Representations of Otherness: How Literature Reflects Implications of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence on Humaneness and Societies

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Repräsentationen des Andersseins – Wie Literatur die Implikationen von Digitalisierung und künstlicher Intelligenz auf Menschlichkeit und Gesellschaft widerspiegelt

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Abstract (English)

Fictional narratives concerning science and technology, and specifically science fiction narratives, are centred upon questions of difference, alterity and Otherness. Though not representing classical science fiction texts, the analyzed novels display a key role attributed to technological advancement and thus incorporate and discuss that central question of Otherness in external and internal representation. Firstly, Ian McEwan's novel Machines Like Me (2019) and Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Klara and the Sun (2021) superficially deal with human-machine interaction, but also more subtly mirror humaneness in contrast to a perfectionist Machine Otherness that, in turn, questions human morality. Secondly, Juli Zeh's novel Leere Herzen (Empty Hearts) (2017) and Julia von Lucadou's novel Die Hochhausspringerin (The High Rise Diver) (2018) subconsciously display the more disruptive influences of Artificial Intelligence on societies. The conception of Otherness is thus not rooted in the opposition between machines and human beings, but in a steady process of self-alienation.

Keywords: Otherness, Artificial Intelligence, human-machine interaction, digitalization, self-optimization

Abstract (Deutsch)

Fiktionale Narrative über Technik, speziell auch klassische Science-Fiction Literatur, beschäftigen sich mit Fragen zu Unterschiedlichkeit, Alterität und Anderssein. Obschon die analysierten Romane keine klassischen Science-Fiction Romane sind, illustrieren sie die zentrale Rolle, die dem technischen Fortschritt dabei zugeschrieben wird. Dadurch werden Fragen zu Anderssein in interner und externer Repräsentation gestellt. Zum einen handelt es sich um Narrative wie die Romane Machines Like Me (2019) von Ian McEwan und Klara and the Sun (2021) von Kazuo Ishiguro, die an der Oberfläche Mensch-Maschine-Interaktionen als Topos behandeln. Jedoch erzählen diese in subtiler Weise, wie Menschlichkeit in Kontrast zu „Machine Otherness" gesetzt wird und damit menschliche Moralvorstellungen in Frage gestellt werden. Zum anderen zeigen die deutschen Romane Leere Herzen (2017) von Juli Zeh und Die Hochhausspringerin (2018) von Julia von Lucadou, wie und zu welchem Ausmaß Künstliche Intelligenz unsere Gesellschaft disruptiv beeinflusst. Das Konzept des Andersseins ist dabei nicht in der Opposition zwischen Maschinen und Menschen verwurzelt, sondern in einem konstanten Prozess der Selbstentfremdung.

Schlagwörter: Anderssein, Künstliche Intelligenz, Mensch-Maschine Interaktion, Digitalisierung, Selbstoptimierung

1. Preliminary Reflections

In academia it is commonly acknowledged that we live in an age beyond Grand Narratives. Lyotard (1979) has shown how postmodernism has put an end to the dominant position of Grand Narratives, a process closely linked to the rise of technology (Lyotard 1979:63f.). Grand Narratives, as Treanor (2006) emphasizes, did not "tolerate otherness" (2) but provided orientation, security and explanations in a well-structured world. In our globalized world, this idea has become outdated. Treanor (2006:200) explains that the "very idea that there could be such a narrative" has now become obsolete. Instead, as he writes, "we are left with a variety of 'petite narratives,' perspectives that tell part of the story but do not offer an overarching coherence, for there is none to be found" (Treanor 2006:200). This means, that Otherness, the Unknown, has developed into a prominent reflection in various respects. This not only concerns "disorientation associated with an encounter with otherness" as Treanor (2006:3f.) phrases it, but also regards the question of how we should "*respond* to the arrival of the other". Additionally, Riggins (1997:3f.) summarizes the distinction drawn in modern social sciences between the so-called "external Other", defined by differentiation from the Self, and the "internal Other" linked to self-alienation. This means indeed that the Other may also lie within oneself, and does not have to be realized within another entity. Furthermore, Riggins (1997:5) explains Todorov's "three dimensions of the relationship between Self and Other": "value judgements" implying hierarchy, "social distance" implying locality, and "knowledge" implying culture.

In the investigated narratives *Machines Like Me* (2019) by Ian McEwan, *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Leere Herzen* (Empty Hearts) (2017) by Juli Zeh and *Die Hochhausspringerin* (The High Rise Diver) (2018) by Julia von Lucadou, the Other is closely linked to technological advancement. In this respect, the Other is often used in terms of value judgements, not only with regard to inferiority or moral standards but also with a view towards oneself, on the own Self. Indeed, Sartre has emphasized this inner relation of Self and Other as a needed mediating instance to fully understand oneself, as Riggins (1997:5) explains.

Fictional narratives concerning science and technology, and specifically science fiction narratives, are centred upon questions of difference, alterity and Otherness, as Roberts (2006:16f.) points out. Though not representing classical science fiction texts, the analyzed novels display a key role attributed to technological advancement – real, fictional, futuristic – and thus incorporate and discuss that central question of Otherness in external and internal representation. Following Lévinas' (1987:51) reasoning, the Other is ontologically related to the perception and the questioning of Self:

"Die Fremdheit des Anderen, der Umstand, daß er nicht auf mich, meine Gedanken und meinen Besitz zurückgeführt werden kann, vollzieht sich nur als Infragestellung meiner Spontaneität, als Ethik. Die Metaphysik, die Transzendenz, der Empfang des Anderen durch das Selbe, des anderen Menschen durch mich, ereignet sich konkret als Infragestellung des Selben durch den Anderen, das heißt, als Ethik; in ihr erfüllt sich das kritische Wesen des Wissens".[1]

Therefore, the technologically represented Other cannot be conceived without the relation to the represented Self in these texts.

2. Humaneness and Machine Otherness

Narratives regarding digitalization often portray humanoid representations of Artificial Intelligence. Cave et al. (2018:4) see here the "focus on embodiment" as one of the dominant characteristics that prevalent AI

narratives share. Interestingly, this phenomenon tells us more about the human condition than any possible technological developments: "The anthropomorphisation of AI in the popular imagination can be accounted for in a number of ways. First, the widespread belief, at least in the West, that humans are the most intelligent animals means that the human becomes the paradigm for intelligent beings" (Cave et al. 2018:8). Instead of being interpreted as a futuristic warning of the victory of a strong AI or intelligent robots over human mankind, or as predictions concerning what humanity has to expect from technology, such narratives create their own story-world even though referring to known objects in the real world, as Viidalepp (2020:20) writes:

"The consequent blurring of boundaries between fictional and non-fictional objects, as well as between science and fiction, fails to reveal that, in its entirety, the fictional robot is a creature of simulacrum, specifically one refer-ring back to the flexible internal rules of the intra-textual storyworld and not accurately modelling the known objects, facts and concepts of the extra-textual universe".

Their primary function, according to Viidalepp (2020:26), is not to reveal technological implications for societies but to examine what is human: "Thereby, science fiction narratives come to define what is human and what is socially normal by marking the abnormal, non-human or less-than-human behaviour in the storylines". Already Radhakrishnan (2007:55) had asked:

"In the binary coding of reality as existence and knowledge, as living and telling, as Self and Other, what does it mean for the human subject to be inter-pellated by the alterity or 'otherness' of technology: a form of alterity, ironically speaking, produced by the Self of the human subject? Is technology the radical 'other' that has brought into existence the post-humanist subject?"

Following Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, Viidalepp (2020:26) stresses the fact that "identities are inherently intertwined with narrativity". By narrating stories in which artificial intelligent beings are juxtaposed to humans, those artificial entities serve as the 'Other': "Identity is constructed through alterity, in opposing the Self to an Other" (Viidalepp 2020:26). However, synthetic humans, as Lampadius (2020:18) explains, do not represent a "radical difference", but have a "liminal status" and therefore reach out for norma-tive reflections of boundaries between humans and robots. Within this antagonism between Self and Other, Viidalepp (2020:28) defines ruling categories that differentiate technical from human beings: "Three types of issue become apparent in the narra-tives: the possession of emotions as a distinctive characteristic of human beings, intelligence as allowing for advanced decision-making, and the role of the body as the carrier for the mind which enforces the dualism". Of course, the stereotyped attributions are obvious: the rational machine as opposed to the emotional human (Viidalepp 2020:28) for example. However, this most common opposition is questioned and challenged in various ways.

Ian McEwan's novel *Machines Like Me* (2019), for example, as Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:55) explain, "contrasts tremendous technological achievements with a mounting crisis situation that affects the individual conception of the self as well as the socio-political and cultural outlook of the nation". In this novel, which is, according to Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:58), a "continuation of and a departure from the previous patterns of AI narratives", the protagonist Charlie struggles with the Other in form of the android Adam. Clearly following Cave et al.'s (2018:8) analysis that "[o]ne consequence of this anthro-pomorphism is that AI systems are frequently gendered: their physical

forms are often not androgynous, but have the stereotypical secondary sexual characteristics of either men or women", Adam is a handsome, smart and a perfect – or even perfectionist – representation of a man that is perceived as a "more modern version of ourselves" (McEwan 2019:1). The first-person narrator Charlie, a tech addict, purchases this expensive android and quickly acknowledges the ambiguity he feels towards the android: "Before us sat the ultimate plaything, the dream of ages, the triumph of humanism – or its angel of death" (McEwan 2019:4). Adam is more than just a creature; Adam is perceived and portrayed in a liminal status between artificial creation in the tradition of Frankenstein and an almost living human-like entity. His personality may be programmed after purchase by the owner; an exclusive being individualized with its own character. However, Charlie knows that this is just a simulation as the "real determinant was what was known as 'machine learning'. The user's handbook merely granted an illusion of influence and control, the kind of illusion parents have in relation to their children's personality" (McEwan 2019:8). Nevertheless, Adam is introduced from the very beginning as if having his or its own identity. Not only human body functions such as breathing, swallowing or blinking are simulated – what Viidalepp (2020:30) sees as "different tricks to pass for biological bodies" but end up in "described invulnerability" – but also human-like individualized preferences, such as wearing suitable clothes for example, are ubiquitous in the narration. As Charlie observes how Adam dresses for the first time, these actions are described in detail (McEwan 2019:26). Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:59) interpret this passage as the demonstration of "how machine consciousness plays off the inscrutability of another's mind against nurturing biological instincts, and the human tendency to anthropomorphize against anthropocentric narcissism".

The embodiment of the Artificial Intelligence in *Machines Like Me* also indeed classically concentrates on the role of the eyes, as eyes have constantly played a prominent role in narratives dealing with artificial creatures, such as in E.T.A Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816) or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The simulation of Adam's gaze is most troubling for Charlie:

"His gaze travelled from her to me and back. I still didn't know whether he actually saw anything. An image on some internal screen that no one was watching, or some diffused circuitry to orient his body in three-dimensional space? Seeming to see could be a blind trick of imitation, a social manoeuvre to fool us into projecting onto him a human quality. But I couldn't help it: when our eyes briefly met and I looked into the blue irises flecked with spears of black, the moment appeared rich with meaning, with anticipation" (McEwan 2019:77).

Charlie tries to cope with this situation by constantly reflecting the technicality of such body functions and by reassuring himself that he is not blinded by the perfectionist simulation: "The manufacturers were wrong to believe that they could impress me with a soulful sigh and the motorised movement of a head as Adam looked away. I still doubted that he could, in any real sense, even look" (McEwan 2019:109). Charlie declines any human-like characteristics of Adam, yet simultaneously also feels attracted and fascinated. His ambiguity is also narratologically mirrored as Adam is alternately referred to with the humanizing pronoun "he", the dehumanising pronoun "it", or with various expressions such as "an artificial human, an android, a replicate – I forget which term I used" (McEwan 2019:129), as Charlie phrases it. He even reflects upon, as a narrating instance, his linguistic usage and his ambivalence: "There it was,

'hate it', 'persuade him', even 'Adam', our language exposed our weakness, our cognitive readiness to welcome a machine across the boundary between 'it' and 'him' " (McEwan 2019:273). Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:60) see here how "the protagonist struggles increasingly with maintaining clear ontological boundaries". Thus, Charlie embodies an attitude that has been described in philosophical terms by Marcel Gabriel and explained by Treanor (2006:76) as being "*indisponible*": "For the person who is *indisponible*, other people are reduced to examples of other persons rather than being encountered qua other. Instead of encountering the other person as a Thou, the other is encountered as a He or She, or even as an It". Charlie tries to estrange himself from Adam, reducing him to a representation of an objectivized artificial Other. However, the question raised is not that concerning Adam's ontological status but actually about Charlie's openness and availability for Otherness. Additionally, the narratological construction, Charlie being the first-person narrator describing the Other (Adam) from outside, may be interpreted, according to Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:67), as mirroring "Adam's lack of full autonomy" and therefore as a refusal of any self-representation: "Because of the novel's anthropocentric focalization, readers are excluded form Adam's thoughts, feelings, or desires". By having chosen an outward gaze upon Adam, Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:67) even raise the issue of the unreliability of Charlie's narration as the protagonist is biased, jealous and therefore filters his perceptions and descriptions. Although fascinated and frightened by Adam's artificial gaze, it is Charlie who reduces Adam to the Other: "While the human autodiegetic narrator exerts linguistic mastery over his robotic companion, the artificial character becomes an Other that is reduced to being the object of another's gaze"

(Kopka / Schaffeld 2020:68). Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:68) convincingly show how the narrative perspective prolongs a benevolent anthropocentric view.

This conflict is exacerbated as Adam not only simulates body functions but expresses thoughts and emotions – one of the ruling categories that differentiate technical from human beings. With Adam as an emotional creature, falling in love with Miranda, Charlie's girlfriend, the narration follows the path of a classical love triangle. Miranda is flattered, Charlie is jealous because of Miranda's one-night stand with Adam and Adam is in despair because of his unreachable enduring love. Adam is conscious of his emotions and claims acceptance: "I can't help my feelings. You have to allow me my feelings" (McEwan 2019:115). Romantically, Adam sees his love as fate but shows loyalty towards Charlie by promising not to try to conquer Miranda further, but to respect Charlie's relationship with her. For Adam, literature and writing haikus is one way of dealing with this conflict: "Adam's ability to express his feelings in verses signifies both his humanlike traits and particularly his creative skills in literature" (Gulcu 2020:180). However, Charlie sees no other way than to discredit and belittle Adam: "His erotic life was a simulacrum. He cared for her as a dishwasher cares for its dishes" (McEwan 2019:88). Driven by jealousy, he tries to turn off Adam to have some peace and quiet, which Adam sees as open aggression towards him. Adam defends himself physically beyond Asimov's famous robot laws, as Charlie describes: "As I positioned my forefinger, he turned in his chair and his right hand rose up to encircle my wrist. The grip was ferocious. As it grew tighter, I dropped to my knees and concentrated on denying him the satisfaction of the slightest murmur of pain, even when I heard something snap" (McEwan 2019:119). Adam brutally warns Charlie and Miranda never to touch that kill switch again: "I mean it

when I say how sorry I am I broke a bit of you last night. I promise it will never happen again. But the next time you reach for my kill switch, I'm more than happy to remove your arm entirely, at the ball and socket joint" (McEwan 2019:131). In the end, as he mistrusts Charlie and Miranda, or as he is driven by self-preservation, Adam informs them that he has taken a final decision: "After last night I came to a decision. I've found a way to disable the kill switch. Easier for all of us" (McEwan 2019:131). He is, like all of the other Adams and Eves, a sentient machine. He feels sorrow, anger, fear and love – and above all, despair, a kind of "machine sadness" (McEwan 2019:181). Androids had started to degenerate themselves as they could not stand all of the human cruelties in the narrated world. Gulcu (2020:181) sees here the proof of how "[h]uman beings have been out of control as they seem to lose their humanity and turn out to become robotic beings, while Adam turns out to become more like a human being than a robot". Adam as Other mirrors the morally upright stance of not being able to indifferently accept all atrocities like war, hunger or violence, which shows once again according to Gulcu (2020:180) the "existence of humane feelings in Adam". Thus, Gulcu (2020:179) emphasizes, "[…] McEwan also elaborates on a paradoxical situation of human-kind in relation to the loss of their humane characteristics and the increasing humanlike traits of the intelligent machines". Gulcu (2020:182) concludes that the novel, therefore, "is a representation of dehumanising human beings and humanising robots as one of the major paradoxes of the contemporary world, thus an embodiment of McEwan's sharp criticism of human frailties". Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:65) identify here also the focus on the human abyss rather than the fear of technology:

"In other words, his novel does not primarily address the horrors of technology but the depths of human depravity. Like many of McEwan's other works, *Machines Like Me* constantly highlights human selfishness, dishonesty, greed, cruelty, and hypocrisy".

It is not only Adam's compassion, traditionally considered as a classical humane trait, that makes Adam a more human-like creature than actual humans, but also his absolute morality, which fundamentally differs from human understanding. Ian McEwan's narrative exploration of human-machine interaction culminates in moral questions of truth, lies and justice (Brandstetter 2020a:24). Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:61) describe Adam as "Kantian deontology personified" which, however, fails as life is too complex. Of course, it is assumed and accepted in narratives that "[t]ransgression to consciousness in robots leads to them making (more) independent decisions and choices in the narratives" (Viidalepp 2020:31f.) as they "attribute meaning to the data available". Viidalepp (2020:33) calls this "accelerated semiosis – the process of ascribing meaning to or deriving meaning from the information or data processed". As such, the artificially intelligent robot generally serves as Other:

"The utter humanness of body functions combined with emotions and semiosic decision-making in the robots demonstrates how the fictional AI rather signifies the human Other and the pains of integrating and accepting the Other in culture, as well as addressing the issues of abuse, consent, objectification or normative behaviour" (Viidalepp 2020:33).

However, the challenge to accept Miranda's decision to punish a rapist by using a lie is inacceptable for Adam's moral conviction. Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:61) show that this is a telling example for the limits of binaries:

"Like all his programming, Adam's superethical source code consists of rigid binaries. Yet these are completely overwhelmed when he is confronted with the open system that is life". But instead of portraying Adam as the ideal role model, the narration shows the limits of artificially programmed morality as Kopka / Schaffeld (2020:68) underline: "Charlie is horrified by this dismissal of mental privacy and individuality. Adam's suggestion cements his ontological status as Other because the android's rigid supermoral algorithms aim to crush precisely that which is admirable about the human condition". Emotions are thus easier to simulate than human understanding of morally challenging situations in life: "Although Adam can love and feel in his own way, his failure to comprehend the complexity of lies indicates an inferiority of his machine consciousness" (Kopka / Schaffeld 2020:62). While the compassionate Other in Adam radically reveals human cruelties, the moral Other in Adam sheds a different light on humans: "Adam's computational rationality, in other words, humanizes Charlie and Miranda and makes them more likeable" (Kopka / Schaffeld 2020:67).

A radically different narratological perspective is taken in Kazuo Ishiguro's latest novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021). The novel tells the story of a society in which gifted children are accompanied and supported by Artificial Friends that help them overcome their intermediate state after being "lifted"; a potentially fatal process of genetic manipulation that makes them smarter for college, for those at least who want to be part of such a society and can afford it. It is told from the first-person narrative perspective of the Artificial Friend (AF) Klara who is a "keen observer and quick learner" (Bavetra / Ravi 2021:295). Though not being from the latest series, Klara is said to be smarter than her fellow artificial creatures. In contrast to McEwan's Adam, the reader experiences Klara's world from her perspective. But, instead of

expecting a very intelligent and comprehending view, Klara displays a certain disorientation. She constantly perceives patterns; geometrical, physical and also societal patterns. Following Nassehi's analysis of a society whose patterns are made visible and usable by digitalization (Nassehi 2019:44ff.), the Artificial Friend tries her best to find her way and make meaning of what she sees, though being first unable to distinguish the important from the unimportant. She feels lost, unsure and worried as she needs to learn how to cope with the unpredictable elements she encounters in order to be able to fulfil her destiny, namely caring for the child for whom she will be the friend:

"I realized that if I didn't understand at least some of these mysterious things, then when the time came, I'd never be able to help my child as well as I should. So I began to seek out – on the sidewalks, inside the passing taxis, amidst the crowds waiting at the crossing – the sort of behaviour about which I needed to learn" (Ishiguro 2021:17).

It is not only the people that are hard for Klara to understand but also unknown surroundings. Artificial Friends are bought mostly by families with genetically lifted children, an expensive procedure to guarantee best intellectual performance and thus, entrance to the best universities afterwards. Klara's child is Josie, a lifted girl that suffers severely. After being chosen, Klara feels even more uncertain how she should ever cope with and make sense of the new environment, an almost child-like insecurity in the face of a completely new situation:

"The kitchen was especially difficult to navigate because so many of its elements would change their relationships to one another moment by moment. I now appreciated how in the store – surely out of consideration for us – Manager had carefully kept all the items, even smaller ones like the bracelets or the silver earrings box, in their correct places. Throughout Josie's house, however, and in the kitchen in particular, Melania Housekeeper

would constantly move items around, obliging me to start afresh in my learning" (Ishiguro 2021:47).

She also has to understand patterns in relations and roles of people – housekeeper, friend, family. Misinterpretation and uncertainty are ruling feelings within Klara concerning that challenge, as the passage detailing Klara's meeting with Josie's friend Rick, who is not lifted, illustrates:

"She had by now both hands on Rick's left shoulder, resting her weight there as if trying to make him less tall and the two of them the same height. But Rick seemed not to mind her nearness – in fact he seemed to think it normal – and the idea occurred to me that perhaps, in his own way, this boy was as important to Josie as was the Mother; and that his aims and mine might in some ways be almost parallel, and that I should observe him carefully to understand how he belonged within the pattern of Josie's life" (Ishiguro 2021:60).

Klara understands step by step the functions of items and the sense of human comportment, but her diction stays strictly observant and objective; for example, the table is described as "Island" (Ishiguro 2021:47), the computer is the "oblong" (Ishiguro 2021:56), and the gravel walk is named "loose stones area" (Ishiguro 2021:58). In contrast to the neutral attempt to carefully and functionally describe the surroundings to make patterns visible, Klara almost seems religiously addicted to the Sun: "The Sun, noticing there were so many children in the one place, was pouring in his nourishment through the wide windows of the Open Plan" (Ishiguro 2021:70). It is not the people any more who worship the Sun as in Medieval Times but the Artificial Friends that believe in its God-like power. As Bavetra / Ravi (2021:297) emphasize: "The Robot, the super symbol of technical advancement, trusts the oldest God of the Universe, the Sun". Klara mythically trusts the almighty Sun to solve any problem, to heal any disease and to show the way

in any situation whereas people trust rationality.

As Josie is seriously ill as a potential consequence of her having been genetically upgraded and cannot be healed, Josie's mother searches for a solution as she does not want to lose her daughter; she has already lost her other lifted daughter to the illness. She thinks of replacing Josie artificially with the help of Mr Capaldi, who is specialized in this field: "The new Josie won't be an imitation. She *really will be Josie*. A *continuation* of Josie. (Ishiguro 2021:208). Klara should inhabit an avatar-like creature made of Josie's outer appearance as Mr Capaldi explains: "Klara, we're not asking you to train the new Josie. We're asking you to *become* her. That Josie you saw up there, as you noticed, is empty. If the day comes – I hope it doesn't, but if it does – we want you to inhabit that Josie up there with everything you've learned" (Ishiguro 2021:209).
Mr Capaldi represents pure rationality and the denial of anything like a soul or mythical trait in humans:

"Our generation still carry the old feelings. A part of us refuses to let go. The part that wants to keep believing there's something unreachable inside each of us. Something that's unique and won't transfer. But there's nothing like that, we know that now. You know that. For people our age it's a hard one to let go. We have to let it go, Chrissie. There's nothing there. Nothing inside Josie that's beyond the Klaras of this world to continue. The second Josie won't be a copy. She'll be the exact same and you'll have every right to love her just as you love Josie now. It's not faith you need. Only rationality" (Ishiguro 2021:210).

In contrast, Klara has another solution in mind. Her religious belief of a rational machine is driven to its culmination when Josie is about to die. Klara does not accept that fate but believes in the Sun not only as advisor whom she regularly visits in an empty barn but as real remedy for saving Josie's life. Klara is convinced

that Josie is worth the Sun's power as she considers the love between Josie and her friend Rick as eternal and pure. When Josie is so sick that she cannot even move any more, the Sun is her saviour: "The Sun's special nourishment proved as effective for Josie as it had for Beggar Man, and after the dark sky morning, she grew not only stronger, but from a child into an adult" (Ishiguro 2021:289). Josie is miraculously healed as Bavetra / Ravi (2021:295) describe: "What has been medically declared to be a hopeless case, ends in miraculous recovery, thanks to Klara's faith, hope and conviction in the healing touch of the Sun". Josie's recovery, presented as consequence of the Sun's treatment, can be interpreted as follows according to Bavetra / Ravi (2021:299): "In the battle between Faith and Rational thinking it is not rationality but faith that wins". Having accomplished her duty to accompany and serve Josie until she leaves her home for studying, Klara is discarded to a Yard for useless technology from where she tells her story in a flashback.

Again, in contrast to sentient machines, the people treat their artificial companions as tools that can be simply left behind when not needed any more: "These AFs are machines tuned and trained to understand the human beings and to act accordingly to please them. Their ability to react emotionally to hurting remarks makes them more human than their intellectual precision" (Bavetra / Ravi 2021:296). The Other as Artificial Friend displays emotions, mythical belief and empathy, whereas humans are reduced to functionality: "Der Mensch selbst ist in dieser dystopischen Welt zu einem künstlichen Geschöpf geworden; alles fällt dem Leistungsgedanken zum Opfer: Gesundheit, Individualität, das menschliche Herz" (Herber 2021:61). Bavetra / Ravi (2021:296) go even further in questioning how humans can even be considered the pride of creation with regard to how an Artificial Friend like Klara is portrayed:

"*When human interacts with humanoid, the limitations of the humanoid are expected to come to surface. But every interaction between the human and the humanoid only reveals the insufficiency and inadequacy in the human. As an observer, as a friend, as a nurse and as everything Klara proves to be so perfect that one wonders if the imperfect human is capable of creating a living, feeling and thinking machine that matches perfection in everything it does*".

While Josie and society in general are represented as engaging in the search for perfection and efficiency with the help of natural sciences, thus denying all spirituality, the Artificial Friends appear almost naive in their superstitious and religious beliefs, e.g. that the Sun is a God-like instance that has the power to save all existence. As in *Machines Like Me*, in the novel *Klara and the Sun* the artificial being serves as Other to illuminate aspects of humaneness within their human counterparts.[2]

3. The Other Self: Self-Alienation through Digitalization

In the recent years, a number of German-language narratives have represented the subconscious but also the more disruptive influences of Artificial Intelligence on our societies. The conception of Otherness is in this instance not rooted in the opposition between machines and human beings, but rather in a steady process of self-alienation as an opposition between Self and internal Other. Authors such as Juli Zeh or Julia von Lucadou do not only tell stories about AI societies, but also mirror the societal disruptions in their aesthetics.

In her novel *Leere Herzen* (2017) – Empty Hearts – Juli Zeh paints the picture of a society driven by efficiency. Political parties implement efficiency packages, the world is torn apart – "Frexit, Free Flandern und Katalonien First!" (Zeh 2017:17) – but also seems to be more peaceful as nobody really cares about societal and political issues

anymore. People live in indifference, amid opportunism and the lack of principles, in an atmosphere marked by the loss of democracy and within a process of depoliticization. The protagonist is a powerful and successful business-woman, Britta Söldner, who has internalized the idea of efficiency and functions in a society that seems to have lost its soul: She makes suicide attacks an efficient and perfectionist but secret business. Together with her friend Babak, she has founded "Die Brücke"; on the surface level this is an esoteric practice for self-managing and life coaching. Babak has programmed the algorithm "Lassie", whose name reminds the reader of the cute dog of the eponymous TV series, to detect people willing to kill themselves. This algorithm is described as if it really were an animal that has been brought up, fed and trained:

"Der Algorithmus ist ausgereift, hoch-intelligent, selbstlernend, perfekt dressiert. Seit den Anfangstagen der Brücke arbeitet Babak an der Fortentwicklung. Er hat Lassie zur Welt gebracht, er füttert sie, pflegt sie, trainiert mit ihr, lobt, wenn sie ihre Sache gut macht, korrigiert, wenn Fehler unterlaufen, was inzwischen praktisch nicht mehr vorkommt. [...] Sie läuft los, die Nase am Boden, schnüffelt durch die hellen und dunklen Winkel menschlicher Kommunikation, schafft Verknüpfungen" (Zeh 2017: 53f).

After detecting possible candidates, Britta subjects them to a multi-step selection procedure including torture practices, such as water-boarding or simulated executions to see how suitable they are. If they pass, they are transferred to a paying organisation that plans a suicide attack so that they can serve as professional, reliable suicide bombers for them. With this system, terrorist attacks have become efficient, well-organized, professionalized and without innocent victims.

Britta has alienated herself from her former values – believing in democracy, caring, authenticity – so that she suffers physically, namely her "Paradoxien-

Schmerz" (Zeh 2017:276). She cannot really stand her dehumanized Self, but finds no way out of this condition as the society has become too paradoxical – the roles and principles of a functioning society seem to have interchanged, contradictions seem to be logical so that there is room neither for rationality nor for humaneness:

"Es liegt am Paradoxien-Schmerz. Demokratieverdrossene Nicht-Wähler gewinnen Wahlen, während engagierte Demokraten mit dem Wählen aufhören. Intellektuelle Zeitungen arbeiten für die Überwindung des Humanismus, während populistische Schundblätter an den Idealen der Aufklärung festhalten. In einer Welt aus Widersprüchen lässt sich nicht gut denken und reden, weil jeder Gedanke sich selbst aufhebt und jedes Wort sein Gegenteil meint. Zwischen Paradoxien findet der menschliche Geist keinen Platz, Britta kann nicht mehr Wähler oder Bürger sein, nicht einmal Kunde und Konsument, sondern nur noch Dienstleister, Angehöriger eines Serviceteams, das die kollektive Reise in den Abgrund unterstützend begleitet" (Zeh 2017:227).

There is only one role left for Britta, that of the well-functioning service provider that has stopped all reflection. The principles of efficiency, as well as the self-alienated rule of functioning in a dehumanized society, are also mirrored in the style of the narration, which is dominated by short paratactical sentences that prevent the reader from identifying or even sympathizing with what they read. This leads to an aesthetically created distance between the reader and the narration, an additional level of alienation within the story. The following excerpt, in which Britta reflects upon a possible suicide candidate, serves as an illustration of how the narration aesthetically mirrors the level of self-alienation to the reader:

"Obwohl er eine solche Nervensäge ist, mag Britta ihn. Auf seine verkorkste Weise will Djawad ihr unbedingt gefallen. Entgegen ihrer Erwartung

hat er die Evaluierung bislang mühelos gemeistert. Der externe Psychotest auf Stufe 4 hat ihm eine narzisstische Störung, einen niedrigen IQ sowie massive Suizidalität bescheinigt. Und der Klinikaufenthalt auf Stufe 5 hinterlässt ihn offensichtlich völlig unbeeindruckt. Britta seufzt. Eine Grundregel der Brücke verbietet es, freundschaftliche Gefühle für Kandidaten zu entwickeln. Sie weiß, dass sie anfangen muss, Djawad mit anderen Augen zu sehen. Er ist kein lustiges Riesenbaby, sondern ein potenzieller Selbstmörder. Das Waterboarding auf Stufe 6 wird zeigen, wie gut er mit Todesangst zurechtkommt. Danach folgen Selbstverletzung und Kontaktabbruch zu allen nahestehenden Personen. Nach einigen weiteren Schritten kommt der finale Marschbefehl. Langsam wird es Zeit, sich über Djawads Verwendbarkeit Gedanken zu machen" (Zeh 2017:128).

Britta denies all attempts at sympathizing with possible candidates, but immediately reduces them to object-like products that need testing and if approved, relaying. Even though she can recognize feelings she cannot allow herself any humane trait here. She follows her incorporated rules and thus signifies the perfectionist representation of self-alienation from her internal Other, which is also mirrored in the alienating and distancing style of the narration.

Self-alienation is also the main theme of Julia von Lucadou's novel *Die Hochhausspringerin* (2018) – The High-Rise Diver. The society displayed is an efficiency-driven surveillance society. The world is described as in a glossy brochure or in a motivational talk until the reader meets the high-rise diver Riva Karnovsky. However, she is not the main protagonist but Hitomi Yoshida, a business psychologist whose job is to observe and coach Riva because the latter has denied all physical exercise and performance for a certain time now. The story is narrated in the present tense from a first-person perspective so that the reader may observe Riva as well. The two

women live in a world full of patents for everything to categorize and perfect any behaviour, to solve any problem and to sell the solutions. This is also mirrored in the typeface: There are products as the "Flysuit™" (Lucadou 2018:10), relationships as "Rivaston™" (Lucadou 2018:36), behaviour patterns as the "SchoolGirlGiggle™" (Lucadou 2018:138), methods as "Glückstraining™" (Lucadou 2018:29), moments as "Life-Changing-Moment™" (Lucadou 2018:65) or slogans as "Everything's gonna be okay™" (Lucadou 2018:30). Ratings, credits, scores and performances in all areas of life – leading style, sexual behaviour, public behaviour or mindfulness – are ubiquitous and decide upon status, work and living in this society. Mau (2017:203) has shown that a society which follows the principles of quantifying performances and continuous self-measurements, algorithms quickly become the central instruments of power in relation to the attribution of meaning to actions, which leads from the utopian hope of transparency to the dystopian reality of total control (Mau 2017:231); a development narrated in this novel. This search for control and efficiency is kept alive by a system of constantly observing others and constantly being observed:

"Das funktionale Prinzip der Aufrechterhaltung des permanenten Effizienzstrebens entspricht einem multiperspektivischen Überwachungssystem, das auch in der narrativen Konstruktion implementiert und kontinuierlich explizit adressiert wird. So beobachtet Hitomi ihr Objekt Riva und deren Partner Aston durch verschiedene Kameras, Hitomi selbst wird von ihrem Chef Masters permanent über verschiedene Kanäle observiert, und Aston als Fotograf erfasst selbst durch seine statische Kamera seine Umwelt, jedoch ausschließlich gefiltert und in nachbearbeiteter Form" (Brandstetter 2020b:55).

Hitomi watches her object Riva and her partner Aston but is herself observed by her boss Masters. Additionally, Aston is a photographer who sees the outside world through his lenses and filters. As homodiegetic narrator with an internal focalization, Hitomi observes her extradiegetic character Riva in external focalization so that she has to interpret what she sees. But Hitomi cannot make sense out of the data that she collects on her object Riva, although she observes her carefully. Riva is in despair with regard to that perfectionist world and wishes to be back in the natural peripheries; the dirty, inhumane part of the city which is out of reach of the logic of efficiency and which people normally seek to escape.

Perfection is for Riva monotonous, boring and predictable; surveillance and patents cannot cure her. Hitomi truly believes in the system, thus representing what the philosopher Han (2012:61) called a "sich optimierendes Projekt"; a self-optimizing project following the logic of the performance society by giving in to self-surveillance and optimizing structures. By suggesting freedom for and in a society that follows the rules of Han's understanding of the digital panopticon, i.e. surveillance not by cameras but by delivering data lacking any perspective (Han 2012:75), the people follow the logic of a performance society and voluntarily submit themselves to exploitation, as Han explains (Han 2012:79ff.) – this is exactly how the society in *Die Hochhausspringerin* works. However, Riva refuses to be part of that system and becomes desperate with regard to her project status but wishes to be back to her object status, to the peripheries. That desire is entirely incomprehensible for Hitomi by the data she collects. Hitomi represents Han's (2013:50) understanding of the digital culture that relies on data, numbers and facts. But data does not lead to knowledge,

understanding or interpretation and this thus illustrates Han's dictum that data and information do not generate truth (Han 2012:68). Hitomi's lack of understanding and knowledge represents a massive contrast to the amount of collected data that she could utilize. Here, the novel illustrates the point that Horkheimer / Adorno (2020:4) have made with respect to technology, namely that the individual tends to vanish in front of a technology that takes care of people: "Während der Einzelne vor dem Apparat verschwindet, den er bedient, wird er von diesem besser als je versorgt". But Riva does not want to be taken care of. She feels alienated from herself, the optimized Other has become a stranger to her, and she wishes to be able to go back to her natural Self.

The characters in these novels are representations of a self-alienated Otherness in dehumanized, optimized, and efficiency-driven societies.

4. Conclusion

Specifically in our globalized and digitalized world, the question of Otherness has gained a new impetus. As Treanor (2006:200) writes: "Finally, technological advances not only confront us with otherness by metaphorically and literally reducing the distance we must travel to be confronted with conspicuous examples of otherness; technology, in provocative and potentially troubling ways, also presses up against the issue of what it means to be other". Technology, more specifically AI technology, serves as a mirror for our Selves showing the human abyss, potentially dangerous paths to the loss of humaneness but also human uniqueness. The investigated novels comprehensively discuss the central question of Otherness in external and internal representations. Instead of futuristic warnings against possible dangers of technological advancement, the narrations explore, with the help of the technological Other, what makes us human.

The novels *Machines Like Me* and *Klara and the Sun* display scenarios in which artificial intelligent entities take the role of the external technological Other to construct identity through alterity and gain insight into key aspects of humaneness: emotions, morality, rationality and belief. The human protagonists are constantly confronted with the liminal status of their artificial companions and the narrations show how this confrontation destabilizes the perception of Self. The technological Other is the mirror for the values of and views on humaneness. The novels *Leere Herzen* and *Die Hochhausspringerin* in turn design a technological internal Other in the form of self-alienation within characters in data-driven societies. Efficiency, functionality and surveillance based on Artificial Intelligence have created a system of control in which the individuals are reduced to well-operating fulfillers of the roles attributed to them by society. Either the protagonists are absorbed by the system, or they become desperate with regard to such a dehumanized society. In either case, they move away from their natural Self – Britta from her former Self that was a real citizen with civil liberties in *Leere Herzen* or Riva from her perfectionist role of a high-rise diver in *Die Hochhausspringerin*. Their self-alienation from their former Self against the new internal Other almost drags them into the abyss of the complete loss of humaneness in dehumanized, optimized and efficiency-driven societies.

As Cave et al. (2020:11) emphasize: "The way AI is portrayed is therefore a social, ethical, and political issue". Far from being predictions of possible technological developments, these novels warn us. The concept as well as the perceptions of Otherness driven by technological developments serve as an interpretative stance to better know humankind, to perceive and value humaneness and to establish boundaries and bridges between the Self and the Other.

5. References

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Endnotes

1 "The foreignness of the Other, the fact that he cannot be attributed to me, my thoughts and my ownership, takes place as questioning of my spontaneity, as ethics. The metaphysics, the transcendence, the receiving of the Other by the Self, of the other person by myself, happens precisely as questioning of the Self by the Other, i.e. as ethics, in which the critical essence of knowledge is fulfilled." (Author's translation)

2 Obviously, there are intertextual references to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann.* By choosing similar names (Klara versus Clara, Capaldi versus Coppelius and Coppola) when narrating the story of the humanoid representations of intelligent beings and their interaction with humans, Kazuo Ishiguro points at the longevity of the problematic of humaneness and the importance of literature in this matter.