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SPECIESISM,
SUBJECTIVITY, AND
BECOMING-OTHER IN
MICHEL FABER'S
NOVEL
UNDER THE SKIN

ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a critical analysis of Michel Faber's novel, *Under the Skin* (2000), with the aim to explore ethical relations between different species. The primary objective of this analysis is to delve into the concepts of speciesism, subjectivity, and Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-other' in order to investigate their potential in the realm of science fiction literature that mirrors practices of more-than-human animal exploitation and questions their ethics. The novel *Under the Skin* presents the viewpoint of Isserley, a female alien sent to Earth with the mission to capture human male hitchhikers, destined to become a meat delicacy on her home planet. Isserley, who has speciesist modes of thinking towards humans and, therefore, does not acknowledge their subjectivity, is resilient to becoming-other. This article seeks to criticize speciesism and anthropocentric subjectivity through the lens of critical animal studies, using Faber's novel to

explore themes such as speciesist behaviour and modes of thinking, carnism, self-centered anthropomorphism as a form of anthropocentric projection, and the possibility of ethical relations between different species. The paper also explores hierarchical systems of oppression, emphasizing the necessity to extend ethical affinities to more-than-human animals. By making use of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-other, the research advocates for reconceptualizing boundaries between humans and more-than-human animals, challenging exploitative practices. The study contributes to the field of critical animal studies and science fiction literature by pursuing vegan literary analysis and fostering a reconsideration of exploitative practices towards more-than-human animals.

KEY WORDS: speciesism, subjectivity, becoming-other, becoming-animal, carnism, anthropomorphism, science fiction, veganism

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INTRODUCTION

The novel *Under the Skin* (2000), written by Michel Faber, aligns with a period marked by the release of notable works of fiction that delved into the ethical dimensions of human-animal interactions.² Despite Faber expressing “bewilderment”³ at the unfamiliarity of language in which academics analyze his novels, *Under the Skin* offers numerous possibilities for interpretations and theories, particularly those which focus on the binaries such as human/animal, male/female, Same/Other, and human/alien. Sarah Dillon (2011) examines the novel through a poststructuralist perspective of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concepts of becoming-animal and becoming-other, which emphasize ethical connections between diverse entities and demonstrate the moral responsibility of acknowledging the subjectivity of the Other.⁴ Dillon also scrutinizes the role of language in addressing subjectivity and tackles Derrida’s concept of limitrophy, which is used to “negotiate the abyssal limit between the human and nonhuman animal.”⁵ Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (2020) employs Julia Kristeva’s concepts of the abject and abjection to offer feminist perspectives on the novel that he claims question gender stereotypes.⁶ Kirsty Dunn’s (2016) analysis brings in the critical animal studies perspective, showing how factory farming practices and industrial slaughter of more-than-human animals are depicted in the novel, with human species taking the role of animals.⁷

Expanding on Dillon and Dunn’s analyses of the novel from the perspective of critical animal studies, this article delves deeper into exploring the concepts of speciesism, subjectivity, and Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-other to investigate the applicability of these theories to science fiction literature that represents practices of more-than-human⁸ exploitation against human species. The notion of speciesism, which was coined by psychologist and animal rights advocate Ricard Ryder in the 1970s and then popularized by moral philosopher Peter Singer in his

² Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, “Eating Men Is Wrong: Empathy, Femininity and the Abject in *Under the Skin*,” in *Michel Faber Critical Essays*, eds. Rebecca Langworthy, Kristin Lindfeld-Ott and Jim MacPherson (UK: Gylphi Limited, 2020), 33-50.

³ Michel Faber, “Foreword,” in *Michel Faber Critical Essays*, eds. Rebecca Langworthy, Kristin Lindfeld-Ott and Jim MacPherson (UK: Gylphi Limited, 2020), 1-3.

⁴ Sarah Dillon, “‘It is a Question of Words, Therefore’: Becoming-Animal in Michel Faber’s *Under the Skin*,” *Science Fiction Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 134-54, <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.38.1.0134>.

⁵ Dillon, 136.

⁶ Dobrogoszcz, 33-50.

⁷ Kirsty Dunn, “‘Do You Know Where the Light Is?’ Factory Farming and Industrial Slaughter in Michel Faber’s *Under the Skin*,” in *Meat Culture*, ed. Annie Potts. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 149-62, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004325852_009.

⁸ The term ‘more-than-human’ is often employed to describe concepts such as “more-than-human world,” “otherness,” “ecology,” and “geographies.” The phrase “more-than-human world” was coined by David Abram in 1996 in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. This term highlights that other species are not merely nonhuman in contrast to human traits, but rather, they encompass more than the human world and perspectives.

book *Animal Liberation*,⁹ refers to human discriminatory justifications and practices towards all other species on Earth. Discovering speciesist analogies and key features in literature can become a valuable tool for literary analysis, especially when applied to an alien species which discriminates against the human species. Speciesism exists within the premises of anthropocentric metaphysics of subjectivity,¹⁰ which privileges the human species based solely on their consciousness and language, while denying or belittling more-than-human subjectivities and forms of cognition. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-other, is not only the ultimate stage of the novel's analysis but also a solid foundation upon which it is possible to build ethical connections between humans and more-than-human animals after dismantling speciesism and anthropocentric subjectivity. This article aims to interpret Michel Faber's novel *Under the Skin* from a critical perspective, examining themes such as speciesist prejudice, the carnist system of thought, self-centered anthropocentric anthropomorphism, eating the other, anthropocentric metaphysics of subjectivity, fluctuating conceptions of subjectivity and desubjectification, and possibility (or impossibility) of ethical connections between different species. Through the lens of Critical Animal Studies and Vegan Studies, this research contributes to the potential of science fiction literature in challenging speciesist behavior and modes of thinking. It aims to promote vegan education and encourage approaches to literary analysis that align with these principles.

ALIEN SPECIESISM AGAINST HUMANS

Animal rights ethics and the criticism of speciesism are part of posthumanist scholarship that has started to question the hierarchy of liberal humanism. The attributes of human(-like) consciousness and language form major part of a speciesist attitude because more-than-human animals express themselves in very different forms to humans when socializing and communicating with their own and other species.¹¹ Speciesism, as well as other forms of discrimination and bias, is part of what Karen Warren calls "value-hierarchical thinking:"¹² a supposedly 'superior' group justifies and sustains the subordination of a supposedly 'inferior' group because of the unique characteristics and features that 'superiors' possess and 'inferiors' do not have. This perspective has been predominant in Western societies and has informed the "isms of domination"¹³ such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and speciesism that are constrained by the "Up-Down thinking."¹⁴ Humans, men, and

⁹ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx8mg>.

¹¹ Marc Bekoff, "Resisting Speciesism and Expanding the Community of Equals," *BioScience* 48, no. 8 (1998): 638-41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1313423>.

¹² Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 46.

¹³ Warren, 43.

¹⁴ Warren, 62.

culture are situated Up, and animals, women, and nature are positioned Down. The “logic of domination”¹⁵ is used to give a moral justification for this oppressive framework in which Up can exploit Down on account of their physical attributes and characteristics of embodied life (race, gender, or species), which are also used to keep them at their lower position. The orientational metaphor of Up and Down, relating humans to up and animals to down, is fundamental to Western culture, and thinking of ourselves as “*higher* animals”¹⁶ at once constructs the notion of ‘lower animals’ that includes, undoubtedly, all the more-than-human animals.

The protagonist of the novel *Under the Skin* is a female alien, Isserley, who is sent to Earth to capture male hitchhikers so that her compatriots can make meat out of them and send this delicacy to the rich on their planet. Isserley perceives herself and her species as proper ‘humans,’ and humans from Earth are called vodsels. Because of this, I will use ‘humans’ in quotation marks to describe Isserley’s species, and vodsels to refer to the humans inhabiting Earth in the novel. Humans without quotation will refer to the real, non-fictional humans. Originally, Isserley’s species resemble canines; however, her body has been painfully mutilated so she could look like a human/vodsel to deceive and capture vodsels. Isserley does not recognize vodsel beings as subjects because of their bipedal form and difference from the ‘human’ species’ bodies; however, she feels empathy and affinity to other animals on Earth like sheep and dogs who are quadruped like her own species. When she looks at vodsels, she is disgusted by “their look of idiocy”¹⁷ and “glazed little eyes,”¹⁸ and perceives their bodies as “a few parcels’ worth of meat”¹⁹ that will be eaten by ‘human’ beings on her planet. However, when Isserley meets sheep, her thoughts are completely different. She is afraid to scare them and calls them “winsome little creatures”²⁰ who remind her of the children of her species. The body of vodsels causes disgust to Isserley because of their dissimilarity with proper ‘humans,’ while the shape of sheep is very close to ‘humans’ and is worthy of admiration and respect. Isserley’s perception of sheep exemplifies what the author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol Adams, states about speciesist attitudes, which is that humans consider as ‘superior’ those animals whom they anthropomorphize and in whom they can see themselves reflected in appearance or communication, while those who are physically and cognitively very different from humans and who may evoke disgust, fear, or other negative feelings are seen as ‘inferior:’

Animals who can communicate in ways ‘we’ can understand are more valued than those who cannot; animals who demonstrate ‘*superior*’ (which is to say, anthropomorphic) intelligence are considered paradigm examples of animals with moral standing; animals who lack reflexive consciousness, language, familial relations, who are aesthetically *disgusting* to ‘us,’ or are culturally

¹⁵ Warren, 24.

¹⁶ Chris Danta, *Animal Fables after Darwin. Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1, 4 (emphasis in original), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108552394>.

¹⁷ Michel Faber, *Under the Skin* (Canongate Books Ltd, 2008, EPUB), ch. 8.

¹⁸ Faber, ch. 8.

¹⁹ Faber, ch. 10.

²⁰ Faber, ch. 4.

unpopular are consistently given less attention in political and legal struggles for animal justice.²¹

Isserley's different perception of vodsels and sheep is reminiscent of what social psychologist Melanie Joy calls 'carnism' in her work *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* (2010). Joy argues that these differences in human perception "are due to our *schema*" which is "a psychological framework that shapes—and is shaped by—our beliefs, ideas, perceptions, and experience, and it automatically organizes and interprets incoming information."²² These schemas are not coded in human genes but are "constructed . . . out of a highly structured belief system"²³ which is responsible for distinguishing edible animals and then allowing humans to eat them "by protecting us from feeling any emotional or psychological discomfort when doing so."²⁴ Isserley constantly encounters the necessity to block uncomfortable thoughts about supposed vodsels' subjectivity and the value of their lives. When she is pondering the meaning of the vodsels' word 'mercy' and understands that there is no translation of this word in her language, she wonders if vodsels could perhaps have dignity.²⁵ Immediately she blocks this thought, and by telling herself "Just look at these creatures,"²⁶ she invokes the feeling of disgust towards the vodsels who are tortured on the farm. Joy asserts that the system of carnism "teaches us how to *not feel*"²⁷ and how to avert empathy because most humans are empathetic towards animals and they do not want to hurt them; however, at the same time, they consume some animals, which results in "incongruence"²⁸ and "moral discomfort."²⁹ This discomfort is overcome by transforming the perception of what seems to be wrong into a social norm and acceptable choice and behaviour.³⁰ A carnist system of blocking empathy makes Isserley push away her thoughts about vodsels as subjects, forcing her to ignore information that might make her change her view on eating the other. However, Isserley's work and, therefore, her survival as a mutilated female on an alien planet, depend on the importance of distancing herself from vodsels' subjectivity. On the other hand, most humans in the real world eat animals because of habits, traditions, and the normalization of meat-eating, under the pretext that "it's just the way things are"³¹ and not because it is necessary for survival.

²¹ Carol J. Adams and Matthew Calarco, "Derrida and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*," in *Meat Culture*, ed. Annie Potts, (Leiden: Boston, 2016), 47-48 (emphasis added), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501312861>.

²² Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (San Francisco: Canari Press, 2010), 14 (emphasis in original).

²³ Joy, 17-18.

²⁴ Joy, 17-18.

²⁵ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 8.

²⁶ Faber, ch. 8.

²⁷ Joy, 18 (emphasis in original).

²⁸ Joy, 18.

²⁹ Joy, 18.

³⁰ Joy, 18.

³¹ Joy, 27.

Meat-eating and eating animals is tightly intertwined with the concepts of speciesism and subjectivity. Human subjectivity is constructed on “the prominence of meat-eating,” and eating more-than-human animals while perpetuating animal exploitation is one of the key manifestations of speciesism.³² In human anthropocentric, speciesist, and carnist cultures, “animals are always-already meat,”³³ and our encounter with animals is mostly based on consumption, which performs “human dominion”³⁴ over nature and all beings in the world. Moreover, the questions of eating the other and who eats whom are “at the heart of intersubjectivity”³⁵ by focusing on subjects who consume objects. Faber describes in detail the conditions in which the hitchhikers are tortured before being slaughtered to become meat: vodsels are “shaved, castrated, fattened, intestinally modified, chemically purified,”³⁶ which leads to a “disproportionately massive body,”³⁷ with “a thin stream of blueish-black diarrhoea clattered onto the ground between its legs.”³⁸ They cannot speak because their tongues are ripped out, and inside their mouths, they have “roasted black where the stub of tongue had been cauterized.”³⁹ They are placed underground in pens in “almost complete darkness,”⁴⁰ and when Isserley is walking there, she smells “a stench of fermenting urine and faeces”⁴¹ and sees “a swarm of eyes”⁴² of the hitchhikers whom she has caught. The analogy between the treatment of animals in slaughterhouses and the tortures they suffer every day, and the vodsels’ agonizing torments is obvious. The bodies of the hitchhikers become a ground for exercising power by the ‘superior’ species that perceive vodsels as “vegetables on legs.”⁴³

The concept of speciesism is defined through the bodily expression that is a key principle for denoting species. The logic of domination and value-hierarchical thinking that uses violence and control to subdue “inferiors”⁴⁴ also intersects with “somatophobia,”⁴⁵ which is disdain and fear of the body, and is “symptomatic of sexism, racism, classism, and speciesism.”⁴⁶ The novel explores the aliens’ gaze of speciesism that assesses human/vodsel bodies as objects of consumption, similarly as

³² Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood, “Introduction,” in *Thinking Through Veganism. Towards a Vegan Theory*, eds. Quinn, E. and Westwood, B., (Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2018), 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73380-7>.

³³ Sherryl Vint, *Animal Alterity. Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 26, <https://doi.org/10.5949/UPO9781846316135>.

³⁴ Vint, *Animal Alterity*, 28.

³⁵ Vint, 36.

³⁶ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 5.

³⁷ Faber, ch. 5.

³⁸ Faber, ch. 5.

³⁹ Faber, ch. 8.

⁴⁰ Faber, ch. 7.

⁴¹ Faber, ch. 7.

⁴² Faber, ch. 7.

⁴³ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 8.

⁴⁴ Greta Gaard, “Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 3 (2002): 117-46, 138, <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2003.0006>.

⁴⁵ Gaard, 138.

⁴⁶ Gaard, 138.

humans often do with other species. While driving, Isserley observes male hitchhikers and looks for “big muscles”⁴⁷ because she needs meaty bodies, as “scrawny specimens were no use to her.”⁴⁸ Her work requires male “specimens”⁴⁹ because men are usually more muscular and “meaty,”⁵⁰ and this exploitation based on sex is similar to the human methods of animal subjugation and consumption in which individuals of certain species, for example cattle, are exploited as milk and calf suppliers, while bulls are forced to be producers of semen.⁵¹ Isserley looks at specific parts of a vodsels’ body, examining “buttocks, or his thigh, or maybe how well-muscled his shoulders were,”⁵² and noticing features that could show “the cocky self-awareness of a male in prime condition.”⁵³ Her gaze is limited to the external form of the other, while vodsels’ subjectivity as the capacity to experience desire, memory, perception and welfare does not exist to her, and the only depth she wants to probe is the innards of vodsels’ bodies.

The only ‘human’ who is against the torture of other species is Amlis, the son of a capitalist who runs the business of producing meat out of vodsels. Amlis secretly travels to Earth to see how his father’s enterprise works. He discovers that vodsels are not “vegetables on legs”⁵⁴ but living beings that live and breathe just like his own species. He tries to explain his position to Isserley and frees the mutilated vodsels from the pens, but they are eventually caught. Amlis understands that his act of empathy does not change the whole scheme of exploiting others and decides to go back home to persuade the elites that “this whole trade is based on terrible cruelty,”⁵⁵ since he sees the vodsels as living beings with their unique subjectivity and life. However, Isserley believes that Amlis’ aspirations to share the truth with their species are just fads of the rich who “are born into a life of lazing around and philosophizing”⁵⁶ without any necessity to work and struggle for survival. She condemns his behavior and empathetic attitudes to vodsels arguing that it is because of his wealth that he can think about the other, while she and other poor workers have to work hard every day to make ends meet. Amlis is inclined to acknowledge the subjectivity of the other because of his status that allows him to possess moral resources and possibilities to think about the ethicality of exploitation and to see similarities and connections between different species. Along with the exploitation of more-than-human animals, human farmworkers in the animal slaughter industry tend to come from vulnerable and marginalized social groups such as immigrants and women, who are excluded from legislation, have low-paid wages and poor working conditions, and lack medical

⁴⁷ Faber, ch. 1.

⁴⁸ Faber, ch. 1.

⁴⁹ Faber, ch. 1.

⁵⁰ Faber, ch. 2.

⁵¹ Hannah Velten, *Cow* (London: Reaktion Books LTD, 2007), 159.

⁵² Faber, ch. 1.

⁵³ Faber, ch. 1.

⁵⁴ Faber, ch. 8.

⁵⁵ Faber, ch. 11.

⁵⁶ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 11.

benefits and work unions.⁵⁷ From the perspective of critical animal studies, the exploitation of more-than-human animals and human farmworkers happens simultaneously, and it is based on both desubjectification and objectification of these oppressed groups.⁵⁸ Due to his background, Amlis' does not have to work in hard and damaging conditions and can avoid having to catch other species for meat on another planet. He perfectly understands that by seeing himself as a subject in life, he can also see subjects in other shapes and forms, while Isserley, who is neither truly 'human' nor vodsels species and dehumanized by others and herself, cannot experience becoming-other. For Isserley, a victim of desubjectification, objectifying the other serves as a premise of performing her job efficiently, which helps her to avoid being sent back to her planet and to the place called the New Estates where there are crowds of people who live underground, bad food, dirty air, and lack of medicine. Isserley's distinction between creatures who deserve to live and those who will be objectified makes a solid basis for the speciesist hierarchical thinking that helps her do her work properly. The rationale and foundation of speciesism that she expresses are grounded in both external and internal representations of the other—the body and the consciousness that create a delusive dichotomy, which illustrates instances of speciesism in the novel.

MORE-THAN-HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

Traditional metaphysics of subjectivity is tightly interconnected with speciesism since, in the anthropocentric reality, subjectivity is assigned exclusively to humans on the basis of their perceived difference from more-than-human animals who, as mentioned above, do not have humanlike consciousness and languages.⁵⁹ Such concept of subjectivity comprises a rational and self-aware Cartesian subject and is based on the assumption that only humans possess 'soul,' while more-than-human animals are deprived of it.⁶⁰ Traditionally, the discussion about animal consciousness and subjectivity is based on "dissimilarities"⁶¹ between human and more-than-human animals, claiming that what humans possess and animals lack determines proper subjectivity and the presence of mind. The concept of subjectivity is crucial for comprehending the underlying reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of certain entities in ethical and moral consideration. Legal institutions, grounded in anthropocentric metaphysics of subjectivity, typically disregard the notion of animals

⁵⁷ See Cook, 2010; Cudworth, 2008; LeDuff, 2003; Nibert, 2002; Pachirat, 2011; Perea, 2010.

⁵⁸ Nik Taylor and Richard Twine, "Introduction," in *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies from the Margins to the Centre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-15, 9, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203797631>.

⁵⁹ Susanne Lijmbach, *Animal Subjectivity. A Study into Philosophy and Theory of Animal Experience* (Netherlands: Grafisch bedrijf Ponsen & Looijen b.v, 1998), 1.

⁶⁰ Sherryl Vint, "Speciesism and Species Being in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 40, no. 1 (2007): 111-26, 118.

⁶¹ Colin Allen and Michael Trestman, "Animal Consciousness," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017 (emphasis in original), accessed February 28, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/consciousness-animal/>.

as “full legal subjects,”⁶² while the “anthropocentric moral discourse”⁶³ fails to recognize animals as “full ethical subjects.”⁶⁴ In Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, more-than-human animals are granted a new status and are recognized as sentient beings; however, they still do not fall into the category of full legal subjects and can be treated as human property.⁶⁵ The potential erosion of the human-animal boundary poses a significant challenge to speciesist and anthropocentric metaphysics of subjectivity, which is sustained by a complex interplay of institutional, legislative, cultural, philosophical, and social forces.

For Isserley, her own ‘human’ subjectivity is grounded on a similar basis—she can possess a subjective mode of living when she excludes the other who is completely different from her body and consciousness. When she rejects the notion of vodsels having dignity, she wonders whether “she was losing her hold on humanity and actually *identifying* with animals”⁶⁶ because of her vodsels shape and close interconnection with them. Carol Adams defines the notion of patriarchal subjectivity by the following modus operandi: “We [men] need you [women] to be *something* so we can know we are *someone*.”⁶⁷ The same connection can be detected in a speciesist paradigm of subjectivity when we (humans) need you (animals) to be *something* so we can know we are *someone*. Isserley’s ‘humanity’ and ‘human’ subjectivity depend on the ‘somethingness’ of vodsels who are other to her; likewise, anthropocentric human subjectivity relies on converting animals into objects that should reflect the ‘someoneness’ of human beings. She can lose her ‘humanity’ if she identifies herself with them or, in other words, recognizes them as herself, that is, as subjects.

The sense of Isserley’s ‘human’ superior subjectivity over the other is reflected through a mental unification of vodsels who are “all exactly the same fundamentally”⁶⁸ when they are exploited by “intensive farming and standardized feeds.”⁶⁹ The sameness of vodsels’ bodies after their cruel treatment and torture allows Isserley somehow to parallel this sameness with their lack of uniqueness on a fundamental level. Her perception mirrors that of a carnist and speciesist scheme of the human mind when they merge individual bodies of a species into a homogenous pile, thereby transforming them into “mass commodities.”⁷⁰ However, Isserley is speculating about how vodsels look when they are wearing clothes and style their hair, and she agrees that they “could look quite individual”⁷¹ and that it becomes

⁶² Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 131.

⁶³ Calarco, *Zoographies*, 131.

⁶⁴ Calarco, 131.

⁶⁵ Global Animal Law GAL Association, “Animal legislations in the world at national level.”

⁶⁶ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 8 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁷ Carol J. Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 38 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁸ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 6.

⁶⁹ Faber, ch. 6.

⁷⁰ Bruce Boehrer, “Introduction: The Animal Renaissance,” *A Cultural History of Animals in Renaissance* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 1-26, 2, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350049550-006>.

⁷¹ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 6.

possible to feel as if you are “with human beings.”⁷² Isserley unifies the individual bodies of a completely unfamiliar species into one mass of livestock, and her xenophobia reflects a human perception of farm animals and most species that are hunted, experimented on, consumed, and used in different forms of exploitation.

Furthermore, Isserley criticizes the anthropomorphism of vodsels and denounces this tendency to impose ‘human’ traits on vodsels. She believes that vodsels might in some cases resemble ‘humans’ by sounds or gestures, but sees this as a misinterpretation of their ‘nature,’ believing that ‘humans’ should not regard them as equals or as creatures with subjectivity. Carol Adams argues that anthropomorphism affects humans’ speciesist attitudes in the sense that it permits anthropomorphizing those animals who have anthropomorphic intellectual capacities and similar emotional and communicative expressions. These animals are then treated better than those that apparently lack the qualities that enable the human imposition of anthropomorphism.⁷³ Anthropomorphizing the other involves attributing human-like traits and characteristics to non-human species, which implies recognizing their subjectivity by drawing parallels between them and humans. This comparison is often hierarchical, establishing a perceived superiority in certain species and inviting others to join this hierarchy based on shared traits, expressions, and forms of existence. Others will never be able to access this implied subjectivity because of their physical appearance and/or cognitive abilities that are too different. Thus, for Isserley, vodsels might possess some properties and capacities that are close to ‘humans.’ Nevertheless, they are still too different as beings, which is why they are still considered as a lower species; the impressions of ‘humanness’ created by some nuances of their appearance or behaviour are seen as deceptive. I hypothesize that Isserley bases her speciesist attitudes toward vodsels on their bipedal shape, less hairiness, and other physical attributes that differentiate humans from quadrupedal canine species.

However, when Isserley is thinking about the anthropomorphism of vodsels, she tries to rationalize her speciesism and define proper ‘humanness’ by determining all the concepts and abilities that ‘humans’ possess and vodsels lack:

In the end, though, vodsels couldn’t do any of the things that really defined a human being. They couldn’t siuwil, they couldn’t mesnishtil, they had no concept of slan. In their brutishness, they’d never evolved to use hunshur; their communities were so rudimentary that hississins did not exist; nor did these creatures seem to see any need for chail, or even chailsinn.⁷⁴

For vodsels, these are meaningless notions of another species’ culture, nature, or skills, whereas, for Isserley, the possession of these concepts, skills, and capacities

⁷² Faber, ch. 6.

⁷³ Carol J. Adams and Matthew Calarco, “Derrida and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*,” in *Meat Culture*, ed. Annie Potts (Leiden: Boston, 2016), 31-53, 47-48, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004325852_003.

⁷⁴ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 8.

defines a real ‘human’ being and a person with subjectivity. These differences between ‘humans’ and vodsels create a boundary between them, and this boundary distinguishes the beings whose subjectivity exists from their others, whose subjectivity cannot be seen and recognized.

The cornerstone of humanist subjectivity lies in the “abjection of embodied animality”⁷⁵ and the criminalization of bestiality within human nature. Traditional metaphysics of subjectivity is based on the differences between human and more-than-human animals that include humanlike languages, reason, self-aware consciousness, soul, culture, etc. Heidegger considered these differences between humans and animals to be a rationale for the idea that humans possess a unique subjective mode of living as well as the belief that animals lack any subjectivity at all.⁷⁶ In the same way, Isserley defines the difference between her own species and its other as a marker for subjectivity and its absence. However, this rationalization through concepts, consciousness or culture, of the notion that vodsels are not worthy as ‘humans’ works as the justification of the exploitation of vodsels only, and does not apply to sheep and dogs who also lack proper ‘human’ traits. When Isserley looks at sheep, “her fellow-traveller,”⁷⁷ she anthropomorphizes them:

It was so hard to believe the creature couldn’t speak. It looked so much as if it should be able to. Despite its bizarre features, there was something deceptively human about it, which tempted her, not for the first time, to reach across the species divide and communicate.⁷⁸

The sheep’s lack of *siuwil*, *mesnishtil*, *slan*, *hunshur*, *hississins*, *chail*, and *chailsinn* traits left unclarified in the novel – does not prevent Isserley from acknowledging the sheep’s subjectivity. Her rational explanation of why vodsels cannot have ‘humanness’ and, thus, can be exploited does not work with quadruped nonhuman animals that resemble Isserley’s species. When Amlis asks Isserley whether they tried to use sheep for meat, she becomes “dumbfounded”⁷⁹ by his “ruthlessness”⁸⁰ and answers that “they’re on all *fours*, Amlis, can’t you see that? They’ve got fur—tails—facial features not that different from ours.”⁸¹ This is similar to human speciesist arguments which are in fact largely based on the grounds of exclusively bodily differences, which is typical of racism or sexism. The logocentric arguments which foreground notions such as language, reason or consciousness merely further justify and the exploitation of the other. Isserley’s perspective of who might be closer to ‘humans,’ and who therefore gets anthropomorphized, proves the point that the body is crucial for defining who possesses subjectivity, whereas the

⁷⁵ Colleen G. Boggs, “American Bestiality: Sex, Animals, and the Construction of Subjectivity,” *Cultural Critique* no. 76 (2010): 98-125, 100-101, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cul.2010.a402871>.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 194.

⁷⁷ Faber, ch. 3.

⁷⁸ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 3.

⁷⁹ Faber, ch. 11.

⁸⁰ Faber, ch. 11.

⁸¹ Faber, ch. 11 (emphasis in original).

differences such as consciousness, language, and culture are secondary—even though Isserley pays attention to the fact that sheep lack *siuwil*, *mesnishtil*, *slan*, *hunshur*, *hississins*, *chail*, and *chailsinn*, them being on all *fours* is critical to her judgement.

ALIEN AND HUMAN BECOMING-OTHER

Deleuze and Guattari reject the anthropocentric and humanist metaphysics that center on individualism, challenging the fixed identity associated with *being*. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, they introduce the concepts of *becoming* and *becoming-animal*, emphasizing the multiplicity of the subject.⁸² *Becoming*, contrasted with the static state of *being*, involves a *molar* (bound and organized) entity within aggregates such as “states, institutions, classes,” coexisting with a transformative and *molecular* (vital and fluctuating) entity.⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari explore various forms of becoming, such as becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-Jewish, becoming-black, all of which are considered molecular.⁸⁴ Becoming is not defined by either physical or imaginary changes, but by ethical connections that are drawn between entities which differ with respect to gender, species, race, and sexuality.

These transformative affinities exclusively operate towards molecular becoming-minoritarian.⁸⁵ The concept of becoming-majoritarian is deemed nonexistent, as the majority status is not being seen as contingent on quantitative superiority but is rather defined by its rootedness in conventional power dynamics, hierarchical relations, and notions of dominance and superiority which are ingrained in human civilization.⁸⁶ The archetypal majority figure is envisioned as the Western white adult, affluent, heterosexual, powerful, and rational male, who is seen as inherently possessing the “right and power of man.”⁸⁷ The dominant metaphysics of subjectivity and majority project images of normality onto white, typical, masculine, young, and healthy subjects, pathologizing and marginalizing other embodiments as minoritarian entities.⁸⁸ The realization of *becoming* is only achievable by embracing minoritarian consciousness and breaking away from the majoritarian hierarchical thinking.⁸⁹ The philosophers distinguish between the terms ‘minoritarian’ and ‘minority,’ asserting that the former represents “a becoming or process,” while the latter is “an aggregate or a state.”⁹⁰ Through the process of becoming, minorities

⁸² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, 195.

⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, 195.

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, 291.

⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, 291.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 291.

⁸⁸ Rosi Braidotti, “Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others,” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 526-32, 526, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2009.124.2.526>.

⁸⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, 106.

⁹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, 106.

transform into minoritarians, undergoing a deterritorialization of their identity as a change in nature and connection with other multiplicities.⁹¹

The notions of becoming-other and becoming-animal play a pivotal role in reshaping traditional subjectivity politics and prompting a reevaluation of our ethical connections with more-than-human animals.⁹² This shift facilitates the overcoming of anthropocentrism and encourages the exploration of novel philosophical perspectives and knowledge derived from “other-than-human perspectives.”⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-minoritarian aids in comprehending and reexamining both the theoretical and practical approaches to overcoming speciesism and anthropocentric metaphysics of subjectivity through affectivity. This perspective emphasizes ethical interconnectedness and proposes a redefinition of human-animal boundaries by positioning more-than-human species within the realm of the other and recognizing our ethical responsibility toward more-than-human animal entities.

The notions of similarity and difference between different entities and beings determine the subjectivity of some and the desubjectification of others. This division creates xenophobia—a fear, hatred, and discrimination of otherness. The concept of becoming-other in opposition to xenophobic attitudes describes ethical affinities and close interrelations between diverse forms of beings, invites empathy toward alterities, and opens the subject up to multiplicity. Finding similarity with the other is for Isserley equal to “losing her hold on humanity and actually *identifying* with animals.”⁹⁴ She becomes angry with herself when she accidentally tells her compatriot that she sleeps on the bed like a vodsels instead of sleeping “like a human being, on the ground.”⁹⁵ This similarity to vodsels, perceived as a “proof of her subhumanity,”⁹⁶ does not make her closer to the vodsels by extending ethical consideration to them; it rather confirms her own self-desubjectification in acting like a non-subject, like her other. When she is thinking about her first meeting with Amlis, she is “dreading him”⁹⁷ because she sees him as a “normal person from home.”⁹⁸ Compared to him, she sees herself as a “freak,”⁹⁹ a “hideous animal.”¹⁰⁰ By perceiving herself as abnormal but still considering perspectives from ‘human’ normality, she views vodsels similarly as flesh and muscle rather than subjective beings. Isserley is limited to a state of ‘being’ in a molar, fixed identity, which is not ready to undergo the process of becoming and embrace molecular identities of herself and her other. She is confined to a position of the molar minority, which only after undergoing ‘becoming’ can be transformed into a molecular minoritarian and, therefore, lead to autonomy. Her own ‘interspecies’ position prevents her from being a proper ‘human,’ while at the

⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, 9, 106.

⁹² Vint, *Animal Alterity*, 52-53.

⁹³ Calarco, *Zoographies*, 42.

⁹⁴ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 8 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁵ Faber, ch. 4.

⁹⁶ Faber, ch. 4.

⁹⁷ Faber, ch. 4.

⁹⁸ Faber, ch. 4.

⁹⁹ Faber, ch. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Faber, ch. 4.

same time alienating her from vodsels because of the speciesist system of subjectivity she embraces.

Amlis in his attempt to persuade Isserley to recognize the subjectivity of the other also appeals to the resemblance of their own species to vodsels: “That meat you’re eating . . . is the body of a creature that lived and breathed just like you and me.”¹⁰¹ Isserley uses the concepts of similarity and difference against Amlis, and applies them to both ‘human’-vodsel relations and classist structure of their society: “I really doubt there’s much similarity between the way you and I live and breathe, let alone between me and . . . my breakfast.”¹⁰² Her words emphasize that recognising the similarity between the Same and the Other is not the same as becoming-other, in other words, not equal to producing ethical relations. When Isserley is afraid to lose her ‘humanity’ due to identifying herself with the vodsels and anthropomorphizing them, she departs from becoming-vodsel and loses the potential of developing an empathetic attitude toward them. I consider that even if the concept of similarity to others might be the first little step to becoming-other, nevertheless, it does not apply to many others whose alterity prevents the dominant group to see resemblance to itself. Becoming-other requires acknowledging all existing beings as “subjects-of-a-life,”¹⁰³ embracing the multiplicity of subjects, rejecting “value-hierarchical thinking,”¹⁰⁴ and recognizing the subjectivities of otherness. For some, the notion of similarity might be a point of departure for becoming-other, but it should be rejected as a reference point for ethical judgement and understood as its periphery.

For Isserley, there is no way to recognize the subjectivity of the other if she is trapped in her own desubjectification by the dominant Same. She herself is the other as a modified member of the vodsel species, as a female and working class. Even her desire to occupy the position of proper subject, which cannot be achieved without exploiting and objectifying the other, makes her an other. However, what if there is no escape from being the Same and the Other at the same time? And what if the exploitation of marginalized entities cannot be justified by the fact that there seems to be no other option for those who are other themselves? Isserley is the other for the Elite on her planet, for her compatriots who still possess proper ‘human’ bodies, but also for the male workers because of her interspecies appearance, her class and gender. At the same time, she takes part in the exploitation of vodsels because of her speciesist and carnist perspectives; and the vodsels, in turn, created a similar system of oppression against all species on Earth except themselves. Isserley appears to be a victim of her own desubjectification, and is simultaneously a slave driver. Her position explains her current work status, her feelings of despair and the suppression of her thoughts, but it cannot be seen as an excuse for how she treats her others. In the same way, the desubjectified hitchhikers, whose bodies are mutilated and tortured in the pens, represent the human species that normalized the similar brutal treatment of

¹⁰¹ Faber, ch. 7.

¹⁰² Faber, ch. 7 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰³ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Los Angeles: University of California Press Berkeley, 1983).

¹⁰⁴ Warren, 46.

other species on their own planet. The fact that they occupy the position of victims in the oppressive capitalist and racist (amongst others) systems should not serve as a justification for their own subduing of different others. The words of one hitchhiker who told Isserley that “foreigners’ minds don’t work the same as ours”¹⁰⁵ are derived from the same xenophobic stance which can be seen in Isserley’s claim about Amlis: “He couldn’t tell the difference between a vodsel and his own arse!”¹⁰⁶

Isserley is not able to undergo becoming-other, especially after being raped by a vodsel. She loses her power and feels strong hatred toward the alterity of the other. The rape showed her that even those whom she considers a lower species might abuse her body and hurt her physically and emotionally. When Isserley looks at another hitchhiker who is interested in her as subject she feels that “the sheer brute alienness of him hit her like a blow; and, with a heady rush like the nausea after a sudden loss of blood, she hated him.”¹⁰⁷ They meet each other on different grounds: he is wondering about her “inner person”¹⁰⁸ and “woman’s story,”¹⁰⁹ while Isserley is not at all ready to be friendly with any hitchhiker, and considers him “a typical male of the species; stupid, uncommunicative.”¹¹⁰ The hitchhiker welcomes her alterity; despite not knowing that she is an alien, he becomes-other, letting go of his majoritarian position as a man and embracing her minoritarian position as a woman. However, their interspecies communication never happens, and Isserley uses this hitchhiker to alleviate her pain after the rape, soothe the feelings of humiliation, and ease her mind full of agonizing thoughts and emotions. She forces herself to enjoy watching him being tortured, castrated, and mutilated but ends up being terrified and passing out.

Furthermore, Isserley does feel a glimmer of empathy and compassion for the other. After delivering one of her victims whom she felt sympathy for, she examines his photographs, and realizes that “she could tell just from his expression that his happiness was genuine.”¹¹¹ In particular, she starts to be concerned about this hitchhiker’s dog that was locked in a van and could not escape because their caregiver was kidnapped by her. She remembers her usual nightmare about being “buried alive, abandoned, condemned to die in airless prison”¹¹² and then realizes that “the creature at the centre of the drama seemed to be someone *other than herself*.”¹¹³ At the beginning of this nightmare, Isserley sees herself suffering from suffocation, and then she transforms into a different species and becomes an other, the dog that is “trapped inside a vehicle in the middle of nowhere.”¹¹⁴ As explained above, Isserley tends to ‘anthropomorphize’ quadruped species, and is close to acknowledging their subjectivity. Still, other species are for Isserley not ‘humans,’ despite their bodies

¹⁰⁵ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Faber, ch. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch.10.

¹⁰⁸ Faber, ch.10.

¹⁰⁹ Faber, ch.10.

¹¹⁰ Faber, ch.10.

¹¹¹ Faber, ch.13.

¹¹² Faber, ch.13.

¹¹³ Faber, ch.13 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁴ Faber, ch.13.

being similar to the ‘human’ body shape, as she thinks that, “their consciousness [is] rudimentary.”¹¹⁵ Despite this dog’s ‘deficiency,’ Isserley finds the van and frees the dog that looks “like a miniature Amlis in animal form.”¹¹⁶ Isserley is more open to becoming-other when this other might be liked by her and of a similar shape to a proper ‘human.’

After rescuing the dog, Isserley decides to leave the farm and stop her work. Different reasons influenced her to make this decision: Amlis, the only ‘human’ to whom she opened up emotionally, left Earth and “she was ready to die;”¹¹⁷ the mistake she made by kidnapping a vodsel with family—“You shouldn’t have taken that red-haired vodsel . . . William Cameron. . . . You’re slipping. *It’s over;*”¹¹⁸ and finally, the company that she worked for notifying her that another modified ‘human’ will be sent to Earth to do the same job. The only thing that kept her working was the feeling of her indispensability—the idea that only she could do this job perfectly and be a professional in this ‘sphere;’ however, the word “*indispensable*”¹¹⁹ was “a word people tended to resort to when dispensability was in the air.”¹²⁰ Indeed, there were other female ‘humans’ who desired to undergo species change rather than suffer underground and work for the rich at the oxygen factory. Moreover, the company sent Isserley another request, and that is to obtain them “a vodsel female, preferably one with intact eggs.”¹²¹ This was one of the most significant changes in her perception of her own work and consideration of her future. Isserley’s species has the same binary perception of sexes, female and male. On her planet, the male sex with “their little power games”¹²² are socially privileged and hierarchically superior to females. After being asked to bring a vodsel female, Isserley hears “owls ... calling to each other, screaming like *human women* in orgasm.”¹²³ It is not clear if Isserley feels more empathy toward the vodsel women than towards men of her own species. However, her reaction to the news and her inability to continue her work makes me wonder if an ethical stance towards alterity could be built on Isserley’s taking the first step towards becoming-other in comparing herself to the vodsel females.

To summarise, Isserley cares about others but only about those who possess similar traits to ‘humans’ and who meet her concepts of ‘beauty.’ Those who do not fit these ‘criteria’ are excluded from her consideration—there is no becoming-other for Isserley, and there is no ethics in her treatment of her others. Isserley does not have enough material resources and capacity to become her main other, and that is vodsel, but she makes a step towards it by leaving her work and helping out her last hitchhiker whose “girrilfriend’s hugin’ a bebbby.”¹²⁴ After their car crash and before Isserley’s

¹¹⁵ Faber, ch.13.

¹¹⁶ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch.13.

¹¹⁷ Faber, ch.12.

¹¹⁸ Faber, ch.12 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁹ Faber, ch.4 (emphasis in original).

¹²⁰ Faber, ch.4.

¹²¹ Faber, ch.12.

¹²² Faber, ch.12.

¹²³ Faber, ch.13 (emphasis added).

¹²⁴ Faber, ch.13.

supposed suicide, her last thoughts are directed to her desire to “become part of the sky”¹²⁵ and to “live forever”¹²⁶ in this beautiful world. Perhaps being part of this celestial essence would make it possible for her to become everything around her and embrace all different living forms of existence.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the science fiction novel *Under the Skin* has explored the concepts of speciesism, carnism, subjectivity, eating the other, and becoming-other, demonstrating that an embodied form is linked to the speciesist attitudes and objectifications. Isserley’s speciesist hierarchical thinking rejects the subjectivity of the other. She anthropomorphizes and gives preference to those beings whose bodies resemble her own species, and the concept of carnism creates a specific mental schema that blocks Isserley from acknowledging the subjectivity of the other. The novel explores the intersection of the hierarchical systems of oppression. Isserley’s position as a desubjectified being prevents her from becoming-other, as her ‘humanness’ relies on the ‘somethingness’ of the other. The discourse of becoming-minoritarian and the concept of the other reflect the philosophical and activist necessity to elaborate on the theory and practice of ethical responsibility towards human and more-than-human entities. Becoming-other as a form of “*being-with others*”¹²⁷ allows humans to expand their thinking and ethical behavior beyond both corporeal and ‘non-physical’ borders, such as gender, race, species, mental and physical abilities, sexual orientation, age, etc. To extend ethical affinities to more-than-human animals and embrace the primary ‘Other,’ it is necessary to reconceptualize the boundaries between humans and more-than-human animals. These boundaries are “used to dehumanize the other so that ethics do not enter into certain kinds of killing,”¹²⁸ as exemplified in the novel by the forms of more-than-human animal exploitation in slaughterhouses. The application of these theories to instances of reversed speciesism in science fiction literature contributes to the reconsideration of exploitative and unnecessary cruel treatment of more-than-human animals. The resilience, subjectivity, and uniqueness of more-than-human animals inspire critical animal and vegan scholars to employ creative methods in liberating more-than-human animals as primary others. □

¹²⁵ Faber, *Under the Skin*, ch.13.

¹²⁶ Faber, ch.13.

¹²⁷ Ralph R. Acampora, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 120 (emphasis in original), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvs89dhj>.

¹²⁸ Vint, *Animal Alterity*, 117.

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