

## OTHERNESS IN CULTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL, THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE FILM “UNDER THE SKIN”

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This paper analyzes the expression of *otherness* as interpreted by modern philosophers and thinkers of, such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir through the prism of the film *Under the Skin* (2013). This paper will explore how *otherness* is expressed in the movie, be it from the position of the alien towards the human and of the human towards the alien, the implications this has for cultures and individuals living in a society, as well as possible hypotheses about how this process of *othering* can be overcome for the sake of a more open and accepting society, based on feminist and post-humanist ideas and philosophers such as Donna Haraway. We will see how by interpreting the movie through philosophical and culturological concepts, we can discover numerous ways through which the film can be understood to comment on social problems and dilemmas, on gender phenomena, immigration, the *subaltern*, the *gaze*, anthropocentrism and various topics of importance for contemporary philosophical and cultural thinking.

**Keywords:** feminism, post-humanism, cultural interpretation, anthropocentrism, the Other

## ДРУГОСТА ВО КУЛТУРАТА И ПОЕДИНЕЦОТ НИЗ ПРИЗМАТА НА ФИЛМОТ „ПОД КОЖА“

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Оваа статија ја анализира другоста, интерпретирана од философите и од современите мислители, како Емануел Левинас, Жан Пол Сартр, Симон де Бовоар и други, низ призмата на филмот „Под кожа“ (2013). Статијата ќе ги истражи начините на коишто другоста е изразена во филмот, од позиција на вонземјанин наспроти човек или од човек наспроти вонземјанин, импликациите за културите и за поединците коишто живеат во општеството, како и можната хипотеза преку која овој процес на исклучување (othering) може да се надмине, со цел создавање поотворено и инклузивно општество, втемелено врз феминистичките и постхуманистички идеи на философите како Дона Харавеј. Ќе видиме како преку интерпретација на филмот, користејќи философски и културолошки концепти, можеме да откриеме бројни начини на коишто тој може да се разбере за да се промислат социјалните проблеми и дилеми, родовите феномени, имиграцијата, субалтерното, погледот, антропоцентризмот и други значајни теми за современата философија и културологија.

**Клучни зборови:** феминизам, постхуманизам, културна интерпретација, антропоцентризам, Другиот

## 1 Introduction

*Under the Skin* is a sci-fi film directed by Jonathan Glazer, based loosely on the novel by the same name, from the Dutch author Michel Faber. It premiered in 2013 and was released worldwide in 2014. The film was a box-office failure, yet it managed to captivate audiences, receiving generally positive reviews by critics and audiences, even being ranked number 61 in the BBC’s 100 Greatest Films of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century list.

The subject of the film revolves around an alien that takes a woman’s form, preying on males in the city of Glasgow, Scotland, seducing them sexually, and in the end harnessing them for an unknown reason. The general ambiguity of much of the reasoning and thoughts behind the actions of the alien specifically, has created the possibility of multiple interpretations and viewpoints, which can be viewed from different perspectives and schools of thought. In this paper I shall examine some of the ideas and themes which may be expressed through the film, especially the *othering* in cultures, and also try to put it in a modern context. It is by doing this process that works of art, such as films, express one of their greatest powers: the ability to put the self-reflexive nature of the human mind to work. Modern-day society, especially in Europe and the US, has the tendency to often highlight this *otherness*, through politics and media. This is an all-too-human phenomenon: human beings wish to be differentiated from each other, yet media and access to technology has created a space of over-information and over-identification of this *otherness* which otherwise would have been expressed in smaller circles and societies. It doesn’t take much to find media articles from Europe where immigrants, many of African descent, are portrayed as perpetrators and criminals, especially highlighting their racial or ethnic background. The same has been witnessed in our region: the Balkans. It is not hard to find numerous articles highlighting the ethnic background of people involved in murders, killings, tragedies and crimes, without there being any logical need to highlight that ethnicity, except to rouse people towards nationalistic feelings by creating a dichotomy of *us* and *the others*. By using theories of otherness, feminism, posthumanism and morality we will see how, maybe even ambiguously, this film tackles themes of identity, acceptance and non-acceptance, selfhood and otherness, morality and immorality, and ideas of feminist theories, which can be of use especially in such confusing and “fake news”-ridden times for our societies.

## 2 The human as “the other”

The philosophical idea of “the other” and “otherness” take up an important space in modern philosophical and cultural thought, maybe made even more important in a modern context by general spread of right-wing politics (especially in Europe), rapid spread of information and technology, and the even more rapid development of AI sciences. What is *the other* and how can we understand it? Without getting into a deep philosophical rabbit hole on the meaning and definitions of “the oth-

er,” we can understand it as “that which is not me,” or in a larger context, as “that which is not us,” something which is outside of ourselves and through this distance is ungraspable. Jean-Paul Sartre managed to define the other as “others are the Other, that is the self which is not myself” (Sartre 1956: 230). Emmanuel Levinas describes *the other* as that which is outside of our grasp, that which is outside our conception and “invasion,” that which is metaphysical as he says: “The Other is metaphysical” (Levinas 1961: 87). He expresses this idea in reference to *other* humans, *other* “selves,” but this idea has been used to respond to even greater concepts of *otherness* such as God, which Levinas also refers to as “The Other,” not as a being in itself, but as *an other* who calls towards ethical responsibility and openness, an idea tackled specifically in his 1974 book *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*.

What interests us the most is the relation the characters of the film have with this concept of *otherness* and *the other*. The film can be understood as playing from two perspectives: the perspective of the alien, and the perspective of humanity. What is characteristic of this film is the fact that as an audience, we are drawn to empathize with the alien, not antagonize it. The alien is never shown in its true form (except the end), rather it is always presented in a woman’s form. As an audience, this creates a tension and question for us: who *is the other* in this context? Are the humans the others, or is it the woman (alien)? Here the film seems to play on Levinas’ concept of “the face of the other” – the idea that when confronted with the physical face of a being, we are called, maybe even ordered, to be responsible, open and accepting of the *other* being, as Levinas states, the face forbids us to kill (1974). “To kill” in this context can be understood not only as a physical wish to kill the character, but a wish to antagonize, to distance ourselves from the perceived threat to humans and humanity as a whole. Yet, the position created in the film makes it tough for the audience to create a moral high-ground over the plot, thus making the audience part of the plot’s dilemmas and not just an observer. We are drawn to empathize with the alien, from a feminist viewpoint – with the woman. By creating this complex context we are invited to attend to the film from two viewpoints: that of the alien towards the humans, and of the humans towards the alien.

First, let’s analyze this otherness from the viewpoint of the alien. The alien positions itself in the position of “the predator,” or “the dominant being.” As such, the film starts by creating a dichotomy of “me” and “us” from the viewpoint of the alien. The alien, presented by a woman, has one goal in her mind: harnessing humans (the others) for her personal benefits. The humans, with their overdependence on sexuality and biological instincts provide an easy target for the alien, which uses female sexuality to attract interested men. They, humans, are not “beings” for her, rather they are beings which can be used as a means to an end: personal benefit. This can very well be compared to general human attitudes towards other worldly beings, and thus raises questions of morality and ethics, raised also by posthumanists and ecocritics of modern society: is nature (animals specifically) treated in an ethical manner? Or another important question which can be highlighted by this dichotomy of relationships presented in the beginning of the film is: is an anthropocentric view of the world a moral and ethically ac-

ceptable viewpoint? For now, it is important to notice a dichotomy which is presented from the very beginning, by the stance of the alien towards the humans. The humans are *others* from the alien's viewpoint. They express ethical values which are unknown and ungraspable for the alien as such, thus there appears a deep disconnection between their worlds, highlighted very beautifully, in the sea scene, where we can see the alien expressing her moral/ethical values, and also humans expressing their own moral/ethical values. By choosing not to help the drowning couple, by leaving the child to cry alone by the shore, the film shows the deep disconnect between these two worlds. The alien doesn't understand human values; thus she doesn't have a moral compass which resembles a general human one. This reflects a core situation presented in the first half of the film: the alien hasn't recognized *the face of the other*, in this instance, the face of the human, she is shown as invincible towards it, thus it isn't able to recognize traits that we might define as "human" or "of beings" in their presence.

This reflection raises questions about our intra-human relations towards *othering* politics. It raises questions on how modern societies tend to *other-ize* groups of humans (but not only), be it on basis of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, political partisanship, asking us to find our own position regarding these *other-ings*. It also raises the question of what it means to notice the face of the other, and how much of the process of noticing that face of the other is in our own 'hands,' or how much in contrast depends on the position of *the other*, and how much of it is a biological process. The film seems to suggest that a process like that cannot be achieved without "putting ourselves in the shoes of the *other*," without understanding what it means to be the *other*, expressed in the second half of the movie. This will be expanded in the latter part of the paper.

Another philosophical and social theme which is often expressed through the film, is the idea of "the gaze," evidenced even by the first scene of the film: the creation of an eye. The philosophical idea of the gaze, as the act of looking, observing or contemplating someone or something is widely discussed in modern philosophy and cultural studies. For Sartre, the gaze is, firstly, a central aspect of human subjectivity and self-awareness. It creates a sense of self, of a being that is being experienced by the outside world, yet oftentimes objectified and turned into a mere object, *a collection of flesh*. As he states: "But the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other. By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (Sartre 1956: 222). Put into the context of the movie, we can notice the physical act of gazing, looking, or noticing, from the very beginning of the film; noticed on the stance that the alien takes towards humans, looking at them, *gazing* them, hunting them, we can even suppose, for their flesh (as mentioned in the book on which the film was based). This act of gazing is even more pronounced in the last moments of the victims' lives: falling into the dark abyss, they are confronted with the look of the alien, the last gaze of the other, which gives them the sense of self, which is then being lost while they come to their end. In this context the gaze of the alien alienates the humans, it isolates them and, in a way, destroys the humanity that they achieve from it.

The concept of *the gaze* is perfectly expressed by the camera work. The visuals often focus on the alien's act of looking and gazing for her next prey. The gaze, acts in this sense as an act of judgment and a tool of judgment, highlighting the weakness of the others (humans in this case) by consciously looking at them as a means to an end. By this process of gazing which becomes so evident through the figure of the alien, we are asked to position ourselves morally in that context. How much of *our* gazing is a process of judgment which leads to other-ing and disconnect between people and groups? It clearly reflects a political struggle: of the powerful – predator (alien) and the weak – prey (humans). This gaze of the alien thus is used to express this differentiation even more, it highlights differences, and creates even more of those, as acts of judgments often do.

Yet, the film plays on another modern and quite interesting perspective of the gaze. Something, often called in feminist circles, *the male gaze*. As defined by Laura Mulvey, the concept of *the male gaze* has played an important role in our ideas around films and culture in general. She argued, in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that mainstream cinema and films was built around a male, heterosexual perspective, which placed women as objects of male desires, as she says:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey 1975: 11).

It is not hard to find examples of this behavior in public media, be it cinema or music videos for example. Building on this concept of the male gaze, the film gives a new perspective, here we do not see *the male gaze*, but we witness *the female gaze*. The positions of active and passive have been reversed, challenging the normal and ever-present existence of the male gaze in world culture, creating thus a reversing of roles which highlights feminist calls to reverse and challenge patriarchal structures, of which the male gaze is a part. This *female gaze* shown in the movie gives “power” to the woman, yet it also creates a new problem: by expressing the female position through the creature of a monster, alien in this case, which has negative tendencies towards humanity, we can start to question the effects of this reversing of roles: doesn't this express right-wing and conservative positions that a changing of traditional social norms is an idea pushed by “female predators”? Doesn't this concept play into the idea of conservative thinkers that feminists and “femi-nazis” as they are often named, wish to completely overpower males? Yet, counterarguing this position, looking deeper into the context of this reversal of roles, we can try to understand the alien not just as an expression of female desires, but contrary, it can be used to express already established positions of male-dominated societies and traditions, in which, contrary to what the literal scenes of the films show, it is the power-rulers (males) which behave in the way the alien signals (since the alien can be used to express dominant structures in this situation), it is often argued that male power-structures are those that try, have tried, and often in history managed, to dominate, overpower, neglect and repress female presence in culture and society.

Thus, this concept presented by the film can be used to express a more nuanced and present tendency of power struggles: general *other*-ing and objectification of less powerful structures by dominant structures, expressed not only through the male-female dichotomy, but also racial, social, class and ethnic lines.

This discussion of power relations can be used to express one of the most important themes of the film: the struggle between dominant and "lesser" structures. Thus, we can notice how through the perspective of the alien the film expresses tensions in the relations of *others*. The alien, as a figure, is the mechanism which highlights the expressed dichotomizations of our world, of our societies and cultures. We can notice that the figure of the alien is a break from the typical, a break of the traditional conservative and social values often expressed in dominant structures of already-established societies, and by expressing this break, by showing the totality of the human race as *the other*, the film highlights the often-present mechanisms of *other*-ing used to divide human beings into politicized "us" – "them" pairs, often misused for power benefits, hegemonic rule, or economic profit, meanwhile ostracizing less present and powerful groups and cultures.

### 3 The (dis)connection between others

Yet, the narrative arc through which the figure of the alien passes during the second part of the film is of great importance to the messages and themes that the film elicits. The alien experiences a mental transformation, expressed as a transition specifically in some scenes of the movie. The first of these events is expressed through the appearance of empathy and sorrow towards humans, breaking the until-then established relation between predator and prey. This second part of the film seems to indicate a tendency towards an idea expressed by Hannah Arendt as *world-building*. By participating in social interactions, by accepting the other as part of one's experience, we become part of collective and individual world-building. As Rosine Kelz summarizes: "Finally, it is up to those who remain on the sidelines to establish, by judging and narrating, the actor's identity. Arendt asserts that the reality of the political realm has a narrative character" (Kelz 2016: 28). This position very clearly represents the ways in which the alien begins being part of the human *world* and in return participating in her own *world-creating* (a process of establishing connections and relations with the world and herself), a process which will be affected by relationships between her and humans present in that world. This participation in the human world, and in return, the start of her own world-creating begins to happen during the second part of the film, when the alien lures into her van a man with a deformed face, played by the actor Adam Pearson. This character clearly expresses *other*-ing: by being so different physically, he has been deprived of acceptance by conventional social, sexual, and human norms; he has become an *other*. One would not be entirely wrong in associating him with another expression of the subaltern. "The subaltern cannot speak," says Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and truly, this character cannot speak; he is eliminated from general society by the existence of a feature (his face deformity) that is not of his or anyone's choosing, as are race, caste or ethnicity (Spivak 1994: 104). Faced with this representation of ostraci-

zation the alien faces another example of *other*-ing: the *other* (character played by Adam Pearson to humans) ostracized by *the others* (humans to the alien). This confrontation seemingly has a psychological effect on the alien, making her question her own relation to humans. It is of great effect that a character with a deformed face is the force that pushes the alien towards noticing of *the face of the other* – the power to notice other entities as unique and irreducible identities, not only as objects or means to an end. This confrontation with the concept of the *face of the other* is the moral turning-point for the alien, aligning her moral compass to a more “humane” one. This turning-point is also interestingly expressed by the fact that she decides to not kill the character played by Adam Pearson, rather accepting his existence as an independent entity. This throws us back to one of the main concepts expressed by Levinas and the face – as a call, to, first of all, not kill, yet also calling her to respond to his humanity and especially, vulnerability. Yet another cinematic moment which expresses this reevaluation of the alien’s moral stance is expressed by the contact she has with *her own face* after releasing the character played by Adam Pearson. By *gazing herself* the alien goes through processes of moral perfectionism as expressed by Stanley Cavell. Kelz defines Cavell’s moral perfectionism as follows:

Cavell’s perfectionist ethics... is part of a tradition of moral philosophy where ethics is defined as a reflexive turn towards the self. Two ways of assuming moral responsibility come into play here: First, the individual becomes a moral subject by assuming responsibility for her actions... Second, ethical responsibility, in the perfectionist sense, implies that the individual takes responsibility for who she is and could become. (Kelz 2016: 83).

Yet Cavell does stress that this process of concern over the self, nevertheless unfolds itself in its engagement with others (*ibid*). One could argue that by examining herself in the mirror, the alien goes through the process of self-examination and self-criticism per Cavell’s ideas, re-evaluating her moral stance in the world by positioning it with regard to the presence of *others* which have their own identity and right-to-life, and conflicting it with her own ethical stance and position. It is through this self-examination, even in a literal sense, that the alien can notice that she is ‘more human’ than she would think, even in a physical, bodily sense. This discovery now plays an important role in the direction that her moral stance takes: she starts to see herself as part of the *others*, she has already become one of them in a physical form, now being transformed even morally.

Analyzed from a different angle, this process of becoming human shares similarities to Judith Butler’s ideas of performativity regarding gender, identities, and through this film, species. By using the idea expressed by Butler that “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” we can get a new understanding towards the figure of the alien in the film (Butler 1990: 25). One could argue that this process of humanization, of “changing of identities,” could be a process forced by species-related norms (cultural and social forces), of which the alien is now a part of, especially by physically becoming a human. By recognizing the *face of the other* and as a result becoming part of *their world*, she is now part of a social construct of humanization which



relates to every human: she becomes part of the humanizing machine. It would be interesting to delve deeper into the psychological aspects that could influence this transition, yet the film pushes us towards an understanding that this process of humanization is something which the alien wishes for and enjoys. Here, performative identity is in action: by wanting to *become* human, the alien acts as a human, during the second part of the film. She tries to eat as a human would, tries to have sex as a human, tries to experience human feelings, yet she mostly fails at these tasks. She spits back the cake that she tries to eat, she isn't able to have sex since she doesn't have human reproductive organs and in return, she gives up on trying to experience the human feeling of love.

These situations are interesting in the way that they position the concept of performative identity. Does the alien fail at being human because of her biological difference (even though it is similarities in biological appearance which appear to push her towards humanization)? Could this be understood as a criticism of performative ideas as outside-of-biology? One could argue that by creating a performative identity from the very beginning of the film, the alien putting itself in a woman's body and acting as a woman in a social context, and then later on trying to accept this identity but failing to be part of humanity by her biological differences, the film could suggest a more traditional viewpoint on the topic of identity construction, emphasizing the importance of biological construct in identity construction. Isn't the effort to become part of that human structure an expression of the power hegemonic structures have on individual identities, and by accepting this pressure, and actually wanting to actively participate in them, show the alien to be the opposite of an independent entity?

Yet, alternatively, this situation presented in the film, could raise other questions on the importance of biological construct in the construction of identities. Does the inability to have sex and eat as a human deprive someone from the right to be human? The concept of biological identification plays an important role in the latter part of the film. This can be seen during the second encounter the alien has with herself, when she gazes at herself now by literally and metaphorically "shedding light" on her biological situation: the scene after she fails to have sex with a human and is examining her genital organs. This moment becomes a scene of another realization: she cannot be human *to others* since she isn't really biologically human. This could be understood to represent a stance of defeat to the impossibility of becoming something due to biological limitations, yet it could also be understood as the ostracization of someone we do not count as *someone*, something similar to the character played by Adam Pearson. We will return to this matter in the next chapter, but it is important to notice similarities between non-acceptance regarding gender or identity in our own societies, and the non-acceptance of the alien, thus being seen even as a critique of hegemonic powers and structures of mentalities. We can see that this second part of the film has an important role in exploring themes of identity, morality, acceptance, conformity and alterity. It tackles big questions of the importance of systems and practices of cultures, the way we connect and/or disconnect from others, and troubles that rise from the tensions between these stances, even in our own way of identifying with ourself and the world.

#### 4 The alien as “the other”

As mentioned previously, the film could also be interpreted from the position of the human as the hegemonic structure which sees the alien as *the other*. First, let’s analyze the figure of the alien as an expression of womanhood and women’s presence. The woman seems to play on the general patriarchal tendency of the male gaze: she is an attractive young woman, seemingly open to sexual relationship, and quickly becomes *other-ized* in the eyes of the males. It is quite of interest to note here that almost all of the scenes where the woman communicates with men in the streets of Glasgow have been filmed with a hidden camera, and their reactions are as true as they can get. Keeping this in mind the film manages to break an important barrier which often doesn’t allow people to feel the effects of art in “real” life: the scenes are a representation of reality, not of a reality imagined by the director, thus it speaks even more strongly on the presence of male tendencies to objectify the female. It is in this context that we witness the *other-izing* that happens from humans, specifically males, and which in turn ties to the tendency of expressing the male gaze explained beforehand: they experience the woman (alien) as an object through which they could possibly fulfill their sexual desires and fantasies. This tendency could point to something which ties to the character played by Adam Pearson. He, being ostracized by general human society, being deprived of sensual and sexual contact in his human life (expressed clearly by his inability to communicate with others), might represent the act not of sexualizing and objectifying the woman (alien), but of *finally* having the ability to have a humane connection with someone. It might be the case, then, that this vulnerability and weakness expressed by Adam Pearson’s character, this expression of moral and deeply *humane* values is the force that pushes the alien towards “humanization.” Or yet, it could be understood as a moment of connection or empathy between two entities which have been *other-ized* by the same structure: humans.

It is not by coincidence that the woman is only shown naked in two instances during the film, even though she has numerous sexual contacts: the first, when she lures Adam Pearson’s character in her house, and the second time, in the house with the man she tries to have “real,” “human,” sex. In both cases this signifies vulnerability shown on the part of the alien, in the first case, as explained beforehand, she is changed from the encounter she had with Adam Pearson’s character, and on the second instance, she is showing vulnerability in a “human” manner as an attempt to become human. These scenes express changes in her attitude, yet they also express attempts at connection between two entities that would otherwise be *others* to each-other. And the second instance could yet be used as an example of a difference in attitudes towards *others* when analyzed from a male-female perspective in a patriarchal society. In this case the man doesn’t just see her as a means of achieving his sexual desires, as an object of pleasure, but rather as an identity to be respected – expressing another possibility of humans to coexist, also expressing another idea, that of vulnerability and the existence of humanhood only when we see each-other in a respectable manner.

But this seemingly idyllic scene is quickly halted by the “realization” that she can’t be human, thus deciding to leave the house and visiting a cabin, meeting a

logger during the way. It is through this logger that we as an audience are again thrown into a position of *other-ing*. She falls asleep and wakes up with the logger touching her sexually, thus she attempts to escape. In this scene we again witness a change of attitudes in the film: the gaze, once deployed and used by the woman (alien) now returns to the man (logger), again it returns to its contemporary holder in our societies, she has become "prey" and man has become predator. This could easily be understood to represent rape and harassment culture present throughout cultures, now coming as a shock to the alien, which had until now not experienced such an attitude towards her. She has blatantly been *other-ed*, though not as an alien, but as a woman. This situation could be interpreted as a strong commentary on crimes, rape, harassment, and general disrespect shown towards females: she has become the object of a powerful structure which blatantly and repeatedly mistreats members of her gender.

But it is interesting to note the ending scene of the film: the woman trying to escape is tackled by the logger. As she tries to escape from his grip, he rips her skin, showing to us and the logger her true alien form. The logger then kills the alien, lighting her on fire. Yet again we notice a shift in attitude towards her: from an object of desire and sexual gratification, the alien becomes an object of fear and disgust – now she expresses *the fear of the other*. We could argue that this scene highlights a tendency of humans to *other-ize* and judge others strictly by their appearance. This holds valuable importance when put into a racial and ethnic context, possibly connecting it with attitudes towards immigrants and people of different races which oftentimes we are quick to judge without knowing them in a "human" level. This attitude is especially present in western right-wing medias which are having a great presence in social media with the rise of popular figures such as Donald Trump, Ben Shapiro, Andrew Tate and Jordan B. Peterson. Highlighting and blaming immigrants for societal and economic problem has become the norm in numerous political and social circles and it is of interest to note that one often used term to refer to immigrants is *aliens*. By expressing this fear towards *appearances* the film pushes us to consider our own individual and social stances towards the acceptance of others and their right to the opportunity of living a more fulfilling life. Thus, by the end of the film not only has the process of *other-ing* and gazing been reversed, and returned to their temporarily established positions, but these reversals also push us to explore the depths and layers of *other-ization* that we express and experience in society and culture, since the alien is not only *other-ized* as a woman, but as another identity or being entirely. This expression of the politics of *otherness* fits with the general purpose of these politics: to maintain and establish already-existing structure. By being *other-ed* as a woman and as an alien, the alien is excluded from the moral responsibility of the man (logger), arguably representing the dominating structure of modern (but not only) societies. Being gazed as an *other* from different aspects, the alien represents *layers of otherness* which feed from one-another to create a mosaic of hatred and disgust, but also of rebellion and resistance, to the man.

Another process which happens in the last part of the film is a process of change and realization, as she "sheds her skin," holding her human face on her hands, understanding again that under the skin, she is still an alien. Again, as in the mirror

scene, she witnesses “her” face, but not as herself, not as part of that performance, but as an outsider. It is not random that the name of the film is “Under the Skin”. As an idiom in the English language, it is used to mean “in reality, as opposed to superficial appearances,” suggesting again that, this could be a criticism of performative identities as suggested by Butler, since “in reality” as much as the alien wants to be human, she cannot ever be one. Yet again though, the question of who judges whether she can become human arises, and what does it mean for someone or something to become human? – is it the appearance, or behavior? Explored from this angle, we can come to something of a conclusion that the alien, even though not able to “fully” live as a human, identifies as such in the end. This psychological change can even be understood by the shocked and sorrowful expression implied by her when she sees her human skin dismantled on her hands: she wanted to be a human, yet in the end, she wouldn’t be accepted as such.

By showing the audience two expressions of otherness – one towards humans and the other towards the alien – the film nevertheless explores themes and topics of the same kind: isolation, ostracization, judgment, objectification and *other*-ing present throughout societies and cultures. The film raises questions of identity, how we create them, how we place them in different worlds created by different identities, how we connect and disconnect from these *others*, and how we are influenced by the process of being *other*-ed. It raises questions of morality, acceptance, communication and openness, expressing vulnerability as a means of identity and world creation. It highlights self-examination and self-criticism, it highlights questions of what it means to be oneself, what it means to be stepped on and *alienated*, bringing to the forefront topics and problems very much present in today’s societies and politics.

By expressing these themes and ideas, and by often creating dichotomies of “us” and “them” the film manages to put the audience in the middle of a juxtaposition. Where do we find ourselves in the relations that are expressed by the alien and its adventure in the human world? We are pushed to dislike the alien for its inhumane behavior, yet at the end we feel sympathy for it. But is that a fair moral judgment from our part? Do we like her in the end just because she behaves in accordance to our own “human moral compass” and does this call to something related to moral relativism? How can we judge the morality of another species? These are all questions raised if we try to distance our idea of morality from an anthropocentric point-of-view, and these are questions which also have a deep philosophical importance to modern society.

## 5 The shift towards understanding

Now, having analyzed the ways in which the film represents the above-mentioned themes, during this chapter I will try to expand on ideas that try to give solutions or viewpoints regarding these themes, and how can these ideas expressed in this film be tackled in our modern society. By exploring these themes and by using ideas from different contemporary thinkers the film manages to push us towards attitude of more openness and acceptance in society. When Simone de Beauvoir says “otherness is a fundamental category of human thought” she seems to hint at a funda-

mental truth of the human condition: we are a species that divide and *other-ize* (de Beauvoir 1953: 16). It might well be this tendency to divide and categorize *others* that has helped us survive and develop as a species to this stage. It has allowed us to differentiate friend from foe in prehistoric times, it has allowed us, at the same time, to create a sense of identity and what it means to be *I* in a world full of other *I*-s. Yet, as much as this process of *other-ing* can be seen as a natural process, it is nevertheless *not neutral*. The times of prehistoric anxiousness over survival have passed, and now, especially Western societies, find themselves expressing different nuances of this non-neutrality. This process of *other-ing* is the same process that creates enemies and targets even in our own species.

Let's analyze this process, first in our country, and then try to find examples of it from all around the world, in the meantime noticing implications it may have on our societies. The Republic of North Macedonia is a multi-ethnic country, including in it, majority Macedonians, a significant minority of Albanians, and smaller, yet also quite present, minorities of Serbs, Bosnians, Turks and Roma populations. Being comprised of such varying people and cultures, and being quite far from the general idea of a nation-state, North Macedonia has historically been a breeding ground of ethnic and multicultural collaboration, yet also of tension and conflict. It is not at all rare to witness purposefully provocative mentions of ethnic background in news and articles about criminal happenings or fits of violence in the style of "Albanian man..." or "Two Macedonians..." But this phenomenon is not something pushed only by medias and blogs, it is a purposeful play on general nationalistic and ethnic tensions and feelings bred through years of *other-ing* nationalities and ethnicities. It is not just a push towards *other-ing*, it is also a phenomenon created by it. This phenomenon is not something typical only to North Macedonia, it can be found in every country where different cultures or ethnicities co-live. We might be more familiar with racial separation in the US, yet nuances of *other-ing* can be also found in Africa (between tribes and ethnicities), in India (from the caste system), and in pretty much every part of the world. This again shows to prove De Beauvoir's point that this process of *other-ing* is a fundamental category of human thought. Yet some questions which arise from these situations, expressed so sharply by the film, are: should it be overcome, can it be overcome, and how do we go about this process?

Should *other-ing* be a process that we resist? If we use the viewpoint of *The Golden Rule*: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"—an idea present in every Abrahamic religion, religious ideas of the East such as Buddhism and even Confucianism, yet also echoed in Kant and other philosophers of the Western tradition—then yes we should! Being such a widespread idea, present in independent cultures and schools of thought, one would not be wrong in believing that this idea has a deep significance in the way that humans need to see the world and society. Seen as an echo of acceptance towards the *other*, this quote also reminds of the importance that the collective efforts of humanity have had in building societies and cultures. It is only through cooperation and acceptance of each other that we truly become human, otherwise nothing *great* that has come from the human world would have been possible. From this perspective, we can easily answer the first question: Yes, we need to learn to overcome this process of *other-ing* those that we perceive as different from us and our culture/tradition.

But can this be done? I believe history is full of cases when cooperation, acceptance and openness to *others* has been achieved and has resulted in new attitudes. I would argue that one of those examples is the United States of America. Yes, this country has deep-rooted notions of racism and *otherness* connected with it, but the idea of the existence of the U.S. from a European point-of-view is quite fascinating. Settlers, coming from totally different national and ethnic backgrounds get together to create a new country which encompasses all of them under the same name of American. This in itself is even more fascinating when connected with general attitudes of *otherness* present historically in Europe regarding its nationalities: one shouldn't forget the enormously long wars and battles, genocides and killings, that have happened in the European continent, and yet, those 'life-long' enemies got together to create a new identity, that of American. This argument shouldn't be seen as a justification of racist and imperialist tendencies (ways of *other-ing*) expressed by the U.S. throughout history, but it is quite an astonishing moment of overcoming one aspect of *other-ing*. One other example that comes to mind is that of Switzerland, a state made up of mainly four different nationalities and cultures, yet which coexist under the same state and institutional power which has overcome this process of *other-ing* in some respects. I wouldn't know if this is a sentiment expressed by the general population there, yet the institutional powers do express this openness and acceptance of *others* as an important part of its existence. These are just two examples out of a lot of times when, at least, aspects of *other-ing* have been overcome by a society or institutions, and these examples could be used to express the possibility that these changes can actually happen, and in result, produce societies which create rich cultures, economies and freedoms.

And how do we go about undoing this process of *other-ing* in our societies? This is one of the most important and complex questions regarding modern societies. And if we establish that *otherness* is one of the fundamental categories of the human thought, it is a process that would probably require deep rethinking on how we view the world, *others* and ourselves. One rather interesting and quite possible way of looking on how to treat this problematic process of othering, might be the idea expressed by Donna Haraway in her 1985 essay titled *A Cyborg Manifesto*. By proposing the idea of a *cyborg*, which knows no biological connection, and which is independent of traditional (especially Western) schools of thought and action, such as patriarchy, colonialism, essentialism and naturalism, this cyborg society could escape traditional and problematic forms of taxonomies, which is another way of expressing the idea of *other-ing*. So, male/female, culture/nature, civilized/primitive etc. shall make no more sense in a society which has disconnected its base from the human tradition. In this sense, a connection with machines, the creation of a new form of "Frankenstein's monster" though which is not connected to a specific creator as he is, would bring the possibility of blurring of boundaries and differences between categories of *others*. Analyzing this idea, I would add that even though this concept is a viable one, maybe one which is closer than we think (we need not look far for such great technological developments that are happening as of late all around the world), yet, a serious problem arises: if this cyborgism takes its literal form of real creation of "a new species," and goes hand-in-hand with the general tendency of hegemonic powers to maintain that power and make it inac-

cessible to the general population, this could potentially lead to a society where the already-established elites (rich people, influential figures of politics and society, etc.) use this technology and privy it from less privileged groups to maintain their supremacy. It is reasonable to think that these kinds of developments in technology would not be restricted only to bio-technological spheres, but be used to influence political and social structures, creating a dystopian future where the few control these technologies and use them inside their own circles, while the mass continues its existence under this influence. Thus, a change of this nature, I propose, would need to be connected with a general world-wide change in attitudes towards these technologies, not appropriated for the few, but available to all, in a regulated and safe manner.

But, it is quite possible that these kind of technologies and developments will never be achieved, or at least for a long period of time. What in this case? I propose, that the fastest and most direct way to tackle this problem would be a change of perspective of human societies. Post-humanists and eco-critics have long wondered over the nature of our anthropocentric view over the world. Yet to achieve a total *all*-centric view on life and world, we need to be able to escape individual and group-centric viewpoints. It is a development away from the *us*-centric that could allow us to achieve *all*-centrism. In my viewpoint this would encompass firstly, a shift towards empathetic and self-critical viewpoints, as expressed by Cavell, but also Butler and Arendt. It is only through a tendency towards understanding and acceptance, by following the Golden Rule, by being able to put ourselves in the place of the other, that the first base of a shift towards an *all*-centric viewpoint will be available – I propose that as a step towards this acceptance can be the inclusion and practice of ethical subjects in schools from a very young age. Next, general human societies need to create a system of checks and balances with regard to institutional and cultural integration, a system to educate on, yet shun *other*-ingas a means of functioning in a public sphere. And more radically, I would propose a shift away from national identification, towards human identification. This last step would encompass, most importantly, the loss and disappearance of ethnic and different languages, to be replaced by one human language, a language similar to Esperanto, or whatever form it may take, since it is language, our means of communication and miscommunication that often disallows us from having a human and empathic contact. This in return could allow for a general creation and acceptance of new forms of culture and society, new forms of ideas and thoughts, which could create a connected and accepting *world-society*.

But, as utopian (or dystopian) as this proposition may be, we are far from this situation. We need action now, and that action needs to take the form of more public presence of liberal intellectuals in media and society in large. It needs to take the form of education on the values of acceptance, cooperation and mutual-respect. It needs to take the form of distancing from *other*-ing activities and provocations, and we need to remind ourselves more often that behind all the different languages, cultures, rituals, traditions and beliefs, in the end, we are all, *all too human*.

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