches back to Friedrich Georg Jünger’s (1957) concept of storage forgottenness (*Verwahrensvergessenheit*). On this, Dietmar Rieger says: “Quite close to the cemetery metaphor is the attic metaphor [...] by way of which the symbolism

a library burning down, the burning of books, all these are just preconditions for but not the process of oblivion. Thus, on the one hand, oblivion appears as a consequence of an accident or disaster. On the other hand, such a condition may as well be initiated, so that – once again by limiting the potentials of social memory as it became apparent in the course of the burning of books by Chinese Emperor Qin Shihuangdi (Strähle, 2003) or in the Third Reich – it just achieves incomplete oblivion. Thus, any conscious deleting or destruction is tied to the social because the actor purposefully makes information disappear, hoping that in its existing shape, it will be no longer relevant or a subject of remembrance. Possibly the actor him-/herself will be the last witness and thus the trace indicating this disappearance. Who wants something to be forgotten does not necessarily need to forget him-/herself. This can only be imagined in the context of counting on one's forgetfulness, for example, by eliminating remembrance stimuli such as photographs, presents, souvenirs reminding of broken love.<sup>104</sup> However, such intentional oblivion is difficult since one will easily fail because of the social frame of collective memory.<sup>105</sup>

Another variant of intentional oblivion, which may be grasped as a precondition for oblivion, can be well illustrated by the phrase “You can forget about it!”. The meaning of this statement is to devalue the relevance of certain information for future use because it will be (or is said to be) useless. This recommendation aims at ignoring, overlooking or neglecting certain information. This is sociologically significant as it expresses the expectation that the concerned information might be recalled and recognised as relevant by others. However, the expected perception is influenced. Accordingly, somebody having a clear idea of how a particular goal might be achieved may tell his/her partner which information, in his/her opinion – and his/her interest – is helpful and which may well be ignored. In this case, the oblivion demand aims to recommend “put something right out of mind”. Indeed, this may also be

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of the attic as a storing place is made fruitful: ‘storing’ yet also marginalisation, indeed the exclusion of what is not needed, has become obsolete, of the forgotten traditions or traditions which shall be forgotten of earlier generations on the one hand – freedom from taboos, valid norms and constraints, the return to values which are no longer contemporary – yet authentic – the view to the open, the trigger for not least poetic, imagined memory on the other” (Rieger, 2004, pp. 26–27).

104 On this see the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* by Michel Gondry (2004) which is extremely illustrating for many aspects of sociological considerations on oblivion (Germ.: *Vergiss mein nicht!*).

105 A literary example of this is provided by Max Frisch's novel *Stiller*, whose main character, Anatol Ludwig Stiller, cannot escape his “past” when he returns to his home, despite having obviously been successful with individual oblivion (see Heinlein & Dimbath, 2010, p. 276).

one's own intention: the actor decides to resist an expected perception and ignore certain, possibly relevant information. When pretending to not wanting to know something, this implies that one does not want to be reminded of the horizons of the meaning of the concerned information.<sup>106</sup> However, such an oblivion demand will be successful only if it is obeyed and the goal is achieved without further irritation. In other cases, one will be reminded of what has been neglected or overlooked.

In the case of deletion and ignorance, we may speak of oblivion in the wider sense.<sup>107</sup> Given the here unfolded theory of social memory, however, it is not about the oblivion process but about creating the preconditions for later oblivion. Also, these variants are of significant sociological interest.<sup>108</sup>

Oblivion in the stricter sense (oblivion (II)) should exclusively be understood as the process of oblivion. First, however, it must be clarified how something like this is supposed to be possible in the social context. The previous considerations on social memory provide one approach. Only if it is clear under which circumstances we speak of stocks of knowledge, an analysis of the loss of knowledge is possible.

Social memory has been described as an aspect of order which produces a continuity of a before, a now and perhaps an after, thus producing the idea of time for the processing consciousness. The memory structure consists of networked schemes and scripts or socially constituted types or (interpretation) patterns from which the memory – and this is its function – selects relevant structural patterns for the organisation of current behaviour and a pending meaning-related definition of a situation. Thus, oblivion involves selecting one possibility from different reference possibilities for defining the presence and ignoring other – “objectively” perhaps as plausible – alternatives. Then the function of memory would have to be described as discriminating against oblivion and remembrance, in the course of which much is forgotten, and remembrance is an exception (Luhmann, 1996). However, at a closer look, it becomes evident that not recalling patterns of information processing alone is always only a precondition for oblivion. At least there is the possibility that these patterns might be considered more relevant on the next occasion – and

106 Harald Weinrich (2004) tells the story of Immanuel Kant suffering from dementia who writes down on a sheet of paper that he must forget his servant, Lampe, who has fallen from his grace.

107 For an overview of the issue of deleting see Stefan Hesper (2001), and on ignorance as a special kind of oblivion see Achim Geisenhanslüke and Hans Rott (2008).

108 Accordingly, Georg Kreisler sings the song *Ich habe dich zu vergessen vergessen* [I forgot to forget you] or Elvis Presley sings *I forgot to remember to forget*. When stubbornly creating preconditions for oblivion prevents oblivion, this may be called a reflective figure.

under different circumstances. Thus, nothing of the “intellectual property” is lost initially. However, the respectively current nexus influences the further design of path-dependencies, and access, which refers to alternative processing patterns, becomes more unlikely. Schemes, types or scripts that are frequently recalled this way and updated stay relevant as routines of processing information, whereas the recalling of rarely used patterns becomes gradually more difficult.<sup>109</sup> In other words: we may say that a particular way of dealing with a current situation may be considered obvious; however, another way may be considered “absurd” or at least not particularly “obvious”. If one becomes aware of having forgotten something, this is a violation of an availability expectation. Such an expectation refers to information that is supposed to exist as proven by indications or traces. In this context, oblivion constitutes itself regarding the future by addressing a past event of which there is no experience. From drafting future actions, which is confronted with a horizon of incomplete yet expectable knowledge, remembrance is necessary as an intentional action.<sup>110</sup>

If we understand both individual and collective information-processing as a process in which adjustments constantly happen in modifications and continuations, different views in oblivion (II) result. Then oblivion (II) happens as a permanent while at the same time an unnoticed process of neglecting various areas of an experience-induced potential of processing information. The proverbial fading away of memory comes from not recalling, in the current situation, a great number of possible patterns for coordinating behaviour or action. The appropriate structures have not disappeared this way. They are still existent but are not actuated – the path to them may become “overgrown” if it is blocked, for example, by other nexuses. However, that these paths may be reactivated more or less soon becomes apparent when visiting – according to the declarative-reflective dimension of memory – places or relations of one’s own, allegedly no longer existent, past and when suddenly, due to the appropriate frame, memories of the “old stories” occur. The situation is similar – in the field of the incorporated-practical dimension of memory – e. g. in the case of a musical piece, the player of an instrument used to master well in the past and which he/she can master again much more quickly than if he/she had to learn it without any background. However, it may also be imagined that both fluency and responsiveness are not as they used to be and that thus the score cannot

109 In certain contexts – such as when the expectation of availability consists of an action routine which has been practiced in the past and furthermore has been made part of one’s own biography and cannot be recalled as expected – the insight of having forgotten something is interpreted as unlearning.

110 On this see Alfred Schütz’s (1962) essay on “Choosing among Projects of Action”, in which he deals with decision-making.

be played as expected. The stricter concept of oblivion – of oblivion (II) – may well be described by the phrase “out of sight, out of mind”, “sight” illustrating current perception and “mind” the current association opportunity. The fact that oblivion (II) may in different ways be connected to oblivion (I) results in problems which will be discussed in the further course of the study.

### 3.3.2 *Consequences of Restructuring*

If we understand oblivion (I) as a precondition for and oblivion (II) as the process of oblivion, we may consider the condition to precede the process – only in the context of the social because only in exceptional cases or with difficulty the individual consciousness is capable of manipulating itself: an object disappears; thus it can no longer be immediately viewed at or be an element of a reference frame and accordingly does not trigger any remembering definition of a situation. Then the consciousness recognizes and processes other information, and that what has been associated with the disappeared object, as its activation potential or horizon of meaning, retreats. This way, the process of oblivion as a loss of the relevance of individual association may happen, which also holds for the entire association context. Such a process can be demonstrated by the booming of certain topics in the mass media, when a disaster dominates every news channel for a short time, to then disappear again. “Ebbing away”, however, is not a result of hearing news of the problem having been solved or having disappeared but of the media no longer being supplied with new news as well as of the topic being replaced by a new one.<sup>111</sup> If news of a disaster does not only result in compassion but also come along with changed behaviour – such as avoiding certain kinds of vegetables due to fear of these vegetables being infested with germs – changes of classified interpretation schemes can be stated: the consumption of cucumbers and tomatoes is perceived as being risky. However, with the lack of new press reports, these interpretations of danger retreat to the back again – except this kind of vegetable is completely taken off the market. Thus, the fact that cucumbers and tomatoes may be infested with dangerous germs at first extends the concerned schemes; however, in case of a lack of new warnings, this scepticism is eclipsed by other experiences: the schemes of cucumbers and tomatoes are again determined by culinary experiences which are not associated with the fear of health hazards,

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111 According to Luhmann, this is a crucial aspect of the influence of the mass media. “The almost neurotic compulsion in the economy in, politics, sciences and art have to offer something new (even though no one knows where the novelty of the new comes from and how large a supply of it exists) offers impressive evidence of this” (Luhmann, 2000, p. 21).

and consumption goes on as before.<sup>112</sup> In other words: by way of a media-related interpretation, it can be demonstrated how oblivion, as a restructuring of socially classified schemes, happens by way of the disappearance of thus-connected reports from the news of the day. This does not only concern oblivion processes with individuals but can be concluded from a comparison of subjective schemes with socially classified collective schemes. For, whereas among individual people, reservations towards cucumbers and tomatoes may indeed persist, both the mass media public and the political public become less fearful. Then, from the majority point of view, careful people are considered fearful people, and fearful people are eventually considered neurotics.

Furthermore, the difference between oblivion (I) and oblivion (II) can be related to the initially made distinction between object-related oblivion and subject-related oblivion. Deletion, disappearance, ignoring are, first of all, object-related, whereas the process of oblivion is a selectivity problem in the context of individual or social consciousness structures. It seems impossible that any redirection and restructuring of the ways of information-processing by way of the selectivity of memory result in deleted associative connections. The structure of information-processing is maintained, quite in the sense of the psychoanalytical idea of the unconscious or the social-phenomenological idea of the “true-because-motivation”,<sup>113</sup> without right from the beginning being accessible to the declarative-reflective definition of the situation. Thus,

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112 The “ebbing away” of the scheme of danger in the context of a consumption experience happens by the kind of vegetable the consumption of which has at first come to a complete standstill being gradually put on the menu again. If then there does not happen any further irritation, the knowledge of safe consumption eclipses the reservations which are then be forgotten until further notice. However, oblivion does not happen as complete deletion; as soon as there appear messages of a similar danger, the old nexuses are reactivated. This connection between oblivion and possible reactivation may also be described as a loss of trust. Such a loss results from the occasional memory of lost certainty.

113 “[I]n every genuine because-motivation both the motivating and motivated lived experiences have the temporal character of pastness. The formulation of a genuine why-question is generally possible only after the motivated experience has occurred and when one looks back on it as something whole and complete in itself. [...] The meaning-context of the true because-motive is thus always an explanation after the event.” Schütz (1967, p. 93) distinguishes these because-motivations from subjective meaning in so far as the latter has access to the actual motivations for an action, which are part of an actor's biography, only if he/she turns towards them. At the moment of self-interpretation, however, “they are simply memories and have received their perspective-horizons, their highlights and shadows, from a Here and Now always later than the one in which the project was constituted” (Schütz, 1967, p. 95). Thus, the because-motivations correspond with those imprints into the experiencing individual as being reflectively accessible for his/her consciousness only as construed memory.



regarding the brain, there is no reason to equate oblivion with deletion or annihilation – and the existing structures are not even lost due to a change of the association system; it is only that currently they are not connected due to the selective activity of the memory. However, the “no connection” diagnosis depends on the existence of a connection that has been interrupted somewhere.

Things are different in the realm of the social. In the case of the structure of information-processing, which can be collectively reconstructed and consists of classified schemes and scripts, deletion due to a change of the ways of information-processing can basically be imagined. This may happen if certain contexts of meaning are no longer needed or have become obsolete, as a result of which the traces indicating them are cleared – such as in the course of cleaning processes. However, these are processes that cannot be started in the short run and without further ado, but usually, they are cultural, quasi-evolutionary processes in the course of which it has already been forgotten why once one did not want to forget certain things.

Nevertheless – both from the point of view of the individual and the collective – one may leave oneself to the idea of intending oblivion. In this case, usually, oblivion (I) precedes oblivion (II). Thus, in the following, it will be about analysing processual kinds of oblivion (oblivion (II) = forgetfulness) at the various levels of the social first, to then extend the view on oblivion as an action goal, which results in connecting oblivion (I) to oblivion (II) (intending oblivion and making forget). For a sociological argument, this means that the statement that something has fallen into oblivion is exclusively considered from the point of view of the social. By reaching back to the previous assorting achievements, it seems helpful to consider oblivion aspects at the three aggregation or abstraction levels of social phenomena – micro, meso, and macro. This structure is indeed disputed, but it is helpful with making first systematisations.

The micro-level comprises both the level of relations in dyads and micro-groups and the individual referring to his/her socially constituted environment, such as in the context of practical, individual action regulation or the problem of subjectively defining a situation. First of all, groups are in focus at the meso-level, the aspect of organisation being at the fore. Finally, the macro-level covers social institutions and cultural practices. Thus, it is about both societies and cultures, if by “culture” we understand a phenomenon going beyond social norms and regulations – as represented, e. g. by national states. Furthermore, we distinguish “automatic” forgetfulness (1), the volitional intention to forget (2), and instrumentally making forget (3) from each other, to then analyse how they affect the three sociological aggregation levels.

It has already been explained that forgetfulness may be understood not just as a property, or more exactly: as a tendency of forgetting easily and frequently, but also as stating the oblivion process diagnosed for a social entity. As the concept of forgetfulness is always connected to a consciousness-gifted entity<sup>114</sup> and not to an object which has been forgotten or is supposed to be forgotten, and as furthermore, it refers to a process and not to a state; it is mostly identical with oblivion (II). At the same time, forgetfulness is much in line with the idea of “natural”, structural or “automatic” oblivion, as it seems to be in the “nature” of memory to continue or revise associative connections caused by selection processes. This process is experienced as being “natural”, as forgetfulness evades the everyday attention of consciousnesses.

Where aspects of such a kind of forgetfulness become apparent in social-scientific theories has already been worked out. At the micro-level (a), “natural” oblivion can be analysed by connecting to the considerations on the subjective experiential context according to Schütz and by connecting to the context of the social reference frame according to Halbwachs. At the meso-level (b) of the social group or organisation, we find indications of forgetfulness, making instrumental use of it most in studies on organisational sociology. Finally, for the analysis of oblivion at the macro-level (c), the range of theories can furthermore be extended by Paul Ricoeur’s narration-theoretical works, by Mary Douglas’s ethnological studies as well as by the considerations by historians on the issue of oblivion in the field of the historical sciences, such as those of the *Annales* school.

If the oblivion-theoretically relevant considerations on the subjective experiential context in Schütz and the issue of leaving social reference frames which Halbwachs attributes to oblivion next to each other, the concepts seem to complete each other mutually. Schütz explains the problem of the consciousness turning towards an event with the help of the concept of relevance. In this context, relevance as structurally directing attention is on the one hand caused by an event happening in the environment of the respective consciousness bearer; on the other hand, it is always also induced by the perception apparatus – which has been shaped by experiences made in the course of life. Thus, a change of the experiential context is only possible if an event is declarative-reflectively changed into an experience or incorporate-practically into a routine – thus, if it leaves its impressions in

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114 However, this consciousness-giftedness may also be switched off – one is indeed not aware of forgetfulness as a “natural” process, which only makes it a problem for the consciousness. However, discussing this becomes only possible again by way of a reflective view.

mind or body. As any “undisguised” perception is hardly imaginable and is at best a Weberian-ideal-typical border case, the selectivity of perception is already based on those schemes and scripts as constituting memory. In other words: the relevance-induced control of “view” results from the perceptive faculty as it has developed in the course of life so far. This perceptive faculty is most of all connected to socially communicated experiences. In particular, in the field of thematic relevance, precisely that is moved into “focus”, which is described as the social reference frame in Halbwachs. However, with Schütz, this issue can be grasped more fundamentally insofar as Halbwachs seems to be first of all interested in the conditions of the constitution of declarative-reflective memory. In contrast, socially structured relevance also includes the incorporated-practical aspect of orientation. At the same time, the frame as a classified scheme is a “handier” concept representing a complex social context. Accordingly, Schütz does not further elaborate any arrangement of topically relevant structures which might be compared to the social reference frame, or more generally, it is just called a “cultural pattern of group life” (Schütz, 1976a, p. 92).

If now oblivion is described as leaving a frame or by a frame becoming obsolete, with Schütz, this must be understood as the lack of a topically relevant stimulus. He deals with this in his works on the *stranger* and the *homecomer*, in which – in Halbwachs’s terminology – the leaving of social reference frames is analysed. Schütz assumes that the knowledge which is sufficient for coping with everyday life is widely unspecific and inconsistent. However, people living in a specific culture that is the home of such fragmentary knowledge do well despite these limitations.<sup>115</sup> The stranger – the immigrant in Schütz – approaches a different culture whose civilisation patterns he/she does not yet share. To him/her, who is familiar with a different arrangement or with different configurations of social reference frames, many everyday routines of the new group appear dubious, as they cannot claim the “authority of a tested system of recipes” (Schütz, 1976a, p. 96). He/she finds it impossible to remember the past or the experiences of his/her new social environment. At the same time, he/she must successfully participate in its everyday affairs, and for this purpose, he/she can neither make use of the patterns he/she is familiar with from his/her own society of origin, nor can he/she easily connect his/her

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115 Schütz (1976a, p. 95) calls this arrangement of culture-specific frames a fixed and ready-made, standardised scheme of cultural and civilisation patterns which has been communicated by “ancestors, teachers and authorities” as an unquestioned and unquestionable guideline for all situations.

reflective knowledge to the alien environment.<sup>116</sup> Rather, he/she must appropriate knowledge of the ways of interpretation of the alien cultural patterns.

For Schütz, one such pattern – when it comes to a social group, *Halbwachs* would also use the frame concept – is the language that goes far beyond the linguistic symbols to be found in dictionaries.<sup>117</sup> Whereas the already established individual makes use of familiar cultural patterns in an incorporated-practical way, the stranger is forced to include declarative-reflective interpretation processes and thus construes a “social world of pseudo-anonymity, pseudo-intimacy and pseudo-typicality” (Schütz, 1976a, p. 103). The stranger stays a stranger until he/she completely succeeds with replacing his/her old civilisation patterns with the new ones. Thus, his/her adjustment to the new group is a process of dealing with new civilisation patterns, which eventually may become a matter of course for him/her.

It is evident that by laboriously appropriating new civilisation patterns or new social reference frames, the old schemes are partly provided with new accentuations or modified. Thus, during his/her time in a foreign country, an oblivion process happens due to associative reorientation resulting from adjustment or assimilation. However, it is typical for this kind of oblivion – and also this may be stated as being congruent with *Halbwachs* – that when the foreigner returns to his/her original home, the old, familiar civilisation patterns may be addressed again. What has been completely forgotten in the course of coping with everyday life is soon present again in the course of being reactivated within the old reference system. However, that it is not possible to seamlessly fit in again with the “old times” is dealt with by Schütz in his essay on “The homecomer”. Also, this may be read in terms of oblivion theory, if it is, for example, about two people who once were close to each other but were separated and meet again after a long time.

The same things will remain relevant, the same degree of intimacy in personal relationships will prevail, etc. Yet by the mere change of surroundings, other things have become important for both, old experiences are re-evaluated; novel ones, inaccessible to the Other, have emerged in each partner's life. (Schütz, 1976b, p. 112)

116 Right from the beginning, such knowledge is not suitable for successfully interacting with the members of the foreign group (see Schütz, 1976a, p. 98).

117 “In order to command a language freely as a scheme of expression, one must have written love letters in it; one has to know how to pray and curse in it and how to say things with every shade appropriate to the addressee and to the situation. Only members of the in-group have the scheme of expression as a genuine one in hand and command it freely within their thinking as usual.” (Schütz, 1976a, p. 101).

By referencing Ulysses's stay with the Lotus-eaters and by reaching back to reports by the US Ministry of Defence from 1944, Schütz points out that, independently of how the experiences made there are subjectively judged on, a foreign stay comes along with leaving the home patterns. In Schütz's example, the empirically observable consequence of such processes was that 40 per cent of the US American soldiers returning from the war did not want to return to their original jobs and not to their home communities. Schütz explains this by two different worlds where different kinds of anomy are encountered. For the anomy of war, what counts is the bravery of the fighter and his/her ability to gain the upper hand in combat; to this disorder, there corresponds the military virtue of control and discipline towards the "inside". The anomy of civilian life consists of the absence of control and discipline towards the "inside", and not even the structure of "outward" combat is demanded. Then, returning to the old patterns is difficult most of all for those who had been more successful under conditions of the foreign than at home. Like Ulysses's crew, they found it easy to forget the old, and again like in the *Odyssey*, fitting in with the interpretation patterns and routines of the behaviour of the home environment is difficult.

Schütz describes the process of oblivion because relevant social reference frames have become obsolete in a way that is similar to Halbwachs. In "The Stranger", he demonstrates how subjective classifications – or schemes – gradually change in the course of adjustment processes. Analogously, Halbwachs speaks of oblivion, which necessarily comes when leaving the group and the relevant frames.<sup>118</sup> However, in Schütz, given the topic dealt with in "The

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118 Given the great similarity of the two perspectives, it is remarkable that Schütz (1076c) explicitly distances himself from Halbwachs. In a treatise on the collective memory of musicians Halbwachs (1939) interprets musical notation as the socially conditioned frame of a language of music. The composer's musical creativity, he says, is his/her capability of, within the frame of this language of music, intruding previously undiscovered regions. After all, it is not that musical notation was created for the preservation of music but, vice versa, only the frame of notation allows for creating music. In contrast to this, Schütz is of the opinion that, firstly, an idea does not depend on its nature of being communicable and that, secondly, indeed it is not possible to communicate any musical idea without sounds or notes. Halbwachs, however, wrongly counts on notation only as a communication medium. Although we must agree with Schütz concerning his criticism of the reduction of the frame to the semantics of musical notation, still there remains – and quite obviously for both authors – the social fact of the frame within which alone (musical) ideas can be provided with meaning. That, as Schütz explains, not musical notation is a precondition for music but playing music together results in developing the frame of a collective memory, (see also Grathoff, 1995, pp. 223–224), would indeed hardly have been denied by Halbwachs when it comes to his understanding of the constitution of social reference frames.

Homecomer”, another phenomenon moves into focus which is easily counted among oblivion. Due to their lack of an immediate relation to each other, both the person living in a foreign country and those remaining home develop ideas of the other, which have not much to do with the respective realities. When meeting again, these perspectives, which have in a way been “alienated” from each other as a result of such pseudo-intimacy and pseudo-typicity, clash against each other. The disappointing experience of not understanding each other, which consists of the others allegedly having forgotten who I “really” am and what I am “really” like, has nothing to do with a loss of knowledge but a separation-induced lack of a shared history. Then the counterpart may be blamed for this, for a kind of light-hearted forgetfulness.<sup>119</sup>

Oblivion at the micro-level of socially constituted subjects and social relations cannot be experienced, as it comes along with continuous processes of adjusting schemes and scripts to social contexts – we may also speak of frames or contexts of meaning. Thus, it looks like the “natural” and not immediately experienceable deficiency of what individuals imagine as memory and what may be described by the concept of the individual stock of knowledge. Oblivion can be experienced only as the consequence of selection processes when the expectation of the availability of knowledge content is articulated. This may be based, on the one hand, on attention having been attracted otherwise and the scheme not showing any current entry-searching; I am moving through the spatial space, trying to remember where I had the key the last time. On the other hand, forgetfulness is experienced with others and through others, if the history of a relationship is assumed there where there is no common past and where everybody used to live with the other in “the heart” but without “seeing” him/her.

That and how social groups forget has frequently been discussed also from a social-scientific point of view. One established motif of social oblivion among groups is the fluctuation of their members as bearers of collective consciousness.<sup>120</sup> If one does not only look at the individual but also his/her social environment, it is obvious to connect oblivion among the group to the generations of its members. This concludes most of all if the concept of generations is connected to age cohorts, that is, peers, but e. g. also to cohorts of participants who define themselves by joining and leaving the group or their years of membership. Even if a group can establish its own documented or

119 Such synchronisation problems of the memory may also be described by the hysteresis effect of habitus discovered by Bourdieu (see Bourdieu, 1990; Schmitt, 2009; Wehling, 2011b).

120 Organisational research understands the memories of members to be a relevant sub-aspect of organisational memory (see Walsh & Ungson, 1991).

documents-based frame for its collective consciousness – such as by way of statutes, a “group philosophy”, or general principles – still it depends on the individuals it brings together, as representatives and “executive bodies” of these principles.<sup>121</sup> Vice versa, it must be assumed that the classifications connected to the group’s collective consciousness may change due to individual members leaving it. The group as a whole forgets – and this must be distinguished from the forgetfulness of individual members – due to the discontinuation of group-specific communication and practices which the participating individuals realise. This forgetfulness of the group is limited by the fact that particularly meritorious members may, even after having left, be kept in the group’s collective mind by way of remembering them and by being adored as symbols of the collective consciousness, which may happen through objectification and thus connected remembrance practices such as memorials, relics or myths. This may also indicate groups being aware of their “natural” forgetfulness, considering this a problem and taking measures against it. How long group members are remembered depends on each group’s everyday practical structures. For example, by reaching back to Evans-Pritchard’s studies on the Nuer tribe, Douglas demonstrates that the remembrance of the ancestors is maintained as long as it is relevant for giving reason to claims to dowries in the context of marriages – as Halbwachs has it, these are family frames.<sup>122</sup>

Organisations are groups whose goals and cohesion are constituted according to purposively rational or value-rational aspects.<sup>123</sup> Crucial for this orientation is a clearly defined goal and constant attempts to optimise the ways of achieving these goals. The exact goal is difficult to define due to the different interests brought together by the organisation.<sup>124</sup> One overarching goal shared by all organisations may doubtlessly be the organisation’s survival, which is

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121 Karl E. Weick speaks of retention cycles if members of an organisation “store” parts of their organisational experience, to then again recall and communicate them in the context of their tasks. However, he makes the reservation “that only modest amounts of this retained formalized information are injected into organizational thinking, and not much of it is available on a day-to-day basis to affect decisions” (Weick, 1969, p. 214). It is remarkable that after all Weick, who indeed goes at considerable length with his considerations on organisational memory, considers it to be only of modest value, as also he considers it an obstacle for the adjustment performance of an organization.

122 See Mary Douglas (1986) and, fundamentally, John A. Barnes (1947).

123 In connection to Weber’s rationality types it becomes obvious that organisational sociology cannot be taken up in management research – organisations must be understood both as organisations of work and in the sense of interest organisations (see Schimank, 2002).

124 Organisations are sometimes provided with statutes and documentations where goals are fixed – however these do not cover the functions and informal goals by way of which the roles of individual participants are connected to their commitment with the organization.

guaranteed by permanent adjustment to the environment.<sup>125</sup> Although the forgetfulness stated for the social micro-level and, generally, for social groups is also encountered in the context of organisations, under the perspective of adjustment, the forgetfulness of the organisation seems to be an ambivalent process. Accordingly, adjustment to a changing environment requires a high degree of flexibility and openness which is hampered by an all too strict orientation, in the form of established structures, at one's past. Against this background, a certain degree of oblivion seems to be a precondition for adjustment and organisational learning.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, precisely the rational organisation is characterised by highly artificial and differentiated selection mechanisms. Seen this way, control of the group memory is an advantage of the organisational structure compared to the disorganisation or alleged primordialism of unorganised groups. This does not refer to the contents of the archives of organisations, which develop from documenting processes in the form of files; after all, even documents are open to interpretation, and reading them as well as including the information found there into the organisation's communication may also result in oblivion.<sup>127</sup> More important is the practice of documenting with the help of files and, e. g. the establishing of a hierarchy of statuses and positions that connects selection tasks to certain positions.

Additionally, there are ways in which organisations succeed with safeguarding successful processes against their own forgetfulness. In this context, Luhmann points out to organisational programming: utility programmes fixate all those premises for decision-making which are needed for achieving organisational goals. On the other hand, conditional programmes are used if decisions about rare yet vital situations must not be forgotten. As a selection structure, utility programmes determine or coordinate the "everyday business"

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125 The interaction between the two future prospects of "goal achievement" and "continued existence" may, in particular in the case of organised interest groups, result in the continued existence of the organisation even if the goals defined by the statutes have been achieved. This is the case if the structures established in the course of goal achievement have been consolidated to such a degree as to allow for orienting at new goals. This way the original goal orientation becomes irrelevant and may be forgotten or left to the organisation's historiography.

126 Already at an early stage, James G. March (1972) pointed out that organisational memory may become the enemy of organisational learning.

127 On this see Niklas Luhmann (2000, p. 160) who points out to the fact that files do not only "organise" remembrance but also oblivion and that, when being read again as texts, they may as well motivate for conformity instead of deviation. Communicating decisions in writing creates its own time, a time for self-mobility, for dynamic stability; and empirically undeniable obstacles for innovation may be due to completely different reasons, such as the "organisational culture" which is not recorded by the files.



of an organisation. Conditional programmes appear as a memory second order, as they are kept ready for specific situations (Luhmann, 2000, pp. 275–276). The organisation “knows” about an avoidable loss of control when it refrains from continuing proven ways of proceeding. Then it runs the risk of failing to adequately adjust to a changing environment (Dimbath, 2009). Against this background, it seems to be “rational” to orient the selectivity according to the organisation’s experiential context, past or “history”.

Several research works are dealing with the “natural” or “automatic” forgetfulness of organisations. Their diagnoses are different from each other, each according to the theoretical background and empirical approach. For example, Walsh and Ungson state that when it comes to forgetfulness among groups due to the change of members, the members contribute considerably to organisational memory. This is more likely the longer somebody has been a member of the concerned organisation. The knowledge of organisational processes and corporate identity connected to the organisation’s culture depends essentially on staff members whose “everyday business” is precisely this. If a long-standing staff prevents certain kinds of fluctuation-induced forgetfulness, it hampers the acquisition of younger members of the organisation whose innovating potential will stay unexploited due to all too strictly insisting on established structures (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). According to Christopher Pollitt, those organisations, on the other hand, which believe in achieving a high degree of adjustment by placing much value on younger staff and a high degree of fluctuation run the risk of a loss of memory, as the members have neither the possibility to extend their task-specific experience nor of passing it on to others – each member starts from scratch.<sup>128</sup> Thus, the extent of organisational forgetfulness depends on the extent and fluctuation or the consistency of its membership structure. However, it would certainly be superficial to state that long-standing staff shows no forgetfulness at all.

As it must be assumed that referring to established social classifications in the sense of collectively binding schemes and scripts run more comprehensively and undisturbed, specific adjustment processes, such as product innovations with enterprises, are frequently connected to existing types or traditional knowledge. This may result in the innovative aspects of new processes not entirely included in the organisation’s experiential context. Thus, forgetfulness happens because new knowledge cannot be remembered, and it is diagnosed if the organisation finds that recently acquired knowledge has been lost again and that a successful process can neither be repeated nor transferred into

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<sup>128</sup> Pollitt (2009) reports this by referring to studies on temporary contracts with boards and ministries – a phenomenon which he calls a decline of the bureaucratic career.

the company's routine. Apart from this incapability of adopting innovations caused by memory-specific selection mechanisms, the well-known problem of knowledge becoming degenerated and simpler in the course of action routines must be called a kind of organisational oblivion. This problem, reconstructed as another kind of oblivion, is illustrated by Pablo Martin de Holan and Nelson Phillips by the example of a restaurant that has been granted its third Michelin star and has thus advanced to the worldwide elite of restaurants. Three years later, it is incapable of maintaining the high standards of its service of the past, as the knowledge of the thus required refinements has "fallen by the wayside" (de Holan & Phillips, 2004a). From the point of view of theories of organisational learning, this is a specific kind of unlearning.<sup>129</sup>

Forgetfulness among groups and organisations is due to "ordinary" structural change, which mostly evades the perception of the historically uninformed observer who is also under practical pressure to act. However, this forgetfulness may be made a subject of discussion if problems interrupt the course of everyday routines that are identified as being known due to certain traces or starting points. The rational organisation tries to avoid such situations by purposefully organising those selection mechanisms as constituting its social memory – such as programming. Only more recent studies on organisational learning have revealed the Janus-faced character of such a strategy. Sometimes, it results in radical restructuring measures concerning the organisational memory, which, as adocracy or post-bureaucratic organisation, focus on criticism or run the risk of overshooting the mark of better adjustment and forgetfulness main principle of their activity.<sup>130</sup>

Given the social macro-level, it must be stated that the as yet negotiated kinds of forgetfulness culminate at this level, which is the highest level of aggregation and abstraction, first. Thus, what has been worked out so far is valid also there, and much of what has been diagnosed in the context of relations at the micro-level, for group and organisations, is also true for institutions, societies and cultures. However, there are also aspects of forgetfulness that are located most of all at this level. More specifically, they become apparent from studies on the forgetfulness of institutions and the forgetfulness of cultures, particularly given historiography in the context of national states and societies.<sup>131</sup>

129 In this context it would make sense to discuss if unlearning must be equated with oblivion. On the problem of *unlearning* in the context of knowledge management see also Stephanie Porschen (2011).

130 On post-bureaucratic organisation see Pollitt (2009) – adocracy is counted among the situative approach of organisational research (for an overview see Kieser, 2001).

131 However, this is also true for group or organisational history. Against this there works the project of *oral history* which turns precisely against forgetfulness caused by the

What Mary Douglas describes as institutions controlling the perception of individuals within a particular space and at a certain time is what Ludwik Fleck and Karl Mannheim called the thought-style (*Denkstil*).<sup>132</sup> These are comprehensive typologies that are valid for large groups. The thought-style of a specific time implies a particular kind of forgetfulness insofar as its particular selection mechanisms systematically exclude several alternative points of view. This exclusion happens on the one hand at the moment of (public) perception, by way of ignoring, and on the other hand also because of the opportunity to change, by way of political influencing, existing classifications which are understood as collective schemes. It must thus be stated that everything looking alien against its background is less likely to be transferred into experience regarding the forgetful institution. Many indications of something new are either overlooked or not “kept in mind”. Forgetfulness is admitted – usually at the political level – if one must acknowledge to oneself that one has not recognised the signs of the times.

Forgetfulness and thus hampering learning due to being fixated on the past prevents new things from being adopted; however, forgetfulness appears also vice versa, as learning may also be prevented by not learning lessons from the past: as it is well known, who is not ready to learn from history will be forced to repeat it.<sup>133</sup> Through this warning, the significance of the science of history for politically defining the present may be particularly emphasized. Historian Lucian Hölscher, on the other hand, believes that contemporary historical awareness is characterised by oblivion to a high degree. Any historiography, he says, happens in the mode of declarative-reflective memory. Although it aims at researching how past events “actually” happened, all it can do is reach back to the memories of others or sources. From the fact alone that the historian believes – due to his interpretations being a construct – to know more about historical events than the total number of all sources tell, one can conclude that he/she must assume comprehensive social oblivion. Any kind of social

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unreflected reproduction of existing power relations in studies and in the course of working with sources. The debate on history, historiography and memory happens in view of the macro-level – this really traditional debate starts with the dispute between Halbwachs and Marc Bloch, to be found again in Jacques Le Goff or Pierre Nora (on this see J. Assmann, 2005; Gierl, 2005) as well as in Helmut König (2008).

132 See Mary Douglas (1986) who refers to the works by Polish physician and science theoretician Ludwik Fleck (2012) and to memory researcher Frederick C. Bartlett (1977). However, the concept of thought style, which she attributes to Fleck, is a couple of years older and might go back to Karl Mannheim who connects to Max Scheler.

133 This statement, which is certainly dubious from the historian's point of view, goes back to philosopher George Santayana (1905).

memory necessarily ignores many facts that are not or cannot be made a part of remembrance.<sup>134</sup>

To sum it up, social forgetfulness can, on the one hand, be concluded from different kinds of amnesia concerning individual consciousnesses but potentially creating collective effects, after all. If with Halbwachs or Goffman, the social order is described as a system of different reference frames, and if one follows Schütz's relevance theory, oblivion at the level of the individual comes along with the loss of orientation-providing material or immaterial knowledge elements, meanings or important facts. To the degree to which individuals can no longer identify certain frames, they will – quite automatically – forget many aspects of the thus connected contexts of meaning.

Whereas at the macro-level this kind of forgetfulness can also be identified with regard to groups, we can identify further variants of an oblivion-induced loss of knowledge with collectives. The collective memory of the group structures both its goal and its “identity”. During centripetal periods – such as rationalisation programmes in the case of organisations – both may be shaped more clearly and be provided with higher relevance; during centrifugal periods, it may rather be weakened. On the one hand, such a weakening may be connected to individual actors leaving together with their significance for the group's cohesion; on the other hand, it can be connected to a decline of potential in the context of maintaining social order (“sloppiness”). At the macro-level of socialised large groups and institutions, there happens a kind of oblivion that is self-induced due to the relieving effect of habituated rules. Institutions rule out alternative solutions that the individual or the group might choose but are actually “unimaginable” because of the given order.

As the second kind, by wanting to forget, a kind of oblivion is described, which may also be called intending what cannot be intended.<sup>135</sup> This is about the intention to forget a burdening experience volitionally. In contrast to “quasi-natural” forgetfulness, the intention to forget develops from a combination of the two kinds of oblivion (I) and oblivion (II), as it is about creating favourable conditions for starting a “natural” oblivion process. Such attempts

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134 “This does not refer to the trivial fact that any recalling of a fact requires the latter to have been forgotten and, vice versa, any oblivion to previously-having-kept-it-in-mind; but rather to the fact that by remembering obviously there appears a shift of the remembered fact, a suppression of the original event in favour of an event which has been modified afterwards. This shift, which also includes oblivion, happens involuntarily and inevitably.” (Hölscher, 2009, p. 106)

135 Paradox figures in the sense of intending something which cannot be intended are collected by Jon Elster (1983) in his study on the *Sour Grapes. Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*.

at manipulating the consciousness can be identified both at the personal and at different social levels. Just the same, at the level of individual consciousness, particularly in the context of dealing with traumatising experiences which – as they generate persistent memories – can no longer be suppressed<sup>136</sup> and forgotten, such attempts appear to be as necessary as they are hopeless. What in view of the individual consciousness appears as being complicated if not impossible is more likely in the context of the social relations: for example, one may (commonly) decide to forget about an injustice by way of forgiving and reconciliation. Thus, the intention to forget must be analysed from two points of view: on the one hand as organised self-delusion or manipulation, and on the other hand as manipulative social engineering. In any case, it is about the attempt to reduce dissonance by not allowing memory-specific, problematic schemes, classifications or associations to interfere with the process of constructing and defining current situations. This requires steering and control, consisting e. g. of reorganising social reference frames and removing memory-triggering objects or interrupting connections.

Given the one-sided or mutual desire to forget irritations for a relation, the phenomenon of wanting to forget may be analysed at the social macro-level (a). In this context, at the meso-level (b) of social groups and organisations, collectively binding taboos and negotiating oblivion agreements move into focus. Also, at the macro-level, it is possible to diagnose an intention to forget in the context of certain ways of collective silencing.

The individual's desire to forget has produced the result that an *ars oblivionalis* was already announced in antiquity, apart from the *ars memoriae*. Such an art of oblivion may at first refer to dealing with one's own experiences. What regarding oblivion (II) and the already mentioned considerations by Umberto Eco (1988) is considered to be at least difficult, although sometimes it is attempted with the help of measures in the mode of oblivion (I), appears as a civilising step in case of social interaction or relation. This step serves to maintain the stability of the self, the belief in the certainties connected to the community, and the further existence of a relation that has become problematic. Such an *ars oblivionalis* is not only suitable for making or keeping pace within the social group, but it also works against not-being-able-to-forget caused by traumatising. By way of a self-objectification that uses the knowledge of

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136 Here the term "suppressing" seems to be appropriate – however at first without its psychological meaning. Experiential knowledge connected to violations is not overwritten or deleted and is preserved as a warning reflex, without any possibility of replacing it by alternative or new patterns for defining a situation in the course of further everyday experience.

social oblivion, such a desire to forget by the individual can be made plausible. A number of strategies by which subjects attempt to outwit themselves and their urge to remember result from this.

Only at first sight intended oblivion from the point of view of the individual consciousness appears as a purely psychological issue. The desire to forget appears for the first time when an experience that is perceived as hurting the soul either proves to be persistent, by again and again and on allegedly inadequate occasions become an element of a situation<sup>137</sup> and usually also of the definition of this situation. On the other hand, a desire to forget can be identified if an experience – as a weaker variant of trauma – is supposed to sooner fall into oblivion (II), as it is perceived as mortifying. Furthermore, the desire to forget alone may result in the thus connected associations being increased and thus, after all, also to this “memory” becoming persistent. This holds most of all for memory effects that are not dealt with in the declarative-reflective way, which in trauma research are understood as incorporated protection reflexes. According to psychoanalytical theory, as a result of dissociation, suppression or inhibition, they cannot be reflected on and thus sometimes appear in the form of neuroses (see Schacter, 2001). It is not easy to imagine that a burdening experience can be thought without a social-biographical frame. Thus, traumatisations have to do with social relations, in the context of which the persistence of experiences, which have solidified to experience, can first of all be explained by the strong involvement of the incorporated-practical memory dimension.<sup>138</sup> The reference to the body memory is an indication that many therapy attempts start from the body. Thus, the strategy of drowning grief in alcohol or different kinds of escapism, such as the consumption of media or drugs, may be understood to be a body technique, just like behavioural therapy, in the course of which situative-problematic routines of behaviour are supposed to be “overwritten” by alternative routines of behaviour. Also, more recent methods, such as pharmacological products or the technique of retrieval-induced forgetting or of eye-movement-desensitization-and-reprocessing (EMDR), aim to change the body in the sense of fighting

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137 Thus seen, the intention to forget – like in the story about Kant and Lampe – is already a memory-specific selection mechanism which, by way of assessing if something has been forgotten, constantly updates, by way of remembrance, the object which is supposed to fall into oblivion.

138 Accordingly, neuro-scientific oblivion research attempts to make trauma-related imprints less emotionally burdening (see Henry et al., 2007).

symptoms.<sup>139</sup> Other strategies are e. g. changing the environment in the sense of a radical change of frames, which is connected to the hope of no longer seeing anything that might remind of the past.<sup>140</sup>

However, not only the trigger of the trauma is social; also, the experience of being burdened may – at least partly – be traced back to a discrepancy between subjective experience and social horizons of expectation.<sup>141</sup> Trauma is a kind of suffering that is due to an irresolvable dissonance of two realities, as Schütz describes it in the case of the homecomer. This is a reciprocal oblivion assumption coming along with a fundamental loss of recognition which – given the fact that there is no opportunity for discussing it in a declarative way – is “acted out” exclusively or at least first of all in a bodily way. Then, the consequence of maladjustment to the home society caused by the experience of completely different relevance in a foreign environment may first be the desire to forget again about these foreign relevancies. As this is not possible, and as the effects of the new schemes on each current definition of a situation at home cannot be prevented, there develops a therapy case in the sense of Berger and Luckmann. They understand therapy to be society safeguarding itself against institutionalised definitions of reality by outsiders.<sup>142</sup> In other words: from the point of view of society, this kind of therapy – which is voluntary and must be wanted by the individual due to his/her own insight – serves for reintegrating outsiders and for providing the concerned environment with a suitable

139 On this see the short overview in Christoph Lau, Peter Wehling and Oliver Dimbath (2011) as well as the elaborations on *intentional forgetting* in Golding and MacLeod (1998).

140 Also, here, as one out of many examples, we may refer to the failed attempt by Max Frisch's fictional character Ludwig Anatol Stiller. The new beginning in America represents such an oblivion strategy.

141 Thus seen, taking the perspective of the victim in stigmatisation processes is always connected to persistent remembrance; thus, *labelling* or stigmatization also appear as a memory-specific selection process.

142 “Such a conceptual machinery permits its therapeutic application by the appropriate specialists, and may also be internalized by the individual afflicted with the deviant condition. Internalization in itself will have therapeutic efficacy. In our example, the conceptual machinery may be so designed as to arouse guilt in the individual (say, a ‘heterosexual panic’), a not too difficult feat if his primary socialization has been even minimally successful. Under the pressure of guilt, the individual will come to accept subjectively the conceptualization of his condition with which the therapeutic practitioners confront him; he develops ‘insight’, and the diagnosis becomes subjectively real to him.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 131)

interpretation of deviating behaviour. Thus, one has oneself been brought “back in line”.<sup>143</sup>

Apart from these oblivion strategies of the individual, a dyadic intention to forget can also be identified. The latter becomes evident by phrases such as “letting somebody get away with something” or “not being unforgiving”. Thus, tolerance and calmness in close relationships serve to maintain the intent to be forgiving – such as ignoring and forgetting – despite frequently being irritated again. This is possible if one decides not to place too much weight on disappointed expectations and prioritise the continuation of harmonic togetherness over a threatening conflict. This is an everyday practice of more or less intended oblivion, by quite purposefully – in the mode of oblivion (I) – preventing disappointing experiences from becoming solidified, in order of not hampering oblivion (II), if possible. One established way of clearing up irritations and avoiding irritation of a relationship to be continued by a sequence of mutual insults and revenge is discussing the problem. In severe cases, this may be connected to the goal of achieving reconciliation and forgiveness.<sup>144</sup> In everyday interactions, this may be accompanied by trivialising or at least minor conflict-laden semantics if it is about clarifying “misunderstandings”.

The phenomenon of wanting to forget among groups is dealt with by ethnologic research on tabooing. One well-known figure is maintaining “inner” peace by not mentioning past conflicts and their consequences. In this context, groups do not only show a tendency of being silent about bad experiences but also of preventing any communication about them not to endanger social cohesion. This may go as far as denying the victims any kind of recognition because any punishment would put the community’s basic principles of coherence as well as its security fiction into question. However, like at the micro-level, here two perspectives should be distinguished: firstly, the group’s self-reflective orientation at “inherent” oblivion, called a (self-)technique

143 Not only since the occurrence of globalisation processes the globetrotter is contrasted to the individualised type of the placeless person – such as the urban nomad who oscillates between cultural relevance systems, who is capable of communicating everywhere but has no home. In late-modern society this can be tolerated in the context of cosmopolitan interpretation patterns or simply because he/she cannot be considered a guest or a foreigner. If, however, the placeless person gets confused or revolts because due to his/her experience he/she is able to compare, he/she may soon be declared a therapy case. In case of doubt, he/she is expected to forget the other, with which he/she is also familiar, and to credibly signalise belonging and loyalty.

144 Paul Ricœur discusses the difficult relation between forgiveness and oblivion and comes to the conclusion that “forgiveness is a kind of active oblivion” (Ricœur, 2004a, pp. 144–145) which must be distinguished from passive oblivion. Forgiveness requires common remembrance, to this way create the preconditions for common oblivion.



above, may be emphasized. Secondly, however, also the relations groups have to their environment must be considered analogously to discussions at the micro-level. The communication between groups may happen both by intended oblivion and expecting others to forget.

The connection between tabooing and oblivion has already been addressed elsewhere. In the case of far-reaching inner troubles, a group may decide to impose a taboo on past conflicts. Indeed this is not the only reason for imposing taboos, which may also derive from power-political intentions. Furthermore, taboos on claims to revenge as known from history and being connected to oblivion – or amnesties – are first of all documented at the social (macro-) level. However, the ban on mentioning past events might endanger the group's cohesion and is also known from families or village communities, such as when a "dark secret" is kept.

It seems to be that the self-location of oblivion with organisations is less problematic. Those scenarios and theories as developed in the context of unlearning as well as theories of organisational learning conceptualise oblivion as a vital strategy of organisational adjustment and explicitly include it into their management doctrines. For example, international cooperations, takeovers, or just the reorganisation of product lines sometimes result in the opinion that the "culture" of an enterprise must be fundamentally changed. Pablo Martin de Holan and Nelson Phillips describe this by the example of the cooperation of a Western hotel chain and Cuban enterprises, in which oblivion processes were purposefully started in the interest of synchronising routine processes (de Holan & Phillips, 2004b). Strategies of oblivion may be implemented by first uncovering the concerning routines and programmes, to then explicitly taboo and exclude them. In practice, this may be achieved first of all by introducing new programmes and ways of communicating and processing. However, such a reorganisation may also require an exchange of staff.

For the interaction between groups, it is fundamental to preserve certain aspects of a shared past, however others not. Events connected to group relations that are not helpful for each individual group or the cooperation of several groups are practically not remembered. In this context, it must be remarked that even hostility between groups may definitely be functional for each group's inner cohesion and may thus be maintained.<sup>145</sup> In view of groups

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145 On this see the classical distinction between *ingroup* and *outgroup*, the campsite experiments by Muzafer Sherif (1969) or more recent approaches of *othering* or *changing* (see Reuter, 2002). In this context, for example the remembrance policy of school curricula is a crucial contribution to group-specific integration. Education creates a cultural reference frame of its own kind by way of which integration may happen across groups or milieus. By providing canonized knowledge as an aspect of collective identity it is possible to

in general, also this is very close to the problems at the macro-level of the social, which are going to be negotiated further below. There, mutually related oblivion among groups may happen, e. g. peace-making processes and mediation, if forgiveness is granted and accepted.

In inter-organisational communication, oblivion processes are regulated by law, the media or the market.<sup>146</sup> Jurisdiction allows organisations to formalise their conflicts and to distinguish between conflict theatres and cooperation relationships. This way, the organisational memory is provided with selection opportunities different from those of the social group. However, there are cases in which a conflict happens at the level of “organisational cultures”, and strategic oblivion is difficult to implement.<sup>147</sup>

One variant of intentional-volitional oblivion or of preparing and enabling for forgetfulness at the social level is the practice of silencing. At first, silencing follows principles that are similar to group-related oblivion demands. Additionally, however, the expectation that certain events are not mentioned is no longer exclusively based on group-related coherence mechanisms – such as according to the understanding of mechanical solidarity in Durkheim. Instead, it is about an initially unclear connection between declarative-reflective and incorporated-practical memory, which must be considered volitional because there is a tacit agreement not to mention a certain topic. However, this is different from forgetfulness due to the apparent functionality of silencing, which – once revealed – may easily be attributed with meaning.<sup>148</sup> In the following, we will distinguish two kinds of silencing: silencing towards the inside and silencing towards the outside.

A special kind of institutionalised tabooing as hope for oblivion is being collectively silent about one’s own shame.<sup>149</sup> This becomes an institutional topic

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cover up the sometimes fundamental sub-cultural differences between social groups or milieus so that they may be forgotten (see Georgi, 2006).

146 However, these are macro-phenomena – money as a system medium does not remind to anything except to itself. Yet still, the memories of the economic system find expression by the language of money (Baecker, 1987, pp. 528–529).

147 In this case we must think of take-overs of enterprises and unequal mergers in the course of the process of economic concentration, when the collective identity of a group is damaged in the course of the problematic synchronisation of organisational cultures and, as a consequence, there are failures.

148 The many examples of amnesty-related oblivion in antiquity rather appear as meso- instead of macro-phenomena, as it is about peace both among and between groups – it may as well be based on a volitional desire to forget, resulting from a home- or foreign-political decision-making process.

149 Here, Aleida Assmann distinguishes between the memories of the victims and the memories of the vanquished. “Traumatic experiences of suffering and shame find it difficult to

if silencing is also legally normatively backed, legitimated and thus sanctionable. Examples of this variant of the group-related intention to forget are found in the history of coping with dictatorships and state terror in South-American societies. There one gets the impression that the whole continent suffers from an “illness of oblivion which has simply lifted authoritarianism by way of amnesia” (Traine, 2009, pp. 96–97). Sometimes this happens by hardly listening when charges are filed, and the atrocities of the past regime are lamented. This is partly due to the practice of protecting former office bearers from legal persecution by granting them immunity or amnesty; sometimes however, there are also informal inhibitions when deciding about charges in a legally correct way.<sup>150</sup> Such inhibitions must be attributed to a macro-structural-volitional kind of oblivion if there is a tacit agreement about too much “probing” being undesirable. Apart from legally fixed deadlines for amnesty, we must assume an implicit expectation of a limitation of actions regarding past injustice. This is different according to culture and has as yet hardly been empirically researched. After this has expired, guilt assignments are no longer accepted, and sometimes accusers are even negatively sanctioned. One starting point for this is the sequence of generations when the following generation replaces an “ageing” generation or entelechy of generations. Then the relevancies of the old generation are derided or discredited as being old-fashioned, outdated or outmoded.<sup>151</sup>

Being silent about a past that is interpreted as being problematic may be based on two motivations. On the one hand, giving up on discussing the topic results from the abolished or collapsed old order and the thus resulting necessity of fundamental reorientation. This concerns new political-moral norms and values as well as focussing on the reconstruction of whatever kind. On the other hand, there may appear several interest groups within one society, in the

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be included in the memory because they cannot be integrated into a positive individual or collective self-image” (A. Assmann, 2002, p. 187).

150 The problem of silencing practiced both by perpetrators and victims in Spain is dealt with by Beatrice Schlee (2009).

151 Connecting to Mannheim’s (1952) concept of generations, here we must distinguish between a concept of generation in the sense of age cohort and the (large) group-related shape of a generation. This distinction is necessary for more detailed analyses, as the definition of new relevancies is not made by the entire age cohort but by a sub-group which Mannheim defines as a generational unit which, against the background of its own position within the generation, succeeds with unfolding definatory power. First of all, one delimits from the predecessor generation – only secondarily it is about coping with competing peers.

context of which the more powerful ones enforce their own ideas and intentions of transparency or investigation.<sup>152</sup>

Volitional oblivion with large social formations such as nations, cultures, peoples or tribes looks back to a long history. It is reflected by the symbolic acts of peace-making. A mutual arrangement expressing the desire to forget about a past conflict for the sake of a future relationship which is supposed to be different both at the level of identity and the formal-legitimate level may be illustrated by the phrase “to bury the hatchet”.<sup>153</sup>

A very comprehensive debate on the problem of institutional oblivion concerning the mutual relations of large groups – and this can only be hinted at here – happens in the context of Holocaust remembrance.<sup>154</sup> Whereas dealing with the crimes of National Socialist Germany has resulted in inherent accounting in the context of selective acts of remembrance, at the international level, there has established a specific, institutionalised way of memory-specific selection in the context of processes of remembering, recompensing and accounting. On the one hand, these processes have been accompanied by accentuations of remembrance to prevent any kind of oblivion which might be expected for the political and social practice, which sometimes finds expression by saying “forgiving – well okay, forgetting – never”.<sup>155</sup> It is thus about inhibiting forgetfulness. On the other hand, the institutional way of accounting for the past always comes along with specific aspects of oblivion in the

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152 As a typical example of the former case, sometimes the German post-war society is given, although the protest of the 1968ers aimed precisely at the unbroken activities of old NS elites. It is at least institutions-theoretically imaginable that a fundamental change of fundamental social structures is at first a subject of silencing. As a matter of fact, in the case of Germany we may suppose a mixed form of paralysis of the vanquished, *tabula rasa* and the notoriously forgetful memories of the perpetrators (see Aleida Assmann, 2002; Giesen, 2004). Concerning the latter case, the problems of coping with the Chilean dictatorship are given as an example (see Wehr, 2009).

153 Overcoming the “hereditary enmity” between Germany and France may be given as an example of a mutual adjustment of remembrance, in the course of which hostile knowledge stocks and traditions are left to volitional oblivion, as they are considered to be no longer fashionable.

154 In view of remembrance policy in the context of European unification, Claus Leggewie even speaks of “Europe’s negative founding myth” (Leggewie, 2011, pp. 15–16).

155 *Forgiveness* by Vladimir Jankélévitch may be read in this sense – it starts with these words: “It is legitimate to have a grudge against criminal for twenty years, but after the twenty-first year, one becomes rancorous! With full rights and from one day to the next, the unforgivable is thus forgotten. What had been on for unforgivable until May 1965 has abruptly ceased to be in June 1965. It is indeed necessary to set a date, is it not? And so official forgetting begins tonight at midnight.” (Jankélévitch, 2005, p. 35)

context of which a way of remembrance is ignored state actors have agreed to not want.

Also, with changes in the relations between nations, we must diagnose aspects of volitional oblivion. A comprehensive change of how to deal with cross-national memories is described, e. g., by theoreticians of second modernity. For example, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider demonstrate his reception in different national states in their discourse-analytical reconstruction of the debate on Daniel Goldhagen's book *The Holocaust and memory in the global age* (Levy & Sznaider, 2006). According to their estimation, the success of this study, which is disputed among historical scientists, is the result of an authenticity deficit of (US American) Holocaust remembrance. It is thus an effect of institutional oblivion at the global level, as the experiences of victims had been ignored by historical accounting, and the victims could now make themselves heard.<sup>156</sup>

However, even beyond accounting for a bad past, under conditions of increasing globalisation, a degree of institutional adjustment must be assumed, which, in the individual case, may even happen in the form of a fundamental break. This begins with the destruction of indigenous cultures in the course of colonisation and Westernisation and goes as far as to allegedly "soft" adjustment processes such as McDonaldisation, in the course of which cultural particularities may be suppressed and forgotten over time.<sup>157</sup>

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156 For this, the tension between sources-based historiography and statements by contemporary witnesses is crucial. The memories of contemporary witnesses are indeed very much authentic, however frequently such memories are mistaken – on this see Aleida Assmann (2007) as well as the critical debate in Alexander von Plato (1999). In the context of volitional oblivion at the level of collectives or collective identities this may result in considerable conflicts about interpretation.

157 The statements by German politicians giving expression to their readiness for different steps towards European unification may be understood as argumentative routine in the service of anti-traditionalism and anti-particularism and as resulting from the history of Germany's coping with its own past. That "the" Germans seem to adhere so little to their national symbols, their Deutschmark, their grammar schools, their universities, is perhaps due to the "zero hour" experience. Thus seen, the German post-war society is ahead of many of its neighbouring societies, as far as the intention to forget traditional and habituated structures is concerned. That still in many fields nothing happens except statements becomes obvious everywhere where institutions do not bow to a sometimes short-sighted desire for change. For, whereas on the one hand institutions function as oblivion generators – in the sense of ruling out any alternative action – by their stubbornness they frequently prove to be much more complex than expected by reformers. The phrase "never change a winning team" indicates, among others, that change management runs the risk of not taking all steering-relevant aspects into consideration, that is of forgetting some of them.

The intention to forget something proves to be a civilisation-related aspect of the oblivion concept, as it demands the actors to give up on satisfaction and triumphalism – of whatever kind. In its pure form, as a civilisation-related precondition for oblivion, it marks a difference to a discipline-enforced desire to forget: the civilisation-related kind is connected to the figuration of social (interest-)groups. It is based on the insight that, by reconciling past conflicts through mutual benevolence, a new beginning and a start or continuation of the social relationships are possible. In the case of the discipline-enforced kind, the emphasis is more on the power-related and sometimes implicit expectations of society the subject is supposed to meet. Here, the aspect of constraint by others is more emphasized, whereas in the former case, self-constraint in view of being empowered to decide freely is weakened.<sup>158</sup>

In the context of social groups and political decision-making, this motif appears as promising progress of civilisation if the decision for taboos and purposeful silencing has been made in a participative way. To prevent claims to justice from being limited, this must have been preceded by commemorative constructions of memory – such as in the sense of an at least symbolical yet authentic recognition of the bad past and thus connected reconciliation.

The third dimension of social oblivion is oblivion initiated by third parties, i. e. making forget. In this combination of oblivion (I) and oblivion (II), actors are assumed who make others forget something. For this purpose, they must first assume a “natural” kind of forgetfulness in the sense of oblivion (II) based on a topic that is not discussed and perceived and will lose its relevance. Like in the case of self-delusion in the context of wanting to forget, this may be supported by removing the concerned subject or preventing and prohibiting any search for traces. This is not only about erasing traces indicating a deed that has not been punished. Rather, the focus is on actions aiming at an object of knowledge available for individuals who are supposed to be enabled or obliged to oblivion. It is thus about the social organisation of selectivity in the sense of staging and deciding about relevance. In this context, launched oblivion projects may aim to cope with interactions that are expected to be problematic or aim at deleting a past event from the framework system that allows for collective remembrance. Also, the following elaborations are structured according to making forget at the social micro-level of subjects and interpersonal relations

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158 Norbert Elias (1981) and Michel Foucault (1977) by their concepts of civilising and of disciplining point out to the figure of the transition from self-constraint to constraint by others. The project of a comparative debate on this theoretical motif has hardly been explicitly started for the time being.

(a), to the meso-level of social groups and organisations (b) as well as to the question about the social macro-level which comprises oblivion policies (c).

The creation of conditions which are supposed to support oblivion (II) with others is at first in line with social action in the sense of Max Weber: it is about anticipating how probable memory is with others and, by way of one's actions, about tolerating or neglecting, about taking care that this probability will decline.<sup>159</sup> The manipulation of memory may at first be strived for and sometimes indeed be achieved at the neuro-physiological or psychological level by medical-therapeutic intervention. This may be imagined to be done with the help of mind-altering medication or brain manipulation. However, what in the context of the individual consciousness looks like dystopic science fiction, is not uncommon in the practice of social action and thus in the field of social memory, if it is about methods and strategies of "shaping" or manipulating both individual and collective memory.<sup>160</sup>

Erving Goffman's frame theory allows for shedding light on such aspirations. As well-known, the change of primary frames happens by way of modulation and deception. Deception consists of an actor's attention being purposefully directed at a particular frame, whereas the other (deceiving) actor refers to his/her action to a different frame. To this, there belong all kinds of purposeful deletion, destruction, hiding or obscuring against the background of not revealing the concerned measures – Goffman calls this collusion.<sup>161</sup> Deception, aiming at making others forget, produces the effect that the view of an object which is considered to be "objectively" emergent is blocked. This way, any association of the thus connected horizons of meaning becomes improbable. Then the deceiving actor hides the object in question; for the deceived person, on the other hand, it is non-existent. Even if for him/her the object is interpretation- and thus action-relevant because he/she is familiar with the appropriate possibilities to connect, he/she will not be able to address them because the frame he/she is provided with does not offer any indications.

159 See the sociological basic concepts in Max Weber (1979).

160 An impressive example is the collective deletion of memory as presented in the film *Dark City* by Alex Proyas of 1998.

161 In case of a collusion, for Goffman (2017, p. 339) there result consequences at two levels: on the one hand, for an excludded person reality is kept unstable. This changes as soon as the manipulation of the situation is revealed. On the other hand, the relation of the colluded person to the colluding actor is put into question if the former discovers the deceit. Yet, collusion guarantees the maintaining of the social order. Making forget may be understood as a variant of collusion which, however, would have to be pursued further in view of this terminology.

To continue interpersonal relations, it may well be functional if one or both interaction partners dedicate part of their mutual actions to the denial of indications of the relationship being disturbed – such as mutual trust – or appropriately preparing for encounters. It is an as yet mostly unanswered empirical question in which cultural contexts and interaction situations traces of an irritating past are typically eliminated. This becomes relevant for an oblivion theory as soon as these are indications of a past that will inevitably burden the continuation of a relationship if being discussed.<sup>162</sup>

When it comes to making forget in social groups, a steering impulse or impetus is crucial, guided by certain interests. At first, this is about the purposeful maintaining of group cohesion, which is represented by the holy and is taken care of by priests in traditional communities. Clerics have the task of supervising and safeguarding, purposefully shaping collective oblivion processes, the cohesion of the community.

In secularised social structures, at the meso-aggregation-level, this is the task of leading elites which may be attributed to micro-politics, leadership or management. This does not only hold for populism, among whose repertoire there belongs purposeful distraction from topical fields or debates which are not in line with its interests when the populists' interests are supposed to be successfully presented. Instead, the focus is on any memory or remembrance policy allowing for or intending comprehensive, collective oblivion. Whereas Halbwachs seems rather understand the latter, which must be considered the construed nature of collective memory, as being evolutionary, Aleida Assmann understands it according to Nietzsche's statement according to which it is a "memory of will' and of calculated selection". Thus, in contrast to individual memory, not compatibility but mostly a "polemic counter-construction to other existing collective memories" is in the fore (A. Assmann, 2002, p. 186). This figure is similar to the idea of construing identity by creating a difference, in the context of which commonalities and similarities are ignored. For Assmann, the manipulability of memory is one reason, among others, why collective memory should be distinguished from cultural memory: due to the artefacts stored by cultural memory, she says, it is less open to the grasp of the powerful who decide what is supposed to be remembered and what is supposed to be forgotten. However, it may be that she overlooks that any cultural artefact is itself a product of selection by the powerful, that only against the

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162 Any indications of past love, as well as some traces of the previous life are carefully erased if a new love is pending – Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a thus-related, nice fiction when, instead of immoral young Dorian, his portrait, hidden in the attic, becomes older (see A. Assmann 2006).



background of predominant discourses can it be provided with meaning and does not have any meaning *a priori*.

Also, concerning organisational micro-politics, oblivion management is common practice, for example, enforcing particular or strategic interests and orientations. For example, any presentation – such as a business report or statement of financial position – consists of selected information. In the case of over-complex contexts, only selected facts of the organisation's past activities are accentuated and exposed – others are ignored and “brushed under the carpet”. Also there, dealing strategically with oblivion does not only serve for hiding violations of norms but most of all – as finding expression by Goffman's collusion concept (Goffman, 2017, p. 339) – for maintaining the social order as well as the power relations which are currently realised by it.

Furthermore, the realm of organisational learning may be associated with authoritarian oblivion if certain information is no longer available. In the field of organisational narrations, such a kind of oblivion may consist of the disappearance of once established stimuli for memories of old times – such as rights connected to the memory of founding days and claims by the members of the organisation.<sup>163</sup> In particular, the transfer of personnel may be based on purposefully making forget as a tool of organisational steering. Thus, it is not exclusively about entrusting staff members who do not meet the expectations with different tasks but also about making their assumed wrong decisions fall into oblivion so that the concerned operating unit is ready for a fresh start. Sometimes oblivion is even given as the reason when, after a leading position has become vacant, this position is supposed to not be occupied for some time – although actually, this is due to the management's attempts to save money.<sup>164</sup>

At the level of state or regime, institutionalised making forget may be due to the desire to safeguard the nation's future existence and the power structures or the “system”. Ernest Renan's statement that oblivion is almost constitutive for forming a nation may be completed here by a practical aspect of rule (Renan, 2018): oblivion policies are, on the one hand, institutional settings for not discussing specific interests and claims resulting from past events. The function of political steering to coordinate and carry out institutional change always results in forgetting obsolete structural elements, starting or at least

163 Richard Sennett's (1998) descriptions of company restructuring imply comprehensive oblivion processes happening not only in the sense of organisational forgetfulness but are also initiated by the management.

164 The problems for organisational memory connected to such a personnel policy have been pointed out to not only by Christopher Pollitt (2009) but also by Sylwia Ciuk and Monika Kostera (2010).

tolerating structural oblivion (II). On the other hand, they appear as the flip-side of remembrance policies, when memorial days for specific events are not introduced, or historical persons that might be commemorated by naming streets after them are not considered. That no memory is possible without oblivion becomes obvious most of all in this context. Any political decision on memory historicises and this way emphasize certain features in developing collective identity. However, it would be naïve to assume that this is just an addition to the stock of memories. Rather, in the slipstream of remembrance, there happens a much more comprehensive forgetting of everything that would also have been remembered in the given context. Focussing – also of resources – on a remembered event is the same as steering and distracts from alternative remembrance options. From the point of view of political decision-making, it may be reasonable to launch little disputed remembrance where problematic memories might irritate the existing order.<sup>165</sup> Here, the oblivion aspect may be understood in the sense of social overwriting or of screen memory.

Politically launched remembrance is persistent – at least in stable systems. Once established, it is difficult to rededicate or remove a memorial day, a memorial site, a street name, a museum or an archive, but also a law, without good reason, as the thus connected information as well as the ritual or at least routine way of dealing with it has become an element of everyday practice. Thus, in the course of politically motivated remembrance, there also always happens structural amnesia. Then the decision maker's skilfulness decides how far it is possible to forget peacefully or if, as a consequence of his/her actions, ghosts are unleashed.

As it has been demonstrated, the memory-constitutive and always a manipulative variant of making forget can first of all be stated for the context of the social. Crucial in this context – if for once we disregard the possibilities of purposeful medical-therapeutic interventions into memory, which are still at their beginnings – there is the attempt to shape the selectivity of social memories in such a way as to certain memories no longer being accessible. This does not only happen by destroying memory-laden structures or artefacts but also by way of manipulating their meanings.

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<sup>165</sup> In Spain, the remembrance practice changes with the respectively ruling party or regime – one time the victims of the Civil War, another time the victims of the dictatorship are commemorated, sometimes in the course of exhumations covered by the mass media. The way of commemorating and who is commemorated, however, is always accompanied by political considerations. Accordingly, Walter L. Bernecker (2008) states that shortly before the parliamentary elections of 1986 the government abstained from comprehensively commemorating the Civil War, to not alienate right-wing voters.

Up to here, the above-developed aspects of social oblivion have been dealing first of all with the perspective of social entities. The forgetting of objects as well as the object nature of what is forgotten has hardly been addressed. According to what has been said so far, it must be stated that two sub-processes of the process of oblivion may be distinguished. Oblivion (I), as preparation for an actual loss of knowledge, is subject to social action. The meaningful approach connected to this kind of oblivion happens most of all in the realm of declarative-reflective knowledge and is connected to experience as well as to the shaping of individual and collective memory. For the time being, the actual loss of knowledge, as it has been described by the terms forgetfulness or oblivion (II), is difficult to describe if self-application is concerned, as it works in the realm of pre-reflective practice or the context of incorporated-practical stocks of knowledge. Thus, oblivion-oriented action always consists of connecting both kinds of oblivion. In the following, we will consider two problems that do not easily fit in with the unfolded classification. On the one hand, it is still about the issue of what has been forgotten and thus about the object perspective. On the other hand, we must still address the effectiveness of oblivion in the context of social structures of meaning.

### 3.3.3 *Oblivion*

One main problem of the sociological way of dealing with the phenomenon of oblivion is that the forgotten represents something that is no longer existent. Elsewhere it has already been pointed out that oblivion may be considered a special variant of not-knowing. Oblivion (II), defined as the process of overwriting and newly connecting schemes and types, cannot be reflected on from the point of view of an individual or collective consciousness and is at best an observer category. This is addressed if a way of behaviour is supposed to be understood, neither according to situation-appropriate expectations towards the past nor open to being interpreted as purposeful disregard. From the point of view of the forgetting consciousness, one's forgetfulness and the forgotten object can be guessed from traces that are interpreted as indications of currently inaccessible or inexistent knowledge.

The concept of trace has a number of oblivion-theoretically relevant meanings – beyond its use in the deconstructivist context. The trace is not just a disconcerting object which at first evades any meaningful classification; being an indication, it refers to different connections which, however, are at first only vague. Here it is worthwhile to look at the attributions of the trace concept as collected by Sybille Krämer: the trace, being the hollow pattern of an imprint, always indicates absence. Connected to it is an orientation achievement, as the reading of traces does not only consist of action but also

anticipates future actions. Also remarkable is the aspect of disturbance, as the trace is only perceived if an existing order is irritated. Finally, the trace draws attention to an epochal break by indicating something that is already gone at the moment of being discovered.<sup>166</sup> At the same time, however, the connection points are still there and may sometimes reactivate older associations.

The trace as an indication of oblivion and that what has been forgotten becomes sociologically relevant most of all if it becomes a subject of communication and makes both the ways of and reasons for oblivion and the forgotten object a topic. In this context, two questions must be taken into consideration. The first one is about why traces may appear which are not adequately recognized but interpreted differently – then it might be that one is “on the wrong track”. The second problem results from the first one if traces are noticed that demand remembering without any addressee of this remembering. Such traces refer to aspects of the collective consciousness and are perceived as enigmatic and terrifying as long as they have been dissolved by way of memory. It is obvious to call this figure of a structure-induced revision of oblivion a spectre. In the following, we will have a closer look at the two problems of forgetting about oblivion (1) and of the spectre as a phenomenon of object-centred forgottenness (2).

If one finds out that it has been forgotten that something has been forgotten, at first sight, this seems rather a pun instead of a real problem. In sociological literature, however, we find two hints at forgetting about oblivion. Firstly, Alois Hahn states that the habitus concept, according to Bourdieu, describes such a kind of oblivion. In the case of incorporated memory, not only the realisation of certain practices, that is, learning and rehearsing them, but even the existence of skill is forgotten – at a given time, they are simply practised “automatically” (Hahn, 2007). If, however, one distinguishes between declarative-reflective and incorporated-practical memory, the problem seems to dissolve. Accordingly, the “automatic” or routine selections of the incorporated-practical dimension are characterised by not being remembered in a declarative-reflective way. It is indeed part of the “essence” of routine that its origin and the detailed causality and functions of the way it runs are forgotten. These habits and practices stay declarative-reflectively communicable and thus meaningful because of the narrative form, e. g., of tradition, which provides a legitimating substitute

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166 Apart from the already mentioned aspects, Sybille Krämer (2007) discusses the materiality, the lack of motivation, the observer and action dependency, the faculty of being open to interpretation, the one-dimensionality or irreversibility, as well as the mediality of the trace. All these attributes seem to be fruitful for an oblivion-theoretical exploration. Here, however, we must be satisfied with pointing out to the possible potentials of the concept.

for the routine's forgetfulness of meaning. In other words: the diagnosis of having forgotten about oblivion given the existence of incorporated knowledge results from astonishment about not declaratively remembering this.

A similar concept is double-loop-forgetting, according to Sylwia Ciuk and Monika Kostera, in the case of which, however, not incorporated knowledge is the topic but successful intentional or created oblivion with organisations. If intentional oblivion is successful, nobody knows why oblivion has happened (Ciuk & Kostera, 2010, p. 5). Precisely double-loop-forgetting provides a starting point for understanding the irritation resulting from the appearance of traces whose origin can at first not at all be explained. Accordingly, it is a popular motif of films and novels that a protagonist who, due to retrograde amnesia, has "lost" his/her (declarative-reflective) "memory" starts decoding his/her origin with the help of incorporated skills that have not been lost.<sup>167</sup> However, even groups may encounter things connected to a past which is their own but whose existence cannot be sufficiently explained, as, for quite some time, the selections of the social memory have schematized or classified other association patterns. Such enigmatic encounters with the past of one's group have neither been described sociologically nor in any other way, which is why in the following we are going to offer an interpretation labelled, strangely enough, a sociology of the spectre. It might, however, be a crucial element of a sociological approach to social oblivion.

Making use of a concept coming from the "enchanted garden" of pre-Enlightenment times, which cannot even be declared a common metaphor, is risky indeed. However, it seems necessary to lay out the figure of the spectre as a sociological fact if one understands it as a genuinely social authority connecting oblivion and remembrance. This is meant to say that not at all it is about something supernatural, metaphysical or romantic, as after a sociological clarification of the term, many ghost stories can be explained in terms of the sociology of memory.<sup>168</sup>

The post-structural theory provides several considerations which may be connected to this. For example, according to Jacques Derrida, hauntology starts from the famous first sentence of the Manifesto of the Communist Party by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism" (Marx & Engels, 2014, p. 74). Derrida asks about

167 Sequences of this kind are found e. g. in the *Bourne* films by Doug Liman. A systematizing analysis of amnesia motifs in the film genre – among others in view of behaviour routines which are at first unexplainable for the protagonist – is presented by Katja Kirste (2001).

168 A somewhat more detailed depiction of the social spectre is to be found in Oliver Dimbath und Anja Kinzler (2013).

possible motivations for using this image and identifies parallels to the spectre in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Like the father's ghost appears to the Prince of Denmark, in Marx, the spectre aims at the future – it threatens the existing order and gives cause to change.

If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual a present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, not-presence, not-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other. One must perhaps ask oneself whether this opposition, be a dialectical opposition, has not always been a closed field and a common axiomatic for the antagonism between Marxism and the cohort or the alliance of its adversaries. (Derrida, 1994, p. 40)

Without further pursuing this dialectic interpretation of the haunting here, it must be stated that, by way of an unexpected reference to the past, the spectre irritates each respective current reality and addresses an alternative future. Thus, any “appearance” or “trace” whose origin can be clearly attributed to the past of a social – individual or collective – consciousness shall be called a spectre. However, it is typical for such a situation that no interpretation routine is at hand for each individual case of the spectre.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, it is transitory; as an appearance, it lacks the aspect of materiality. Whereas the trace is always something that has been left behind, an indication in need of interpretation when having insight into a disturbed order, usually the spectre disappears without a trace, to then suddenly reappear. Thus, we must start from an incident that can be observed but shows the trace attributes of the indication and need for interpretation in the context of irritation. Who sees a spectre is thus “automatically” concerned, as it only appears in the context of the past of a social order of relevance. Such a person may be aware of the disturbance, and then he/she must get along with the repeatedly appearing phenomenon, or he/she experiences the process as calling on him/her to pursue this previously unknown disturbance.

169 The reader of traces need not necessarily be an expert of the assessment of indications, as he/she is characterised in Carlo Ginzburg (1989), as the type of the scientist per se, but rather somebody seeking orientation in the sense of Werner Stegmaier's (2007) trace analysis.

The spectre demands memory without revealing the necessary associations. If the trace is not successfully pursued, and as long as this is the case, and as long as no solution is found that considers the collective consciousness order, it will go on haunting. The isolation or acceptance and inclusion of this spook into everyday life may have been possible in older kinds of society;<sup>170</sup> in modern society, it is unacceptable. As a knowledge-sociological motif, the spectre is a structural inhibition for oblivion rising from the “corpus” of the social; it might be imaginable that, e. g. an aspect of mechanical solidarity of the collective consciousness has been violated. According to Durkheim, restrictive law demands appropriate punishment, which has not been possible due to certain circumstances. Now, allegedly from the “structure”, there arises the demand to retroactively avenge the injustice which has wrongfully been forgotten (Durkheim, 1984) or to create the preconditions for forgiveness and active oblivion in the sense of Ricoeur (2004a).

In this sense – to refer to a famous example from the *belle lettres* – we may interpret Oscar Wilde’s ghost farce *The Canterville Ghost* in terms of the sociology of memory (Wilde, 2016): Sir Simon de Canterville haunts the castle, not because he has killed his wife, as the legend has it, but because in revenge her brothers bricked him in at a hidden place in the castle. This violation of the collective consciousness of British society, in which an offender was not regularly tried, and the sinful deceased was not regularly buried, results in a spook. However, the story becomes grotesque when the spook is de-contextualised. Oscar Wilde has the family of a US-American diplomat – as a symbol of enlightened-modern American pragmatism – buy the haunted castle along with the spectre. This change of frame and reference group produces the result that no longer Sir Simon confronts the descendants of those who were responsible for his existence as a spectre with the past but that he is confronted with his terrifying behaviour being consequently misinterpreted. The spectre faces the dilemma of no longer having any addressee for his remembrance activities and must – personified as an actor or no longer appreciated and feared as a terrifying spook – be aware of going around as a meaningless bogey in

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170 Here, an alternative interpretation of the archaic belief in ghosts becomes apparent, in the context of which spectres are no longer understood in the context of totemism and animism but as interpretation systems lastingly unsolved social problems. It is about connecting remembrance and oblivion: in certain situations the collective memory enforces problem-specific remembrance in the sense of interpreting a situation as terrifying, tabooed, dangerous and unsolved. In this context, the terrifying nature of the interpretation causes forgetting about the social origin of an, after all, social – of course solvable – problem. However, the function of this institutional arrangement is still to relieve current action when it comes to “tough nuts”.

all eternity, as nobody seems to be able to understand the, at best, enigmatic remembrance symbolism and to thus solve the riddle and deliver him from his existence as a spectre. Then there comes rescue by the person of the diplomat's daughter who, being British by birth, can act as an interpreter and decipher the cause of the spook. Finally, with the help of a religious-magical ceremony, it becomes possible to deliver the Lord of the castle by creating the preconditions for a regular burial. The social order, which was violated in the past, has been restored.

A spectre is a highly concise while at the same time immaterial trace. It irritates only those whose social past is concerned or those who are involved. Only they have the possibility to pursue it. This opportunity is due to the circumstance that the spectre is understood as such only by those consciousnesses as belonging to a group whose foundations of social cohesion have been shaken. In other words: the spectres of one group cannot be seen by the members of other groups respectively, the traces cannot be recognised or deciphered as such. It is the function of the spectre (as a revenant) to remind to past violations which must be avenged (or compensated for) even in memory – that is retroactively – to restore the damaged consistency and coherence of the collective consciousness. What is at stake is group cohesion in the sense of mechanical solidarity and collective consciousness in the sense of Émile Durkheim. The past violation of cohesion is avenged by the spook. There where this function has become obsolete as a result of modernisation processes, the spectre is effectless.

Typically, the archaic-traditional spectre refers to the ban of murder, and if the murder cannot be avenged, it appears because a) the deed was committed "perfectly" (that is, without any indication of the perpetrator(s)) or b) because it has allegedly been legitimated by way of power/rule.<sup>171</sup> Crucial in this context is pointing out a violation that would have to be avenged by restrictive law, which puts the community's coherence based on mechanical solidarity into question. Atonement need not necessarily be the punishment

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171 For another famous ghost story, here we may refer to Catherine Howard haunting Hampton Court Palace. Being one of the wives of King Henry VIII, she was accused of marital infidelity and executed. Still today (para-)psychologists and natural scientists investigate these spook appearances (see e. g. Wiseman et al., 2003). According to a sociological interpretation, it is an as yet unpunished violation of the sense of justice of British collective consciousness which, concerning this case, has not "come to rest" until these days. In such cases, the members of the concerned collective react particularly sensitively to irregularities of their physical environment – they see ghosts.



of the long-deceased perpetrators, which cannot be realised, but the correction of memory – for example, by the mortal remains being buried at the right place, which way they are posthumously recognized by society. Probably this kind of spectre has never been completely replaced and still haunts – and that is communities kept together by mechanical solidarity.

In social-scientific literature, the here discussed spectre is addressed – although not explicitly – in different contexts. Usually, it appears in the context of issues of social memory or remembrance, and thus it can be discussed concerning its attribution to the sociological micro-, meso- or macro-level.

At the micro-level, on the one hand, it corresponds to Freud's concept of suppressing an injury of the soul in the past. The neurosis appears as the ghost of the traumatised soul, which can be "delivered" through systematic association on the psychoanalyst's couch. On the other hand, such difficult to understand traces are found in close social relationships, with ways of behaviour making an interaction partner suspect that the other hides something from him/her. In this context, it must be assumed that the hiding partner – mostly unaware – leaves traces that indicate that something is wrong – such as blushing or sweating. Thus the deception, camouflage or suppression – as far as there is one – is imperfect, perhaps not even intended, but it appears as an aspect arousing suspicion, which finds expression by phrases such as "there is something between us".

The collective consciousness of the social group (meso-level) seems to be the reference point of the spectre's function, in the context of which some shifts of emphasis are necessary when it comes to analyses of modern societies. The modern spectre appears in functionally differentiated contexts, in the guise of a "bad conscience", and there it does refer to violations of the institutional order or the coherence principles of modern societies in general. Like the archaic spectre, here it is about "damage" that has not been compensated for by restrictive law and cannot be effectively repaired by restitutive law. In other words: there is an attack on the principle of organic solidarity and not a violation of individual, functional-organic and balanced orders.

At the social macro-level, we find large collectives and social regulation systems in the sense of institutions, norms and values. There the identification of spectres becomes difficult. The structural aspect of the macro-level does not know any disorder and does not have any sense of guilt or right and wrong. Thus, there is no addressee for oblivion being prevented – except we assume a spectre aiming at the national consciousness. Then, the appearance of Catherine Howard would be perceivable, particularly for English people.

Metaphorically, the terror by the *Rote Armee Fraktion* is understood as the spectre of Germany's post-war society.<sup>172</sup>

The spectre may also be understood as an effect resulting from different tempi of oblivion at different aggregation levels. For example, politically initiated making forget (oblivion (I)) may consist of being silent – normatively legitimated – about certain violations of the rights of social minorities from which there result in expectations of compensation. By problematic topics officially not being allowed to be mentioned, the compensation claim is passed on or habituated at the micro-level. Then to the later generations, a thus resulting, possibly passed on, “hereditary enmity” appears as a spectre, until either they have been divulged in the “secrets” of this enmity or they are capable of lifting the “curse” from the past.<sup>173</sup>

After this way, the previously unfolded oblivion systematics have been completed by questions resulting from the problem of object-related oblivion, the second section of this study shall once again be summarised in somewhat more detail. Only then will it become possible to apply the oblivion-theoretical set of concepts to the institution of modern sciences and find out about the oblivionism diagnosed there.

### 3.3.4 *Search Heuristics for Ways of Social Oblivion*

So far, remembrance and oblivion, some crucial connection points for a sociological interpretation of social oblivion, have been assessed regarding the connection between memory. These considerations can be made more plausible by way of two diagrams. The complicated connection of knowledge, experience, remembrance and oblivion in the context of ontological constitution and identity construction can be illustrated by Figure 2. It depicts one stage out of a sequence of steps of the genesis of knowledge whose basic motif is an interaction of existing knowledge structure (knowledge (I), stock of knowledge or frame) and a perceived experience, an event or a situation. The thus connected interpretation process results – in analogy to a dialectic figure – in a synthesis called new knowledge (II).

172 The film “Die innere Sicherheit” [Inner Security] by Christian Petzold (2000) tells the story of former RAF terrorists who must return to Germany after a having been on the run for a long time. The working title was “Spectres”, and indeed the protagonists of this road movie act as a spook from the past of post-war Germany.

173 The historical or legitimacy preconditions for such situations are described e.g. by Helmut König in his reconstruction of the Germans’ way of dealing with the Treaty of Versailles. “Indeed, actual combat comes to an end at some time, but the war of the minds cannot be reversed just by a simple declaration of will or intent in the context of a treaty” (König, 2011, p. 51).

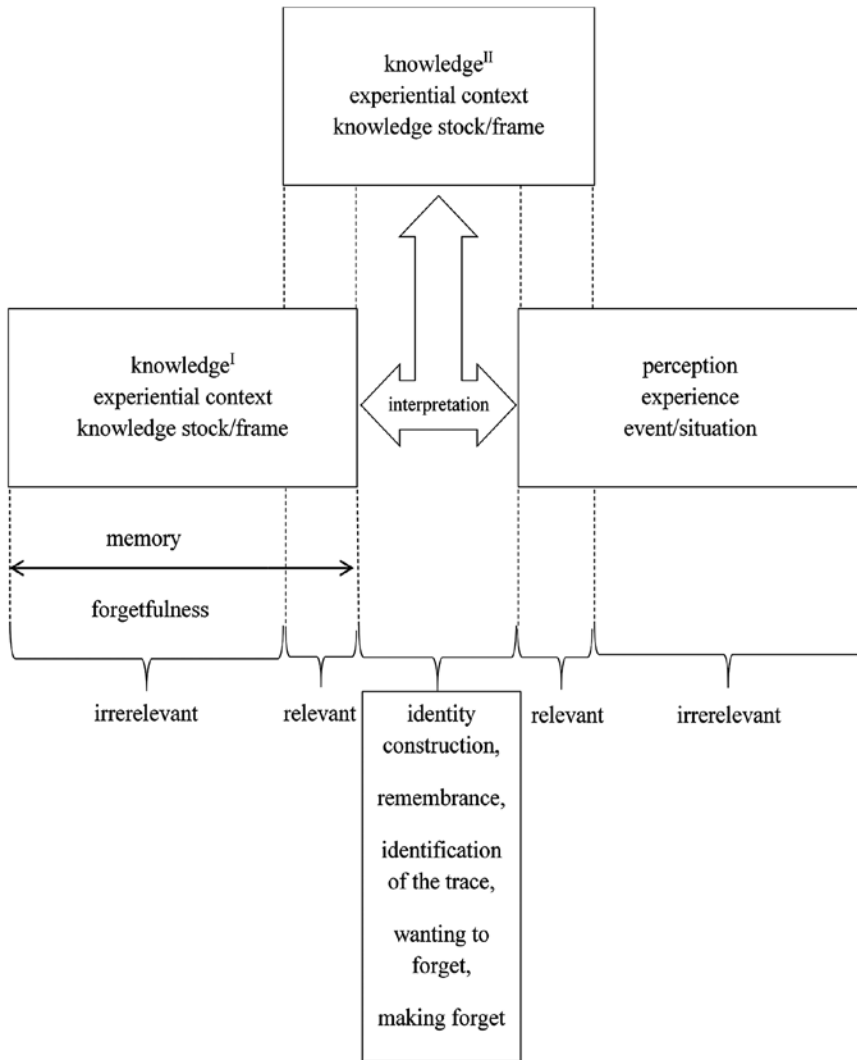


Figure 2 Oblivion in the process of the genesis of knowledge

In the course of adjusting the situation and the available knowledge to each other, certain experiences and certain perception information prove to be relevant and others not. Figure 2 demonstrates that each new state of the stock of knowledge consists of modifying existing schemes and results from the synthesis of interpretative knowledge (knowledge (I)) and perceptions that, based on existing schemes and frames, are considered relevant. Unaddressed knowledge is ignored and falls into oblivion (oblivion (II)).

The performance of memory consists of selecting relevant schemes and connectable nexuses, which is why the “extent” of what is adopted and what is left to oblivion is different from case to case. In the same way, that kind of perceived information is not considered irrelevant for the new knowledge state.<sup>174</sup> However, they need not be forgotten, as they are no element of the context of experience or stock of knowledge. In the realm of interpretation, the necessity of remembering results from communicating between existing knowledge and perception. This results from discovering traces of oblivion as a conscious construction of identity. There is also the insight of no longer wanting to address certain existing, declarative-reflective knowledge and wanting to forget it, and likewise the intention to make such knowledge inaccessible to others.

Figure 3 illustrates the intersubjective connection of the various kinds of oblivion. At first, the declarative-reflective and the incorporated-practical dimensions are distinguished from each other – two fields that may also be called the conscious and the pre-conscious level. By the example of the simplest case, that is, the dyadic interaction between ego and alter, the complex and double-contingent “play” of the three kinds of oblivion is demonstrated. The direction of the arrows gives the effect of oblivion processes. Forgetfulness as a pre-conscious loss of knowledge reduces the

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174 This is basically a figure similar to the one to the left, as according to Schütz's relevance theory also perception is guided by schemes and thus in a memory-specific, selective way. However, here we cannot speak of oblivion or forgetfulness, as one does not at all become aware of the not selected perception information. Giddens (1984) describes this situation by reaching back to psychological analyses in the context of which the scheme-oriented selectivity of perception is made plausible; in Luhmann (2012, p. 351) the problem is indeed mentioned but not clearly solved, as there the system memory selects the perception information, to then forget about everything not being congruent with the “system as reality”. It is thus assumed that the “consciousness” or the perception apparatus at first adopts everything, to select subsequently.

consciousness's capability of reflection. In the case of ego, starting from the consciousness, wanting to forget aims at unconscious knowledge. From the perspective of the individual consciousness, wanting to forget must be equated with making forget – in the sense of self-objectification. Now, by way of interacting with alter, the ego may try to influence the alter's conscious as well as pre-conscious knowledge.

The following will be about integrating these manifold aspects as far as possible and developing a scheme of interpretation from this. For this purpose, some guideline distinctions will be made (1) by way of which findings on the social functions of oblivion can be further systematised (2). Then, to conclude, these perspectives will be located in view of the distinction according to social theory and theory of society, as it has already been unfolded at the beginning of this study (3).

As has become apparent in the course of our considerations so far, the structural-reconstructive work at the phenomenon of social oblivion requires quite a number of differentiations. The benefit of such a differentiation is that social aspects of oblivion can be determined in more detail. By introducing further differentiations derived from sociological order semantics, a scheme has been developed with the help of which several oblivion motifs and oblivion equivalents to be found in the sociological debate can be systematically organised.

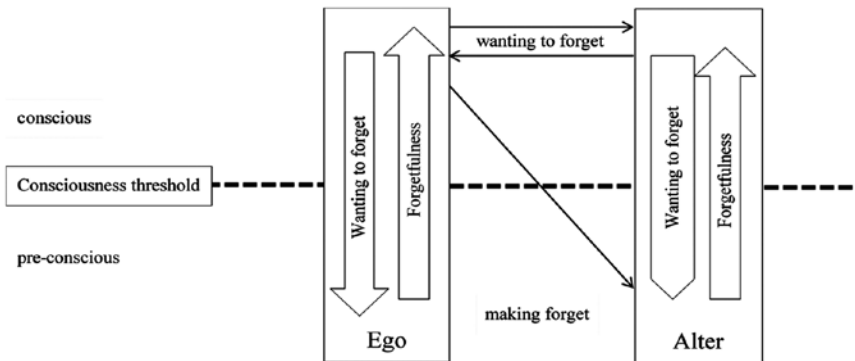


Figure 3 Intentional und unintentional oblivion

From an overall view, the manifold kinds and possibilities of social oblivion can be depicted as follows:

		Constitution of being	Identity construction, participative	Legitimacy construction, manipulative
		Forgetfulness (oblivion <sup>II</sup> )	Wanting to forget (oblivion <sup>I</sup> and oblivion <sup>II</sup> )	Making forget (oblivion <sup>I</sup> and oblivion <sup>II</sup> )
Social relation	Institution (macro)			
	Group culture (meso)			
	Interaction (micro)			

Figure 4 Search and interpretation heuristics for kinds of social oblivion

The levels of the social, which above are distinguished by micro, meso, and macro, which are understood to be orders of social relations becoming manifest by interactions, group cultures and institutions, also correspond to the concept of social reference frames. By way of the latter, it has been possible to categorise the different levels of phenomena of social oblivion. Constitutive for distinguishing the kinds of social oblivion of forgetfulness, of wanting to forget and of making forget is delimiting the oblivion process – as oblivion in the stricter sense of oblivion (II) – from the preconditions for this oblivion, which have been included as oblivion in the wider sense of oblivion (I). Whereas the concept of forgetfulness depicts the process nature of oblivion,<sup>175</sup> both wanting to forget and making forget appear as combinations of the activity-mediated and intentional production of making disappear, no matter in which way, both material and cognitive objects as well as the expectation, which is connected to this intention, that forgetfulness will start. This kind of forgetfulness consists of preventing remembrance.

175 It is thus not about the tendency, common in everyday language, of easily forgetting something but about the fact that something can be forgotten and this ability to forget is a universal process.

If forgetfulness is supposed to be used strategically, the change of schemes, scripts, frames, or types embedded in contexts of meaning or experience or in the stock of knowledge comes into view. However, such a change does not consist of any substantial change of shape but the restructuring of the embedding- or connection-structure so that associations with an object which is supposed to be forgotten or with a context of meaning are separated as much as possible from each respective relevance attribution. This requires the removal of remembrance stimuli.<sup>176</sup> It may also be imagined that the knowledge of a certain event is completely ignored. Even in this case, the knowledge is not lost, and it may be – although in a different shape – restored in the course of a memory-constructive search for traces, or it may be provided with a new meaning.

The difference between wanting to forget and making forget is that, in the case of wanting, work on the social construction of reality, which is about social action in the Weberian sense, happens more or less participative and in accordance with the participating consciousness bearer. In the other case, it is manipulative strategies for which actors exploit the principles of forgetfulness and try to influence an existing knowledge structure. A mixed kind of wanting to forget and making forget develops in the context of authoritarian regimes or asymmetrical relations, which may bring the will of the collective in line with the interests of rulers.

Metaphorically spoken, when it comes to consciousness, the oblivion process which has been characterised as forgetfulness may be compared to an iceberg, with only its peak being declarative-reflectively accessible to conscious perception. The by far larger part constitutes knowledge in the incorporated-practical mode, which leads to the conclusion that the process of oblivion can hardly be experienced, although it considerably co-constitutes the being of each respective entity. Thus, in this context, we may speak of forgetfulness as a constitution of being, in the context of which most of all the process and less the state and structure of a being is depicted. The other two kinds of oblivion are construction methods that happen mostly intentionally and can be grasped or experienced consciously or discursively. In the case of wanting to forget, after all, it is about construction processes that – as self-attribution or attribution by others – aim at identities. In the case of making forget, on the

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176 Connecting to more recent debates, this may also be called experiential knowledge (see e. g. Böhle et al., 2001). However, as the concept of experience according to the knowledge-sociological understanding is used differently, and as the equivalent given as “traditional action” among the reasons for action in Weber (1979) is not suitable, Schütz’s concept of “habitual knowledge” appears to be more appropriate here (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973).

other hand, rather the construction or preservation of legitimacy or legal rule is at the fore.

Given the broad range of interpretations of the loss of knowledge as social oblivion, now given oblivion's theoretical benefit, we may further ask about the social function of oblivion. The starting point is three kinds of oblivion, from whose interpretation as a constitution of being, of identity- and legitimacy-construction it is possible to derive social or societal functions. Thus, the constitution of being, communicated by forgetfulness, guarantees orientation for a social entity that is rather incorporated-practical instead of declarative-reflective and meaningful. In exceptional cases, this orientation may serve as the foundation for relevant experience based on past experiences, for only part of this interpretation of the presence is based on *declarative-reflective* remembering. The overwhelming share of knowledge consists of incorporated routines and practices taken as a matter of course and are not explicitly discussed. The memory selects what is relevant by way of a process of social adjustment. In this context, the memory process consists of connecting or associating what is perceived in a given situation with existing association patterns in schemes, scripts or types. As this happens by way of a similarity comparison, it stays at first an open question if this connection happens by way of a similarity connection (redundancy) or the exclusion of dissimilarities (variety). At the same time, at the moment of renewed, reminding connection and adjustment, a time index is inscribed into the modified structure,<sup>177</sup> which works in favour of a selection according to "novelty" or "actuality". The flipside of the results of this double memory process is described as oblivion in the sense of forgetfulness. Fallen into oblivion has everything which is not currently used for finding orientation in an emergent situation. This is both due to lacking similarity estimation and to the chronological distance or lacking relevance.

However, this way has fallen into oblivion must not be understood to have disappeared but to have not been used. It is an element of the stock of knowledge *in potentialis*; that is, it is basically available for associative connection to define the present. Regarding the ontological status of oblivion, it may be stated that it is incorporated "knowledge" whose activation can only in cases of exception be controlled by consciousness. Then forgetfulness – as a memory process – develops by way of ignoring schematised or classified knowledge

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177 That this happens only in exceptional cases, as Luhmann (2012, p. 350) believes, is only partly correct. Only in rare cases, if the date is obviously relevant, a scheme will be parallel connected to a corresponding time scheme. A scheme-immanent indexing of time, however, creates the basis for the inherent history of a scheme in the sense of being "unprecedented".



structures. However, as an associative context resulting in unperformed current connections may be connected to many other associative contexts, again and again, it is possible to experience references to rarely used patterns – the delay and the difficulty of newly creating or reactivating such connections has its equivalent in experiencing the attempt to remember forgotten things.

The flipside of positive memory selectivity as defining relevance has the function of excluding other possibilities of the presence-constitutive performance of orientation. As only connected association patterns are provided with an updated time index, any case of not connecting or not activating reduces the probability of any new recall. As we might have it illustratively, the social entity flows in the bed of its continuity which, as a result of the power of flowing, changes slowly but stubbornly – progress under the pressure of what has been. As here – in contrast to the individual consciousness – the selectivity of the memory must be theoretically modelled, an analysis of the social function of forgetfulness provides insights into the construction of each respective being's boundaries to its each respective environmental context. That naming and investigating this function is constantly confronted with the non-declarative or *incorporated-practical* makes it scientific exploring a core problem of knowledge-sociological thought at the level of reality constructions second order.<sup>178</sup>

These both complex and abstract considerations on the social function of forgetfulness as a quasi-natural oblivion phenomenon related to non-natural concepts of social-scientific analysis are the starting point for defining the functions of the two other kinds of social oblivion. Both *wanting* to forget and *making* forget are based on – this has already been pointed out to – knowledge of the process of oblivion. In any case, the conscious dealing with ideas of the effect of oblivion consists of the assumption – somewhat counter-intuitive at first sight – that oblivion can create order. Against this background, for the actors, oblivionist oblivion appears to be a tool with the help of which memories and thus the selectivity of orientation-providing knowledge can be organised.

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178 From Schütz's (1967) social-phenomenological point of view, the determining of the social function of forgetfulness cannot be about reconstructing the 'effect' of oblivion processes but must be about investigating the meaningfulness of such a kind of oblivion in the context of social-scientific observation categories. In other words: the sociologist is incapable of immediately researching social oblivion, but he/she depends on his/her own models or concepts of the social – indeed analysis units which are not 'naturally' given and are already 'artificially' defined categorisations: groups, collectives, discourses, and so on.

In this context, it seems as if two patterns of interpretation determine such a way of taking oblivion into service. Firstly, any scientific understanding rests on the idea that the future could be controlled by artificially creating forgetfulness. On the other hand, secondly, any technocratic understanding comes from the assumption of being able, by way of manipulating the framework conditions for possible remembrance, to control “natural” forgetfulness and to this way also control the present future and, as a consequence, also future presences (Luhmann, 1976). Whereas in view of the social the first variant still rests mainly on some naïve, blind faith in science or on dystopic science-fiction and, for the time being, is most of all discussed in science-ethical debates on science assessment,<sup>179</sup> the second variant has always been an element of (micro- or everyday) political practice. Both kinds are sociologically relevant if they are distinguished according to participative (wanting to forget) and manipulative (making forget) tendencies. The social function of both wanting to forget and making forget consists of shaping presence-related definitions of situations which also aim at future action. In contrast to “natural” forgetfulness, however, here it is about *intentionally* shaping the social order – although the results of appropriate actions particularly generate side effects and are unstable as well as mostly uncertain.

Given the different implications for the genesis of social constructions of knowledge and thus also for the social order, one may ask if the issue of social oblivion might also provide independent starting points for the development of a sociological theory or if we should leave it at a “phenomenology” or “sociological analytics”.<sup>180</sup> The following shall thus be about assessing at least the possibilities of a theory of social oblivion.

As has been worked out so far, social memories are said to have context-specific and universal qualities. Among the universal qualities, there belongs firstly, in analogy to the insights concerning the functioning of the human brain, the capability of structural genesis. The development of order results from the “experiences” of social entities and allows them to adjust to their environment by developing a system of successful reactions, among which, since the existence of language, there also counts symbolic schematisation or classification. Furthermore, the circumstance of the situation-sensitive selection of

179 The feasibility of pharmacologically induced oblivion is discussed in the contributions to Volume 9, issue 7, of the *American Journal of Bioethics* (2007).

180 Peter Wehling asks a similar question, by at first not at all intending to develop a theory of social oblivion and then attempting to “react, in a theoretically appropriate way, to the heterogeneity and multi-dimensionality of oblivion as a social phenomenon” (Wehling, 2011a, p. 15). For the start, he leaves it at looking for elements or tools of sociological oblivion analytics.

possible associations in view of an existing structure or pattern of information processing must be considered. Thirdly, the construction of timeliness may be understood to be an independent scheme that feeds on a time index inscribed into the schematisation processes.

When assuming that the performance of social memories develops further in a stubborn way, according to the assumptions of functional differentiation, the reconstruction of differentiable ways of selecting produces the result of field-specific social memories. This way, it becomes possible to connect the principle of memory to the concepts of the subject, dyad, group, collective or nation and also to the thus connected ideas of order in the sense of identities, discourses, systems or institutions.

Furthermore, if we assume that these social entities constitute themselves more or less stubbornly, the category of memory becomes a crucial theoretical element of the social-scientific description and analysis of this constitution process. In other words: only the concept of social memory provides us with an appropriate conceptual tool set for the analysis of the path-dependency of social change beyond any framing by – always meaning-communicated – historiography and historical science. In a twofold way, social practice theories, which have been dealing with such blind spots for quite some time, are not helpful. Firstly, the concept of practice is ambiguous, as it also always implies practice as the opposite of theory and is used as a counter-concept to a kind of science that is relieved from everyday pressure to act. Secondly, in the wake of a practical turn, many social circumstances cannot exclusively be described as practical, routine-guided, habitual or unintentional. Rather, a concept is needed to understand explicit and implicit knowledge with an admittedly necessary reference to the past as being authoritative for situative orientation. Thus, the crucial aspect is how each analysed social context constitutes itself by reaching back to its “past” concerning the knowledge structure to be diagnosed. Parallel to the entities of the social to which, as an individual or collective consciousness, a memory may be attributed, in view of the ordering principles of the social we speak of memories. However, keeping this apart would result in terminological difficulties when it comes to the already existing terminological practice, which is why in the following, we will speak of the memories of systems and institutions – although obviously, we will look at individual selection mechanisms.

The question about social oblivion shares this basic assumption. It accentuates the memory's selection mechanisms and focuses, on the one hand, on those selection practices as being connected to category-specific ways of constituting. On the other hand, it is interested in the circumstance that any orientation or adjustment performance indeed provides for the possibility of

other connections resulting from the past of each entity but is, for obvious reasons, not taken up. In other words: any social entity does not only “know” much more than it believes to know and can declarative remembering. Also, it “knows” more than needed for the routine operations of organising its selectivity-communicated orientation.

The difference between what is provided by the (social) experiential context and what is practically used and consciously communicated is what has been forgotten – knowledge that exists but is currently unavailable. The processes and mechanisms constituting that what has been forgotten are a differentiated context of different ways of forgetting. Of particular interest for sociological analysis in this context are those processes as being based on their schemes of oblivion. Thus, the focus is on the hypotheses-guided analysis of practices and strategies of oblivion in social relations, which are meant for creating social order. However, in contrast to the closely related memory processes or to the process of remembering, here rather a kind of “de-memorising” is at the fore, that is, attention turning purposefully away from memory-specifically expectable relevancies. If the interest in such processes is focused on constituting meaning or reasoning, we enter the realm of what may be called oblivionism: intended or created oblivion as socially meaningful action.

Whereas the analysis of the oblivion process, which here has been presented as forgetfulness or oblivion (II) as a specific way of schematisation or association, may already reach back to comprehensive theoretical preliminary work – in particular from the fields of psychology, the neuro-sciences and philosophy –<sup>181</sup> it seems as if the social use of oblivion, in the sense of its action-practical exploitation, has as yet been hardly described and assessed for its thus-connected potential for sociological investigation.

According to the quality standards of Weber’s adequate causation, the critical analysis of historical processes of the change of the meaning of terms, discourses, institutions, thought styles or identities is certainly difficult yet realistic in the context of the standards of adequate meaning. The empirical analysis must start from indications for certain memory-relevant topics having been eliminated, being eliminated or being supposed to be eliminated. The social process resulting in or legitimating such actions informs about the schematic-classified idea of social figurations or cultures. Furthermore, this theoretical perspective allows for viewing both at the range and way of functioning of

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181 As has been shown, even genuinely sociological approaches are oriented at these theoretical traditions: Schütz is inspired by the philosophies of Bergson and Husserl, Luhman also integrates findings from the neuro-sciences and cybernetics.

its own forgetfulness and at those associative contexts of meaning serving as the foundation for those cleaning efforts as making oblivion possible. Thus, both oblivion (I) and oblivion (II) as well as their combinations of *wanting* to forget and *making* forget, must be considered an explicans, that is, statements by way of which certain social facts can be explained. In focus are both past realities and those being close to the present of the analytical-specific kind, just like time-diagnostic diagnoses of processes for which particular aspects of oblivion could be proven to be sub-processes. In other words: the necessary connection of a structural theory to an action theory of social oblivion may be applied to any level of social relations.



## Application: Oblivionism in the Sciences

As a first approach at trying out the oblivion-analytical toolset, the scientific system looks particularly suitable, as several interpretation patterns are connected to the sciences, which, on the one hand, suggest a particular emphasis on permanently referring to the past. On the other hand, a strong suspicion of systematic oblivion mechanisms cannot be denied. Additionally, there is the fact that for a knowledge-sociological analysis, the social field is of particular interest where right from the beginning, the focus is on the genesis and accumulation of knowledge. In other words: it is about an action field where at first sight, oblivion does not seem to be structurally provided for.

In the beginning, it has been pointed out that the diagnosis of oblivionism in the sciences results from a cultural criticism of oblivion. Against the background of the now provided systematisation of theoretically-conceptually concluding on social oblivion processes, the finding of oblivion can once again be outlined in more detail: oblivionism in the field of the modern sciences does not seem to be if we follow Harald Weinrich's judgement, a problem of a scientific kind of forgetfulness (Weinrich, 2004). Social oblivion, which has been structurally inscribed into the sciences – in the sense of *incorporated-practical* knowledge – must indeed be a subject of an analysis of oblivion in the sciences but is hardly covered by the criticism of oblivionism. The latter is rather about a kind of oblivion coming from a certain kind of the selectivity of rationalisation and modernisation processes. It depends on the point of view if the here addressed wanting or making forget is understood to be intentional or if it is about simply accepting the side effects of progress-relevant decision-making and particular institutional order.

Weinrich's criticism sounds like a gloomy comment on those aspects of selection that have been introduced as a reaction to the growing intricacy and complexity of the sciences as a whole – sometimes at the urging of science policy, sometimes of the scientists themselves.<sup>1</sup> It is largely left open what is lamented, after all. Is it about the objectification of scientific work that, as a

1 At about the same time when Weinrich's book on oblivion is published, university research starts to become established in Germany, dealing with the problems Weinrich hints at, among others – however without placing this into any knowledge-sociological or oblivion-analytical context. The meanwhile voluminous literature on this field provides many indications which may be assessed in view of social oblivion. As the following section is going to be about sounding out oblivion-analytical problem fields in the sciences, however, here we

result of rigorous steering of attention, falls into oblivion sooner, or focuses on those social entities whose striving for genesis of order violates habitual practices of scientific preservation and accumulation of knowledge? There are only vague hints concerning the field of scientific activities this criticism aims at. It is about the selectivity practices of the natural sciences. However, as it is stated by a cultural scientist who is no proven science studies researcher, it seems as if Weinrich's criticism is due to a bad feeling when it comes to the (media-) public perception of the sciences, assuming that in the context of funding science and attributing resources the same standards measure the cultural studies and the humanities as the natural sciences. This leads to the impression that these are the workings of a hegemonic oblivion regime ignoring the subtle discipline-related cultural differences within the sciences and – starting from some guiding disciplines – unduly making the habitual, differentiated practices of knowledge production subject to its relevancies and selection principles.

The criticism of oblivionism in the sciences is the starting point and inspiration for the here presented analysis of social oblivion. It has already been pointed out that oblivionism covers only a part of this institutional oblivion if it is located in the realm of volitional ways of oblivion (I) (wanting to forget and making forget). Oblivion in the sciences covers a much more comprehensive phenomenon whose problematic nature has not been recognized and analysed due to habitual routine and practice aspects. At the same time, the social institution of “the sciences” is a vast field whose many facets – like with any other institution – show more or less explicit aspects of oblivion. It would be an illusion to believe that a comprehensive oblivion analysis of “the sciences” is possible.

When in the following, by reaching back to the above-presented search heuristics, we will investigate aspects of oblivion in the sciences; it will predominantly be about exemplarily applying the analysis tool – and not about completeness. The latter could at best be achieved in the context of small-scale analysis foci, such as in view of individual organisations, subjects or disciplines. Nevertheless, the considerations to be made here aim at the entire field of scientific activity, to be able to at least roughly grasp the explicit and already existing findings from different fields. This is not to say that belonging to a discipline or profession is a distinguishing feature but that the up to here developed, just heuristic, differentiation of social entities of the sciences along the social micro-, meso- and macro level is such a feature.

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are going to stay away from a closer inspection. Yet still, university research comes first if it is about having a closer look at one of the topics identified in the following.



The analysis in the course of this third section of analysing social oblivion, dealing with a case example, is going to happen as follows: first of all, it is about stocktaking already presented concepts of scientific memory and remembrance – also taking into consideration the problem of time in the sciences – as well as an inspection of memory concepts along the three distinct categories developed for the memory-specific analysis of kinds of knowledge: *declarative-reflective*, *incorporated-practical*, and *objectivist-technical*. Then the second sub-section consists of an analysis of oblivion within the sciences. Also, this starts with an inspection of already existing points of view and, by a third section, combines the results with exploring the field alongside the previously unfolded search heuristics for ways and functions of social oblivion. In this context, the existing research approaches are going to be associated with the individual table elements, further indications for ways of oblivion in the sciences are going to be taken up, and finally, starting points for research desiderata resulting from a comparison with the three ways of social oblivion – forgetfulness, wanting to forget, and making forget – at the three aggregation levels of the social are going to be pointed out.

Most of all, it must be shortly sketched what we are talking about when speaking of “the” sciences as a social field of activity, a sub-system or a social institution. Given the meritorious efforts by the philosophy and theory of science to achieve both differentiated and comprehensive conceptual definitions, we are oriented at the easiest one:<sup>2</sup> science is an “institutionalised, multi-levelled, logically connected system of statements which accumulates knowledge by way of methods which can be objectified” (Greca, 2002, p. 699). Additionally, there are institutionalised regulations and norms which are typical for scientific activity. The highest precept of scientific activity is being obliged to the truth.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding all ontological problems of the concept of truth, both institutional belonging and quality are measured by creating true or veritable insight. Enlightened, modern science no longer strives to uncover universal ideas but understands itself to be a relativist and dependent on the point of view.<sup>4</sup> The criterion for truth is thus statements on the condition of the world, which are consolidated by experiment and argument.

2 A concise overview of crucial positions on the road to the development of modern science and its inclusion into “society” is provided by Stefan Böschen (2007).

3 Striving for truth is already inscribed into the conceptual understanding of knowledge. By the criterion of truth, “knowing” is different from “thinking” or “believing”. Of course, it cannot be about a kind of truth, excluding all human needs and interests, which is “conceived of as an accurate representation of how things are in themselves” (Rorty, 1998, p. 4).

4 On this see e.g. Max Scheler’s (1965) considerations on the grounding of scientific knowledge by way of connecting to a relatively natural world view.

For the analyses, the main focus will be on a limited selection of aspects of the genesis of scientific knowledge. Accordingly, they base the creation of scientific knowledge on a specific feature: any knowledge “fed” into scientific communication must be “new”, that is to say, it must add something to the stock of knowledge. This claim may be called the imperative of genuineness or progress.<sup>5</sup> However, science is more than “just” regulations and networks of communication from the sociological point of view. From the perspective on science, also all decision-making contexts whose work influences the further course of science are included: science policy, which does or does not provide resources for the sciences and can support certain fields, each specific organisations in the context of which science happens, the economy with whose expectations and desires scientists are confronted, as well as the economy of the sciences itself.<sup>6</sup> Suppose we do not consider the system of the sciences according to the stricter understanding of the theory of social systems and instead address the overall context of all actions and orders dealing with science in the broadest sense, even regarding memory and oblivion. In that case, we are dealing with a wide range of different selectivities. Whereas the manifold references of science to its social environment show different kinds of selectivity which are more or less meaningful for the scientific genesis of knowledge but are always relevant, given the ongoing accumulation of new knowledge – and the assessment of its genuineness – selectivity becomes a problem. One institutional rule of scientific activity demands the strict prevention of selectivity precisely in research work. Thus, the assessment for genuineness is only possible if everything old is included in the comparison – that is remembered. As the so-called completeness ideal of modern science is a crucial memory-specific aspect, we are going to discuss this problem in more detail later.

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5 Peter Weingart describes the quality demand, according to which newly added scientific knowledge is also legitimated by being topically new, as the “imperative of genuineness” (Weingart, 2003, p. 22). Elsewhere, the necessity of progressiveness is pointed out, too (see Dimbath, 2011b; Luhmann, 1992; Popper, 2002). That progress cannot be reduced to the improvement of the capability to predict is demonstrated by Richard Rorty’s concept of “philosophical progress occurs to the extent that we find a way of integrating the worldviews and the moral intuitions we inherited from our ancestors with new scientific theories or new sociopolitical institutions and theories or other novelties” (Rorty, 1998, p. 5). It is obvious that necessarily this comes along with processes of oblivion.

6 A comprehensive characterisation of science as a social field of activity is presented – from a functionalist point of view – by Walter L. Bühl (1974). A more recent overview of the networking of this institution is to be found in Peter Weingart (2003).

## 4.1 Memory and Remembrance

In the field of science, which is a systematised kind of the genesis of knowledge starting from the necessity to rule over nature, specific ways of dealing with the past have developed. This has resulted in the fact that any research must also always provide its “history”. How the selection of research questions happens and how the appropriate “narrations” are told is a topic of scientific research studies. Attempts at self-reflecting on institutional selectivities with the help of historical science have several times come to their limits. Like in the field of the science of history, for science research and the history of science, the introduction of the memory concept results in an extension of the range of reflections. It also covers selectivities that, according to thought style, derived from also considering everyday-practical action logics. The following section focuses on a short stocktaking of social memory and remembrance approaches in the context of science.

### 4.1.1 *The Time of the Sciences*

In the course of the previous considerations, we have been dealing with the sociologic understanding of time before discussing social memory. Time is no natural subject or one which might be considered independently of the consciousness, but it is socially created by reaching back to past experiences in view of a future that is supposed to be drafted. Thus seen, it seems obvious to put objectivist understandings of time into brackets and ask, against the background of the analysis of the memory of science, about the socially constituted time of science. This way, the view is neither at dealing with time philosophically, in the sense of a philosophy of time, nor at the various concepts of time developed by different disciplines to cope with their respective subjects. Instead, it is about a “system time”, which helps answer the question of what scientific activity considers an operatively relevant past and which deadlines are relevant to the future. Science makes use of time as an observer’s category; however, it also creates its own time. In this context, Luhmann distinguishes e. g. between the time of the observer and the time of the observed, which amounts to a problem of how to deal with simultaneity interpretatively.<sup>7</sup>

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7 Here Luhmann makes use of the figure of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. By way of its observations, the system of social meanings creates time: “With primary observation, after all, the simultaneous is only simultaneous as long as observation happens; and only if this observation is observed (which may as well happen within the same system) its actuality can be distinguished and called an actuality of time, that is an actuality with a future and a past.” (Luhmann, 1992, p. 105)

As an observer's category, time becomes operatively relevant in simple temporal differences by marking a before-after difference. Any causal explanation is based on such a difference; it is, for example, created under controlled conditions in the course of an experiment when a state given at a time  $t_0$  is, after having been manipulated, compared to a state at the time  $t_1$ .

Concerning the analysis of the memory of science, the time of observation leads to questions, to the construction of time intervals.<sup>8</sup> Then time becomes a comparison tool, allowing for assuming some features of an object as unchanged, others however as being changeable. The time of the observer, on the other hand, concerns the social time regimes of scientific activity as such. Also, science defines itself by path-dependencies resulting from pasts and plans for the future, which are considered relevant. Thus, for example, the scientific community determines which horizons of time are acceptable for research. This holds, e. g., for the stages of a scientific career, carrying out a research project, or the question about the "half-time" of scientific knowledge.

#### 4.1.2 *The Memory of Science*

Concerning the issue of memory in science, some approaches have been presented above. Sometimes we have been speaking of memory, which in most cases referred to specific selectivity mechanisms which, being rather implicit aspects of memory, must be attributed to the incorporated-practical realm. In the context of a declarative-reflective reference to the past in the context of scientific communication or scientific knowledge, some explicit hints have also been found.

The emphasis on declarative-reflective knowledge seems obvious, insofar as at first sight scientific knowledge seems to consist of explicit "knowledge" which can be accumulated, as represented most of all by scientific products, such as publications. Thus, precisely the *declarative-reflective* memory of science strives, if not for completeness, then for endless growth, in the context of which selectivity decisions become a problem. Thus, given the exponential growth of knowledge, it is no longer about the separation of outmoded or

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8 In this sense we may also understand Luhmann's considerations on the problem of time and memory within the scientific system: "Indeed memory makes its running business easier by way of chronologically (or also spatially) extending and thus organising those aspects of meaning it is assessing. It operates e. g. according to the rule that contradicting issues cannot have been at the same time and the same place. However, it operates only while operating, and only concerning the meaningfulness it takes up in each case. Thus, knowledge cannot be understood as kind of a time-proof stock but only as a kind of complex assessment operation. We speak of "experience" when wanting to say that in current situations it is possible to mobilise knowledge of the past and the future." (Luhmann, 1992, pp. 128–129)

false knowledge but increasingly about an oblivionist practice of classifying relevance attributions. Apart from such orientations, for quite some time, the research interest has also been attracted by the practices of creating knowledge, that is, by conditions which are not – or no longer – explicated and happen rather “automatically” or indeed according to the understanding of an *incorporated-practical* memory.

In the following, the declarative kinds will be discussed (1), to then, with the help of practice-theoretical approaches, look for incorporated aspects of the genesis of knowledge (2). Finally, we will deal with an aspect of social memory relevant to the genesis of scientific knowledge but has yet been neglected: the *objective-technical* aspect (3).

In science, the archive seems to be mostly identical with the stock of knowledge, as the accumulation of scientific knowledge happens first of all by way of essays and books, which are (or may be) collected, catalogued, stored and kept ready for possible access at libraries. As the production of scientific knowledge consists much of creating compatibility and describing path-dependencies, it is not just about filing each present product. It is also about allowing for the reconstruction of developments. Constitutive for this is the museum collection of objects – and this also comprises technological apparatuses and inventions which are no longer in use. Thus, the practice of accumulating, archiving and storing comes from the agreement that knowledge collected by humankind may not be lost if one is not supposed to start from scratch again over and over. Thus, a practice has been established for science that, in quite a certain way, coordinates a topic-specific way of remembering while at the same time – at first – preventing any practical selectivity which might come along with coping with the flood of information. This may be imagined as a circular model, producing at first information or artefacts (*production*), to then keep them (*storage*), to have them ready for the further production of information (*retrieval*), in the context of which only part of the available information is used for the further production of knowledge (*selection*).<sup>9</sup>

Such an understanding results in attributing science to a “perfect memory” (Bowker, 2008, p. 4), which cannot and must not forget anything because the entire information relevant for the production of certain knowledge contents must be in principle available. The roots of such an understanding of science are in the distant past. A “classical” hint is given by René Descartes (1980),

9 Selection does not only refer to the process of selecting but also to selection made, and thus to a structure of information considered relevant for a certain problem of scientific production. From the point of view of the production process, this information is taken from the “past” or indeed from the stock of documented experience.

who, in the context of his regulations of the methods of the correct use of reason, demands any new knowledge to be based on the entirety of already existing knowledge. In the context of the idea of completeness the concept of memory still is most of all that of a store or container where knowledge is accumulated and provided for future use. Given the exponential growth of the stocks of scientific knowledge,<sup>10</sup> however, this *completeness ideal*, which initially bothered the encyclopaedists,<sup>11</sup> had soon to be qualified, although today it is the guiding orientation for many fields of science.<sup>12</sup> From the awareness of the rapid expansion of knowledge and its limited availability, due to spatial distance – sometimes access to already existing knowledge required considerable efforts – the selectivity problem results.

Closely connected to the ideal of completeness is the idea that existing knowledge is replaced by new knowledge going back to Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. In this context, Mannheim distinguishes several traditions of the genesis of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> For example, he says, natural-scientific thought is based on the accumulation of knowledge, whereas humanities thought rather assumes the old to be replaced by the new.<sup>14</sup> Also, this memory motif is based on the idea of a knowledge store. Now the archive is no longer understood to

10 An influential study on the growth of scientific knowledge – it doubles every 15 years, making the science the “institution” with the fastest growth – has been carried out by Derek de Solla Price (1963).

11 Here we may go as far back as to before the age of the most famous encyclopaedists, D’Alembert or Diderot – such as to Konrad Gessner and his *Bibliotheca Universalis*. With the beginning of printing there developed “the idea of enforcing the totality of knowledge by help of a timeless ‘order of orders’ in one single book. [...] The order of knowledge is important to master experience, to govern the present, or to conquer the future” (Schneider & Zedelmaier, 2004, p. 355).

12 This can e. g. be read from a contribution by Uwe Schimank (2010a) who, given the flood of publications, demands a self-limitation of the producers of knowledge. For example, he says, swift production ignores the completeness ideal if not even topically relevant literature is taken into account.

13 See Karl Mannheim (1936, p. 13; 1952, p. 170) who states that natural-scientific thought always continues the construction of a system, whereas philosophical thought in the sense of Hegel’s dialectics must achieve always new syntheses or “systematization centres” – a motif which is also taken up again by Richard Rorty (1998).

14 This view may as well be reversed, however, if we consider the quotation practice of the natural sciences: there, referring to “classical authors” and the constantly repeated interpretative reference to theories which are considered fundamental is mostly ignored. Already the research context of a study informs about its theoretical orientation, the methodological quality criteria determine the comprehensibility of the process of producing insight, so that probably there is no need to further take into consideration those giants on whose shoulders one is of course sitting.

be material-physical but to be the knowledge of humankind that progresses on and on by building on older knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

As scientific knowledge is legitimated by progress, the genuineness or progress imperative is immediately connected to social memory. Thus, any kind of knowledge which is claimed to be new depends on reaching back to previously created knowledge by way of remembering. In this context, it is at the same time natural to also base it on the completeness ideal, as progress can be proven only by comparison to already existing knowledge. The selectivity of memory is not discussed, as reaching back must refer to a complete store or a perfect memory. Thus, the insight that the memory of science works selectively fundamentally questions the already shaken imperative of completeness and that of progress.<sup>16</sup>

For the theory of social systems, selectivity is no problem but a constitutive feature, for it explicitly reorients the memory of science from the store model to the selection function. The self-creation or autopoiesis of the scientific system happens by memory, in the context of the binary code of true/untrue, creating the “identity” of the system while delimiting it from the system’s environment, after all.<sup>17</sup>

At the transition to the practice-communicated selection mechanisms, which are also encountered in the realm of science, there happens methodological reflection. This kind of self-observation of science serves for controlling, in particular, the truth and correctness imperative. At the same time, this kind of reflection also creates precedents when it comes to proceeding with the practice of the genesis of knowledge, by certain ways of proceeding being invented, others being further developed, and yet others being declared obsolete and thus being practised no longer. Thus, the conflict between

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15 Reiner Keller brings together the different dimensions of meaning of the archive concept according to Michel Foucault (1988): “The archive is ‘the universal system of the formation and transformation of the statements [...]’ or ‘the law of what is allowed to be said, the system governing the appearance of statements on individual events [...]’.” “Archaeology analyses discourses ‘as specific practices within the element of the archive’” (Keller, 2008, pp. 77–78).

16 Here, once again the grave irritation becomes obvious which results from the assumption of standardised logics of the scientific genesis of knowledge. The distinction between natural-scientific and philosophical progress in Rorty (1998) or Mannheim (1952) cannot be arbitrarily further differentiated – however it cannot be ruled out that with modern science we might encounter even more interpretations of progress than only the accumulative and the dialectic ones.

17 Already beforehand it must be pointed out that, given the mass production of scientific knowledge, other selection anchors may be imagined which might be differentiated according to disciplines (see e. g. Luhmann, 1996, p. 325).

understanding and explaining social research on the one hand and quantifying and qualitative social research on the other should not only be interpreted as a dispute about the “true” approach to knowledge but, just the same, as a debate about the appropriate selection mechanism of scientific memory (Luhmann, 1996, p. 325). Fundamental methodological differences concern issues of future research and the construction of the present by way of a selective reference to the past, which e. g. declares certain elements the foundation of newly presented insights while others are at best mentioned in footnotes, as science-historical excursions and for the sake of “completeness”.

Another selection mechanism is distortions in the context of reaching back to existing research results, may it be in the form of preferring studies that are considered successful or of personally preferred schools, or in the form of purposefully ignoring certain people or positions.<sup>18</sup>

Selectivities of the memory of the sciences connected to explicitly reaching back to knowledge produced in the past – thus to memory – are attributed to the realm of *declarative-reflective* memory. Any selection violating the completeness rule requires explicit reason-giving and thus a formulated “rule”. This way, the *declarative-reflective* dimension has another side, as the subjects of remembering become a topic, as elements of scientific activity, and remembering as such.

Another access to the memory of science is provided by approaches dealing less with the explicit procedure of the scientific genesis of knowledge but rather with its implicit practices. The *incorporated-practical* aspect is to be found with all common routines of research. For example, it is one of the fundamental practices of scientific activity to grasp the world, which is supposed to be researched in a conceptual-organising way. Classification happens both when it comes to the naming of objects and in the context of aggregating terms and references; this is an early feature of modern scientificity. The crucial aspect in this context – and from a sociological point of view belonging to the Comte-Durkheim tradition – is the ongoing differentiation of the social organisation of knowledge. Accordingly, classificatory differentiations create more concepts ever. At the same time, classification always happens in the sense of producing types that make only certain features stand out from a

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18 The equivalent in the science of history is that perspective which is accused of being *whig history*. Lamented are different manifestations of a kind of presentism construing historical reality according to criteria of the presence – or of the researcher’s current state of mind and preferred values. In the worst case, it is said, historians give a completely wrong depiction of the past (see e. g. Mayr, 1990).



given variety, prove them to be typical or characteristic, and place them into a context of interpreting the world.

Another aspect of scientific activity is the creation of hypotheses concerning contexts and effects in the form of theoretical-abstracting systems of statements leading towards achieving as simple and generally valid insights as possible. However, any abstraction achievement comes along with a reduction of complexity and must thus be understood as a selection mechanism. This is demonstrated by studies on scientific memory such as by Jens Soentgen, who, by the example of Parson's theory of society, illustrates the memory nature of the practice of theory construction (Soentgen, 1997), or by Harald Hofer's study, who reminds to the fact that the reification concept of the Frankfurt School points out to the destruction of the very nature of an object as a result of being scientifically named and theorised (Hofer, 2011). Hofer's assumption is particularly confirmed in academic life, which is oriented at continuously producing reifications, thus systematically ignoring the complexity of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the constructionist studies of laboratory life demonstrate that frequently at a number of stages of the research process, the work at laboratories – at complicated facilities under technologically demanding experimental conditions – follows implicit routines.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, with the scientific fabrication of knowledge, two selection mechanisms are at work which are by far not synchronised, one of them supporting the creation of specific remembrance (*declarative-reflective*) with the help of institutionalised assessment routines, the other one (*incorporated-practical*) organising the perpetuation of unquestioned, implicit (procedural) knowledge. Also, social inequality works as an incorporated selection mechanism in academic life – this does not only hold for gender inequality but also the various kinds of age- or origin-related inequality.<sup>21</sup>

For example, when it comes to passing on scientific knowledge, selection happens according to reputation and seniority, when the judgements by older

19 These positions start out from Edmund Husserl's (1970) concept of meaninglessness; they are also found in the context of Heidegger's (1967; 1975) oblivion of being, however also in the context of the critical theory terms reification and context of delusion (Grave, 2008).

20 See the analyses of laboratory life by Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar (1979) as well as Karin Knorr-Cetina (1981).

21 This begins with Aleida Assmann's (2006) observation, according to which women deal with remembering and are still forgotten, whereas men prefer oblivion and are more likely to be remembered. Studies on forgotten female scientists provide indications for this (see e. g. Honegger & Wobbe, 1998), however also the effects of the habitual differences, described by Pierre Bourdieu (1988), between scientists of different origin or age limits in case of appointments are testimony to a variety of selections which, in each different ways, are the result of reaching back to past events.

colleagues with higher reputation are taken seriously. In scientific communities, there are generational effects combining expertise with authority. In this context, Stephen Toulmin comes to the conclusion that to the same degree to which a group of people can be identified with any discipline “whose judgement carries dominant weighty with professional colleagues in the science concerned, the approval of these men does more than anything else to ensure the success or failure, not only of new societies, journals and meetings, but also of new ideas” (Toulmin, 1977, p. 283).

Scientific disciplines are provided with a degree of passed on knowledge that consists of a limited number of acknowledged ways of explaining, of a stock of as yet not established theoretical variants, and a catalogue of criteria for assessing them. As a crucial chronological interval of change, Toulmin identifies the generation or existence of an authoritative group until it is replaced. The concept of the degree of passing on suggests a twofold selectivity of scientific memory. Accordingly, within one generation, an identifiable path-dependency of passing on knowledge becomes obvious; alternative explanations are systematically rejected. However, in the course of generations, a break with this continuity can be stated, which does not always come along with a revolution in the sense of Kuhn but in any case with temporary open-mindedness and uncertainty. Then alternative explanations become negotiable – even if they have almost been forgotten.

As described by Elena Esposito, telematic memory establishes a new variant of selectivity, which is of significance most of all for scientific activity.<sup>22</sup> It seems as if increasingly scientific decision-making by way of machine-based selectivity is pushing through, as it establishes either in the context of information retrieval or “automatic” assessment techniques in data mining. There,

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22 See Elena Esposito (2002; 2013) on telematics as well as on the perfect memory of the Internet. However, Daniel Bell already provides indications in his diagnosis of post-industrial society: “An *intellectual* technology is the substitution of algorithms (problem-solving rules) for intuitive judgments. These algorithms may be embodied in an automatic machine or a computer program or a set of instructions based on some statistical or mathematical formula; the statistical and logical techniques that are used in dealing with ‘organized complexity’ are efforts to formalize a set of decision rules.” (Bell, 1973, p. 30–31). Equivalentents are to be found in the more recent literature on tracking by search engines whose algorithms reconstruct path-dependencies and make them into individually “custom-made” information profiles and offers: “In July 2010, Google News rolled out a personalized version of its popular service. Sensitive to concerns about shared experience, Google made sure to highlight the ‘top stories’ that are of broad, general interest. But look below that top band, and you will see only stories that are locally and personally relevant to you, based on the interests that you’ve demonstrated through Google and what articles you’ve clicked on in the past” (Pariser, 2011, p. 61).

the procurement of information is no longer oriented at what the researching subject considers relevant but also at the programme's selectivity or a technological system. Technological selectivity means that decisions concerning the selection or relevance of information are left to automatic routines or assessment procedures of getting access to symbolic hints in view of past events. Then the individual deciding about meaning has the task of making "sense" both of the thus investigated drafts of the future and the thus created pasts. Thus, there is the possibility that a telematically worked out draft of the future – such as in the sense of the context of two variables requiring further analysis – will later be retrospectively bereaved of its telematics past and be replaced by a past which attributes the discovery to "conventional" procedures. In other words: the reconstruction of memory remains the task of the participating consciousnesses, whereas one or the other basic decision is not at all made by scientists "in solitude and liberty" but by a technological system. In such cases, memory-related selectivity is replaced by technological selectivity to which, in retrospect, the quality of memory is attributed, which way it is made a past controlled by actors.

#### 4.1.3 *The Memory of Organising Science*

The change of the scientific system, away from research tied to monasteries and feudal lords as far as free universities, was further stimulated in the second half of the 20th century. Since the educational reforms of the 1960s, however, since the introduction of increased autonomy of universities at the latest, which are now declared "entrepreneurial", and since the implementation of concepts of new public management,<sup>23</sup> scientific activity, as well as memory-specific selectivity, can no longer exclusively be described by the norms and institutions of "pure" science. Thus, the specific selectivities of science are increasingly completed by the organisation's instrumentally rational selectivities or being organised. Initially, the influence of the state made sure that scientists were privileged when it came to the ideal of the freedom of inquiry. With the more recent arrangements, in return for the empowerment of scientists, coming along with deregulation processes in the context of organisational autonomy, there is also a growing influence of organisational principles on scientific production and thus a different kind of heteronomy.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the specifics of scientific organisation, many approaches at organisational memory are (for the time being) not easily transferable. Currently, the changing organisation of the sciences in Germany is still too far away from

23 On the concept of NPM see Stefan Lange and Uwe Schimank (2007).

24 For a critical view see Richard Münch (2009; 2014).

the goal of the entrepreneurial university. Nevertheless, it may be stated that, due to the changes of administrative structures, we must assume an increased effect of non-scientific aspects of selection. The following scenarios can demonstrate this:

Firstly, defining scientists as services providers in the economic sense is a new development. It comes from a politically enforced institutional isomorphism consisting of a more or less trivialising transfer of clichés of entrepreneurial steering mechanisms onto former public institutions.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the genuinely “science-related” binary coding of true/untrue was hardly relevant for the *organisation* of academic life, it seems as if the secondary coding of “renowned/not renowned” is pushing through in all fields of scientific activity – that is with research and its organisations (Luhmann, 1992; Schimank, 2010b).

Secondly, historiography in connection with research institutions is nothing new – such as coming to grips with the NS past – what has been less frequent, however, is an organisational memory referring to the nominal goal of an organisation. This is increased with the development of corporate design and corporate identity, in the context of which it is about improving publicity and inventing an organisational memory. Identification by way of narrating an organisational identity may then contribute to highly renowned scientists-celebrities keeping alumni in line as cash cows. Also, for their former institution, self-historicisation to maintain its reputation becomes significant for maintaining contacts to alumni, not least in connection to the hope of possible future donations and – in the case of tuition fees – for solvent students.

Restructuring towards public management or approaches at an entrepreneurial university demand a high degree of readiness to learn from all sides. Both administrative staff and scientists must be put on adapting to new structural guidelines as comprehensively as possible. According to the research of organisational memory, one must take care that the old will be forgotten as soon as possible, and the traditional routines will swiftly be de-learned. Also, organisational memory may indeed be rendered a problem for science organisations, a persistence mechanism that might notoriously block swift adjustment processes.

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25 Birger P. Priddat (2013) discusses this phenomenon, which is frequently discussed as the economisation of university, and emphasizes that at best it is a kind of political economisation in the sense of “politically intended scarcity”.

## 4.2 Oblivion Diagnoses

After the up to here compiled approaches at the issue of time and memory with science, now – in the same way – the view will be on studies and connection points concerning scientific oblivion. Also, there are a few contributions which – each according to theoretical provenance – touch or sometimes even mention the problem of oblivion. Two essential traits can be identified in this context: on the one hand, according to accumulation logic in combination with the completeness ideal and progress orientation, which have been characterising the sciences since the discovery of writing, any oblivion must be identified as a mistake which must be avoided at any costs. Against this background, oblivion must be rendered a problem and must be considered a leak in scientific insight. Reflecting on the loss of knowledge aims at the problem of forgetfulness in the sense of latent or uncontrolled selectivity aspects of the scientific memory. On the one hand, points of view are developed, which put the possibilities of the accumulative growth of knowledge in the sciences into question, thus, for the first time moving steering impulses of the selectivity of memory into focus. In this context, probably rather problems of wanting to forget and making forget are in the fore which may as well be described as a kind of “cleaning”.<sup>26</sup>

For the inspection of studies on social oblivion in science so far, a rough classification is sufficient. Accordingly, among the presented studies, none takes the distinction between wanting to forget and making forget into consideration, and also, there has been no explicit differentiation according to the social micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Nevertheless, these studies may still be attributed to the levels they primarily deal with: some studies discussing oblivion in the sciences belong to the philosophy of science in the broadest sense and thus rather address the social macro-level. Other studies start from the production of knowledge and view at the social micro-level of the relations between individuals or of the practice of research. By the first step of our stock-taking, however, we will distinguish two basic kinds, one of which aims at forgetfulness in the sense of structural amnesia (oblivion (II)), whereas the other brings together several ways of more or less intentional oblivion (oblivion (I)).

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26 In the context of these kinds of oblivion, Bowker (1997) in an essay on organisational memories distinguishes between clearance and erasure. In both cases the focus is on an interest-guided change of selectivity mechanisms. In this context, clearance refers to recognising existing selection structures as such and replacing them by new ones. Bowker demonstrates this by the example of nursing, where the traditional, handwritten, system of documenting is replaced by the electronic and catalogue-based documentation of performance.

Apart from the oblivion demand with which Nietzsche confronted the science of history, in view of prominent oblivion diagnoses in the context of science, Husserl's late works must be taken into consideration. However, other than Nietzsche, Husserl does not identify any obstacle for thinking, reflecting, or progress due to too much useless remembering. Instead, with the history of the natural sciences, he identifies a trend of forgetting about the connection of sensual perception and lifeworld due to constant abstraction. In Husserl, once again in contrast to Nietzsche, this kind of forgetfulness is not at all positively connoted but is a dysfunction that, according to Husserl, is one cause among others for the crisis of European science. Nevertheless, this is no explicitly worked out oblivion theory but states an ongoing alienation that is connected to oblivion processes. However, this way, Husserl is one of the first to point to forgetfulness with the sciences, a kind of forgetfulness caused by the success of the scientific activity and being institutionally inherent to science.

By the example of the works and working of Galileo Galilei, Husserl works out the turning away of the sciences, particularly of mathematics and physics, from the sensually experienceable world in his *Crisis* study. For, even the idea of grasping nature as constructively determinable by way of measurement results from historical developments. Husserl demonstrates that measurement creates a world of its own that refers to the sensually experienceable world but has no longer much in common with it, as there is mathematical-computational proof and the development of methods, formulas, and theories crucial. He said Galilei was one of the first discoverers to turn away from the lifeworld by experimenting.

Galileo, the discoverer [...] of physics, or physical nature, is at once a discovering and a concealing genius [entdeckender und verdeckender Genius]. He discovers mathematical nature, the methodical idea, he blazes the trail for the infinite number of physical discoveries and discoverers. By contrast to the universal causality of the intuitively given world [...], he discovers what has since been called simply, the law of causality, the 'a priori form' of the 'true' (idealized and mathematized) world, the 'law' of exact lawfulness according to which every occurrence in 'nature' – idealized nature – must come under exact laws. All this is discovery-concealment, and to the present day we accept it as straightforward truth. (Husserl, 1970, pp. 52–53)

Fallen into oblivion has the fact that scientific insight is connected to the lifeworld as being extrapolated through sensual perception. As it is diagnosed also by others, science creates its own objectified or reified reality and presents it as being reality as such. Suppose the construction nature of scientific knowledge is forgotten, and this kind of knowledge is considered a knowledge

higher order. In that case,<sup>27</sup> there happens an ever-ongoing alienation from the lifeworld – and this appears as the forgetfulness aspect of a kind of science that no longer knows any routines of reflecting on its own activity.

Another aspect of mostly non-reflective forgetfulness with the scientific production of knowledge results from a crucial motif of progress or innovation – in analogy to Joseph A. Schumpeter, we might understand it as the principle of creative destruction, destruction always also including the abandoning or loss of existing (intellectual) property (Schumpeter, 1949).

The forgetfulness of science is also an obstacle for solving the questions implied in Husserl's considerations, if sensual forgetfulness results, in the long run, in linearly moving away from the essential or the original or in ever more complicated arrangements of oblivion and forgetting about oblivion, or if one should rather assume a circular movement which will always bring science back to the original objects.<sup>28</sup>

The forgetfulness problem may be identified and dealt with differently in the various disciplines. Also there, however, it seems to be evident to at least distinguish between natural sciences and humanities.<sup>29</sup> The already stated memory-related practices of abandonment on the one hand and of canonisation on the other indicate that, in the former case, sensual oblivion is to a higher degree supported by abandonment assumptions and, in the latter case, a stronger orientation at completeness or at least at the discipline-specific canon of knowledge, and thus a more intensive dealing with previous knowledge is demanded.

These considerations become plausible, e. g. regarding the natural-scientific experiment, which is about the empirical assessment of causal hypotheses and which, against the background of “abandonment”, unfolds historicity as well as

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27 That scientific knowledge is considered to be of higher rank in the context of societal classifications of knowledge is to be found e. g. in Peter Weingart, Wolfgang Krohn and Martin Carrier (2007). In more recent modernity, however, relativisations of this hierarchy can be diagnosed (Böschchen & Dimbath, 2012).

28 As it is well-known, this problem – however not in the form of materialism but of the analysis of the (intentional) awareness of objects – is already the starting point for Husserl's (1980) attempts at developing phenomenology as a foundation of scientific thought at his time.

29 It must be doubted that the analysis of oblivion should leave it with this rough yet, in terms of the history of science, highly evident distinction. It must be assumed, for example, that there exist levels of kinds of forgetfulness both of universally scientific as well as differentiated – down to the level of individual disciplines – kinds of forgetfulness. Here, the direction taken by Karin Knorr-Cetina (1999) with her differentiation of knowledge cultures seems to be promising.

selectivity of its kind. It creates a highly artificial kind of reality, in the context of which the “comprehensiveness” of the world is reduced to the conditions of the experiment. The framework conditions of the experiment are controlled so that the connection between dependent and independent variable can be examined, explained and made into a law. Science-historian Hans-Jörg Rheinberger demonstrates – after all by reaching back to Nietzsche, who already at his time pointed out to the arising diktat of method in the sciences – by way of his concept of “experimental systems” that experimental arrangements make the scientist again and again “exploit” a once successful system. That this comes along with an enormous reduction of insight opportunities is then no longer considered. Over practical research, in the course of which experiment is followed by experiment, one forgets the search for the substantially new (Rheinberger, 1997). Thus, forgetfulness is not generated by the progress logic of science but by the logic of causal reasoning or the science-specific imperative of truth inscribed into scientific work – and here, particularly in the context of quality criteria such as reliability or validity.<sup>30</sup>

Another kind of forgetfulness – that is less forgetting about practical facts in the context of theorising and methods of the scientific genesis of knowledge but oblivion in the field of the discursive legitimating of progressiveness – is the so-called *half-life of knowledge*.<sup>31</sup> Metaphorically applying the physical concept of half-life, which describes the decline of radioactivity measured by time units, is a statistic of science research describing the time until the number of quotations halves – and thus the degree of attention an argument concerning the process of remembering attracts. Such a measure may be applied to individual studies, to literary genres or indeed to entire topical fields or disciplines. In other words: “half-life” refers to the acceptable degree of selectivity – nevertheless differentiated according to the culture of each specific discipline – when dealing with the completeness imperative concerning the legitimation of scientific insight against the background of groundwork by others. It is about legitimate forgetfulness, thus about a kind of oblivion which, in a specific scientific community, is accepted as being “normal” indeed sometimes considered unavoidable.<sup>32</sup> The degree of the “half-life of knowledge” describes

30 All this is closely connected to the criticism by Paul Feyerabend (1993) whose point of view can be differentiated, in terms of oblivion theory, by formulating theses about where wide parts of that kind of knowledge remain which has come from gloomy (ir)rationality.

31 The citing half-life is the mean age of all references in one field – calculated by tenths of a year – recorded by help of huge databases such as the *Web of Science* (Havemann, 2009, p. 54).

32 Also, here e.g. Mannheim’s distinction between the accumulation of knowledge and the abandonment of knowledge becomes valid. Both ways of dealing with older insights



the average speed of the turnover of knowledge within one discipline and thus as a control variable for evaluation processes to decide about the sustainability of a scientific argument from this field. The resulting practical consequences of gaining a dimension of deciding about what may well be “forgotten” will be discussed later. Thus, “half-life” becomes an indicator of the volatility of knowledge in the knowledge society and supports the demand for appropriating knowledge more swiftly or for improved archiving.<sup>33</sup> The measure, however, is not only the assessment criterion but may also be read as a coefficient of forgetfulness, with the help of which one can calculate how soon knowledge becomes outdated or is lost in the light of compatibility or of being attractive for connectivity. Also, this kind of forgetfulness has not much to do with the problem of the store or storability, and also not much with the issue of providing information or of archive organisation. Rather, it is about a measure that, with the help of means of probability calculation, can depict the giving up on nexuses.

Apart from this kind of forgetfulness, resulting from the “inner” logic of scientific activity, we may also imagine kinds of structural amnesia causing a loss of knowledge in the sciences due to “outside” influence.<sup>34</sup> However, apart from Harald Weinrich’s criticism of oblivionism, there are quite a number of observations describing the scientific genesis of knowledge being influenced by non-scientific stimulations.

For example, in the context of the exponential rise of scientific publications, Niklas Luhmann diagnoses a change in the logic of knowledge production, which further increases the selection problem in deciding what is supposed to be remembered and what is supposed to be remembered to be forgotten. No

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result in different half-lives, as they result in specific quotation cultures. Precisely in the humanities and the social sciences the constraint of pointing out to those traditional lines of knowledge which have produced new insights is bigger than with the natural sciences where obviously the connectivity to existing research may mostly be presumed.

33 Christian Wolff reveals the mythical nature of this concept, by pointing out to the fact that the reference value of half-life is not changing knowledge but “social behaviour in the context of scientific publishing”. Instead of speaking of shorter half-lives or the decay of knowledge he suggests different analogies: “New knowledge deposits in layers above the previous state of knowledge, without this knowledge being judged on or changed concerning its quality. Precisely with application-oriented sciences with short half-lives the sources referred to by scientific literature often give testimony to a very short chronological horizon: what is older is not perceived, not because it is irrelevant but simply because it is believed to be too old, because there is not enough time for thorough research or because digitally unavailable literature requires too much effort.” (Wolff, 2008, pp. 212–213)

34 For a differentiated estimation of the suspicion of the sciences being economised see Uwe Schimank (2008).

longer is this exclusively a result of system-immanent consistency assessment but happens primarily because of the effects of an expansive supply industry.

The flood of meaning produced by the printing press makes it impossible to know what is known: to process it into running communication. What will subsequently be realised as communication is difficult to predict. One depends on auxiliary assumptions, and for doing so, one can reach back to standardisations (such as the typical scientific essay) and the novelty of results. If the text is supposed to become knowledge, it must find a reader if it is supposed to complete the as yet incomplete communication. But how? Being published is no guarantee that the book will be read, and definitely not if libraries only buy it. Not even sending books to “multipliers” is an effective means of achieving “reading”. This way, only bookshelves are reached. Given this difficulty, alternatives start the other way round: they start from the reader’s search and decision-making practice and support him/her with the help of subject-related and topical differentiation, abstracts and keyword registers, today increasingly with the help of automatic data processing. (Luhmann, 1992, p. 157)

However, not only the “supply industry” changes the practice and relevancies of knowledge production; also, attributing knowledge value to the individual results in co-coding, in the sense of distinguishing between renowned and not renowned. The result is an implicit rationalisation of knowledge production.

Reputation requires focusing on attention and selecting what, in much probability, deserves more attention than something else. At least, this is true always when causalities are supposed to be established, and the conditions for specific effects (such as for a publication or a scientific career) are supposed to be identified. Thus, the system must provide guidelines to limit the arbitrariness of selecting topics, reading, quoting and formulating, and in the sciences, indeed, this happens by establishing a reputation. (Luhmann, 1992, pp. 245–246)

Although Luhmann identifies the scientific system itself as being responsible for the limitations, he lists a performance-related system code or, instead, its symbolic communications medium – reputation as the currency of the attention economy (Franck, 1998) – is in the fore. Precisely the impression that the orientation at reputation comes from the sciences themselves increases the suspicion that it is a stubborn interpretation of economic thinking among the sciences, which, apart from truth and progress, also establishes a relevance selection according to the success of individual persons. Thus, attention is “automatically” directed at the renowned, whereas the non-renowned is rather left to oblivion.

The situation is similar when it comes to the oblivion of science caused by political steering. If funding is granted or rejected as a result of political

decision-making, this affects those concerned and the respective scientific communities as far as science as a whole.<sup>35</sup> Political steering concerns both the scientific action fields of subjects, disciplines or research institutions and the archiving of scientific information. In single cases, the public reflects on certain subjects or disciplines that have been abandoned as not having been able to answer all the questions they have raised, so abandoning them is said to mean a loss. The project of university profiling, on the other hand, does hardly seem to consider the danger of a structural loss of knowledge as a result of dissolving traditional disciplines and of smaller, “under-critical” research units to be relevant. The abandoned “exotic” subjects are as yet not forgotten, but the phrase “out of sight, out of mind” can perhaps also be applied to academia which is going on to exist even without smaller interest fields that politics consider dispensable. In other words: both university policy and the management of universities influence the differentiation process of academic life by determining which subjects may be closed down because of being less “efficient” or “effective” and, as a consequence, may be forgotten as independently organised units.

Positions that may be interpreted in the sense of processes of wanting to forget and making forget in the sciences describe intentional preliminary work for kinds of forgetfulness. At first sight, against the background of the demands of modern science, articulating an oblivion desire is normatively problematic. As a result of restrictions which are e. g. due to the exponential growth of the stock of scientific information – “these days it’s simply impossible to know everything” – on the one hand, and the shortcomings of the producers of knowledge – “there’s no need to know about bad works” – selectivity in the scientific system is legitimated e. g. in the context of evaluation. Such an evaluation refers to norms of outmodedness if it is e. g. about valuing more recent information higher than older but highly renowned works or about reception convenience when it comes to creating presentations of scientific results. The latter is in analogy with the “logic” of “Whig-history”. At the beginning of the 1930s historian, Henry Butterfield criticised his colleagues’ common practice of describing the present as a necessary consequence of certain historical

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35 One example of such an unequal treatment at the level of individual universities is the Excellence Initiative (see Münch, 2006). As soon as the distribution logic is connected to the providing of resources – such as in the context of applications – it is no longer about a “good” research idea but about the formal correctness of an application in the context of sometimes highly complicated procedures. In any case those being allegedly “weak” will be forgotten – universities, disciplines, scientists – who lack sufficient equipment to compete in a system of scientific competition.

developments (Butterfield, 1931). By “Whig-history”, he means a particular view of history, the tendency of “praising” revolutions if they have been successful or emphasizing specific principles of progress in the past as important steps towards the future. Such a kind of view may also determine the historiography of science, resulting in e. g. telling the history of scientific discoveries as a necessary sequence of success stories. Then, there is no need to consider that each scientific achievement happened at the cost of many failures. Consequently, entire oeuvres cannot be remembered and may fall into oblivion if, in the respective case, these efforts do not fit into a consistent image of the epistemic genealogy of a research subject. Selectivities of this kind have only marginally to do with the quality of individual research results; rather, they are blanket judgements in the context of which non-topical arguments can ignore the topical contributions.

The tendency of scientific reporting of preferably documenting success stories when working out shapes – or narrative constructions – is closely connected to the scientists’ professional legitimation needs or aspirations. This becomes obvious, among others, because studies that have neither produced the “expected” nor otherwise “positive” results are less likely to be published, although they may be highly relevant for the progress of science.<sup>36</sup> The low degree of attention given to rejected hypotheses and research questions indicates a gigantic oblivion process inscribed into academic activities. In this context, the oblivion problem consists of the fact that the unsuccessful is not even transformed into archivable information and, secondly – should this be the case, there is little interest in follow-up communication. The problem with this kind of ignorance and thus-resulting oblivion is that many a problem is dealt with several times and shelved again as unsolvable.

Also, to the realm of the academic attribution of relevance, there belongs a phenomenon that has been analysed by Merton and Harriet Zuckerman (Merton, 1973; 1988). In an analysis of the attribution of attention around Nobel laureates, they found out that, when quoting, “great” names attract much more attention than less-known co-authors. In other words: it seems as if just the high reputation of one author results in the other one being ignored or forgotten. This phenomenon, called the *Matthew effect*, comes from the parable of the talents in the New Testament, where it says: “to everyone who has will more be given [...]. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be

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36 Although currently, by the *Journal of Unsolved Questions* (JunQ), there exists a scientific forum for failed analyses, precisely the fact that it is interdisciplinarily oriented and run by doctoral candidates allows for the conclusion that it is of comparably little relevance for inner-discipline discourses.

taken away" (The New Testament, Matthew 25:29). The consequence for co-authors of scientific studies is that the reputation of the more famous author grows ever more, whereas that of the less-known author is not increased. In this context, it is even irrelevant in which order the authors are listed in the title and thus in any bibliography. The principle of the Matthew effect cannot only be applied to individual scientists but becomes obvious also in the case of expert journals and even nations (Bonitz, 1997). The oblivion aspect coming along with Matthew effects may be understood to be intentional wanting to forget.

However, Merton also analyses the problem that a relevant contribution is not or falsely quoted. On the one hand, he is interested in the "careers" of scientific ideas, concepts and theories, which are frequently quoted and, in this context, are dissolved from the crucial statements or their originators. Merton calls such a development, which may be compared to the children's game called "whisper down the lane", the *palimpsest syndrome*. By quoting the "focused interview", which goes back to his early works, he reconstructs the development, caused by quotation chains without he himself contributing, towards a conceptual neologism: the focus group – which was then again attributed to him (Merton, 1987). Also, in this case, forgetting about an object of knowledge is at the heart of things when falsifications, distortions or unintended neologisms are "passed on" from one author to the next in the course of inaccurate follow-up communication.<sup>37</sup>

In his work *On the Shoulders of Giants*, Merton pursues who exactly coined certain "winged words". Based on the title, which mirrors the scientist's modesty given the gigantic tradition of knowledge he necessarily refers to, he starts searching for traces of who, after all, was the inventor of a certain dictum. In the course of doing so, he reconstructs an entire range of scientific inaccuracies in the context of referring to and appreciating those on whose shoulders one claims to sit. One variant deserving to be mentioned in terms of oblivion theory is Merton's concept of cryptomnesia which he adopts from psychology. This "unwitting plagiarism" consists of having "incorporated" a knowledge object to such a degree that one believes to have invented it oneself (Merton, 1993). "The fact that cryptomnesia can occur at all subjects the scientist to the ever-present possibility that his most cherished original idea may actually be

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37 One example of such a distortion – little consequential in this case, but remarkable – is the diagnosis of the "steel shell of serfdom" which was attributed to Weber's theory of bureaucratisation, although the phrase is not to be found in Weber. Weber just spoke either of the "steely shell" or of the "shell of serfdom".

the forgotten residue of what he had once seen or read or heard elsewhere” (Merton, 1973, p. 403).

Another selection mechanism comes from the realm of the so-called science of science. It results from the abundance of scientific information and is derived from the insight that scientific achievements are distributed in a way that is similar to what Vilfredo Pareto depicted in his income function: a large share of the income of an economy is distributed among comparably few, whereas very many must share a small part of the national income among themselves. Connecting to such functions, mathematician Alfred J. Lotka developed the 80:20 rule, according to which it is sufficient to read 20 per cent of the scientific publications on a certain topic to have an overview of 80 per cent of the total information available.

Similarly, we may understand Bradford’s Law of Scattering, formulated by library scientist Samuel C. Bradford. Confronted with scarce spatial and acquisition resources at libraries, he was looking for a formula with the help of which a librarian might find out which periodicals are most fruitful for readers. Also, many essays are indeed published in just a few journals, whereas many journals publish only a few articles on that same topic. Then the librarian will look for such core journals and subscribe to them. With the help of bibliometric procedures, it is possible to analyse scientific debates for frequently quoted authors or studies. Thus, by evaluating the lists of references of the 20 per cent of most renowned sources, one may assume to be provided with an overview of 80 per cent of all related literature.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, researchers use quotation analyses to make certain decisions connected to publishing easier: for example, the evaluation of quotations may influence the decision about where to publish if one knows which journal is more “visible” concerning the topic in question. The fact that a high reputation is connected to high quotation rates, independently of the content of the contributions, has resulted in the selectivity of its own kind, which makes texts published in certain journals – those with a high “impact factor” – more relevant.<sup>39</sup>

38 On this see e. g. Franz Havemann (2009), and on the development of the impact factor as well as on investigating “significant” journals see Eugene Garfield (1976).

39 Also imaginable are arrangements which make a qualitatively minor contribution in a journal with a high impact factor look like being of higher rank than a qualitatively major contribution published in a less visible or prestigious journal. Thus, this procedure works in favour of attention-economic behaviour, by assuming that a kind of selectivity which is dissolved from the basic ideas of scientific activity – intended oblivion – is met with agreement and is thus implemented.

When it comes to the debate on social oblivion in science, this practice can be easily put in a nutshell by stating: everything not listed among the relevant 20 per cent will fall into oblivion, like everything not published in journals with a high impact. This is one aspect of Harald Weinrich's (2004) criticism of scientific oblivionism.<sup>40</sup>

One of Robert K. Merton's disciples, information scientist and bibliometric analyst Eugene Garfield, when reacting to criticism of bibliometric methods, addresses the phenomenon of science-related oblivion.<sup>41</sup> To the question, if the selectivity of systematic analyses of quotations will not possibly make highly relevant texts fall into oblivion, he answers that it is highly improbable that an important scientific contribution is not quoted. He gives three different reasons for legitimately being not-quoted. Firstly, he says, some studies are only mediocre, unintelligent, irrelevant or simply mad and are thus ignored (uncitedness I). Secondly, it may at least theoretically be imagined that good and meritorious works remain undiscovered and then fall into oblivion (uncitedness II). Thirdly, he claims, many works are so famous that they are expected to be known as essential knowledge, and because of belonging to the canon, they are thus not particularly quoted (uncitedness III). Seen this way, it may even be a criterion for success if one is no longer quoted.<sup>42</sup>

Criticism of Garfield's methods – he is the founder of the Institute of Informational Science (ISI), which, as a scientific services provider, offers quotation analyses in the context of the Science Citation Index (SCI) – always comes from one direction, as becomes evident from his reactions. Accordingly, critical questions are frequently asked by scientists being concerned that works whose relevance is not in line with the spirit of the time might be forgotten.

40 As an oblivion strategy, the practice of scientific oblivionism undermines the completeness ideal, from which there results the question if that what is quoted most frequently is indeed topically appropriate or of what is going to happen with the practice of quoting if no longer there is the claim to have at least made the attempt to assess all relevant sources on a subject.

41 Accordingly, Garfield – for example when comparing with other evaluative rules for selection such as peer review – writes: "Yes, a better evaluation system would involve actually reading each article for quality but then this entire congress is dedicated to the difficulties of reconciling peer review judgments. When it comes time to evaluating faculty, most people do not have or care to take the time to read the articles any more! Even if they did, their judgment surely would be tempered by observing the comments of those who have cited the work" (Garfield, 2005, p. 20).

42 Garfield mentions the concept of uncitedness at several places, when it is about giving reasons for scientific literature being obsolete. The most detailed clarification he presents in the short memo "Uncitedness III – The Importance of NOT Being Cited" (Garfield, 1973).

This, they claim, is pushed on if the practice of bibliometrically informed research pushes through, as it is incapable of identifying relevant contributions which, however, have been published at “invisible” places.<sup>43</sup> Garfield attempts to dissipate such doubts by suggesting an *index oblivionalis*, pointing out his quotation analyses claiming completeness. He believes it is almost impossible to overlook the works by temporarily forgotten Gregor Mendel, as precisely quotation analysis allows for identifying even marginalised works (Garfield, 1971). Indeed, it seems as if there is some scientific sleeping beauty; but that relevant information is rediscovered only after a long sleep of oblivion, he claims, is extremely rare – at least against the background of bibliometric traceability (van Raan, 2004).

After all, the oblivion problem of bibliometrics is less the indexing of natural-scientific journals, i. e. its core business, but rather consists of all those fields which are not systematically covered as well as of a particular way of implementation. If it is not about complete but about rationalised and thus selective research, there is the danger of overlooking and thus forgetting something important. Here the principle of wanting to forget appears as a special kind of ignorance; this is a problem precisely in academic life if one is satisfied with the frequently quoted “mainstream” works to which one attributes particular relevance which, however, are not necessarily topically grounded but are only based on the attention they attract among the scientific community.

As another kind of intentional – that is intended or made – oblivion in science, we may read the Scientific Revolution according to the thesis by science historian Thomas S. Kuhn.<sup>44</sup> Delimiting himself from the idea of science being accumulative and logically progressing, Kuhn states that sciences develop further in the course of paradigms following each other. By paradigm, he understands a collectively shared view according to which scientific topics are dealt with. In this context, the epistemic process is not linear but rather happens in the sense of radical scientific turns, in the context of which a new view must have developed in the shadow of the dominating one which then, at some point in time – and coming along with “adjustment losses” of the involved scientists – replaces the older perspective which then is considered outdated and obsolete. Reaching back to Karl Mannheim’s concept of generations, the

43 It is remarkable that Garfield’s reactions are oriented at objections which are the result of injured vanity. It seems that he is hardly aware that, if quotation analysis pushes through as a method of science-related remembering, a new kind of selectivity will be introduced.

44 See Thomas S. Kuhn (1962), for whom the Scientific Revolution is a structural aspect in the context of which oblivion effects are at best accepted. From an oblivion-theoretical point of view, the dispute about the leading thought style seems to be about the question of who, from which position, may call for making a competing paradigm fall into oblivion.



Scientific Revolution appears as a kind of social change realised by “successful” generation units. Both Kuhn and Mannheim are based on one and the same figure of a kind of change developing from the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous, which is a kind of a radical change at the same time (Mannheim 1952). This process is accompanied by oblivion processes, although a replaced paradigm is considered to be “incorporated” into the new, as this is only very limitedly the case.

Another position, called institutional oblivion, is developed by Mary Douglas, who delineates the persistence of scientific thought styles or paradigms.<sup>45</sup> This finding is something like “good idea, but too early for the world”, and this does not necessarily refer to an idea being incomprehensible for its time. It may also be imagined that it is not worthwhile for scientists to take up a new, perhaps revolutionary, idea as long as they may still work according to their familiar thought style. Theories and fashions are institutionalised and highly change-proof. Douglas illustrates this by discovering the so-called impossibility theorem, in the context of which it is proven that an actor cannot place his/her own preferences into a hierarchy. In the late 1940s, two authors almost simultaneously reported on this formula – however, none of them was aware that this principle had been discovered already 150 years before. Additionally, even the discovery of the 1940s had been a “sleeping beauty” for twenty years before being appreciated. Douglas considers this a case of scientific oblivion for which she gives lacking congruence with the thought style of the respective epoch as a reason. Only this way, it was possible to adopt the impossibility theorem and to refer it to practical life after universal suffrage had become social reality and its pluralism-induced limitations had become known.

A new discovery it has to be compatible with political and philosophical assumptions if it is to get off the ground in the first place, to say nothing of being remembered afterwards. It is not enough to keep repeating that memory is socially structured. (Douglas, 1986, p. 80)

The arguments stated so far demonstrate that the development of scientific stocks of knowledge happens path-dependently and is co-determined by

45 In this context, we may think of Ludwik Fleck (2012), who is explicitly mentioned by Douglas, however also of Karl Mannheim (1986), both of whom describe the persistence and change of thought by way of the concept of thought style. Kuhn (1962, p.vi) himself concedes that for a long time he had not known about Fleck’s works and that his concept of paradigm is mostly congruent with that of thought style. However, also with Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse we may identify many congruities with thought style or paradigm.

non-scientific influences. That permanent change is hardly reflected in all its broadness is due to comprehensive oblivion processes resulting partly from the structure of the field of activity of “science”, partly from the actions of other actors. We have already pointed out positions assuming some forgetfulness in the sciences, coming along with economisation or bureaucratisation. On the one hand, a mostly unnoticed change of scientific activity and, thus connected, forgetting about original meanings can be diagnosed; there are also assumptions aiming at scientific traditions being given up. In other words: assumed colonisation of the sciences does not happen creepingly, but the actors accept or even pursue it with their eyes open. In this context, we may speak of adjustment oblivion, consisting of a loss of knowledge characterised by the adjustment of scientific structures to non-scientific structural stimulations or guidelines. The kind of institutional change behind this has, in the context of the theory of New Institutionalism, already been described as isomorphism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). At the level of actors, structural patterns of “other” social structures are identified, anticipated and – voluntarily or involuntarily – transferred to the “own” system. Thus, it is about a kind of change that is authoritative or participative but may also happen in the form of one “system” being colonised by another or by the latter’s imperatives and generalised communications media being adopted.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the readjustment to these new organisation patterns comes with forgetting about older structures, which the actors of change desire.

Perhaps Humboldt’s university system – autonomous research in “solitude and liberty”<sup>47</sup> as well as the combination of research and teaching – had just been past its prime when Max Weber wrote his analysis of bureaucracy. In his diagnosis of time, he stated that bureaucratisation covers all fields of social life. Modern universities are administration-like or entrepreneurially organised places where scientific knowledge is gained. Since the spread of new public management, they have been making efforts to increase their adaptiveness and flexibility. Sometimes, business enterprises provide the patterns for such efforts, as they are said to be more capable of dealing with tight resources and efficiency problems.

That scientific work in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century was more accessible and more autonomous is undoubtedly a nostalgic

46 Accordingly, Jürgen Habermas’ (1984) colonisation thesis, originally referring to the life-world, may as well be transferred to the realm of science. Then the diagnosis describes originally scientific aspirations being monopolised by power and money.

47 On this see Helmut Schelsky’s (1963, pp. 118–120) considerations on forgetting about academic solitude.

distortion.<sup>48</sup> And probably both increasing organisation and competition in the sciences have contributed to their exponential growth. However, by the ever more intensive influence of the organisation on scientific activity, a kind of change can be demonstrated, along with comprehensive oblivion processes. In the context of current debates on the institutional capability of the sciences to renew themselves, from an organisation-sociological point of view, one may ask how far techniques and strategies of organisational oblivion are (can be) transferred to academic life (Dimbath, 2012).

One manifestation of the transfer of organisational rationality to research is mirrored by the introduction and spread of control devices – apart from the already mentioned rationalisation of the genesis of knowledge. However, this is not about bureaucratisation but about ways of marketing due to With regard to organisations and institutions of the sciences, aspects of social oblivion prove to be well suitable for the reconstruction of restructuring processes. For example, the introduction of evaluation processes concerning scientific performance – in the form of university rankings or by reaching back to quotation analyses in the context of appointment procedures – influences the scientific aspect of scientific activity and topical orientations. Only by way of evaluative performance assessment, the initially only latently existing possibility of competitive interpretation becomes a norm for orientation. This may result in a highly effective restructuring of institutional selection mechanisms and the thus related relevance structures. However, such a rationalisation stipulation comes with the danger that anybody who does not obey will be ignored and forgotten. The concern of being forgotten, which is connected to vanity but has rational reasons, can influence topical and social-cooperative decision-making in science. The more a field of activity is open towards such motives, the more likely is it that researchers will become oriented at allegedly promising questions and contacts – that is also research that is easily evaluated and results in positive assessments. In times of high recognition for application-oriented and third-party funded research it does not seem to pay off to focus on basic research.<sup>49</sup>

Examples of politics interfering with the genesis of scientific knowledge are found in the context of authoritative systems – such as when any way of coping with the knowledge that is a problem for the nation or the ruling elite

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48 In Max Weber's lecture on "Science as a Vocation" (1946) we read about the uncertainties of the profession of the scientist already at the beginning of the 20th century.

49 In this context, Uwe Schimank (2008) states that this way the orientation at marginalised, special topics might be limited.

is supposed to be prevented.<sup>50</sup> In this context, two trends can be identified. Whereas sometimes research concerning specific topics is more or less outspokenly prohibited, the “softer” variants consist of channelling anyway stretched resources exclusively to projects which either deal with desired questions or provide counter-expertise to politically unwanted facts.

Interference with scientific liberty, which may be connected to hope for oblivion, after all, also becomes obvious in the case of political decisions which are prepared, e. g., by ethics commissions. Then the oblivion expectation is towards the aspirations of scientists to further pursue certain morally or ethically problematic research questions – research fields under taboo must be forgotten. This expectation is supported by resembling the decision to pursue these research paths no longer. The debates in Germany on red or green genetic engineering, stem cell research, or preimplantation diagnostics are just some examples of the transitions between political steering and inner-science self-limitation – which can only be negotiated politically; however, system-immanently – may be fluent. In any case, it is kind of an “intentionality of not knowing”, stubbornly grounded by the various actors, which, as protective or positive ignorance, results in avoiding lengthy controversies (Wehling, 2012, p. 112).

### 4.3 Perspectives of Social Oblivion in the Sciences

After having presented some explicit and implicit approaches to oblivion phenomena in the context of science, now, with the help of the previously unfolded analysis heuristics, the significant number of starting points for an analysis of social oblivion in science is supposed to be grasped. As the method is oriented at an analysis tool gained from theoretical considerations, in the following, it will be about generating hypotheses; the tool serves as search heuristics for as yet undiscovered research problems or a new contextualisation, a rearrangement or a connection to already known questions.

Due to the small number of studies on “oblivion” in science, which are furthermore scattered across various disciplines, the “granulation” of sociological systematisation had to be reduced by several levels. However, it has been

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50 Accordingly, a history of research bans will have to reflect both on the value horizon and on the interest in stabilising power of societies. It is doubtful in how far research interests can lastingly be suppressed by power interests, which would then result in oblivion. Scientists being confronted with research bans may resort to emigration as an evasive move.

possible to maintain the systematics of search heuristics. Accordingly, we have stayed away from structuring according to aggregation levels – which, however, would have been fruitful only heuristically – and from distinguishing the two intentional variants of the conditions for oblivion (oblivion I). For the following considerations, these aspects are going to be reactivated so that in the context of science, it will be possible to pursue social oblivion in the field of the social micro-, meso- and macro-levels, in combination with the kinds of oblivion of forgetfulness, wanting to forget and making forget.

#### 4.3.1 *Obliviating Researchers*

At the level of the subjects and social interactions of scientific activity, aspects of oblivion are viewed as of significance for the constitution of subjects or identities on the one hand and for personal communication among actors. For quite some time, we have been provided with an empirical approach to investigating such aspects, i. e. the research field of ethnomethodology and science and technology studies. Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar or Karin Knorr-Cetina demonstrated that scientific activity is as permeated with an abundance of practices and routines as everyday action at many places.<sup>51</sup> The ethnomethodology approach, which is highly sensitive towards “traces”, seems to be an adequate way of proceeding to identify conditions for oblivion and the reconstruction of science-specific aspects of forgetfulness.

Regarding the micro-sociological level, the following kinds of oblivion will be exemplarily discussed. Thus, not presenting the results of empirical analyses is in the fore but an exploring way of sounding out. It aims at a wide field of different situations, starting from everyday stereotypes typically connected to a “scientist” type of oblivion. Like with the development of the conceptual analysis tool, also the search for oblivion aspects happens at first in the field of structurally grounded forgetfulness (1) and then in the fields of volitional wanting-to-forget (2), and then in the field of instrumental making-forget (3).

At the level of individuals, seemingly natural processes of oblivion can be distinguished according to two aspects: if it is the subject’s forgetfulness given the social reference frames, social roles, or relevant institutions to be found in academia, or if considering the interactions between individuals within research. Furthermore, a combination of these perspectives may be imagined if the relations of the role bearer to his/her everyday social environment are considered – even beyond the field of activity of “science”.

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51 On this see most of all the basic documents of *Science and Technology Studies* and of laboratory constructivism by Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar (1979) as well as by Karin Knorr-Cetina (1981).

If we start with the individual consciousness, kinds of oblivion become visible which the subject, as far or as soon as he/she becomes aware of a loss of knowledge, attributes to his/her forgetfulness or the forgetfulness of others. The former two examples are connected to the researcher's identity. As the identity scheme is constantly updated, and as only in exceptional cases time indices – such as memory-relevant, biographic steps of development in the sense of aha or eureka experiences – are inscribed into this updating, change will be forgotten in the course of the stream of consciousness. This may be stated both when it comes to developing of the personality of a scientist (a) and concerning the development of individual expert knowledge by way of incorporating the thought-style of the scientific community (b). Another kind of forgetfulness can be observed with interactions between researchers, if in certain situations these define their exchange of knowledge as being secondary and thus less relevant (c). Contents which are both topically and inter-subjectively significant may fall into oblivion again immediately after having appeared because they belong to the everyday, practical repertoire of behaviour for which usually no explicit routine of reflection is provided.<sup>52</sup>

The individual identity construction connected to the professional personality results from certain aspects of the professional biography. These are often success stories combined with an artificial, coherent, and narratively created identity in the sense of self-narration or self-history.<sup>53</sup> By comparing the self-concept, which is continued in the form of a scheme, to those aspects of a situation that are considered relevant, only part of what has been experienced is used for updating, and much is forgotten *en passant*. Identity development is idealisation and self-reification simultaneously, making us forget other aspects

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52 By the concept of *epoché*, phenomenological philosophy demands that the subjective perspective is to be excluded, thus taking into account the danger of this kind of forgetfulness. Only at first sight those problems as to be connected to the individual consciousness belong to the scope of psychological research. They become sociologically relevant most of all because of their sometimes conflictual effects, as frequently this is disappeared knowledge connected to the expectations of others – thus, here we might speak of asymmetrical forgetfulness.

53 Also, occupational research assumes that such memory-related constructions of successful processes as well as positive attributes are the regular case (Kohli, 1975). The status of being an expert, which is relevant in the scientific realm, is at the same time the foundation of a “personal experience of meaningfulness” which is based on experiencing one's own usefulness for the group (Beck et al., 1980, p. 220). For the time being, both an analysis of the selection mechanisms of occupation-biographic remembering and of the memories of individual professions are lacking – with the exception of a few studies from the field of biography research which, however, are rather implicit.

that are usually considered irrelevant in the environment of relations.<sup>54</sup> One example of such development oblivion at the level of subjective horizons of expectation is the dissatisfaction of many experienced researchers with the skills of written articulation of young colleagues when it comes to jointly write scientific publications, or the sometimes lacking sensitiveness of examiners for the fears of candidates, which may be due to the experience of being a candidate having been entirely eclipsed by the experience of being an examiner.

We have already pointed out forgetting about sources, as discovered by Robert K. Merton, which he calls *cryptomnesia* or *obliteration by incorporation*.<sup>55</sup> In the course of their production of knowledge, researchers incorporate wide parts of their sets of theoretical and research-practical tools and the boundaries of the epistemically possible, which are defined by the discipline-specific thought styles of their time. Thus, with a growing experience, they get ever more used to the predominant paradigm or the familiar theoretical perspective whose nature of being common science can no longer be seen due to a slowly consolidating, topic-specific oblivion of origins and histories. It is not only about an oblivion-theoretical explanation for tolerated plagiarism, coming along with humbly admitting that one is sitting on the shoulders of giants, but about being too much oriented at the past, a problem Nietzsche pointed out. However, what Nietzsche moralises as the vanity of the historian becomes a knowledge-sociological issue, e. g. in Mannheim's concept of ideology: due to the professional-biographically consolidating orientation at the existing, one does no longer see the new. What is forgotten most of all is, among others, aspects of irritability.

As an issue belonging to the interaction among scientists, forgetfulness becomes a problem at the boundary between everyday action routines or rituals and scientific communication. For example, only in the rarest cases, the informal exchange during dinner or on the threshold is accompanied by organised documentation – such as in the form of ad-hoc memoranda, which themselves require organised archiving. Although the thus developed ideas

54 The term self-reification, going back to Georg Lukács and adopted by Adorno, at first only refers to giving up on recognizing one's own (or, to have it in Heidegger's terminology) authentic subjectivity. Then Axel Honneth (2005) places it into the context of a recognition-forgottenness, which again is not far from seemingly naturally or "automatically" forgetting about one's own having-become in the sense of lacking reflection on the fact that the individual has grown into the social expectation contexts he/she serves – no one is born a master. Harald Hofer (2011) in his reconstruction of different variants of reification speaks of development- or historicity-forgottenness, among others.

55 On *cryptomnesia* see Robert K. Merton (1993, p. 25; 1973, and on *obliteration by incorporation* as the "automatic abandonment" and thus disappearance of older knowledge into the new see Merton (1968, p. 35).

may contribute to the genesis of knowledge, the context of their creation – in the cryptomnesia sense – is easily forgotten. Indeed, the informal exchange is an acceptable source of inspiration in any field of activity – however, if it is about precisely documenting the genesis of this knowledge, this field becomes a subject in need of reflection. This is, even more, the case if, concerning the memory of informal encounters, we must assume some inequality-systematic selectivity: insights gained from a threshold conversation with a Nobel laureate may be supposed to be better remembered and to find their way into research documentations than chats with doctoral candidates during the coffee break.<sup>56</sup>

A second aspect concerns the many ideas generated in the course of informal exchange but not pursued further. As yet, oblivion-sociological analysis asking about the loss caused by this uncontrolled selectivity can be inspired only from the fiction of a library of unwritten books and essays as well as from an archive of identified yet undiscussed research questions.<sup>57</sup>

Another approach to the analysis of oblivion at the social micro-level results from perceiving “automatic” or “natural” forgetfulness with others. For the sciences, this becomes relevant on the one hand if subjects attribute forgetfulness to other subjects or groups, or if on the other hand subjects conventionalise, reify or exploit their own forgetfulness to gain legitimation advantages during interactions with others.

In some segments of academic life, which is characterised by a high degree of the division of work, by being professionalised and organised according to “ordinary science”, it may be that the problem of generativity in the sense of the individual desire to create or bequeath something which may last does not play any particular role. Those being active in the sciences may be provided with meaning-making of this kind either from organised work or from fields of life. However, science may as well come along with a high appreciation of

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56 Whereas science research is currently exploring these informal acts of communication among researchers, such as in the context of congresses, the here suggested approach goes one step further. It is assumed that the informal context is indeed a black box of creativity and innovation on the one hand; on the other hand, it is in line with specific orders of ignoring the here exchanged information – one might think of hierarchies, belonging to generations and groups, which reduce or support forgetfulness.

57 One step into this direction was made by Andreas Urs Sommer (2012), with his *Lexikon der imaginären philosophischen Werke* [Encyclopaedia of imaginary philosophical works] – motivated by the finding that “works not to be found anywhere” extend, as an “intellectual history of the unthought”, the “thought horizon of humanity”. When he is interested in increasing variety “instead of reducing manifoldness to dull simplicity” (Sommer, 2012, p. 9) – this is where he criticizes the practice of the history of philosophy – he starts tackling what oblivion analyses, among others, may be capable of.



an instinct of workmanship – in particular where the idea of autonomy, in the sense of “solitude and freedom”, is still relevant.<sup>58</sup> The motivation for scientific activity may aim at individual achievements and, in this context, at making contributions to the collective property of social knowledge. Then, the scientist creates something he/she bequeaths to posterity – a desire which aims at the opportunity to be remembered, by one’s work, by the collective and to this way become immortal.<sup>59</sup> If this is a relevant motivation, scientific activity seems to be connected to the subject’s awareness of his/her own finiteness while at the same time providing an opportunity to work against the danger of being forgotten. Who has “dedicated” his/her life to science, may believe to be worthless if not succeeding with inscribing him/herself into the “history book” of this system.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the fear of not creating anything that might last would be a driving force for relentless production. In this context, the focus of oblivion analysis is on the structural oblivion of a professional and reference group as anticipated by the individual member and related to his/her own actions, as well as on the diagnosis of behavioural patterns resulting from the involved actors’ attempts to cope with this.

Another starting point for forgetfulness at the micro-level does at first sight not look particularly obvious from a knowledge-sociological point of view. It concerns whether the specifics of the scientific field of activity create a typical kind of forgetfulness among the involved individuals that could be distinguished from other social contexts. The common stereotype of the

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58 One such motivation for deciding for a vocation is mentioned e. g. by Max Weber (1946) in his lecture on science as a vocation – delimiting from a purely bread-winning motivation for scientific activity.

59 The penitents in Dante’s *Inferno* can only be redeemed if in this world somebody remembers them – the most terrible of all punishments is being eternally forgotten (Weinrich, 2004). In science research, Steve Fuller, connecting to works by Bourdieu as well as Latour and Woolgar, points out to this motivation, by stating that scientists with their research work attempt to establish credibility. This credibility is measured by the researcher’s capability of rousing the interest of others. “If they succeeded, they have avoided oblivion – at least for a little while” (Fuller, 2000, p. 39).

60 How little thinkers have actually been shown that grace is demonstrated by Randall Collins (2002) in his analysis of the philosophical canon – some ancient philosophers had more than 1,000 disciples, of which only very few are still today found at the archive of sciences, and certainly most of them are not canonically remembered. A really “classical” approach at the problem of oblivion in social groups – again in the context of science – is already provided by Charles Horton Cooley (1918) who points out that societies are ungrateful and usually soon forget about past merits (see also the related chapter of Olick et al., 2011, p. 131).

absent-minded professor is one example.<sup>61</sup> In this context, only partly the proverbial absent-mindedness finds expression by moments of forgetfulness, as first of all, it consists of a strong focus of subjective attention on the reality segment of science while being comparably much estranged from paramount reality.<sup>62</sup> Due to his/her behaviour, the absent-minded scientist disappoints expectations of the everyday world; however, he/she may hope for indulgence, as the lack of attention may be excused by his/her focus on the highly prestigious activity of producing insights. As, by way of the title, his/her professional status is associatively connected to his/her personality, it may be assumed that this complete personality – and not only the professional aspect – has completely been absorbed by this *déformation professionnelle*. However, the interpretation pattern of absent-mindedness – beyond the indulgence shown towards absent-minded scientists – also tells about the expectations connected to this field of activity in the context of the social differentiation of labour. Thus, an individual's absent-mindedness and, coming along with it, his/her forgetfulness are not only interpreted as a weak spot but are really expected and are attributed to the scientist even in minor cases.

It is remarkable with this kind of oblivion that specific social roles or positions with a lesser degree of adjustment to these roles and positions, determined by social reference frames, are expected. The scientist is allowed to habitually not take part in socially expected changes of context. Some forms of social misbehaviour are excused, as he/she is allowed to stay within an esoteric sub-universe with relevance structures that are mostly non-transparent for the outside world due to his/her profession. In this context, his/her strange behaviour measured by everyday relevancies results in the frame of the interaction being modulated in the sense of Goffman (1986). On the other hand, the private and professional environments of absent-minded scientists are expected to adjust the structure of their interaction to the fact that this subject will stay within the frame of science. This may find expression by assistants or partners developing structures for coping with typical, forgetfulness-induced failures – such as always having a packed overnight bag ready, just for the case that once again, the time for going on a trip has been forgotten. An analysis of forgetfulness oriented at profession-related stereotypes is not meant to insinuate that the professional group of scientists is prone to dementia. Rather, it is a cause

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61 Such an example is also to be found in Sigmund Freud (2010, p. 24) who, in the context of his oblivion-theoretical analysis of failures, mentions the Professor of the “*Fliegende Blätter*”.

62 On this see the considerations by Alfred Schütz (1967) who connects to Henri Bergson and William James.

for an analysis of interactions at the interface between purely scientific communication and other horizons of communication. Then, forgetfulness is not necessarily interpreted as a spleen of a certain group but may be analysed as the starting point for attention and mutual recognition deficits.

The issue of wanting-to-forget, which at the level of the individual or the interaction among individuals is illusionary, after all, may be considered intended oblivion, both when it comes to developing the scientist's professional identity and to make sure that there happens successful interaction in the context of scientific activity. Also this is not exclusively about the individual's steering or control achievements. It would also have to be assessed in how far purposeful communication, which must be associated with wanting-to-forget, can be symbolically articulated and thus becomes action-relevant.

Wanting-to-forget, aiming at individually available, perhaps persistently stored knowledge which is perceived as a burden, comes from the desire to no longer add one's own experiences to subjective memory. This way the issue of trauma as an injury of the soul, which is most of all dealt with by psychology and the neuro-sciences, is – in a weaker form – transferred to aspects of everyday experience. In sociology, such an approach is found in Goffman who deals with damaged identity and the ways of dealing with it in the context of interactions.<sup>63</sup> In the following, some typical aspects are going to be pointed out to which in the case of scientists may be connected to the desire, in the sense of a strategy of coping and updating, to no longer remember or forget certain experiences. At first, the focus will be on the identity work of the scientifically researching subject.

A particular kind of identity-affecting wanting-to-forget can be derived from a purposefully selective reference to social frames, such as when scientists attempt to keep reality levels separate. Such a separation may work as self-protection and comes along with giving up on transferring the knowledge contents of one field to another. Also, this is a specific kind of self-forgetfulness, in the context of which consequences of social differentiation – such as separating work from life – are reflected by the individual's identity. In the form of intended or at least accepted forgetfulness of shape, wholeness or configuration (Gestalt), the individual may do without the idea of integrating his/her self. Then there develops a patchwork or hybrid concept of identity used instrumentally or is accepted as a result of being overtaxed. Such a concept may then be used as a socially accepted kind of "split personality" to justify actions that look inconsistent.

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63 On the self being offended or damaged, see Goffman (1963), on interactive coping see Goffman (1952).

The history of the sciences provides examples of scientific insight and social ideas of truth colliding with each other to such an extent that the scientific individual seems to have no choice but to keep the two fields separate. For example, sometimes, the philosopher's attempt to live according to the system he/she has invented seems to be possible only at the price of madness or disintegration, as it is demonstrated e. g. by Auguste Comte's biography.<sup>64</sup> By ignoring the purposeful integration of different kinds of knowledge, constituting themselves by identity – which may be compared to an intra-role conflict<sup>65</sup> – and by preferring one out of several contradicting fields of knowledge, it is possible to create unambiguity. This comes at the price of artificially created 'schizophrenia' which, in the form of differentiating subjective worlds of meanings, may come along with integration problems when the accepted and thus unsolved contradictions are forgotten as such. Thus, this is the same synchronisation problem researchers are confronted with when believing to proceed without being influenced by everyday rationalities. However, this problem, which is dealt with by more recent scientific research, is two-faced: on the one hand, it is an ideologically maintained everyday forgetfulness of those subjects as being active in academic life. On the other hand, some consciously accepted professionalism forgetfulness happens in coping with everyday problems. The latter may result in inter-personal conflict when scientific expertise is applied to solving situations of everyday conflict.<sup>66</sup>

Another aspect of volitional oblivion becomes evident by the obligation to, in the course of one's work, at first work out the state of research. Given a large amount of information to be processed, it may be that the individual scientist develops selection strategies that are helpful for focused research while at the same time ignoring allegedly irrelevant additional information or alternative orientations, as long as no obstacles appear which might make a new approach necessary. Oblivion strategies aiming at ignoring existing, collectively binding knowledge must be filed under oblivion (I) as preconditions for "natural" oblivion and are found at different passages of the self-reflections of scientists. Among the techniques of selecting information, there are selective reading methods – "you cannot read everything" – such as the limitation to titles, abstracts or introductions and lists of the keywords, and so-called skimming

64 On Comte see e. g. the elaborations by Wolf Lepenies (1988).

65 See Ralf Dahrendorf's (1973) role theory.

66 Such cases are addressed by the concept of the "helpless helper" whose professional orientation aims at acquiring and applying professional knowledge for treating his/her own psycho-social deficits (Schmidbauer, 1992).

or scanning techniques.<sup>67</sup> In any case, documents of scientific arguing are not completely acknowledged, and the “messages” of authors are reduced to a few statements which are considered essential, yet already at that stage, their relevance is decided, and a selection is made. One work is remembered, the other one forgotten.<sup>68</sup> Only after such a superficial selection it is decided if a publication is taken into further consideration, perhaps even received in more detail, or if it is left out of consideration and thus left to oblivion.

What is true for the researcher’s identity may also be related to the change of subjective guiding orientations. Oblivion is subjectively reasonable and desired where a longer research activity proves to be so outmoded and pointless that any further dealing with the concerned subject must be ended. This may be connected to giving up on proven thought routines and thus complete sub-fields of a grown profession-specific context of experiences. Reorientation amounts to relearning, coming along with wanting to forget the old thought style. According to Thomas S. Kuhn, any scientist moving outside a valid paradigm is confronted with the need to decide to pursue his/her different orientations further or stick with the current mainstream.<sup>69</sup>

Another irritation for activity-induced identity comes from mistakes made in the past, which, given the *organised scepticism* among the sciences, should be considered a lesson to learn and a reminder (Merton, 1973, p. 280). From the perspective of the development and presentation of professional identity, however, mistakes are considered a flaw and, if they frequently come to one’s mind as a persistently burdening memory, are accompanied by the desire to forget them. Concerning the scientific production of knowledge, such problems must be diagnosed not only for research mistakes documented by publications but also for the emotional-affective experience of the writing of

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67 Not every discipline allows to ignore canonised knowledge for reporting, due to the abandonment assumption, and not every researcher is able to make use of reliable – because complete – citation analyses. Accordingly, in sociology it is lamented that existing knowledge – on this see the keyword “tertiary illiteracy” in Christian Fleck (2013) – is acknowledged too superficially, given a processing expectation which is perceived as being unrealistic (see e. g. Albrecht, 2014).

68 Oblivion motifs are also to be found in the context of the “salami-slicing” publication strategy, consisting of publishing research results only bit by bit, in order of keeping the complexity of the argument low while at the same time increasing the number of publications (on this see e. g. Schimank, 2010b).

69 A similar problem results from the question if the decision between basic research and application-oriented research must be made in the sense of either-or or both-and. The fact that, as has frequently been shown (see e. g. Stokes, 1997), the research-systematic distinction cannot easily be maintained, does not change the reality of this factual decision-making problem.

publications. Sometimes writer's blocks come from the feeling of being incapable, of repeating old mistakes or again and again encountering them in the course of editing.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from any scientific action logics, wanting to forget can also be comprehended in the context of a typical yet mostly "invisible" change of framing. For example, the shift of priorities in the context of scientific work, away from "pure" research activity and towards becoming committed with science policy, science management or the acquisition of third party funding – in particular when reflecting on different action logics – results in the desire to forget experiential contexts or at least to not addressing them any longer. Sometimes such a reorientation is under suspicion of "changing sides" by third parties remaining in the field of research, coming along with the judgement that the concerned person has forgotten about his/her "old" criteria.

A similar diagnosis must be made concerning the transition from university education to non-university professional life. In particular, in the case of those studies which are less predetermined by vocational fields, graduates become fully swallowed by "the" practice, they adjust to their new working conditions and leave their sometimes very complex theoretical knowledge as well as the habitus acquired during scientific education "in the cloakroom". From the scientific point of view, however, there is the impression that many contents and aspects of the science-immanent practice of reflecting on things, based on exactness and attention, are all too readily or purposefully forgotten.<sup>71</sup>

Even mutual adjustment in scientific interaction may be connected to aspects of wanting to forget if either joint failures of the past or discrepancies and conflicts are no longer a topic of discussion. Then, at the level of interaction, we may speak of ways of constructive silencing, for example, if theory-related or proceeding-related differences are ignored for the sake of further cooperation.<sup>72</sup> By doing so, the interaction partners do not only forget by pursuing a tacit consensus, being silent about conflicting matters. To leave

70 On this see the reflection on problems in the context of writing scientific works by Howard S. Becker (1986), in the context of which the oblivion desire aims at the therapy for the emotive disturbance, not at remembering past failures.

71 In view of the practice shock experienced by sociology graduates when starting non-university gainful work, Stefan Kühl and Veronika Tacke (2003) speak of "sociology" being left at the office door like a coat. This motif of intended oblivion resembles Ulysses' stay with the Lotophages, to which Weinrich (2004) reminds.

72 Possibly this oblivion figure might explain the cooperation of "serious" scientists with "dubious" ones, if for the sake of lucrative cooperation (win-win-situation) e. g. research-ethical contradictions are ignored, silenced and left to oblivion. As concerns being silent about past disagreements, in such cases, insofar as they happen according to certain conventions, there is a micro-social parallel to amnesic oblivion at the meso- and the

the potential for conflict aside, they connect the hope to bridge the gap from the past through successful interaction. This way, failed or offending experiences in the course of interactions are overwritten by experiences of success. In how far experiences of conflict which, in the form of disappointment, have created a persistent memory can be controlled this way can hardly be estimated by the interaction partners.<sup>73</sup> Similar to the concept of suppression of psychoanalysis, there is still the danger that conflicts might, again and again, erupt unexpectedly and in ways that cannot be foreseen. This may be the case if different connotations such as personal disappointment – that is, affective aspects – influence the scientific interaction. We may also imagine conflicts developing in research projects if there had to be “too many” compromises and if fundamental differences affect a project’s “smooth running”.

Apart from these variants of wanting to forget, starting from the individual consciousness, there are also preconditions of oblivion resulting from outside influences on the subject or the interaction. The identity constitution is about processing environmental impressions the individual interprets as indications or symbols of burdening experiences. At the level of interaction, such a figure develops if interaction partners ignore problematic information coming from the situative context.

In contrast to the confrontation of the self with problematic memories, wanting-to-forget involves a specific interpretation of memory stimuli. According to Schütz’s terms *Anzeichen* (indications) or *Merkzeichen* (marks), these are autonomous and unsystematic indications which, for the actor, become elements of his/her definition of a situation by irritating his/her original draft for action.<sup>74</sup> In view of the above-unfolded concept of a sociological

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macro-level (see e. g. Meier, 2010). The intention results from the implicit agreement that professional commitment can only be continued together.

73 Karl Lenz (2003) analysed silencing, hushing up and deception in partner relationships. His considerations may be transferred to the working relationship in science, if there is an agreement about not mentioning “notorious” problems – in case of mutuality this is an aspect of wanting-to-forget, in case of one-sidedness it is an aspect of making-forget.

74 By indications, Schütz and Luckmann mean knowledge elements finding expression by processes or objects of everyday life, in the context of which the following is true: “In general, an adequate interpretation becomes more difficult when fewer components of the original situation are available to A. The interpretation will be more difficult the greater the disparity between the knowledge B originally acquired and the indication to be used for interpretation” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 268). On markers they state: “We can say in general that the further removed a mark is from the original situation of its establishment, or the less at hand the relevant components of the original situation are for the interpretation, or the more anonymous the one who made the mark is for the one who interprets it, then so much the less can the mark convey specific knowledge” (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 275).

spectre, here it is about every day or topic-specific “spectres” appearing as unexpected memory stimuli and again and again making us aware of that what we want to forget – associations of the unresolved we frequently try to counter by way of avoidance. Connected to the concept of trigger-stimulation, this is a “compelling” influence of the social environment which may cause a specific kind of remembering. This influence comes from the adjustment of situative perception and experience or subjective having-become.

The here addressed issue can be illustrated by way of science-critical myths and narratives: Goethe’s sorcerer’s apprentice cannot get rid of the ghosts he has evoked, or Mary Shelley’s Dr Frankenstein, who is haunted and held accountable by the monster he has brought to life. Vast parts of the philosophical criticism of progress may be read as cognitive faculty clashing with the indications of its limits – a symbol-communicated re-entry of modern modernisation maxims in the course of an allegedly linear process of social rationalisation.<sup>75</sup> Criticism of progress refers to the desire to forget our knowledge of limits, as the latter is considered an obstacle to innovation. Already at the level of individuals and their interactions, it can be shown that not-wanting-to-see well-known limitations are the same as the desire to, if ever possible, forget this kind of knowledge, for the sake of progress – perhaps as a kind of everlasting hope for progress.

Another variant of wanting-to-forget refers to ignoring context-specific indications of apparent problems, dangers or potential dangers. This is a kind of “we-ought-to-have-known”, as it is told by many tragedies of the history of science and is connected to a particular readiness to sacrifice or to a quest for knowledge without any caution or regardless of life and limb.<sup>76</sup> However, even credulity may be characterised as a kind of wanting-to-forget that ignores hints, inconsistencies, or warnings when scientists, as frequently reported in connection to plagiarism, were all too easily deceived. Then the credit of trust does not consist of looking away once but systematically and path-dependently and the volitional forgetting of causes for suspicion.

From these starting points for wanting-to-forget at the social micro-level, concerning oblivion (I) in the context of science, we may conclude that the desire not to consider certain existing knowledge cannot exclusively be due to overlooking indications or traces. There must always be an experience- or

75 Also here we find a motif of reflective modernisation, as modernisation processes rebound on their own foundations (see Beck, 1992).

76 Granted, here sometimes also “invisible” risks play a role, if it is e.g. about the fate of physicists who have been handling radioactive material (Marie Curie). The negation of danger is also found with the fates of discoverers who are missing or died during their expeditions, such as Robert F. Scott or Roald Amundsen.



context-specific “frame” within which, again, expectable, existing knowledge would have to be activated by remembering and transferring to action. For practical considerations, individuals or interaction partners decide for volitional forgetting, serving at first for realising once made plans or not putting their implementation into question or endangering it. It is easier to guarantee social action by giving up on the activation of knowledge not in line with the draft and systematic doubt. The precondition is the readiness to ignore problems and concerns to a certain degree and “just have a try”. Behind this, there is the hope that, if things get tough, all reservations will be “belied”, and one may forget all sceptical knowledge with an easy conscience. In other words: this is a credit of trust which must be understood to be a risky strategy of making-forget by the involved actors. In case of failure, the reflection deficit is usually individualised: then it was careless, deliberate, light-hearted or simply deluded-mad (individual) actors. However, it is remarkable that due to the damage being individualised, there are hardly any consequences for the practice of science as a whole and that the relevance of structural causes is forgotten.

More than wanting-to-forget, making-forget – as a precondition or enablement for forgetfulness – is characterised by desire or intention being followed by action and that the creation of preconditions for oblivion may also explicitly refer to forgetting with others. The following selection of examples of making-forget presents ways of (self-) delusion that can be stated in scientific activity. Their overwhelming majority comes from the realm of scientific misbehaviour, the research of which at the level of individuals and their immediate relations has lost its bad reputation of befouling one’s own nest and denunciation only in the wake of fabrication and plagiarism scandals.<sup>77</sup> The oblivion-theoretical perspective provides orientation for such attempts at investigating deviating behaviour in the sciences. It may help with systematically grasping the structural framework conditions, initial motivations, chances of success and consequences of covering, hushing up, pretending, overlooking and ignoring.

If it aims at manipulating the remembering subject as such, making forget comprises first of all actions of self-delusion. In the context of research, these may also be used purposefully by consciously ignoring certain restrictions of the epistemic tool set. This may happen by “theoretical” cleaning on the one hand, however, by exclusively determining a particular epistemic method on the other. Without careful assessment or debate, alternative approaches are

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77 Heiko K. Cammenga (2014) elaborates on intermediate results of the debate now happening among the scientific profession, by pointing out to trivial offences by scientists and demanding an institutional place to go for whistleblowing.

purposefully ignored and thus left to oblivion.<sup>78</sup> The personally preferred “standard method” entices to ignoring potentials for irritation. This may as well be considered a structurally induced kind of forgetfulness if specific ways of proceeding or theoretical figures have been standardised across disciplines or paradigms. However, using a method always requires the researching individual who applies the appropriate regulations in a more or less orthodox way and may, by rule-based steering of his/her perception, may work in favour of his/her forgetfulness.<sup>79</sup>

Also, scientific activity results in piling both material and immaterial objects that no longer seem relevant after certain tasks have been accomplished. If there is no sufficient room or “capacity” for storing, or if one phase has been finished, there starts tidying up, discarding or “mucking out”. As a comprehensive routine of assessing for relevance, cleaning is a self-technique of making-forget, by way of which objects which are no longer used, which may function as memory stimuli, are systematically taken out of view. Tidying up one’s workplace is, at least symbolically, the same as liberating and clearing the consciousness.<sup>80</sup> Also, in the context of science, “ritual” cleaning comprises more: symbolically and materially, it perpetuates a strong kind of oblivion which is supposed to prevent from carrying dead knowledge. The weeding routines at archives, the perpetual updating of collections of textbooks connected with discarding research literature that is no longer used and thus identified as being outmoded, fulfils the double function of releasing capacities for the new and getting rid of memory stimuli that are considered worthless.<sup>81</sup>

By the up to here addressed kinds of intentional oblivion, we have discussed aspects from the border area between volitional and instrumental oblivion,

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78 Then, in disciplines for which there is a pluralism of paradigms it may suffice to identify a point of view which differs from the preferred tradition of theories e. g. just by the quoted literature, to be able to put aside a position without further consideration. This way, the individual actor contributes to an illegitimate, selective follow-up communication or he/she establishes a paradigm memory whose way of working, however, is hardly explicated and can only be understood as resulting from belonging to a school.

79 This is to be understood as an oblivion-theoretical interpretation of the accusation of simplification in the sense of Feyerabend (1993, p. 10–11).

80 Remarkably, Aleida Assmann (2012) counts the cleaning routine among “automatic oblivion”, as if cleaning was a kind of structural automatism.

81 Bowker (1997) pointed out to “cleaning” as an oblivion mechanism which may be associated to the literary character of the *Wegwerfer* [Discarder] in Heinrich Böll. At the level of individual and interaction, these are practices of making-forget whose function and explicit meaningfulness are reflected on only to limited extent – yet still, these are “minor” transition rituals in the sense of Turner, in the border area between ritualism and social, symbol indicating action.

which can be distinguished first because of implementing oblivionist drafts for action. Making-forget happens, among others, by way of activities aiming at producing forgetfulness with others. Then, making-forget – similar to what illusionists or magicians do – happens in the sense of “toying” with the frameworks of the order of interaction or with influencing it.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, making forget is part of the methodological practice of scientific epistemology. In some contexts of data genesis, for example, it is considered legitimate to make the observed individuals or interactions forget, as soon as possible, that they have been subject to observation. From those ways of making-forget, which are considered legitimate, we must distinguish the many “innovative” strategies by which researchers try to make their presentation look good. Then, making forget refers to a field of individual impression management that has previously been considered a “grey area” of legitimate action practice, self-presentation, and strategic communication. Among these, there are specific ways of (self-)delusion, overlooking and ignoring other people and their contributions and purposefully manipulating rememberability.

Usually, the mechanisms of institutional regulation rule out such deceits – only the in context of ethnology, folklore studies, psychology or sociology, as an exception, they are part of the methodical tool set, if researchers cannot reveal their questions or their observation activities without irritating their research objects, thus influencing its behaviour.<sup>83</sup> As long as there is no knowledge of the actual reasons to participate of e. g. a “participating” and the covered observer cannot be forgotten. The problem of forgetting exists only if, on the one hand, the knowledge of the researcher’s “identity” is always existent in the field and actions are required which prevent ongoing reflection and communication about his/her unique status as well as a thus resulting role attribution. One example is the data collection method of the *ero-epic interview*, according to Roland Girtler<sup>84</sup>, who attempts to make an interview partner forget that he/she is in an interview situation with the help of a specific interview technique. Things are similar when it comes to the use of recording devices for the collection of data. The use of such devices must be legitimated by informing about recording. However, as soon as this has been done, it is desirable that recording is (made) forgotten as soon as possible to avoid the shyness of many people towards such devices and thus resulting distortions.

82 In Erving Goffman (1986) this is described as deception.

83 For this purpose, there exist self-obligations within the disciplines – see e. g. the ethical code of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS) and of Berufsverband Deutscher Soziologinnen und Soziologen (BDS).

84 On this see the elaborations in Roland Girtler (2001) which imply that the alien nature of the field researcher is purposefully forgotten.

However, in academic life, we encounter variants of making-forget also beyond the genuinely scientific action logic. For example, researchers tend towards drawing the (scientific) public's attention away from career-damaging behaviour, past mistakes or even attempts to deceive and instead to cases of success or personal achievements. The strategies of oblivion-producing self-presentation are manifold. For example, one or the other less prominent publication may be deleted from the list of publications, or one just speaks of "selected" publications, making oneself appear in a favourable light. Similar things can be observed in the context of presenting fields of activity or project studies. The individual's name is presented as a "product" or "label" with the help of specific communication media and is thus an element of an institutional archive of openly accessible scientific information. However, this is an organisational aspect of providing information that may be organised by an archivist "him/herself". The list of publications and the *curriculum vitae* are also tools of hiding and making forget, as in everyday use, they suggest an expectation of completeness.

What must also be counted among making-forget is strategic disregard, the purposeful ignoring of different and possibly competing positions, paradigms or perspectives. Under conditions of a surplus of information, the quoting researcher must make a choice. If a colleague working on similar issues has as yet not published his/her results prominently, it may be supposed to be not seriously sanctioned if his/her contributions are ignored, to not attract the attention of one's readers to these works. Another strategy of making-forget is placing a quotation into one's context or arguing. Thereby, it is possible to hide even relevant insights gained by other researchers in footnotes or side notes without providing them with appropriate space for discussing the research topic. The rules of attributing scientific attention and reputation grant a certain leeway when deciding about relevance. Apart from the obligatory construction of memory, there also happens consciously controlled forgetting.

Furthermore, the strategy of ignoring allows for no longer paying attention to disturbing objections or persons and positions declared irrelevant by one's reference group. However, these variants of produced oblivion, consisting of ignoring concrete subjects, come along with the second kind of oblivion closer to forgetfulness. Thus, the researcher approves with ignoring and, consequently, forgetting about the orientation towards completeness and innovation, which is rooted in the professional ethos of the sciences. As a collectively shared pattern of behaviour, this results in progressively moving away from the completeness imperative.

Another way of making forget is the call for forgetting topics or individuals. Although nobody is obliged to abide, and although precisely such a call for

oblivion may raise the interest, still this is an attempt to manipulate memory. How successful such an effort will be, depends on the interaction situation; however, it may be powerful if the authorities of a “school” tell their students which colleagues from the discipline shall be considered and ignored. What in one case may still be considered an action-related consequence of a differentiation process becomes a real problem if scientific “disciples” fall into disfavour with their “teachers” and become subject of a *damnatio memoriae* in the form of attention and recognition being systematically withdrawn.

Finally, another kind of manipulation by way of making forget is found with how researchers present themselves and science-related memory work. Furthermore, strategies that must be attributed to individuals are also to be found with academic teaching. For example, the student tactic of placing literature at hidden places in the library must be interpreted as a way of making-forget. On the one hand, motivated by making sure that one will have access to a book or by withdrawing literature that is relevant for examinations, this forces others to cope with the missing of a trace of certain knowledge. In some cases, this results in losing time preparing for an examination if the missing book must be acquired from elsewhere. In other cases, such behaviour results in changing the preparation strategy in the sense of “braving the gap”, which, after all, makes the topic that has been declared to be examination-relevant less remembered. Regarding research scandals, this field of student misbehaviour also knows an “adult” variant. Making-forget is closely connected to deviating behaviour by researchers if they try to deceive, hush up, hide, or forge. Such misbehaviour comes with violations of the transparency imperative, which has been a tradition of scientific activity since Enlightenment if authors use esoteric jargon or do not provide evidence for the origin of the ideas stated in their publications. Full plagiarism serves most of all for making work easier in the context of striving for scientific recognition in the form of titles and reputation; however, if it is successful, regarding the affected originator, it is the same as purposefully working in favour of forgetting original research achievements.

In the context of research and science, these considerations on making-forget at the level of individual and interaction result in several actions which may be understood to be preconditions for later forgetting by the actor him/herself as well as by others. The examples demonstrate that intended oblivion may be “imagined” both as being differentiated according to different kinds of knowledge and depending on context. Accordingly, it seems to be very difficult to intendedly forget relevant knowledge – the intended action of no longer wanting to know something is indeed too closely connected to this knowledge. However, in the context of long-term action and given third parties, it turns

out that it is possible to create a loss of relevance. This can be in the form of self-delusion or deluding others. As it makes instrumental use of ignorance, deletion, elimination or destruction, such a “shaping of relevance” is always a unique case – usually, there is no need to repeat it.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, it is possible to maintain the illusion of forgetting or making forget as a reason to act, and also, it may increase the chances that possible remembrance stimuli will disappear. Then, the consequence is a shaky kind of oblivion that has an effect, at least for the time being.

#### 4.3.2 *Obliviating Research Institutions*

Now that we have distinguished forgetfulness, wanting-to-forget and making-forget at the social micro-level, we will look at the meso-level of groups, networks, and organisations. Also, for the realm of the sciences, this medium level provides an observation perspective which is particularly helpful for depicting the encounter of different realities. This is not about adjusting the motifs and ways of reason-giving of individuals to social structural aspects but about forgetting in the context of group cultures – another possibility to differentiate results from distinguishing intra- from inter-organisational oblivion. Furthermore, there is the possibility to distinguish organisations given fundamental goals. With organised science, we find both organisations belonging to the economic or administrative organisation in the broadest sense – then the purpose of organisation aims, at least nominally, at certain kinds of services – and organisations of participation and the representation of interests.<sup>86</sup>

Before we analyse the kinds of oblivion within the organisation of scientific activity, it must be clarified which organisations may be counted among the scientific production of knowledge. For example, there are business enterprises with their own research departments, non-university research institutions, and universities and colleges in the category of performance-based organisations in the broader sense. On the other hand, to the category of the organised representation of interests, there belong groups and networks such as subject-, discipline- and thus also profession-specific alliances – such as associations of scientific professions as well as their sub-divisions, academies<sup>87</sup> or large-scale

85 Only in Oscar Wilde's spectre comedy the ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville must again and again renew the blood stain which reminds to his crime, after the family of the US American ambassador, who has purchased the castle with the ghost, has stubbornly made use of a stain remover. In case of persistent memories, not even committed making-forget will work (Dimbath & Kinzler, 2013).

86 On this distinction see Uwe Schimank (2002).

87 In our context here, an academy is no educational institution but, in the sense of “learned societies”, a long-time and, to a certain degree, organised forum of scholarliness and

research compounds and collaborative research centres – and also scientific-political bodies. Then, regarding the scientific system, it must be asked how far and where knowledge production follows organisational principles. If we apply the concept of organisation already, if it is about social relations cooperating to achieve a common goal, almost any corporation is organised in a way. Then distinctions are only possible concerning the degree of their regularity and their formal or routine stability – such as in the form of the division of work. However, such an expanded concept of the organisation must also grasp aspects of organising everyday behaviour. It cannot be limited to identifying rationalist-bureaucratic structures, as then the manifoldness of organisational routines, myths and rituals would not be covered.

Mixed relationships characterise the reality of organisations in the scientific realm; attributing certain motifs to a specific type of organisation is not intended. For example, both performance-based organisations and the representation of interests may be associated with decision-making ability. For example, in such a case at universities, the autonomy of the cooperative management level takes a back seat to state and politics influencing the university. This way, the organisation of topical interests is eclipsed by the organisation of administrative or education-political interests, which may also be performance-oriented. The situation is similar with non-university research institutions, where the individual's decision-making autonomy may be predetermined by the topical foci of the research institution or by the interests of clients. Furthermore, we may differentiate according to the degree of organisation of each respective institution. Accordingly, Frank Meier, in his overview of organisations of science production, describes universities as “weak organisations” which, however, might change in the course of the state's decision-making authority being extended on universities, or also as a consequence of the introduction of ways of so-called *public management* (Meier, 2007, p. 789). An analysis of organisational oblivion in science will have to deal with both organisations as rationalised, social contexts of decision-making: planning, steering and control, and with social groups such as communities and networks plus their collective consciousnesses and collective identities. In the following section, these questions will again be pursued by way of distinguishing the three kinds of forgetfulness (1), wanting-to-forget (2), and making-forget (3).

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scientific exchange. Academies are a counterdraft to university which over its history has repeatedly made the impression of mismanagement, failing to behave according to the contemporary understanding of knowledge or when it comes to self-administration and self-disciplining (Schelsky, 1963, pp. 31–33).

Forgetfulness (oblivion (II)) with organisations, which must be attributed to the social sub-system of science, can be diagnosed for all three kinds of scientific organisations. In the context of general access to organisational knowledge, in particular, those practical and non-explicit ways of producing knowledge move into focus which is also connected to “automatic” oblivion. First of all, it is about those stocks of knowledge that are practically used and not stored for documentation – that is, habitual routines that are no longer subject to decision-making by the group. Among these, there is the knowledge about cooperative-corporative ways of organising the production of scientific knowledge. This holds for intentions to document and report, which are still carefully carried out at the beginning of cooperation, to then being either abandoned or becoming empty routine. Also, it applies to coordination meetings at regular intervals, which, as a result of sometimes high time pressure, do no longer seem to make sense to the actors of everyday research work if the cooperation seems to run smoothly. Being liberated from everyday-practical pressure to act in the context of scientific activity allows for more thorough ways of proceeding when it comes to the production of secured knowledge, which must be realised by way of higher demands on communicative feedback in view of a kind of *organised scepticism* (Merton, 1973). In particular, these ways of scientific quality assurance are threatened with soon disappearing from view, given the increasing output- or application orientation of the sciences.<sup>88</sup> The efficiency requirements and the necessity of accelerated knowledge production question the right to thorough forgetfulness the sciences have been granted.

Apart from forgetfulness in carrying out the scientific production of knowledge, there is a kind of forgetfulness, which has to do with the identificatory frame of the organisation – with collective identity or corporate identity. A structural kind of forgetfulness is an element of organisational narratives, in the course of which only certain events are passed on or mythicized, while other events are no longer kept available for later memory. In the case of scientific organisations, the memory of particularly famous members might be people who have been awarded science awards and whose publicly recognized

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88 Accordingly, Michael Burawoy (2011, p. 39) bemoans mode-2-science, denying it the capability of creating knowledge. Due to accepting commissioned research, he states, it is forced to work faster and more superficially (*quick and dirty*). Another example are the changes for publishers of scientific literature, which are subject to the fast pace of markets and now face the problem of estimating the different tempi of becoming outmoded of the disciplines they publish. In this concern, Wulf D. von Lucius states that the lifetime of titles has decreased and that, in view of assortment policy, it is not easy to distinguish “between justified adjustment and exaggerated eagerness” (Lucius, 2005, p. 39).



achievements are connected to an exemplary status – hides the fact that the organisation avoids almost any memory of the minor or major achievements of other members.

The third kind of forgetfulness covers aspects of the loss of knowledge resulting from a lack of reflecting on the history of one's organisation. Suppressing the perpetuation of a collective awareness of history within an organisation is connected to the coming and going of leaderships and the thus connected change of interests and goals. For example, the relevance system of a professional association changes with the individuals occupying the crucial switch points, and these individuals are just the same the representatives of certain strategic concepts or value horizons within the organisation. The thus encountered connection of individual and representative role allows for decisions about relevance which do not only systematically ignore certain alternatives but may, in the future, also neglect existing knowledge contexts. However, a high degree of organisation-related forgetfulness is also persistent memory due to power-induced reforms and "revolutions". A certain degree of "natural" oblivion, allowing for change and adjustment, is inscribed into any organisation. However, it may also be steered – or avoided – by way of the organisation's statutes. To a limited extent, the self-documentation of an organisation serves to work on its identity and present the organisation to the public. Dealing with the NS past both by business enterprises and by authorities and associations is an indication of the attempt to purposefully avoid forgetfulness and establish a connection between organisational and national identity – that is, between collective identities at different levels.<sup>89</sup> The forgetfulness to be observed in the context of changing leadership positions and the positions of delegates may be transferred to organisation members at all levels of the hierarchy, as in the course of staff fluctuation in particular stocks of practical-routine knowledge are constantly left to oblivion.<sup>90</sup> Given the employment situation of the non-professorial academic staff at German scientific institutions, which is often described as precarious, research institutions appear as highly forgetful organisations because of fixed-term employment. In how far the forced mobility of

89 German sociology – as a *scientific community* – and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie as the association representing it are currently debating the significance of National Socialism for the discipline. This is both about analyses of history in the strict sense and about issues of establishing a remembrance culture more firmly, given a kind of oblivion lamented by several protagonists of the debate (see e. g. Deißler, 2013).

90 On this see James P. Walsh and Gerardo R. Ungson (1991), Sylwia Ciuk and Monika Kostera (2010) or Christopher Pollitt (2009). An action-theoretical-utilitaristic analysis of the determinants of organisational oblivion and the thus connected costs is to be found in Guy David and Tanguy Brachet (2011).

the scientific staff is a crucial element of research – in the form of increased adaptability and innovation readiness of the individual who is supposed to be scientifically socialised together with forced organisational forgetfulness – is hardly discussed in this context. From an organisation-sociological point of view, the effect of decreed forgetfulness by way of fluctuation in the field of research could be researched by way of a comparison with appropriate experiences at enterprises.

In the case of wanting to forget, the desire or intention to forget something among an organised group – after all, the volitional variant of oblivion (I) – is characterised by a sometimes tacit consensus: then, there is agreement that a certain, nameable and thus *declarative-reflective*, knowledge content is an obstacle for achieving the goals of the group. This does not refer to any oblivion-preparing activity but to the development of relevancies, such as in the sense of the selectivity-communicating statement: “Forget about it.”

Only in passing, wanting-to-forget in the organisation of scientific education shall be addressed here. In the university realm, the topical organisation of teaching is a matter of the scientists employed there. If not only one professor represents a subject, usually the teaching organisation happens through an exchange with a representative of other subjects. In this context, the contents of lectures and seminars are not exclusively oriented at individual research foci but also at a “local” canon negotiated by the teaching staff. In other words: basic education is constituted by all those involved agreeing on contents they consider necessary. Consensus about the obligatory knowledge for future researchers is *en passant* followed by a consensus about less relevant knowledge. Thus, the counterpart of canonisation as a small-scale selection in the positive sense is selection in the negative sense, by way of exclusion at the level of teaching. Differentiation of these levels or organising the knowledge to be passed on is telling because those receiving this knowledge consider this “top-down” selected knowledge the subject-related knowledge par excellence.<sup>91</sup>

The question of where and in which ways organised research wants to forget must, on the one hand, be investigated by the example of the actors of knowledge production. With many research projects, several scientists deal with the individual aspects of an issue. Thus, the organisation of their activities aims at producing a result. On the other hand, in the case of the

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91 Such a way of proceeding might as well be attributed to the realm of making-forget, in particular if “schools” are developed at science locations. Then it is not only about leaving away everything the decisions makers are not interested in but about, quite purposefully, making the students ignore competing interpretations, schools, methods or positions.

organised representation of interests, there happens profession-specific cooperation in the context in which the programmatic selection of knowledge is communicated.

The intention to jointly “give up” on a particular experiential context so that from then on, it will no longer be supposed to be addressed may be based on different motivations. Processes of agreed oblivion are common in the sciences – even more as even oblivion requires organisation if scientific progress is not supposed to be affected. Thus, a consensual selection of what is supposed to be forgotten happens when specific abstractions, interpretation patterns and schemes, systems of classification and categories are declared to be outmoded or refuted. In the following, the organised possibility of pre-conditions for oblivion in the context of scientific activity shall be considered more closely as a kind of organisational context of cleaning.<sup>92</sup>

In the context of steering epistemological relevance by way of the organised representation of the interests of science, cleaning conflicts appear in the form of negotiating state of the art. As early as in the context of subject-related congresses – such as during the discussions after the lectures – both established and innovated concepts and theories are continuously assessed. Thus, the goal of these debates is at first to control the appropriateness of terminological-theoretical work, in the course of which the expansion possibilities and limitations of subject-related semantics and theories are fathomed out and determined. Then, by way of canonisation and historicisation, such “germ cells” of conceptual innovation may produce the result that concepts are “determined”, which are defined as being fruitful or hopeless. As a result, it is repeatedly determined what must be kept as a memory and forgotten. As this is no positive determination right from the beginning but rather a kind of negative selection, due to this variant of organising some *organised scepticism* (Merton, 1973), a certain wanting-to-forget may be stated. After all, this results from leaving obsolete concepts and theories or certain contextualization to oblivion by declaring the topic to be “over”.

The situation is similar to the organisation of research work, which aims at the production of knowledge. Replacing older patterns of explanation and concepts with new ones cannot exclusively be explained by the principle of the screen memory, as such a replacement does not at all happen without

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92 Here the fact must be pointed out to that this refers neither to the process of “cleaning” nor to any semantic change to be located just at the institutional level. To the context of cleaning their belongs first of all the discussion of existing concepts and theories as it is both part of everyday research and of the reflecting self-steering of scientific communities.

conflict. The topical controversy happens at all levels of the organisation. Consequently, it is necessary to achieve consensus at the level of individual teams about no longer using a theorem or model that has been recognized as being outmoded. As soon as this has been done, the research unit must relearn. In case of such a revision of the group-specific canon, older research results are devaluated or reinterpreted against the new order's background. This is in line – although on a smaller scale – with the processes of paradigm change in the sciences as described by Thomas S. Kuhn (1962). Similar observations can be made when it comes to making use of research tools. Research groups may agree on volitional oblivion if tools or licences they have been using so far are no longer valid, are replaced by other products, or are completely abandoned. From a research-organisational point of view, in this case, there is no reason to reach back to these aids, and usually, no remembering older ways of proceeding and the thus connected means by way of self-documentation or nostalgia is needed. As soon as the remembering access has no practical use anymore, one may agree to delete appropriate hints as far as this is worth the effort. Decision-making within a group makes it easier for a new practice to push through without opposition.<sup>93</sup>

Another kind of organisational wanting-to-forget is basically about controlling what is to be expected due to a selective development of those stocks of knowledge that are considered relevant. For example, the control of epistemological relevance can also be observed in the context of *interdisciplinary* fora. This is no longer about a process of cleaning in the context of *inner-discipline* semantics and theories, but about a competition for terminologies, theories and possibly interpretational sovereignty when it comes to issues dealt with from the respective subjects' points of view. In the case of an encounter of organised knowledge producers of different kinds, there is no reason to assume that any of the groups will give up on defining the problem – in the interdisciplinary context, any cleaning seems to be mostly ruled out. However, what may be imagined are sometimes the import and export of concepts and theories at a metaphorical level. Then it may be that adopted terms become popular, resulting in at least temporary readiness to give up on established concepts and theories of one's own, which are thus conditionally be left to oblivion.<sup>94</sup>

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93 There are a number of examples: the introduction of each new software product replacing an older one comes along with oblivion effects. At the level of the organisation, the adjustment of DOS surfaces to the Window system or the introduction of editors were connected to group decisions in the context of which the older ways of proceeding were collectively abandoned – and forgotten.

94 Such replacement or trivialisation processes are sometimes described in the context of the DFG priority program on the use of social scientific knowledge (Beck & Bonß, 1989).

The inter-organisational competition among organised knowledge producers is – similar to the interdisciplinary competition for interpretational sovereignty – about pushing through with one's positions and perspectives or about making them so widely known that there is a growing probability of follow-up communication. What from the outside appears as a cleaning context is now completed by attention-economic aspects. Then *organised scepticism* serves only as a frame for struggles about positions, in the context of which no understanding-oriented discourse is intended (Habermas, 1984). In this context, wanting-to-forget may happen at two levels. On the one hand, the group wants to forget the positions of its opponent or rather the legitimacy of his/her points of view, and on the other hand, it wants to forget that its behaviour makes use of *organised scepticism* only to make its stand in the competition for concepts and theory offers.

Finally, indications of organisational wanting-to-forget are also found about copyright or unsettled property rights questions if individuals claim their rights towards corporative actors.<sup>95</sup> Volitional oblivion on the side of an organisation consists of ignoring a problem as long as possible, for example, to point to an unsettled legal situation or assuage the concerned parties. Behind this, there is the hope or expectation that the issue will “naturally” fall into oblivion – an attitude, however, which disregards the “spectres”. One example of such a development is the story of the HeLa cell cultures, which were indispensable for cell research for decades. These are cell cultures that have been bred from one cell strain over many generations. Initially, these cells came from US American cancer patient Henriette Lacks and were, without her or her family's consent, processed on and on (Skloot, 2010). Requests by the family concerning the case mainly were ignored and then assuaged by the concerned hospital and later also by “science”. Here medical research was under the threat of a new, expensive remembrance culture as a precedent, which is why – from the point of view of research – it looks institutionally reasonable to forget about the origin of the used “raw material”.

Making-forget in the context of organised science can be connected to substantial research scandals on the one hand and science-fiction fantasies and conspiracy theories on the other. Apart from uncovering hush-ups as far as to criminal behaviour for the sake of securing or maintaining particular benefits or power interests, however, there are also a number of legitimate practices in the context of purposefully initiated oblivion – systematic unlearning alone

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95 James S. Coleman (1982) in his diagnosis of *asymmetric* society unfolds this figure – however without pointing out aspects of organisational wanting-to-forget or sitting out.

serves as a steering strategy of the management if obsolete stocks of experience or knowledge are no longer supposed to be used.<sup>96</sup>

It has already been pointed out that the preparation of intentional oblivion is a process happening in the context of social relations. Whereas usually, the individual consciousness is not capable of self-referential making-forget, it is possible to support or to cause oblivion with others. We shall speak of inner making-forget in the context of organisations if certain actors or holders of positions attempt to influence the “natural” perpetuation of organisational knowledge or the selectivity of organisational memory. Such activities are at first nothing else than steering, as it is also described in the literature on organisational knowledge management, memory, learning and sometimes even oblivion. However, making-forget may also happen in subversive ways, by unauthorised members interfering with the perpetuation of experience. Furthermore, we may imagine steering interventions contradicting the organisation’s goals, which again may make it necessary to keep the motivations secret and distract from the organisation’s goals, which have been identified as being problematic.

According to the previously made distinction between performance-oriented and participation-oriented goals of organisations of the academic system, any inner making-forget may rather be expected for the former type. This is because the ideal type of the participative organisation rules out any manipulative strategies of awareness control, among which there also counts “made” oblivion. Even if such groups develop leadership structures, they are not free of micro-political activities, in reality. These activities, covertly pulling strings, take care that there are majorities for votes. Additionally, they pursue particular interests with the help of information policies or attempt to oblige the members to identify formats of a collective identity that are in line with particular interests.<sup>97</sup> There, making-forget happens in two ways. Firstly, those meso-social reference frames as being available for collective remembering are manipulated<sup>98</sup> by reshaping objects, topographies, narratives or myths so that

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96 On this, see the overview on forgetting about knowledge management with organisations by Stephanie Porschen (2011) as well as the analysis of obliterating organisations in the realm of science by Oliver Dimbath (2012).

97 The research of the organisational memories of trade unions tells about manipulative strategies of purposefully forgetting about unpleasant events and situations in the past (see e. g. Debouzy, 1986).

98 According to the micro-sociological frame in the context of Goffman’s interaction structure and to the macro-sociological social reference frame according to Halbwachs, there lacks an appropriate concept at the meso-social level of groups and organisations. Both frame concepts are able to integrate groups, so that a third concept does not seem to be

the perpetuation of the knowledge of the meaning of the organisation's cohesion is steered to the desired tracks. Secondly, this kind of manipulation, as far as it is open to reflection, must be as comprehensively forgotten as possible. This happens by removing those traces which might indicate any influence on the collectively relevant roots of memory.

Starting points for a diagnosis of organisational making-forget in the sciences are, for example, micro-political processes among the boards of academic self-administration. For example, already the putting together and organisation of the agenda items of leadership meetings may include instrumental oblivion if particularly disputed items are placed at the end of an overfull agenda. Traces are removed e. g. if the archived examination papers of prominent – in the positive or the negative sense – former students are removed from the archive, spare the organisation the uncontrollable consequences e. g. of questions by journalists.

Furthermore, making-forget may happen at the level of professions, if sections or teams of academic associations – below the level of a discipline – provide for canonisations by determining, with the help of reading lists, hence, the literature that is considered relevant for their field of interest. Institutionally, such lists are not binding – however, they provide practical orientation and distract the interested researcher from independent investigation and assessment. By defining relevancies, professionalising groups determine the selectivity of knowledge production and thus control the scientific-topical debate as long as they are not challenged. Oblivion is organised by representatives of professions and happens at the threshold to the mode of wanting-to-forget at the level of academic interest groups, as usually groups of representatives are elected and provided with the authority to represent. At the same time, these groups are out for creating rememberability, which is why in their case, oblivion happens with the help of cover memories.

There are several studies on the comparison of organisational oblivion with organisational learning from the perspective of performance-oriented organisations. The learning theories developed by organisational research are explicitly about organisational oblivion or unlearning. As a change management strategy, making-forget must be placed among those measures taken by the leadership of an organisation when adjustment processes are supposed to be made more efficient. In this context, organisational memory<sup>99</sup> is often

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necessary. However, misunderstandings in the context of theoretical classification may be avoided if the limited group-cultural structures are labelled as “meso-social frames”.

99 The question of organisational memory was raised by Bo L.T. Hedberg (1981) – the term is found in organisation-sociological studies already from the early 1970s (see e. g. March,

connected to undesired routines, conservatism and inflexibility and is characterised as the “enemy” of flexibility and change.<sup>100</sup> Although there are hardly any empirical studies on organisational oblivion with public authorities, many findings may be transferred to the here discussed performance-oriented institutions of academic life.

Furthermore, making-forget happens at the level of academic education. Usually – and particularly in the case of introductory classes –, putting together the syllabus for a seminar is a shaped kind of selection. Each steering of the students’ attention comes along with ignoring other relevant information. This is the institutional structuring of knowledge production in the context of academic teaching. This way, teaching defines core topics that aim to create appropriate basic knowledge for further research and pass on, *en passant*, the specific interests of the teachers to the learners. Thus, the establishment of schools must be described as a mechanism of organised selection in the course of which any orientation at alternative paradigms is systematically ruled out.<sup>101</sup>

The problem of making-forget also includes attempts to influence an organisation’s environment, as far as this activity aims at purposefully covering organisation- or interaction- or competition-relevant information. In view of scientific organisations, such processes may be supposed to be identified in the context of irritation or non-irritation.

In organised lobbying, the strategy of topical making-forget is a borderline case in the context of which it must be distinguished if participative organised groups interact with groups of the same kind or with performance-oriented organisations. Possible starting points for this variant of oblivion are to be found in the debate on saying goodbye to full-scale university. It is stated that particularly the complexity and variety of this kind of university makes sure that not every fashion is followed. If minor subjects are no longer offered and the universities are reduced to standard measure, these organisations are said to lose their independent-mindedness (Kreckel, 2002). There, making-forget happens at two levels. At first, organisational decisions concerning the profile of a university are conflict-laden. Tactical aspects of making-forget are to be identified if one interest group succeeds with changing the relevance structures

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1972). Oblivion as a strategy of organisational steering is analysed by Pablo Martin de Holan and Nelson Phillips (2004a; 2004b).

100 Such an estimation is to be found already in James March and later in James P. Walsh and Gerardo R. Ungson (1991) – for an overview see also Oliver Dimbath (2012).

101 Also in this context it must be reminded that the organised passing on of a certain selection of scientific knowledge not least in the context of thought styles – and by representatives of certain generations – as described by Stephen Toulmin (1977).



needed to reproduce another group. Criticism of a structural change of university and science, aiming at a bureaucratisation or economisation of knowledge production as well as at making the communication of knowledge subject to didactics, thus lamenting the destruction of the idea of the university, address such motifs of making-forget, insofar as they assume contradicting interests of different groups. In this context, it is assumed that those interests as being inauthentic for the social function of the action context succeed with pushing through. University leaderships and administrations enforce a readjustment of the organisational relevance structure, which consists of successively turning away from defining what “establishing the truth” means and turning towards more competition for reputation.<sup>102</sup> In the process, “good” scientific work is replaced by “successful” work. University educationalists change the relevance structure of the organisation of the scientific communication of knowledge, as they can make their insights on the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer heard. By making the academic communication of knowledge subject to didactics, they change the ways of the institutionalised disclosure of knowledge.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, students or the academic audience are no longer obliged to actively collect information, meaning that they must, in the course of acquiring knowledge, shoulder the laborious effort of disclosing knowledge and understandingly comprehending the ideas of others. Instead, the scientists have an obligation to fulfil, which is meant to force them to “take their audiences from where they are”. The odd genius, over whose comments there used to be much insightful puzzling, is supposed to be forgotten as soon as possible against the background of new concepts of teaching and learning. Comprehensive irritation as providing access to insight is replaced by controlled and well-dosed irritation; the academic audience is equated with an interested public.

Even decisions about profile building, which consists of rededicating research funding and staff resources to those considered capable of development, result in changes in the organisational structure and organisational culture. Disappeared places of knowledge production, former local research foci, and former members are no longer recalled by the new members of the organisation and the decision-making structures relevant for them – except in the case of nostalgic recalling by individuals.

Another way of making-forget consists of purposeful manoeuvres of competition-oriented measures: instrumental oblivion with research by and

<sup>102</sup> Niklas Luhmann (1992) makes such a diagnosis, as an example of the change of the functions of systems and, as a consequence, also of a system's structure.

<sup>103</sup> For a similar view see Richard Münch (2009, pp. 87–88).

in the context of scientific organisations is, on the one hand, found with the secret research programmes of the industry and the military, which hardly ever become publicly known. The goal of secrecy and removing traces is to distract public attention from activities the organisation is responsible for and which would require an explanation given their (media-)public environment.

One specification of organisational making-forget in the sciences is decision-making favouring establishing and institutionalising a certain kind of memory. However, what in the case of wanting-to-forget appears as ignoring past failures and mistakes oriented at working on the organisation's identity may be understood as a discourse-related adjustment strategy as well as fighting off in the context of making-forget discourse-communicated attacks on the organisation. In Germany, this is the expectation that organisations will face and reveal their involvement with the NS regime. This way – like with any kind of historicisation – scientifically “objectified” knowledge is produced, which is supposed to replace diffuse experiences or memories whose effects on the organisation are difficult to control. By presenting scientific knowledge of a subject, the possibilities to appropriately assert particular-biographic and unobjectified knowledge are reduced. Thus, the organisation's decision to face and reveal wards off any possible spectre which might affect the work of the organisation and might absorb resources – and this holds not only for the finally produced historical narratives but already for any concern related to the past which, by establishing an “authorised” institution, is channelled into a direction which is favourable for the further existence of the organisation. Thus, historical memory work is a selection mechanism contributing to pushing back inadequate contents of experience and memory and thus making them fall into oblivion.

Furthermore, oblivion strategies may – against the background of the public reputation of the research organisation – also aim at past research if the latter is no longer in line with the state of e. g. the debate on the ethics of science. Confronting the organisation with the spectres of its past will result in any historicising and commenting “coming to terms” only after a more extended period of suffering resulting from public pressure – politics and mass media. Until this, the coping strategy of an organisation that has an interest in maintaining its operability may consist of ignoring and, if possible, removing the traces it is confronted with or which appear again and again.

Concerning oblivion with science, it may be stated that two dimensions become relevant for analysis. One of them covers the distinction between organisations that are oriented at performance and organisations of lobbying. On the one hand, the other one covers the organisational striving for adjustment to outside situations and, on the other hand, internal integration

in the sense of creating organisational identity. If we disregard structural amnesia, which we have called forgetfulness or oblivion (II) and can be diagnosed with any social entity, shaping the selectivity of knowledge production appears – in the Weberian sense – as being both instrumentally and value-rational. Instrumental and value rationality include oblivionist aspects insofar as constantly decisions must be made about which knowledge is supposed to be kept available and which not. Insofar as these are decisions about steering concerning the institutional structures of an organisation of the scientific realm, we may also speak of an instrumental and a value-rationalism of science.<sup>104</sup>

### 4.3.3 *Institutionalised Oblivion*

The final section of the analysis of oblivion by the case example of the academic system is going to deal with the explicitly institutional structures of “the” sciences at the social macro-level as well as with the thus connected unwritten rules in the sense of an implicit order, which are understood as practices. At first, it will be about the normative structural aspects of modern science. These are progress, connectivity, completeness, and rigour as the selectivity of arranging arguments – some of them have already been pointed out. The level of social-scientific aggregation and abstraction suggests placing more weight on aspects in the sense of oblivion (II) than on the intention-related preliminary stages of intended or made oblivion (oblivion (I)). Even if a norm that may be associated with memory implicitly creates forgetfulness, it will be necessary to provide evidence of an organising intention at this level. However, it may be supposed that indications for norm-related forgottenness in the context of institutional change can be identified. Thus, in view of oblivion (I) variants, the analysis will be first of all about hidden, or better: not further explicated, levels of meaning within scientific practice. Furthermore, according to the scheme so far, at the social macro-level, we will look at first for perspectives of forgetfulness (1). Then, at the level of social steering, it will be about issues of intended oblivion in the sense of wanting-to-forget (2) and making-forget (3). This will happen by reaching back to remembrance approaches and – thus resulting – oblivion policy.

Forgetfulness as – usually mostly unquestioned – structural oblivion in the context of scientific practise may – according to the previous considerations – appear in various shapes. At the heart of the analysis, those

<sup>104</sup> This finding also holds for organisations in the non-scientific realm – however, it was developed while starting out from an oblivion-theoretical analysis of scientific organisations (see also Dimbath, 2010).

selection mechanisms are attributed to the social scientific memory. These may be distinguished according to two patterns, one of which develops oblivion from practice; the ways of science-specific acting create relevancies which are not supposed to be reflected on because relevance structures change as a result of progress, and attention is rather directed at innovations than at the side effects of their implementation. We may thus speak of self-created forgetfulness. The other pattern of non-reflected forgetfulness develops in view of other fields of the social production of knowledge. Due to the *primus inter pares* status within the knowledge order of modern societies,<sup>105</sup> any activity of “the” sciences which is perceived from the outside creates a forgetting about habitual stocks of knowledge in other fields – for example, as a result of technological innovations, of so-called “scientification” or the transfer of knowledge.

The – primarily unnoticed – loss of existing knowledge exclusively due to scientific activity may appear in three forms. Forgetfulness goes unnoticed, firstly, with objects of scientific activity (object relation), secondly in the context of scientific activity as such (subject relation), and thirdly in the situative context of scientific activity. The distinction between subject relation and contextual conditions is necessary, as an unnoticed change of the stock of knowledge or the social structure of knowledge and the conditions for the production of knowledge may happen both as a result of scientific activity as such and of the non-scientific environment. Any kind of this forgetfulness has to do with forgetting about the having-become of the concerned object or its history, insofar as reflecting on dealing with it as well as its change or transformation disappears from view. This inattentiveness is because the selectivity of the scientific memory covers only certain aspects of disclosing its objects as being relevant and making appropriate use of structuring processes. In the following, five variants of forgetfulness from the realm of scientific activity will be exemplarily considered.

That science tends to forget that its subjects are grounded in the lifeworld by abstractedly moving ever farther away from the actual objects, was stated by Edmund Husserl (1970) in his *crisis* paper. What he demonstrates by the example of mathematics can be analysed in several respects in terms of oblivion theory. Analogies are to be found in the natural sciences. Also, model-like theoretical constructions result in a reduction of complexity which, in the course of further dealing with existing insights, is nothing else than successively moving away from the original phenomena and questions. However, vice versa, it may as well be imagined that objects are established through

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105 On the hierarchy of societal knowledge orders see Peter Weingart, Wolfgang Krohn and Martin Carrier (2007) as well as Stefan Böschen and Oliver Dimbath (2012).

scientific reconstruction. Then their meaning is maintained, whereas the object under research changes – a problem of the humanities and the social sciences. Accordingly, terms may be more stubborn than the objects they refer to.<sup>106</sup> Only in exceptional cases is there the need to write histories of terms to comprehend language adjustment to social developments (Koselleck, 1985; 2006). One example is the reconstruction of syphilis as a scientific fact by Ludwig Fleck (2012). There, it is demonstrated how many terminologies and the belief in facts depend on the respective age style. Fleck contributes to the theory of oblivion by making clear that the objective fact of a disease picture is accepted as being given without putting it into question because the historical circumstances of the diagnosis and, thus connected, the construction of the phenomenon have not been passed on within their contexts, and the manifold errors of scientific diagnostics and analytics have systematically been forgotten. Today, this kind of structural forgetfulness is due to the fixation on progress which is typical for science. The social attribution of relevance aims at the new and the better; obligatory remembering serves only to emphasise the obsolescence of the now outmoded knowledge – any confrontation with the “day before yesterday” seems unnecessary, at least for routine operation. The situation is similar when it comes to the practical handling of the technology of scientific apparatuses. It may be that innovations of scientific devices are documented – however, for making use of devices, there is usually no need for any exact knowledge of the details of their development. This way, devices become objectification of insights assumed to be objective when it comes to their materiality and function. Their development is grasped as being “constructed”, which has hardly any significance for their practical use and is only in cases of exception archived and documented at technology museums.

Similar motifs are to be found in the works of Michel Foucault and Reinhart Koselleck. Their interest in archaeological-genealogical analyses or analyses of the history of terms aims at those historical-political framework conditions as determining scientific thought and, most of all, the scientific creation of terms. Which outside influences have the potential to cause an unnoticed loss of scientific knowledge? Both approaches indeed take the context-dependent changing of the meaning of terms into consideration.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, scientific or – in Koselleck – social-political terms must not be understood according

106 Semantics change after e.g. the social structure. Niklas Luhmann (1993, p. 15) demonstrates that the change of the complexity of the social system and its operations is answered by a change of semantics.

107 For this, the ethno-methodological approach according to Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks (1970) provides the term indexicality.

to their respectively current meaning but against the background of the predominant discourse at the time of their introduction or use.<sup>108</sup> Usually, the operative way of using each discipline-specific toolset of terms does not care about the fact that the terms have “historically grown”, which is forgotten against the background of a minimum consensus that may continuously be updated. The epistemological damage caused by this lack of reflection on the history of terminology is comparably low, apart from the necessities of historical understanding crucial for scientific, social history, even more as the scientific communication goes on. However, by forgetfulness in terms of the history of terminology, one accepts a reflection deficit, and this is where the power-political aspect comes to bear – there is no differentiation of typical tendencies towards influencing. In other words: for science, it is hardly of relevance which political influences have contributed to coining its terms as long as the system’s communicative autopoiesis is not disturbed. The change of languages in the scientific realms happens in ways that are similar to those depicted by scheme-theoretical approaches for explaining the memory function of the individual consciousness: nexuses in the sense of attributions of meaning which currently are not needed and also do not maintain any historicisation of their genesis as permanent associations are forgotten.

What becomes evident with the change of the terminological toolset, which does not only ignore traces of reification in the sense of double forgetfulness or forgetting about forgetting, may as well be a result of science-political steering. Science depends on funding, which in Western societies is distributed at the level of society, i. e. at the level of the state, civil society or private business. The result of this is losses of autonomy which are reflected by the influence exerted by research policy. If we consider that the Humboldt type of science that enables solitude and liberty is a historical exception, we may state that since time immemorial, science has less been determined by academic self-administration than rather by normative regulations and goals set from the “outside”. When it comes to reflecting on exogenous institutional change, science seems to be mostly blind. Perhaps reflecting on the development of one’s

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108 As it is well-known, Michel Foucault (2001) demonstrates this by the example of the historical development and changing meaning of madness as well as of lunatic asylums. By the example of a memorandum of 1807 Koselleck illustrates that the term “citizen” there is a very recent *terminus technicus* “that had just been minted, that is not to be found in the Prussian Civil Code, and that registered a polemical engagement with the old society of orders. Thus, it is a concept that is consciously deployed as a weapon in the struggle against the legal inequalities of the *Stände*, at a time when a set of civil rights that could have endowed the Prussian citizen with political rights did not exist.” (Koselleck, 1985, p. 76).

working conditions is an obstacle for swift progress, similar to the terminological toolset. However, according to the Enlightenment claim of the modern sciences – in a way like a corrective – there exists the institution of the history of science.<sup>109</sup> Its function is not least to institutionalise this reflection on the conditions under which scientific activity happens and keep the “operative business” of all other disciplines clear of appropriate demands for reflection. Thus, in the context of endogenous forgetfulness, we may suppose that institutional reflection on the development of science, of all, as it is done by the sub-discipline of the history of science, prevents the systematic-asymmetrical association of science and social power structures from being confronted with any, possibly unproductive, revolt as a result of historicising reflection. Outside influence is covered up by a memory function that functions as a forgetfulness generator.<sup>110</sup>

After elaborating on external interventions into endogenous aspects of forgetfulness with academic activities, now the focus shall be on the case of forgetfulness in the context of selection mechanisms in the form of self-control. One variant, which has already been mentioned, is connected to striving for reputation. According to Robert K. Merton, reputation – in the form of attention attributed by the scientific community – is a much more powerful system of recognition than, for example, public interest in successful research (Merton, 1973). The power of reputation-induced motivation comes from the fact that the discipline-related attribution of attention comes from topically informed and, thus, particular relevant sources. Given the researcher's self-presentation, it is also an indication of how successful his/her activities are and may, in quasi-medial ways, result in more attention being attributed. As already stated, Merton calls this Biblical principle of “to everyone who has will more be given” the Matthew effect. In this context, self-referential forgetfulness covers all those actors involved in research and their findings which do not benefit from these reputation mechanisms, according to the addition to St. Matthew's

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109 This argument is also found in Bernhard Giesen (1999). However, here it must be pointed out that the establishment of the sub-discipline of the history of science is certainly no aspect of any conspiracy against science. Like others, it is a result of scientific differentiation processes, is in the service of Enlightenment, and works according to the criteria of scientific practice. However, being an element of the scientific system, it creates boundaries which make any science-historical commitment by non-historians subject to the suspicion of being amateur work, thus making it risky to defend oneself against system-immanent oblivion effects. However, such an effect supports those non-scientific determinants which have an interest in affirmative behaviour and diligent aspirations to progress.

110 Also, here the similarity to Freud's concept of the cover memory is obvious – only that now it is about social and no longer about psychic processes.

Gospel: “From him who has not, even what he has will be taken away”. Another kind of endogenous forgetfulness at the institutional level comes from the internationality of science and, thus connected, the necessity of translations. Translating is always connected to the selectivity of its own kind, as it is always the result of interpretations by the translator. Sometimes this may lead to massive topical distortions, which, on the one hand, may help the topical debate, which is based on such a translation, to completely new associations, however to misinterpretations on the other hand. What is forgotten in the process is the consensual reading of a scientific statement within one language community. It must be stated in this context that translations must be considered to be ambivalent in this respect. On the one hand, they systematically create a loss of knowledge; on the other hand, they allow for new interpretations, some of which would have been difficult to imagine by reaching back to the original text within the language community of its origin.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, forgetfulness at the institutional level covers ways of losing knowledge resulting from the scientific system interacting with other sub-fields of society. At first, this concerns the status of scientific knowledge as the predominant kind of knowledge in modern societies. Secondly, it concerns losing knowledge due to the transfer of knowledge, which again must be understood not as one-sided but as a mutual exchange process.

Forgetfulness may also consist of oblivion in non-scientific contexts, which is unintendedly caused by scientific activity. The problem of forgetfulness caused by the successful transfer of knowledge is to be identified with the interaction of social knowledge orders. Knowledge orders refer to different, sometimes mutually related systems of knowledge production and application, in the context of which certain ways of producing knowledge are more likely to become legitimate than others, each according to culture. An unsettling of knowledge orders can be described regarding the great epistemological changes: the Copernican turn as the turning away from a mythical-religious conception of the world and towards one based on the natural sciences. Along with shifting

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111 The interpretative art of translating is easily confronted with the expectation of being capable of a meaning-identical transfer, which is a fundamental misunderstanding of the institutional range of language. Accordingly, Parson's translation of Weber's “stahlhartes Gehäuse” as “iron cage” is of course a non-identical and consequential distortion (see Baehr, 2002) – however, any judgement on the consequences seems to be difficult. For this, Jan and Aleida Assmann (1983, p. 279) introduce a differentiation: in the field of canonised knowledge, any written storage may reduce the openness towards interpretation. As soon as the forms allow for another, new meaning, however, in the course of the hermeneutic process also the meaning is readjusted – and thus the original meaning is forgotten.



interpretational sovereignty from one kind of knowledge to another, there are other, comprehensive processes of oblivion because, this way, complete systems of interpreting the world become obsolete. Considering such processes is like speculating about the evolution of knowledge in the course of which, for example, we might ask what the world of today would look like had shamanism not been replaced or moved to latency zones but developed further. In enlightened, Western modernity – and this has been pointed out – science may be understood to be the *primus inter pares* of the kinds of knowledge. However, the fact that it is most likely to be legitimated has not resulted in its absolutisation and other kinds of knowledge being completely suppressed, as imagined by the utopian scenarios of a state of letters or Comte's scientific religion. Concerning the analysis of forgetfulness, there concludes hinting at the search for the traces of other, older kinds of knowledge among the, only allegedly, entirely rational knowledge of the scientific kind – for which already Ludwig Fleck made provisions. Thus, the research of scientific practices would have to be extended by a culture-historical dimension, by not only observing and then asking how far scientific action could be legitimated as rational, well-founded or justifiable. Findings based on observation could also be culture-historically put into question by analysing them for traces of forgotten systems of meaning. Statements expressing that *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour, 1993) or that in the past even traditions were inventions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992) are this way additionally legitimated.

Beyond the statement that the pushing through of certain kinds of knowledge in the course of social or institutional change is always connected to suppressing alternative ways of interpreting, we may then ask about the conditions or mechanisms due to which one kind of knowledge becomes superior to another. Two interpretations may be imagined in this respect. On the one hand, we might assume suppression by the “aspiring” kind of knowledge – then the decline of outmoded kinds of knowledge would have to be described with the help of Freud's motif of the screen memory. On the other hand, however, this suppression might as well be understood to be the result of specific mechanisms of forgetfulness. Then, these would have to be connected to the social functions fulfilled, in different ways, by the new kind of knowledge – in the sense of functional equivalents.

However, in the light of more recent developments in dealing with the scientific production of knowledge, expertise and scientific knowledge, the thesis of the primacy of scientific knowledge may also be doubted – for example, diagnoses of the progressing economisation and politicisation of science point in another direction. Exogenous influences – even at the institutional level – are capable, based on power, of changing the structures of the scientific

production of knowledge. Examples of this are, among others, the structural consequences of excellence initiatives and university pacts by way of which politics may control – by way of exerting influence from the outside – not only the communication of knowledge at university but knowledge production as a whole. Due to the change of guidelines and priorities for funding, older regulations fall into oblivion, as the scientific system is forced to adjust to the conditions set by its environment. Similar influences may also be stated given the interfaces between the sciences and business, particularly in the engineering sciences field. When it comes to scientists providing information as advice, it is possible to give evidence to changes of both the genesis and the provision of knowledge, which is, at the institutional level, reflected by the contradiction between basic research and application-oriented research (Stokes, 1997). Thus, this is an exogenously-induced kind of forgetfulness due to more or less enforced cooperation with other fields of society.

Another kind of knowledge loss that is not exogenously reflected on results from knowledge transfer, contents between different realms of social activity. Using scientific knowledge, which is closely connected to the problem of knowledge transfer – that is, the transfer of scientific knowledge or the scientific jargon to non-scientific language and relevance systems – always comes along with distortion, simplification, trivialisation or reinterpretation.<sup>112</sup> A loss of knowledge happens at first in the course of translation as such, in the sense of a loss of exactness, as the information must be adjusted to the needs of each respective “practice”. Whereas scientific knowledge is still being provided within the sciences, the non-scientific actors start to use this available new knowledge. For science, this becomes a problem – as oblivionism – if later it is confronted with requests or questions referring to stocks of knowledge that are attributed to it without any immediate recognition is possible. In other words: the structure of meaning of externalised knowledge has changed so much that it is no longer possible to easily conclude on the original content of the transfer, not to mention the scientific context of its development. In such cases, scientists may be confronted with traces of their work that are not theirs or which are, due to environmental influences, sometimes pretty “weathered”. The interaction of science and a non-scientific “practice” may produce different aspects of forgetfulness. It is thus not only about the meaning of scientific

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112 The transfer as well as the use of social-scientific knowledge has been a topic of discussion for quite some time. A thorough analysis of the thus resulting problems is to be found in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Jeffrey G. Reitz (1975). A certain degree of skepticism, indicating the forgetting of original meanings, may also be stated for the German debate, such as in the context of the DFG priority programme on the use of social-scientific knowledge (Beck & Bonß, 1989).

knowledge being distorted but also about the adjustment of scientific actors in the context of feedback if now the latter are trying to comprehend the self-will of this practice and readjust their own concepts according to application. As a result, those “dubious” terms – lamented by science – whose originally clear meaning has been forgotten due to diffusely using them. This variant of exogenous forgetfulness results from knowledge contents circulating or oscillating within and among different kinds of knowledge.

The heuristic delimitation of wanting-to-forget in the context of institutionalised contexts appears to be problematic, as institutions are no actors with intentions. Nevertheless, at the social macro-level, institutions represent culture-specific, binding rules in the sense of explicit or at least explicable expectations. Since non-compliance may be sanctioned, any delimitation from wanting-to-forget and making-forget becomes difficult. Also problematic seems to be the epistemological grounding of intentional oblivion, as allegedly at the highest level of regulation, oblivion is least wanted by science. However, already Nietzsche demonstrates in his critique of memory that to a certain degree and in certain fields, “the” sciences face a loss of knowledge, accept it and must even normatively welcome it. Some arguments pointing into this direction have already been stated. Altogether, they present the evolution of knowledge, with obsolete or redundant knowledge being pushed to the back for being unnecessary. Additionally, the argument of limited capacities points to selection demands given an exponential growth of available yet at the same time relevant knowledge. Then, apart from such a levelling of desired oblivion, there is a kind of oblivion aiming at the production or the producers of knowledge as such. Accordingly, in the context of science-immanent violations of rules, there exist field-specific opportunities of rehabilitation which, each according to how grave the violation of the values and norms of good scientific practise or ethical principles and self-limitations is, make such a violation, as well as the thus connected “condemnation” by the scientific community, fall into oblivion. In this respect, there are hardly any clearly defined regulations – however, the periods needed to “live down something” would have to be clearly determined.<sup>113</sup>

113 After the fabrication scandal he was responsible for, Korean clone researcher Hwang reappeared comparably soon with his research – which was now honest according to what he claimed. However, it seems to be his problem that without fabrications it is not possible to realise such successful, widely visible research. It is remarkable, however, that perhaps it depends on the respective national research culture or on the resources available to the researcher how soon one might be ready to forget previous violations. If sanctioning comes along with degradation or the withdrawal of resources, also oblivion in the sense of rehabilitation, which is a less clearly delimited variant of amnesic oblivion, will

One basic motivation for endogenous wanting-to-forget is the will to settle or clarify or organise the unorganised. Different variants of institutionalised action contexts preparing oblivion processes are found at the level of practices and institutions. Three orientations must be distinguished in this respect. At first, such a wanting-to-forget may result from the constant rationalisation and modernisation imperative by which modern science is characterised (a). Secondly, the consequences of such processes of change must be considered, as the intention of wanting-to-forget may be derived from them (b). Thirdly, an institutions-communicated kind of wanting-to-forget may be imagined, referring to measures that seem to be necessary for maintaining the system (c).

Wanting-to-forget resulting from rationalisation imperatives is a widely spread kind of adjustment to manifest or only alleged institutional preconditions. Thus, it is an open question if the patterns which make certain aspects of oblivion look desirable really serve for achieving goals by way of concrete drafts for action (calculated oblivionism) or if it is just orienting at field-specific values (value oblivionism).

As a reflecting effect of information science and economics, at first for scientific practice and the institutional structure of the entire scientific realm, a change of values or a standardisation effect by way of scientometric procedures can be diagnosed. Accordingly, it must be assumed that the scientific analysis of the scientific production of knowledge comes along with the possibility of optimisation and rationalisation. Thus, scientific insight retroacts on the conditions of its creation.<sup>114</sup> For example, the “evidence-oriented improvement” of publication strategies, which has been mentioned above in the context of the organisation of scientific activity, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The “evidence-based” readjustment of the practice is followed by establishing appropriate behavioural expectations that again come along with kinds of oblivion expectations.

This complicated context can be illustrated by the debate on the consequences of bibliometric methods. Bibliometrics is feared, resulting in increased readiness for a kind of selection that is oriented at attention-economic criteria and thus establishes an appropriate degree of wanting-to-forget. It has already been pointed out that Eugene Garfield attempts to dispel such concerns brought to his attention in various ways. However, his reactions mark some cornerstones of an oblivion discourse in the context of the scientific

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be slowed down – on the case and the debate around it see the elaborations by Alexander Bogner and Wolfgang Menz (2006) which aim at an ethicalisation of science.

114 Also, these are effects which, in the context of the theory of reflective modernisation, have been comprehensively analysed and described.

production of knowledge. For example, the proposal to classify scientific disregard according to three kinds of uncitedness must be read as a contribution to classifying scientific ignorance and legitimating it. Scientific works which are not quoted and thus “fall through the cracks”, he says, are either of low quality, wrongly placed or already too well-known.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, the desire to make one’s success visible through the mirror of bibliometrics or to refer to successful works when selecting references is provided with legitimation with the help of which doubts concerning the completeness of the references quoted in the course of a study may be dissipated. In Garfield, the *index oblivionalis* is not meant to select cases for assessing bibliometric artefacts (Garfield, 1971) but as a pile of rubbish where everything gathers, which may well be forgotten.<sup>116</sup>

Elsewhere, Garfield reports on a study in the context of the Science Citation Index, in the course of which a list of works from the subject of biology was compiled which had not been quoted over five years. Garfield asked the authors about their explanation that their essays had been overlooked or forgotten, and he concluded that many of these works provided exclusively descriptive information. This kind of information, he said, was little relevant for further research. As a reason why such works are produced, Garfield assumes that it makes sense to collect data and publish them. However, he says, this comes at

115 The three kinds of uncitedness described by Garfield may be completed by another one, where the problem of systematic recognition deficits is taken somewhat more seriously. Elsewhere, Garfield (1972) demands a particular catalogisation of academic examination papers which are less perceived but may still present fruitful ideas and hints for research. It seems as if in the early 1970s Garfield could not imagine that the problem he raised, that of a kind of uncitedness resulting from a genre which right from the beginning had a bad reputation, could be solved by the practice of cumulative examination papers – quite in the sense of bibliometrics focussing on the genre of the scientific essay. However, even from this approach there concludes the strategy to better hand in examination papers of the cumulative kind. Vice versa, as a consequence we may then forget about studies which did not succeed with achieving the demanded number of reviewed journal essays. Accordingly, Garfield plays down also Merton’s obliteration phenomenon – i. e. if wondering why one’s own ideas are not quoted, one may as well imagine that obviously they already belong to the matter-of-course and sedimented canon. Thus, being forgotten may indicate great success: “Obliteration – perhaps even more than an astronomical citation rate – is one of the highest compliments the community of scientists can pay to the author. So, if Archimedes were alive today, he could take comfort in the fact that his primordial paper on pi had been obliterated” (Garfield, 1975, p. 398).

116 In the social sciences and the humanities, the practice of publishing in the context of commemorative publications, compilations and conference proceedings is criticised, as these are said to be “burial fields for articles” whose contents are much less likely to be published than essays in reviewed journals. In how far this is really a kind of storage oblivion of manuscripts which otherwise are difficult to publish or if these are incoherent compilations serving for making lists of publications longer cannot be decided here.

the cost of a lower probability of being quoted because data collections are first of all used for examination papers and theses. Then, however, the strategy of rather not publishing any descriptive material in essays derives from these considerations. This way, it is insinuated that there are relevant and less relevant fields of scientific communication. Nevertheless, this way, an entire genre of scientific treatises would be wrong with certain communication fora and may fall into oblivion (Garfield, 1970a).

The example presented by Garfield points out a transition from scientific reflection to reflectivity. What initially is analysed as a scientific issue is transferred to optimisation knowledge and becomes, after all, a foundation for evaluation. From an oblivion-theoretical point of view, the transition from optimisation knowledge to a criterion for evaluation may also be described as the normative-norming change of intended oblivion (calculated oblivionism) to wanting-to-forget as a matter of course or to ignoring (value oblivionism).<sup>117</sup>

In the context of the completeness ideal, Garfield (1975) emphasizes that citation happens between the two poles of being deficient and being inflationary and that the “correct” measure – what he means is the subject-culturally-specific average in the sense of an obliteration coefficient which is similar to the half-life of knowledge – cannot be explained normatively but must be explained against the background of the respectively current culture. In other words: not even the citation-communicated way of dealing with the completeness ideal can be functionally explained nor by reaching back to norms, but it is a historically changeable social fact. Garfield bases his observation on the limited availability of scientific texts and the strong focus of the scientific discourse on exchanging letters and personal debate. The selection of texts, he says, which are a must for the list of references of a new essay, cannot be compiled according to completeness but must happen out of deference to beneficial information or out of respect towards those “giants” on whose shoulders one considers oneself sitting. Citation, however, is no practice to be performed by the individual alone; it also follows a consensus about what must be quoted within the scientific community. Because of the forms and rules of canonisation, Garfield gives an implicit hint that within the cultures of the respective disciplines, citation-communicated remembrance and the possibility to forget happen in an orderly manner. The professional associations within the

117 On this see Oliver Dimbath (2010). The example of Garfield allows for the suspicion that in the course of time Garfield the information scientist changed into Garfield the information entrepreneur. However, it is not possible to be satisfied with stating a “both-and”, as sales arguments and placations are used to dissipate scientific doubts. Basically, the here stated development of a new kind of wanting-to-forget would be exogenously caused – even if the scenes are located within the sciences (endogenous).

sciences deny both oblivionism by way of canonisation and the cleaning of the canon by creating criteria for obsolescence by way of self-observation. For Garfield, these criteria seem to be determined by impact; however, there is also the possibility that certain traditions of quoting are created which, as long as a topic is discussed, must be continued. Then, the *obliteration coefficient* would inform about from when on certain scientific information is canonised enough so that there is no need anymore to inform about its origin and that, as a consequence, the latter may be forgotten – at least in view of the operative research documentation.<sup>118</sup>

Technological and social change, which has resulted in the frequently described exponential growth of scientific information, most of all due to the development of faster and more comprehensive possibilities to communicate, makes the legitimization of controlled deletion processes inevitable. However, such a deletion process must be preceded by withdrawing relevance from the concerned object. Even such devaluations do not happen coincidentally but following social orders. Some of the rules such processes are based on have already been described. What must be added now are the struggles about definitory power coming along with any kind of social change and the naïve idea of clearing out in the sense of “natural” obsolescence.

In the course of a kind of social change that is attributed to technological progress, there is a growing necessity of selection. Accordingly, practices are developing within the cultures of scientific disciplines which do legitimate certain selection mechanisms but not others.<sup>119</sup> Other than scientific evolutions,

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118 Behind this there hides the question about a culture of wanting-to-forget which is different from discipline to discipline. In view of sociology in the German-speaking countries, the question may be raised of what with theorizing causes this strong obligation to “classical” authors. It seems as if the cultures of other disciplines are much less obliged to their classics, and sociology, of all, which considers itself a science of modernity, seems to submit in this respect to a particularly persistent remembrance imperative – while at the same time forgetting about other positions which might be as relevant for the respective problem.

119 Accordingly, it can be observed, for example, that the online encyclopedia wikipedia was initially kept away, by way of citation bans, from academic teaching, for having a reputation of being dubious. At the same time, however, the process can be observed that renowned encyclopedia publishers stop publishing printed editions – not least by referring to the success of freely available online encyclopedias (see the stop of the Encyclopedia Britannica). Furthermore, it becomes obvious that although collaboratively created Internet encyclopedias experience fabrication scandals, on the whole they prove to be reliable compilations of information. If now one states that due to the principles of their organisation the new information media are not much less reliable than the traditional ones, the initial rejection becomes reduced to the power relations between different generations of scientists.

this is not about topics but about practices of dealing with scientific knowledge. Thus, the assertiveness of each new generation of scientists, in view of dealing with archiving techniques alone, would also be a predictor for specific ways of legitimate oblivion. Additionally, each generation in the cultures of the respective disciplines prefers theories, schools or worldviews. Apart from the change of paradigm, a change of generations may trigger processes of decanonisation and declaring obsolescence. In line with this, the turning away of the mainstream of sociology from structural functionalism can be identified as a process of wanting-to-forget in the history of sociological theories. Simply declaring Parson's theory outmoded and topically insufficient while ignoring the effects of the change of generations, however, is short-sighted, at least from the point of view of a history of science.<sup>120</sup>

Whereas a change of paradigms or replacing a generation of scientists sometimes comes with conflicts, schools or positions may also simply "disappear". Such a "dying out", however, is an exception that is only allegedly coincidental. If we accept Garfield's considerations, a scientist's career success is measured by the usefulness of the information he/she has published. In terms of structure, particularly science following the Humboldt tradition can research even remote fields due to the ideal of academic liberty when choosing one's research interests. Academic liberty depends on the completeness ideal and thus on the thus connected imperative to remember. Apart from the latter, it becomes difficult to not proceed according to an attention economy. Seen this way, the academic Sleeping Beauty is an artefact of modern, attention economy-oriented science, as anyway, the "princes" would have made their way to their Sleeping Beauties – it is their task to look for them incessantly. Wanting-to-forget for reasons of lacking compatibility or employability is not allowed for a kind of science that is oriented at the completeness ideal.

Another kind of practical or institutional wanting-to-forget can be investigated by changing the observer's point of view. For example, oblivion may be analysed functionally. Whereas the dysfunctionality of oblivion may soon be identified as a flaw of the academic system, it seems to be revealing – by reaching back to Nietzsche – to interpret the perspective of wanting-to-forget as a readiness to forget and as being (eu-)functional for the further existence of the academic system.<sup>121</sup> However, oblivion may be functional even if wrong

120 Similar things may always be assumed if authors point out to a "forgotten" position, theory or school. This holds for ethno-methodology (see Langenohl, 2009) but also in view of psychoanalysis in academic psychology or for critical theory.

121 The differentiation of the functional concept refers to Merton's (1968) critique and specification of sociological functionalism.



ways, failures or even social sanctions are supposed to be forgotten to allow for new beginnings. In this context, we may distinguish four starting points. At first, desired oblivion may aim at certain individual actors. Secondly, such a kind of oblivion would have to be viewed in terms of knowledge or information, which, thirdly, may be limited to dealing with risky knowledge. Finally, the forgetting assessment of the basic values or identities of the cultures of disciplines must be viewed at, as it is frequently made a topic of discussion in the context of interdisciplinarity.

From the institution's point of view, the actor perspective in the field of institutional wanting-to-forget aims at the researching individual. In this context, at first two starting points may be viewed: on the one hand, we might ask how dealing with damaged reputation or the standing of science is organised. On the other hand, in the sense of a weaker variant, we might ask about the institutional way of dealing with "underperformance", that is, reputational damage due to commonly deficient publications or those which are alien to the genre.

Already in Greek antiquity, the social problems were documented if mistakes are not forgotten. Thus, it seems to be functional not only in the political realm to indeed sanction violations of rules but, from certain points on – depending on the extent of the violation – to no longer persecute them or to no longer remember them after the end of "punishment". The principle of amnesty is based on such oblivion, which is functional for maintaining the community. For the time being, it is oblivion-theoretically unclear if social orders of amnesty have also been transferred to the sanctioning systems of the scientific system or, given the special status of science, if it has its own mechanisms of sanctioning and its own calendar of remembering mistakes. In favour of the first solution, there is generally a fact that in many societies, violations in the realm of the sciences also have legal consequences – such as violations of copyrights or secrecy norms.

However, oblivion is functional also when it comes to restoring reputation after misperformances – this is not about intended mistakes but sloppiness or bad quality. When scientists have completed the long qualifying period, when such a reputational damage has tough consequences, there are hardly any authorities that might effectively attest bad or misperformance to them. Only recently, in the context of ethics commissions and scientific evaluations, a kind of "memory" for such cases begins to constitute. If the rememberability of scientific misperformance is functional for the development of innovation and progress cannot be decided here. As a result of the introduction of places of memory for the sciences, such as evaluation systems,<sup>122</sup> awards and

122 On this see the works by Michèle Lamont (2009).

competitions, the possibility of institutionally intended oblivion in the sense of practical-routine, rehabilitating oblivion, is somewhat suspended.<sup>123</sup>

Against the background of its normative-norming effect, even the half-life of knowledge may be interpreted as a criterion for orientation in the sense of Nietzsche or De Solla Price. If it is known how soon knowledge is turned over in a certain discipline or sub-discipline and how soon it decays in the light of institutionalised remembering, which is depicted by citation, an understanding of normality can be derived that retroacts the “durability” of new knowledge. From such a way of dealing with the concept of half-life, there derives a change of the selection practice, which makes the quotability of a scientific contribution depend on its publication date. To this, we may object that, after all, the thematic relevance of the argument to be quoted must be crucial. However, against the background of the exponential growth of the flood of information in so many fields, particularly of the ordinary scientific system, it is no longer possible to make such a decision about relevance, which is why right from the beginning also the age of a source may be included into the memory calculus.

From this way of selecting, which results from the surplus of information of the scientific production of knowledge, we must distinguish a kind of oblivion which refers to information connected to self-imposed restrictions. On the one hand, information of potential dangers which result immediately from scientific work is programmatically remembered. On the other hand, risk assessments result from social negotiation processes and rather address ethical-normative aspects or hazard potentials about which no consensus can be established between controversial positions. Functional oblivion aims at knowing about hazards that are differently judged at different times, which way it may serve for scientific progress. On the other hand, such volitional oblivion, happening in the sense of “revising” risk assessments, also comes with the possibility of interest-related negation. Then the reification or mythologisation of risk assessments is constantly assessed. At the same time, however, due to the

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123 One starting point for the investigation of practices by way of which scientific misperformances – after having become obvious – are levelled once again is provided by Goffman (1952; 1963), whose considerations on the interaction order may also be read in view of the aspect of order. In his works on the reconstruction of the damaged self he compiles strategies allowing for saving face or for restoring the “lost face” for oneself or for others. In the realm of scientific activity and perhaps also at the level of the cultures of individual disciplines this kind of interactive amnesty will look differently – all in all, however, it is about a reduction of relevance and thus about the preparation of oblivion processes. One example of the adaption of Goffman’s ideas in science research is to be found by the analysis of peer review procedures by Michèle Lamont (2009).

discontinuation of certain interests or to no longer paying sufficient attention to them, the Promethean potential of scientific progress may again and again newly be unleashed. Then, this would be the case, although there was a consensus about not further pursuing certain paths and orientations in the past. Any self-limitation of science contradicts the scientific pursuit of progress and is thus subject to a rather institutionally communicated wanting-to-forget. On the whole, it seems as if information produced in the context of *organised scepticism*, as evaluative or otherwise secondary knowledge when it comes to scientific statements, depends on the position it gives expression to and the latter's market opportunities.

One last variant of institutional wanting-to-forget results from the context of the progressing differentiation of the sciences. Not only the differences between natural sciences, social sciences and humanities but also the ever more specifying epistemic and disciplinary cultures result in limitations of the transformability of scientific insight from one field to another. Sometimes the differentiation of the entire system is considered dysfunctional when it comes to solving pending problems, which results in the call for interdisciplinary research cooperation. Apart from the apparent advantages of multi-perspective cooperation, interdisciplinarity comes with mutual understanding problems due to different terminologies and research methods. If interdisciplinarity is successful, the involved actors may consider the ties to their disciplines of origin to be outmoded. Then the history of differentiation of inner-scientific kinds of knowledge is forgotten, which may result in both the development of a trans-disciplinary self-understanding and a trivialising mixing-up of incommensurable research traditions, theories and terminologies. Integration at the cultural level is only possible by partial and purposefully initiated forgetting of differences; similarly, in the realm of a much-differentiated structure of institutions, it comes with the danger of forgetting about having become and development achieved and sometimes carved out stages of differentiation and delimitations are forgotten.<sup>124</sup>

Institutional ways of wanting-to-forget may also be viewed from an exogenous perspective if science comes in touch with other realms of society. Also, then it is at first about influences from non-scientific sectors which provide reasons – within science – for wanting-to-forget certain knowledge contents.

124 Such a development becomes obvious in the course of the Bologna reform process at German universities, if courses are supposed to be oriented in an interdisciplinary or topical way or at application or problems. One consequence may be that graduates from these courses may no longer develop any discipline-cultural identity of their subject, which again influences the perpetuation of the knowledge structures of the cultures of these disciplines.

Furthermore, the *primus inter pares* of social kinds of knowledge tends to expect the non-scientific realms to forget about their own kinds of knowledge and replace them with scientific ones. Thus, what is described is an interaction of different kinds of knowledge, with the sciences contributing, characterised by mutual expectations of oblivion.

The fact that other action fields of society are influenced by scientific knowledge has in many contexts been described and problematized as scientification. Nevertheless, examples can also be given for the other way round. The sociology of science in the context of science and technology studies documents that scientific thought is constantly influenced by everyday practices reflecting the social situation of the respective period. Also, science becoming economised refers to scientific structures of meaning being permeated with non-scientific values and regulation structures.

At first sight, purposeful oblivion at the level of the practices and institutions of science seems even more unusual than the institutionally implicated acceptance of oblivion. It has been described in the context of variants of wanting-to-forget. Nevertheless, however, with the regulatory structure of “the” sciences, aspects can be identified which not only support or allow for the loss of existing knowledge. There are also aspects in which the structure of making use of knowledge and thus of the selectivity of “systemic” remembrance is controlled. Viewed at are more or less explicable institutionalised strategies with the help of which knowledge is purposefully exposed, accentuated, and covered up or hidden to safeguard the existing order. At this level, neither the particular interests of the individual nor organisational strategies are at the fore.

The history of scientific knowledge orders shows temporary empowerment for self-control by those being active in science. If initially science was strictly determined by social power relations and the thus connected, sometimes arbitrary research interests, with Enlightenment, there has been much more leeway, going as far as the idea of the freedom of inquiry. Thus, a period of the greatest autonomy of research would be the suitable point of reference for the development of institutional making-forget. Historically, this period is embedded between two non-scientific regimes: if initially science was kept in leading-strings by nobility and clergy,<sup>125</sup> it becomes evident that political and economic power interests monopolised the sciences since the late-industrial society. However, made oblivion is not only a question of scientific

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125 In ancient civilisations, kinds of scientific knowledge are not compatibly institutionalised – however, also changing between the freedom and unfreedom of “intellect” can be described by long cycles or waves.

autonomy but also a strategy of growing authority from an inside point of view. Endogenous making-forget includes three aspects of purposeful oblivion, the first of which concerns the institutional dealing with documenting the conditions for creating scientific works (a). The second one aims at the predatory competition of scientific interpretation offers and solutions to problems (b), and the third one concerns the practical dealing with violations of rules (c). In view of the interaction between scientific knowledge orders, there are added exogenous aspects of the predatory competition between knowledge orders (d) and forgetting about errors (e).

A first starting point for the systematic withdrawing of knowledge from third parties and for making them forget comes from a tradition of scientific work which goes back to a dictum by Francis Bacon: *de nobis ipsis silemus*.<sup>126</sup> Günter Burkart reconstructs the history of this rule regarding sociology and shows that since antiquity (Plato), the writing of scientific works has been flanked by semantic objectification offers. For example, he says, the “I”, representing the author’s subjectivity, is only tolerated with the foreword to a treatise, whereas the remaining text must be written in the style of a “transpersonal authority” (Kohli, qtd. in Burkart 2003, para. 1). Furthermore, he states, it is unusual to make problems occurring in the course of writing the text part of the argument – we have already delineated the practice of not telling about failed experiments. However, ignoring the imponderables of research goes even further if also wrong ways are kept secret. From the point of view of certain sociological schools – such as from a hermeneutic or phenomenological point of view – such objectification practices are hardly comprehensible, as they conceal the fact that a researcher is entangled with his/her research topic, thus making it fall into oblivion. The success story of scientific knowledge can be explained by the latter being artificially objectivist. Only seemingly the practice of concealment and making-forget relieves the authors from their obligation to self-reflection. It is crucial that the reception of scientific works has to do with fallible individuals and a powerful institution called “the sciences”. If general validity and objectivity are claimed, historical or biographic contextual information must mostly be left away. In terms of an analysis of oblivion, such a reification of scientific insight allows for diagnosing the institutionalisation of invulnerability or sacrosanctity, which can be maintained as long as it is possible to also adapt scientific knowledge in an objectivist way.<sup>127</sup> Such an immunisation strategy has the effect that scientific knowledge

126 We are going to be silent about ourselves.

127 It is remarkable that this problem has been raised by sociology, of all – one possible explanation why hints at this kind of making-forget came neither from a natural-sciences point

can only be put into question from the realm of science – a fact which, however, may put science under pressure in the course of other knowledge orders becoming empowered.

Another variant of institutional making-forget can also be identified within the sciences, in the context of the competition for interpretational sovereignty. The fact that citation networks or citation cartels boost certain ideas – so to speak as cover memories – cannot exclusively be explained as a survival strategy of individual actors of academic life. Behind such purposeful-oblivionist reasons, there are regulation structures that only create or support such developments. In this context, the concept of normal science appears as the ideal type of a hardly innovative while at the same time saturated period in the life cycle of a successful paradigm. Only in passing Thomas S. Kuhn points out that work in a mainstream context is always accompanied by displacement effects given potential alternative possibilities of interpretation.<sup>128</sup> Thus seen, history and the history of science are a history written by the victorious side that has pushed through against competing worldviews or solution offers. This competition happens through systematic remembering and not remembering, and if just one particular line of the development of scientific insight is strategically preferred, everything else is ignored. Thus seen, the principle of scientific schools is also an institutionalised aspect of making-forget when it comes to competing perspectives – it is about taking care that at conferences, the “right” positions will be heard and the “right” people will occupy that vacant chairs. What at first sight must be interpreted as a power play among actors within academic life (also see Toulmin, 1977) turns out to be a fight for interpretational sovereignty and the opportunity to define problems which are fought with the help of orders of making-forget and is constitutive for the progress of science.<sup>129</sup>

A third starting point for the diagnosis of social making-forget concerns orders of how to deal with mistakes and misbehaviour, in the context of which it is not about functional amnesic oblivion or oblivion for the sake of rehabilitation but about procedures for cleaning knowledge which has been made available by way of system-specific remembering. In contrast to

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of view nor e. g. from that of the classical humanities is provided by Wolf Lepenies (1988) in the context of his thesis of sociology oscillating between literature and science.

128 First of all he refers to scientists not joining in with this change paradigm and who are thus marginalised (see Kuhn, 1962).

129 It cannot be doubted that such a practice may be dysfunctional and may result in mismanagement. This could be practically prevented only by way of sufficiently supporting all perspectives – a utopia without excellency competitions and tendering processes. This means saying good-bye to selectivity by way of success.

cleaning by sorting out the redundant and the obsolete, the focus is on the correction. Whereas the sciences do not provide for any *damnatio memoriae* and the documentation of proven errors is kept in the archive, forgeries are withdrawn from circulation. Accordingly, in scientific publishing, one increasingly withdraws works that have been recognized as forgeries or plagiarisms. This withdrawing practice serves for maintaining the reputation of a journal's or publishing house's editorial staff, which, for reasons of quality assurance and integrity, cannot accept certain breaches of the regulations. Apart from an unreliable source, however, also a memorial is deleted from rememberability. In view of the public perception of science, such a measure also has the effect that the traces of the scandal are washed away, and investigations are made more difficult.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the analysis of making-forget at the institutional level contributes, among others, to understanding the allegedly lacking awareness of the problem when it comes to scientific misbehaviour. Much suggests that the structural conditions enforce maintaining a "clean conscience" of objective science so that the status of *primus inter pares* is not endangered.

Finally, it is about regulation structures of purposeful oblivion, with the help of which science makes its stand or secures its status within the structure of social institutions. In the following, we are going to discuss two aspects which have already been addressed several times: the competition of knowledge orders, in the context of which now it is no longer about desirable oblivion but about institutionally rooted oblivion techniques and ways of making-forget in case of misconduct negotiated in the light of the public. Both variants of practical or institutional making-forget are functional in view of the autonomy of the scientific system; however, they come along with problems concerning the inner-scientific basic orientations of truth and progress.

The elaborations so far provide indications that the fight for interpretational sovereignty and resources within the scientific system, flanked by oblivion mechanisms, also happens at the societal level, in the sense of competition between modern science and other societal institutions. Indeed, since Enlightenment and the pushing through positive science, the primacy of the scientific kind of knowledge are mostly undisputed in modern society. However, not even this status is a matter of course, and it must be secured with the help of orders. Having pointed out to this is one of the merits of Michel

<sup>130</sup> Science scandals of his kind seem to be repeated periodically and with minor variations. In the 1990s there happened massive forgeries in the field of medical cancer research, in 2004 the forgeries of physicist Jan Hendrik Schön, who had been shortlisted for the Nobel Prize, became known, and in 2010 a number of plagiarised doctoral theses by German politicians were revealed which, among others, finally resulted in Defence Minister Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg resigning from office.

Foucault, whose archaeological and genealogical analyses of societal discourses attracted attention to the gradual change of societal knowledge orders. Reiner Keller pursues this perspective according to oblivion-analytical points of view by demonstrating that the discourse is organised with the help of exclusion mechanisms or control procedures insisting on reducing the number of speaking subjects. Moreover, regarding scientific knowledge, he demonstrates that even the scientific basic code, the separation of “true” and “false”, is not at all exclusively based on reason:

The rubbish heap of history does not only consist of perishable and perishing social orders but also of those ideas and knowledge statements which have been eliminated because they no longer meet the demand of ‘speaking the truth’ or, in this context, are at best considered ‘insignificant’ in this context. (Keller, 2011, p. 127)

From Foucault’s point of view, science appears as a vehicle for the spread and enforcement of knowledge for the sake of action or control, which, after all, allows for separating any kind of unwanted knowledge by considering it “false”. However, it is also in the interest of scientific actors to leave out competing kinds of knowledge and erase their traces or make them fall into oblivion.<sup>131</sup> Then, the process of making-forget does not consist of “concerted” or individual actions but of defining specific regulations for being scientific, which systematically exclude other interpretation offers. Then – sometimes very purposeful while at the same time in a way which is both institutional and in line with the regulations – it is forgotten that now a certain solution to a problem which formerly has been considered scientific is no longer understood to be scientific but esoteric.

The second exogenous order of making-forget results from the way in which science deals with attacks on its primacy of interpretation. Science cannot afford to be criticized by the public. Self-purification must swiftly produce institutional consequences before any steering starts from the outside. Accordingly, in view of science in Germany, Marco Finetti and Armin Himmelrath come to the estimation that forgeries have indeed been a topic of discussion,

[...] but almost all the time off the record and preferably concerning the cases of other people. Whenever they discovered lies and deception at their own institutes and laboratories, universities and research institutions as well as the organisations of the scientific system connected to them, took every effort to

131 Indications are the discrediting of psychoanalysis by modern psychology as well as the pushing away of so-called alternative medicine by academic medicine, the rejection of classical biology by molecular biology etc.



investigate and close such cases in secret. In secret – and on their own. The main goal was always to keep out the public, the media, and certainly state and justice. (Finetti & Himmelrath, 1998, p. 32)

Public silence and hiding information about scientific misbehaviour is no specific to the German scientific system. However, the international comparison conducted by Finetti and Himmelrath provides indications of the different institutional framework conditions under which aberrations or mismanagement are discussed. Perhaps in Germany, the institutional field science activity is under particular pressure to win over the public opinion and must thus invest in keeping back information about failure or making it forget as soon as possible. Then, however, all this is not the strategies of individual actors but developments practically or institutionally coming from “the system”.



## Conclusion: Oblivion and Oblivion Society

After all, what is to be understood by oblivionism in science? Now, in some concluding considerations, we will decide how far social oblivion and oblivionism are fruitful concepts for sociology. As the term has appeared in the context of diagnosing current science and appears to be particularly problematic there, we have had a particular focus on this action field. However, the presented study did not only claim to assess the suspicion of oblivionism when it comes to science. The goal was to make the phenomenon of social oblivion, with the help of an example, fruitful for social theory and the theory of society or sociology of knowledge. The concept was supposed, and this is the research-guiding assumption, to be transferable to other fields of society. Neither the genesis and perpetuation of socially constituted knowledge nor the wide field of not-knowing are in the fore but the problem of losing knowledge. This opens up an entirely new research perspective, also coming along with methodological consequences. Before taking up and judging the eponymous problem of scientific oblivionism here, the basic theoretical lines of this newly worked out research perspective will be briefly sketched, and prospects for other fields of application have to be mentioned. Finally, it must be assessed in how far stating oblivionism may be understood as a diagnosis of our time or the present if the question about oblivion society is raised.

Memory and particularly social memories have not been understood to be chronological or spatial stores. They are aspects of the ongoing production of knowledge orders resulting from each current reference to the traces of past events. Thus, they are the crucial selection mechanism for a presentist construction of the reality of a social entity. Memory and particularly social memories determine what is relevant for any social entity in a given situation. Selectivity and relevance need not spread via communication – for this, the category of *declarative-reflective* knowledge or memory has been introduced. They may also exist in *incorporated-practical* form and may not be accessible to any reflection by subjects or groups. This is not meant to altogether reject the common understanding of memory as a store or archive. Then it is only the explicit and intentional storing and organising of a possible reaching back to traces for communicative purposes. Thus, store or archive refers only to a small segment of a much more comprehensive phenomenon of the social reference to past events.

Remembering has been understood as the exclusively intentional and interpreting reference to the traces of past events, happening in the mode of *declarative-reflective* and thus communicable as well as current construing. Thus, remembering is meaningful and determines meaning. In the case of memory and remembering, the connection to the concept of knowledge is that knowledge consists of the behavioural repertoire collected in past events that have left traces. Selectively, memory provides for behaviour based on a comparison of the current situation with past events. Remembering is reflecting and hence conscience-mediating reaching back. Thus, a social entity may know more than it believes to know due to its past events.

By forgetting, we have understood a loss of knowledge. This loss results from old impressions being lastingly eclipsed by new ones, which is crucially co-determined by the selectivity of memory. As all behaviour can only connect to certain events of the past, its effect on the world is contingent. In other words, behaviour rules out any alternative behaviour that might have been connective within the frame of certain probabilities in view of the past experienced by a social entity. Both unconscious and reflected selectivity perpetuate structural patterns of behavioural orientation; if this happens once, twice or thrice, untrodden paths will fall into oblivion over time. One kind of oblivion happening because of ongoing adjustment in serving knowledge structures has been described as oblivion (II) or forgetfulness. This is the quality of any social entity to reorient behaviour according to its own having become, thus giving up on a good deal of its available knowledge. Whereas forgetfulness as quality is the same as any "natural" decay of knowledge, there is the possibility to influence such processes actively. The intentional orientation at one's forgetfulness and the forgetfulness of others have been called forgetting on the broader sense, oblivion (I) or wanting-to-forget and making-forget. Giving up on as well as the withdrawing of knowledge limits the choice of possible actions. If such action happens unnoticed, it is possible to make oblivion as a loss of knowledge a lasting thing. On the other hand, initiated oblivion becomes known, which may be interpreted as a loss of trust and result in refractory behaviour and conflict.

A cause for wanting-to-forget can be the insight into being overtaxed by too much information connected to being hurt in the past. Making-forget is a tool for the organisation of social relations. An oblivion calculus may help suppress conflicts among couples; it may attract social groups' attention to those things that are considered relevant, and it may influence the development of collective identities towards the desired direction. Forgetfulness and attempts to influence it, control and steering are found with all social relations and action contexts.

Harald Weinrich's polemic diagnosis of oblivion with the sciences attests a particular affinity for knowledge loss to science in the late modern age. Due to the exponential growth of stocks of knowledge and that kind of knowledge production which is considered scientific, the actors of the scientific system come to the limits of their capacity and consequently try to adjust the selection mechanisms. This happens by readjusting the relevancies for dealing with archived knowledge to a faster turnover and main and side streams. Thus, we may state that by oblivionism, we must understand a societal increase of the tendency to forget.

The carried out analysis of social oblivion is far more comprehensive. Here, oblivionism appears as a phenomenon of intentionally preparing societal forgetfulness in the context of wanting-to-forget and making-forget. Science research provides a lot of starting points that make Weinrich's analysis of our time look plausible. However, such an analysis is not sufficient for analysing social forgetfulness in science as a whole. Furthermore, before claiming an increase of oblivion, the latter's potentials and limits when it comes to each respective social or societal realm must be sounded out. In other words: oblivion may be seriously stated only if the conditions for knowledge loss and its growth can be comprehended. In view of the archiving of scientific knowledge, oblivion in the scientific realm seems to be hardly comprehensible. For example, not only the storing capacities for scientific information have grown immensely but also the possibilities of organising it systematically in the form of catalogue systems. Yet, when it comes to decisions about the reception, the diagnosis seems to be highly correct. Oblivionism happens in the context of a – not least power-induced – decision about what is supposed to be remembered and what may be forgotten; thus, it seems to be one aspect of a "history of the victorious". This is not at all anything new but just one more case of discursive hegemony in the course of which more than just a few field-specific and system-specific institutional selection mechanisms may be bypassed by hep of power and influence. Niklas Luhmann described such a development within the scientific system when the prevailing code and programme are readjusted in certain societal action fields. Oblivionism would thus be a call for oblivion concerning the differentiation and diversity of the scientific production of knowledge – such as a de-differentiation facilitated by guiding disciplines which, however, does no longer exclusively operate according to the distinction between true/untrue but according to renowned/not renowned or important/unimportant.

If we understand societies to be fundamentally constituted by knowledge, it is obvious to transfer the question about the principles and variants of

knowledge loss also to other fields of action. Everywhere where acceleration is diagnosed and connected to power-interests, we may thus state oblivion. However, as it must be assumed that selection mechanisms and relevancies are different for each individual realm, we should assume different kinds of social memories where also the loss of knowledge happens in different ways. Thus, oblivion (I) and oblivion (II) in the economy will be different from those in politics, in law or in education, just like in social institutions such as family, security, mourning or organising. Organisational oblivionism would then have to be described as refocusing, as an enacted forgetting of essential goals of an organisation, such as by way of state-decreed requirements for documentation or by a changed tax policy.

A sociological analysis dealing with fundamental issues of theory and claiming to work out new perspectives is well advised to register its subject as a new principle that considerably determines the social order. By introducing an entirely new perspective, problems may be supposed to appear, which will be the task of future research. Also, the analysis of social oblivion may claim to do so. However, it concludes with a rather careful prospect which emphasizes that a thorough analysis of the social structuring of the loss of knowledge promises new insights concerning the social use of knowledge. Nevertheless, against this background, it seems to be both outmoded and exaggerated to proclaim the thesis of an oblivion society. Such a thesis would be outmoded insofar as already more than 100 years ago, modern society was described as a society of oblivion. Processes of social modernisation did not come with any one-sided growth of oblivion but rather with a change in selecting. Thus, the theoretical-conceptual pervasion of the phenomenon of social oblivion, its empirical description, and exploring its consequences remains both a new and urgent research issue. Without any reliable empirical findings, any claim that social oblivion is spreading and is becoming a feature of modern societies or a driving force of social change seems to be premature for the time being. Thus, as a conclusion, it must be stated that the research of social oblivion is insightful for the analysis of social knowledge, even if one does not come up with slogans such as oblivion society, demented society, or social dementia.

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