

## **Beyond Knowledge: Self-Alienation and Collapse in an AI Society**

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The possibilities generated by digital technology and artificial intelligence, including their horizon of possible knowledge gain, promise endless options to enhance efficiency and understanding and, at the same time, generate fears of uncontrollability and the substitution of humankind by a better, more knowledgeable version of human beings that remind us of science fiction worlds. Indeed, as Dirk Helbing summarizes: “there are increasing concerns about artificial superintelligences, i.e., machines that would be more intelligent than humans” (51). Data, however, does not equal knowledge – this is not only a philosophical theorem but an economic constraint, as Adam Moe Fejerskov et al. state:

[K]nowledge is about more than the presence of discrete facts and vast quantities of data and information. This is reflected in the applicability of a number of strategies in humanitarian organisations to manage or conceal available knowledge (4).

As we comprehensively fail to understand how algorithms learn, their knowledge gain remains a black box. Helbing, therefore, emphasises that, for the creation of value from data, “it is crucial to turn raw data into useful information and actionable knowledge, some even aim at producing ‘wisdom’ and ‘clairvoyance’ (predictive capabilities)” (50). Hence, the question of knowledge and non-knowledge in times of digitalisation has gained new force. On the one hand, as a consequence of possibilities of sharing and circulating provided by digital technologies, we now live in what is broadly acknowledged as a knowledge society, in which information is globally and easily accessible (Auguscik and Broders 77). On the other hand, this is accompanied by the counter-development that “an increase of knowledge is often linked to an increase of non-knowledge and uncertainty” (77).

This article explores how non-knowledge is processed as social construction in the novel *Dave* (2021) by Raphaela Edelbauer, analysing how the novel challenges the distinction of Rik Peels’ conception of “non-knowledge” versus a proposed conceptualisation of “beyond knowledge”, which incorporates the two opposing states of knowing and not-knowing at the same time and thus questions the suitability of this dichotomy between knowing and not-knowing in times of digitalisation and AI. The article shows that the conceptualisation of beyond knowledge in the novel is fostered by and leads to self-alienation and collapse of and in a society driven by AI.

### **The Concept of Not Knowing**

The idea of not knowing, specifically in an era that is characterised by the abundance of available information and data, is considered as a flaw to be overcome in our knowledge society, as Andreas Bernard puts it: “The creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge have long supplanted the production of material goods as the most significant economic factor. Non-knowledge has thus come to be understood more than ever as an unavoidable deficit” (22). Digital technology produces data and thus is seen as a means to overcome the state of non-knowledge in a non-transparent way, as he explains:

Algorithms and Big Data are today's instruments of knowledge – and yet the ambivalence of digitally construed organizations of knowledge lies in the fact that, while their *effects* – their arrangements and distributions – are visible to all of us, the specific manner in which they function remains opaque (33).

In his work *Study of Ignorance* (2023), Rik Peels reaches beyond a deficit model. He differentiates three forms of ignorance: propositional ignorance, objectual ignorance, and practical ignorance (25), and defines them as follows: "I conclude that ignorance is (i) the lack of propositional knowledge or the lack of true belief, (ii) the lack of objectual knowledge, or (iii) the lack of practical knowledge" (46). In his study, he concentrates on the varieties of propositional knowledge as a form of "not knowing certain truths" in opposition to objectual ignorance that denotes "not being acquainted with something" and practical ignorance that means "not knowing how to do something" (Peels 25). Following his taxonomy, there are six varieties of propositional ignorance: When speaking of disbelieving ignorance as false belief, a person has considered a proposition  $p$ , has decided on  $p$ , and disbelieves it; or a person has not considered  $p$ , however, has dispositionally an attitude towards  $p$ , but disbelieves  $p$  (75, 90). Suspending ignorance means that judgement upon a proposition is suspended either as a consequence that a person has considered and decided on  $p$  or as a consequence that a person has not considered  $p$  but, again, dispositionally has an attitude towards  $p$  (76-77, 90). Undecided ignorance implies a postponed attitude towards a considered proposition caused by distraction (78, 90). Unconsidered ignorance means that a true proposition has never been thought of even though a person could have considered it (79, 90) whereas deep ignorance implies that the proposition is neither believed nor disbelieved, suspended or unconsidered, but could theoretically be considered (81, 90). Finally, Peels speaks of complete ignorance as deep ignorance including the impossibility of grasping or entertaining the proposition, for example due to intellectual capacity or knowledge (see 82, 90).

Peels' taxonomy focuses on forms of propositional ignorance that exist consciously or subconsciously inside the self. Additionally, as he elaborates further, the concept on agnotology does not differentiate between *de dicto* versus *de re* ignorance:

Second, agnotology zooms in on bringing about in others mental states *that one knows to be cases of ignorance*. Thus, what matters is creating or maintaining *de dicto* ignorance, not *de re* ignorance. If a professor teaches a theory to her students and that theory later turns out to be false so that her students were ignorant, then that professor intentionally brought about a state that was ignorance (*de re*). However, she did not intentionally make her students ignorant (*de dicto*). Agnotology is not concerned with such cases (Peels 146-47).

Edelbauer's novel *Dave* is built around conceptualisations of ignorance. It is a story about a society deeply perturbed by and, at the same time, frantically enthusiastic about technological advancement. The illusionary and impossible quest for knowledge accompanied by the constant manifestation of layers of non-knowledge within the characters creates a paradoxical realm that cannot be knowledgeably decoded. To analyse these forms of not-knowing, Peels' taxonomy, as focused on describing forms of ignorance within people in relation to propositions, offers a

promising basis of conceptualising the forms of non-knowledge presented in the novel *Dave* that lead to a state of being beyond knowledge.

### **Knowledge, Ignorance and Conceptualisations of Beyond Knowledge in *Dave***

The novel *Dave* tells the story of the protagonist and first-person narrator Syz who works as a programmer in a laboratory towards the completion of the first Strong AI, named Dave, that possesses human-like intelligence, self-awareness and autonomy. Dave as perfectionist disembodied AI should redeem humanity from all evil in the future. All people live completely isolated from the uninhabitable world, which has been destroyed by humanity. They have closed themselves off the outside world, living now in this laboratory, in which the task-related affiliation of people and strict hierarchy are topologically reflected. In this world, time and space lose their linearity, places start to waver and sway, chronology overlaps and the first-person narrator Syz seems to live and exist in various timelines and spaces. Only when Syz dares to leave the heterotopian place to explore the external world, he recognizes that he has lived in a posthuman simulation – a memory palace in which he is prisoner and designer at once. The autodiegetic perspective is embedded in a network of multiple text types: historical and theoretical reflections from the fields of mathematics, philosophy, theology, and physics. Thus, textual evidence of knowledge and expertise are ubiquitous in the novel. Furthermore, Syz serves as a model for the AI to develop consciousness. The representations of ignorance can be located in this novel within the narrator and his (non-)knowledge of self, topology, exterior world, memory, and time.

The first chapter of the novel, after a prologue, starts with Syz waking up after a short nap which he experiences as deep, long sleep. In the course of the first chapter, Syz is introduced with regard to his work as a programmer at the laboratory. His job is to programme scripts into Dave to reach the completion of the project. Although half a million scripts have already been written, the goal, as explained by Syz, has not yet been reached: “‘The first, recursively improving, general intelligence; a singularity, the beginning and the end of everything’” (Edelbauer 14).<sup>1</sup> For that, it is necessary to go beyond scripts, to use a human model and programme narrative memories into Dave to reach a state of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. In the novel, Syz serves as a model for Dave and in the so-called copying session, he narrates episodes of emotional importance he remembers, and which are in consequence programmed into Dave.

From the very beginning, the vision of Dave as saviour is ubiquitous in the thoughts and actions of the people in the laboratory. The AI's state of maturity is constantly tested by simulations until it reaches his final state:

‘The simulations,’ I restarted, ‘are an anticipation of the future in which DAVE will automatically go beyond the SCRIPTS and develop consciousness. He will take us by the hand like children, almost like a god, only much better, because he really exists’ (Edelbauer 15).

In the beginning, Syz undoubtedly and uncritically believes in the potential and power of the future AI, representing a state of Peels' concept of deep ignorance, whereas Khatun, a new female colleague Syz must train and instantly falls in love with, at least questions this religious-like conviction. First, she is the only one who scrutinises the fact that Dave is envisioned as male and second, she doubts whether saving humanity is possible if the problems and questions that should be solved are

not clarified in advance. Her scholarly, critical approach, directed toward what she sees as real knowledge, is dismissed by Syz as unwelcome doubt. Instead, the whole approach of solving problems should become obsolete with a fully conscious Dave, as the head of research of the laboratory, Fröhlich, argues:

So what we have to do: Eliminate problems as such. Not individual problems, but the idea of the problem itself. If there is nothing that is impenetrable – because we are directing an endless cognitive force – then all conceivable questions will disappear. Not everything will be answered, but the question will disappear (Edelbauer 96).

Here, Dave is referred to as an endless cognitive force which implies total knowledge, so that no question will be left – and thus, no non-knowledge either. If everything can be known and understood, then there is no room for ignorance anymore. This is a god-like conception of the potential of Strong AI with the difference that the existence of it will then be proven. It is not about believing in the existence of an entity that rules over the world, but about knowing that society will enter into a new era of “*rational control*” (Edelbauer 99). Algorithms and mathematical logic will alter the structure and processes of society in all fields. This conception of data as equal to knowledge and understanding is profoundly criticised by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (see *Transparenzgesellschaft* [Transparency Society] 66-68; *Schwarm* [Swarm] 79; *Krise* [Crisis] 22-23) but represents a state of a society envisioned and embodied by Dave that is all-knowing and has transcended non-knowledge.

Khatun, as a critical new colleague, embodies scepticism towards this view that founds in belief, not knowledge: At the end of their first meeting, when they hug each other for farewell, Syz experiences, in a Proust-like manner, for the first time a moment of incoherence with respect to what he perceives and knows:

I must have remembered something – but not something that had happened, but the future; her scent was a promise of something that I was still laboriously trying to drag to the surface. An inverse *déjà vu* that dissolved after Khatun turned around and disappeared unexpectedly quickly into the elevator (Edelbauer 19).

This is the first of many glitches in time that Syz experiences (see Schütte). During one of the copying sessions, Syz remembers being present at a lobotomy procedure as a young man, but this kind of medical treatment ceased to be performed centuries ago (Edelbauer 108). When told that this cannot be true, he searches defiantly for proof in his mind, but his memory fails:

But suddenly something strange had happened: Like a dream that you can still feel with perfect precision after waking up, but which becomes more porous with every attempt to recall its image, the scene began to fall apart for me (Edelbauer 109).

The most troubling time glitch for Syz is when he finally meets Khatun again, after a long period of time has passed in his perception – he feels like having travelled through aeons. From the very beginning of their second encounter, Syz has the impression that they are talking at cross purposes. After some time, it becomes obvious: Khatun asks for confirmation of their next appointment on Friday as agreed

two days before, but Syz replies that they met for the last time 7 months and three days ago (Edelbauer 182-83). Later, he even reads in a personal file that a former programmer, Witteg, who turns out to be a previous version of Syz, has had the same past interaction with Khatun and even married her. Following this discovery, he desperately declares: "What I saw contradicted space, time and logic, so it had to be wrong" (221).

The researcher Renate Plieseis interprets these illogical discontinuities in her article, in which she analyses the role of time and subjectivity in the novel, in the tradition of an unreliable narrator (see 214-18), but specifically with regard to the first appearance of these discontinuities after having met Khatun as a doubtful critic, the question of reliability of the narrative instance falls too short. Instead, the novel focuses on the question of memorising the past correctly, which is already alluded to in the above mentioned first encounter with Khatun, in which Syz seems to remember a future event brought about by a specific scent. The way Syz is puzzled by his memory follows Federico Luzzi's thoughts that it is beyond a pure preservative source: "Memory is at best epistemically neutral (when it functions correctly), at worst epistemically damaging (when it malfunctions), but never epistemically *enhancing*" (167). The society in *Dave* can be interpreted using Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems (*Soziale Systeme* [Social Systems] 25, 57ff.) as representation of a closed, self-referential system of structures and processes generated by the operations of technology and AI in opposition to its outer exterior. The dimension of time creates the framework of reference, in which individuals interpret reality as difference to past and future and can thus experience memories (Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme* 116f.). Furthermore, as Luhmann explains, "[t]he main function of memory therefore lies in *forgetting*, in preventing the system from blocking itself by congealing the results of earlier observations" (*Theory of Society* 349). Thus, memory has two functions: remembering and forgetting to preserve the system. Of course, time is linked to the idea of memory as points in time in their individuality are the prerequisite of memory, as Luhmann explains:

In any case, in order for time to appear at all, the points in time must remain in their irreducible individuality, precisely because they disappear again as soon as they come into being. We may date them in order to be able to remember and foresee them. But this does not affect their transience; it is merely a kind of mnemonic technique that enables the memory of time to form a 'dimension' on which it can link past and future points in time. (*Die Kontrolle* [The Control] 67).

Luhmann emphasises that there is a circular relationship of mutual prerequisite between time and memory, as time can only be observed if we imagine incidents as one-time events that instantly disappear after happening, which, in consequence, produces the necessary difference needed to distinguish the past from the future and thus locate the present (*Die Kontrolle* 68). However, in the novel *Dave*, time and memory are constructed in a different way. Syz remembers some kind of future, does not remember (and know) a common past with Khatun, neither a near past—having met her regularly and agreed on the next date – nor a past long ago – her and Witteg, alias Syz. Luhmann argues that if an incident or traces of incidents persist, there would be no forgetting and thus also no memory, and the world would be fixed to a certain state (*Die Kontrolle* 68–69). In a certain way, this is true for the narration in the novel. Incidents occur in a continuous loop, but Syz learns in the end that his

existence has left traces in his perceived reality with his previous versions of self, Witteg and Mandelbrot. A timeline beyond linearity was discussed between Mandelbrot and Syz when they first met: Mandelbrot explains to Syz the concept of orthogonal time as imagined by science fiction author Philip K. Dick:

Orthogonal time is a counter-concept to our linear one – Dick said that, like the grooves of an LP, chronology goes round and round and everything that has already happened and will happen is present on the disc at the same time, even if the needle is in a different place. That is the reason why we sometimes remember the future (Edelbauer 116).

With this remark, Mandelbrot hints back again to Syz's first encounter with Khatun, and the narration implicitly realises orthogonality. Besides orthogonality, however, the Moebius strip is another metaphor for the counter-linear time in the novel. Gilles Deleuze understands it as an articulation of difference uniting the two excluding sides of dualism of time and space:

It is rather the coexistence of two sides without thickness, such that we pass from one to the other by following their length. *Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs.* It turns one side toward things and one side toward propositions. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things (22).

Deleuze does not emphasise, as Daniel Cockayne et al. explain, the coexistence of contrariness, but "their common coexistence and modes of inter- and intra-relation" (Cockayne et al. 197). Both sides, as they argue further, "communicate in a relationship of complex double-causality, in which an admixture of bodies and states-of-affairs in the living present on the one side form the *cause* of incorporeal entities on the other" (Cockayne et al. 197). In the novel, Syz even speaks in one of the copying sessions of a strange, Moebius-like place in the human mind, like a cognitive dissonance that processes information in a way that resembles a causal chain to handle inconsistencies in reverse (Edelbauer 233). The Moebius strip, therefore, is not only a metaphor for the time construction in the novel, but also a thematic topic that Syz knows without being able to draw the parallel to his situation. Again, in a state of deep ignorance, he is unable to understand his orthogonal, Moebius-like existence.

Just as Khatun represents a catalyst for the temporal inconsistencies, Syz' self-awareness steadily influences the perceived loss of linearity. Syz, who serves as a model for the AI Dave, gradually learns that he exists in various iterations of time. During his last copying session, number 200, Syz feels like gliding into another nightmarish reality. While narrating, Fröhlich suddenly addresses him as "Arthur", which is Witteg's first name (Edelbauer 320). Syz experiences a crack ripping through the room, losing balance, and Fröhlich continues reproaching him for his arrogance and megalomania, so that it becomes clear that the idea of the mirror hypothesis was introduced by Witteg:

You tell yourself and the whole world that it was knowledge, that it happened for the sake of knowledge, and during the day you succeed in this fiction. But what about at night, when you stand at the gate of sleep and your cool mind

begins to descend into the halls of your memory, where there is no control? (Edelbauer 321).

The question of memory is channelling the realisation that Syz is not only the model for Dave, but a future version of Wittege. Later on, after having left the laboratory and finding himself in a restaurant with mirror surfaces, he sees his own crushed image, reflected a thousand times until this image leaves the mirror: "Instead, however, I was disturbed to see my reflection step out of the frame and sit on a settee in front of me." (Edelbauer 347). This reflected self is Wittege again. Back in the laboratory, Syz starts to research who Mandelbrot really is and learns that Mandelbrot is also another version of Wittege and thus of himself: "His features were Wittege's, and Wittege's were mine – triplets united by the wrinkled chronology of an irrational world." (Edelbauer 394). Finally, he understands that he is not only Wittege and Mandelbrot, but also Dave, programmed to know himself (422): To resolve the paradox, like a brain in a tank that is unable to recognise itself, Wittege programmed a future version into the simulation, Mandelbrot, who is able to look at himself from a bird's eye view and continuously approaches the younger version, Syz (424-25).

As Lea Baumgart writes, whenever Syz reaches an understanding of his various versions and existences, the system restarts a new loop (10) so that the contemporaneity of the non-contemporary, a concept introduced by Ernst Bloch (22), allows past, present, and future to exist at the same time (Baumgart 13). The system in *Dave* thus contradicts the system requirements, according to Luhmann, because the dimension of time is crucial in self-referential systems to be able to differentiate between structure and processes (*Soziale Systeme* 73f.), and to interpret occurrences adequately in their difference to a past or future state (*Soziale Systeme* 116f.).

This is mirrored by the ending of the novel, which is at the same time the beginning. Charlotte Coch, in her article examining this novel in the context of science fiction, emphasises that the quote by T. S. Eliot in Chapter 1 of the novel that describes a circle of exploration and knowledge is, by its doubling, emptied to an undifferentiated loop without information (309). Syz feels increasingly alienated. The more he understands who he is, the more he leaves the state of deep ignorance and travels between suspending and disbelieving ignorance in Peels' terms. An increase in knowledge therefore leads to incomprehension, repulsion, and a loss of knowledge or recurrence of deep ignorance as a restart is initiated, but at the same time, that knowledge is still present, though hidden, in orthogonal time elements. Syz is at the same time deeply, disbelievingly, and suspendingly ignorant.

Similar to the Moebius-like time construction that is linked to (failed) self-knowledge, the logic of space is questioned in the novel as well. The laboratory is constructed like Noah's Ark in which humanity seeks shelter against an inhabitable outer world that has been destroyed by climate change and overpopulation. Knowledge of what has happened in the past and what the exterior world looks like stems exclusively from narrations of Dr Babusch who is a raw materials specialist and educator. With her lessons, she not only fuels fear of the past but also of the outside world. She concludes that humankind is too dumb to ensure its survival, so that an objective, all-knowing AI is the only saviour (Edelbauer 41-42). This guarantees not only humbleness but also loyalty to the duty of staying in the laboratory, which is even fostered by a panoptical surveillance structure, Red Eccles (64). In the sense of disciplining oneself, the main effect of the panopticon, according to Michel Foucault (*Überwachen* [Discipline] 258f.), the construction of the laboratory is also discussed by Mandelbrot when he talks to Syz for the first time:

On the one hand, for example, the Panopticon, a thought experiment by Jeremy Bentham, does that mean anything to you? A prison in which all prisoners can be observed by a single guard – that was the guiding principle behind the central laboratory and its ring-shaped facility (Edelbauer 122).

While they speak of the labyrinthian construction principle of the laboratory, Syz hears for the first time of planned modifications to the building, of which he had not been informed. Although he can observe workers altering the building while they are talking, later on Syz cannot trust his own memory of how the building is constructed anymore. He bumps his head on a wall because he remembers a window being there (Edelbauer 171), the auditorium starts to rotate around its own axis as he tries to leave it (187), and the whole world seems to waver (268). Syz is driven by the urgent need to know more, to understand the context of those time and space inconsistencies, so he decides to leave the laboratory (253). As he finally manages to get outside, he does not die but falls onto ochre ground in a pure hot wasteland full of rubbish with the black monolith of the laboratory behind him (see 329-34). He encounters a woman, Khatun, but quickly realises by the way she interacts and speaks that she is simulated, a programme. Interestingly, this final recognition of Khatun being a programme is narrated in the tradition of the importance of eyes as means of distinguishing machines from humans (see Brandstetter 38). While he interacts with Khatun, he sees from outside how the laboratory changes its silhouette: "Even from a distance you could see that its entire wing had sheared out as if to rise in flight; it rotated and rejoined twisted to the other side." (336). When Syz observes that the walls are constantly and comprehensively renewed, he compares that to a revision of the inner map that everyone had created (Edelbauer 191). The comparison to a map alludes to what the laboratory in the end actually is: the memory palace of Witteg (Edelbauer 417). As the sinologist Jonathan D. Spence explains in his work on the technique of the memory palace, "[t]he real purpose of all these mental constructs was to provide storage spaces for the myriad concepts that make up the sum of our human knowledge" (2). The idea of a memory palace follows Han's dictum that memory follows a narrative principle (see *Die Krise* 39). Here again, this picture not only serves as a structural principle represented by the laboratory but is also thematised by Syz: he reads about the Loci-method introduced by Cicero (Edelbauer 81–82), hears about mnemonics by Fröhlich in his first copying session but cannot remember it (Edelbauer 135), and the method is explained by inserted scholarly articles (Edelbauer 207-08, 218-19, 327-29). The altering of the inner map, symbolising altering knowledge, merges with the steady decay of the laboratory and the society inside (273-78, 383-86).

This memory palace is at the same time a simulation, characterised according to Jean Baudrillard by the disappearance of reality, of reference and the substitution of the real by the signs of the real (11), so the laboratory and the people do not exist but are simulated beings in that memory palace. Again, his encounter with Khatun in the outside world with her machine-like diction makes this brutally clear to Syz:

As the pressure swung the hammer handle past my ribs against the anvil and burst into the archways, I recognised the crunching sound of the lab changing inside me. Then I ran as fast as I could (Edelbauer 340).

He realises the inwardness of the laboratory, the simulation based on the memory palace and experiences this knowledge in the following visit to the restaurant, in which he meets Witteg. Baumgart interprets this inwardness as a merging of the diegesis and the narrating subject, which turns the novel into a closed cosmos in which memory and experience are physical manifestations (12). In this restaurant, everything happens again and again, the orthogonality of time and the discontinuity of space are embedded into that place as well (Edelbauer 347-74).

The knowledge map, the inner palace to remember the past, undermines its own purpose due to its constant changes, like the orthogonality of time hinders self-knowledge so that, using Peels' taxonomy, Syz again is at the same time deeply, disbelievingly, and suspendingly ignorant. Additionally, all these methods and theories are constantly reflected in the construction of the novel, the narration, and the experience of the characters. This *mise-en-abyme* mirrors knowledge theories, memory principles, and (il)logic representations of space and time beyond linearity but does not lead to an increase of understanding.

Syz, using Peels' taxonomy, starts off by not having considered  $p$  ( $p$  can be understood as him knowing about his identity and situation within time and space), showing no attitude toward  $p$ , and even if he could consider  $p$ , he would not believe it, so that he is, at the beginning, in a state of deep ignorance. In the course of the narration, the more hints he receives to grasp the situation, he dispositionally has an attitude toward  $p$  but either suspends judgement (suspending ignorance) or disbelieves  $p$  (disbelieving ignorance). After having fully understood the situation, he is in a state of knowing that is disrupted by the restart of the system. From then on, he is in a constant intermediate state between having considered  $p$  and not having considered  $p$  at the same time. His state of ignorance cannot be defined within the system, as knowing and not-knowing coexist in a Moebius-like way, similar to time and space in the novel. Instead of knowing or not-knowing, of understanding or ignorance, Syz incorporates a state that can be conceptualised as beyond knowledge. He knows and does not know at the same time, he is lost in his self and alienated from himself in his own creation of a heterotopia in Foucault's terms (see *Die Heterotopien* [Heterotopias]). The place that offers protection, order, finality has become a dystopian fate for its own creator.

## Conclusion

At first glance, the society in *Dave* represents the prediction of the researchers Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee in their fundamental study on the influence of AI on society and work that "[o]ur generation will likely have the good fortune to experience two of the most amazing events in history: the creation of true machine intelligence and the connection of all humans via a common digital network, transforming the planet's economics" (251). As has been shown, this is constantly thwarted by the construction of the novel and the narrated diegesis, both producing knowledge and non-knowledge at the same time. Syz is simultaneously deeply ignorant, suspendingly ignorant, disbelievingly ignorant, and knowing. The novel counteracts the concept of knowledge and ignorance by proposing a state of being beyond knowledge: knowing and understanding are a parallel act to ending up in ignorance again. Thus, the novel narrates the story of an "epistemic crisis" (Moser 83), as societies in the knowledge era are confronted with the problem that, as Jeannie Moser writes, "even if digital cultures consider themselves as having escaped from the realm of non-knowledge, access to data doesn't suffice" (85). Moser argues in the same way as Byung-Chul Han, that "[a]n accumulation of information alone does not

produce truth" (Moser 83). Syz recognises this dilemma after the death of his best friend Pawel: "Everything was a simulation, but that didn't bother me – because what was a lie about a simulation if it simulated the conditions of truth itself?" (Edelbauer 302).

The novel shows how Syz is imprisoned in time and space. The more he knows, the more he loses himself, the more time and space collapse. In the end, he is imprisoned in his own self, in his mind and his simulated being. While other novels about digitalisation and AI, such as *Machines Like Me* by Ian Mc Ewan or *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro, investigate the unknown, the incomprehensible Other closely linked to this technological advancement, and discuss that central question of Otherness in external and internal representation in search for understanding and knowledge, in *Dave*, the goal of knowing and understanding has been rendered obsolete in the state of existing beyond knowledge. The questions raised by this novel can be understood as a request to challenge the ubiquity of data against the backdrop of gaining knowledge of oneself and the world. With the omnipresence of data, societies cannot escape the Moebius strip of knowing and not-knowing at the same time, as forgetting is not possible anymore in times of digitalisation. Like Syz, people coexist in various representations of their self in diverse timelines on different platforms. Truth and knowledge can only be obtained if self-mirroring within the data prison is breached in a way that would imply the death of the authoring institution. Witteg, before explaining everything to him in detail, takes Syz's promise in the restaurant that Syz will kill him (Edelbauer 359). This is the only way to escape the prison-like situation of being caught in his own simulation. As Syz does not keep that promise (374), Witteg stays in this endless orthogonality and mirrored space of his own data prison. With that, the novel suggests that, like Witteg, real knowledge would mean leaving this data prison of self-representations and endless memory.

## Notes

1. All translations provided by DeepL.

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