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SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

**A film by Pedro Almodóvar**

# THE SKIN I LIVE IN

**Official Selection**



2011 Cannes Film Festival  
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2011 New York Film Festival, Gala Screening

**Golden Globe Award Nominee**  
Best Foreign Language Film

**Critics' Choice Movie Award Nominee**  
Best Foreign Language Film

**[www.theskiniliveinmovie.com](http://www.theskiniliveinmovie.com)**

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# THE SKIN I LIVE IN

## CAST

Antonio Banderas	Robert Ledgard
Elena Anaya	Vera
Marisa Paredes	Marilia
Jan Cornet	Vicente
Roberto Álamo	Zeca
Eduard Fernández	Fulgencio
Blanca Suárez	Norma
Susi Sánchez	Vicente's mother
Bárbara Lennie	Cristina
Fernando Cayo	Doctor
and José Luis Gómez	President of the Biotechnology Institute

## CREW

Director	Pedro Almodóvar
Screenplay	Pedro Almodóvar, with the collaboration of Agustín Almodóvar and based on "Mygale" by Thierry Jonquet, Éditions Gallimard
Producers	Agustín Almodóvar & Esther García
Composer	Alberto Iglesias
Editor	José Salcedo
Cinematographer	José Luis Alcaine
Art Director	Antxon Gómez
Associate Producer	Bárbara Peiró
Director of Production	Toni Novella
Sound	Iván Marín
Sound Editor	Pelayo Gutiérrez
Mixer	Marc Orts
Make-up	Karmele Soler
Hair	Manolo Carretero
Wardrobe	Paco Delgado, with the collaboration of Jean-Paul Gaultier

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

Ever since his wife was burned in a car crash, Dr. Robert Ledgard, an eminent plastic surgeon, has been interested in creating a new skin with which he could have saved her. After twelve years, he manages to cultivate in his own laboratory, a skin that is sensitive to caresses, but a real shield against all the aggressions, both external and internal, to which our largest organ is submitted. To obtain it, he has used the possibilities provided by cellular therapy.

In addition to years of study and experimentation, Robert needed a human guinea pig, an accomplice and no scruples. Scruples were never a problem, they weren't part of his character. Marilia, the woman who looked after him from the day he was born, is his most faithful accomplice. And as for the human guinea pig...

Over the course of each year, dozens of young people of both sexes disappear from their homes, in many cases of their own will. One of those young people will end up sharing the splendid mansion, El Cigarral, with Robert and Marilia, and will be doing so unwillingly.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Ever since his wife was burned in a car crash, Dr. Robert Ledgard, an eminent plastic surgeon, has been interested in creating a new skin with which he could have saved her. After twelve years, he manages to cultivate a skin that is a real shield against every assault.

In addition to years of study and experimentation, Robert needed three more things: no scruples, an accomplice and a human guinea pig. Scruples were never a problem. Marilia, the woman who looked after him from the day he was born, is his most faithful accomplice. And as for the human guinea pig...

## ABOUT *THE SKIN I LIVE IN*

There are irreversible processes, roads of no return, one way journeys. *The Skin I Live In* tells the story of one of those processes. The protagonist travels one of those roads against her will, she is forced violently to set out on journey from which she cannot return. Her Kafkaesque story is the result of a sentence handed out by a jury made up of just one person, her worst enemy. The verdict, therefore, is a form of extreme revenge.

*The Skin I Live In* tells the story of that revenge.

The first images in the film are of a mansion surrounded by trees, an idyllic place. It's called El Cigarral and it's protected by stone walls and a high barred gate. Through one of the mansion's windows, also barred, we can make out a female figure in motion. Once we are inside the room, the woman seems to be naked as she carries out a series of complicated yoga positions; in the close-ups we discover that she isn't naked, she is totally covered by a flesh coloured body stocking that clings to her like a second skin. In the kitchen, Marilia, the housekeeper, prepares the woman's breakfast which she then sends up in a dumb waiter that opens directly onto the room.

From the outset, El Cigarral is portrayed as a prison in the midst of nature. An isolated place, inaccessible to eyes on the outside. The first actions that show us Vera, the captive woman concentrating on her yoga positions, and Marilia, her jailer, seem strangely routine, lacking in any tension. But life in El Cigarral wasn't always so peaceful.

In her six years of enforced reclusion, Vera has lost, among other things, the most extensive part of the human body, her own skin. Literally, she has shed her skin along the way.

Skin is the frontier that separates us from others, it determines the race to which we belong, it reflects our emotions and our roots, whether biological or geographical. Many times it reflects the state of the soul, but skin isn't the soul. Although Vera has changed her skin, she hasn't lost her identity. (Identity and its invulnerability is another of the film's themes). In any case, the loss of one's skin is atrocious! This is only one of the many losses that leave Vera on the verge of death, by her own desire or in the operating theatre, at the hands of Dr. Robert. But she is a born survivor and, after many difficulties, she decides that "she has to learn to live within her skin", even if it is a skin imposed by Dr. Robert. Once she has accepted her second skin, Vera takes the second most important decision in order to survive: she'll learn to wait.

Eliás Canetti, in his notes on "The Enemy of Death" (a title that defines very well Vera's attitude to life) from his "Book of Dead People", writes: "...the uninterrupted pacing of a tiger behind the bars of its cage so that it won't miss the single, fleeting instant of salvation"

Curiously, that brief instant to which Canetti refers comes to Vera in the form of a tiger, or rather, a man wearing a tiger costume.

One day, during Carnival, a man in a tiger costume manages to get to the hermetically sealed door of the room where Vera is held captive. This incident breaks the impasse in which the three residents of El Cigarral have been living. Paradoxically, given the customs of Carnival, this is the moment when the characters remove their masks and the final tragedy casts its black shadow without any of them being able to do anything to prevent it.

A story of these characteristics made me think of Luis Buñuel, Alfred Hitchcock, all of Fritz Lang's films (from the gothic to the *noir*). I also thought of the pop aesthetic of Hammer horror, or the more psychedelic, kitsch style of the Italian *giallo* (Dario Argento, Mario Bava, Umberto Lenzi or Lucio Fulci...) and of course the lyricism of Georges Franju in *Eyes Without a Face*. After evaluating all these references, I realized that none of them fitted with what I needed for *The Skin I Live In*. For some months I thought seriously about making a silent film, in black and white, with captions which showed descriptions and dialogue. And paying tribute to Fritz Lang and Murnau. After doubting for months, I decided to go my own way and let myself be carried along by intuition, after all, it's what I've always done, without the shadow of the maestros of the genre (among other reasons because I don't know to what genre this film belongs) and renouncing my own cinematic memory. I only knew that I had to impose an austere narrative, free of visual rhetoric and not at all gory, even though a lot of blood has been spilled in the ellipses that we don't see. It isn't the first time I've started from this premise before shooting, but I think that *The Skin I Live In* is the film where I have got closest to it.

I've been accompanied on this journey by José Luis Alcaine, the director of photography, to whom I didn't explain what I wanted but rather what I didn't want, and he knew how to give the photography the density, the glow and the darkness that suited it best. The musician Alberto Iglesias, the only artist I know without an ego, tireless, versatile, patient, capable of looking in one direction and then looking in the opposite direction if I wasn't satisfied, always subject to the dictates of the story and my way of feeling it. And actors who were generous and precise, despite the obvious discomfort of some of their scenes. I'll name them all: Antonio Banderas, Elena Anaya, Marisa Paredes, Jan Cornet, Roberto Álamo, Blanca Suárez, Eduard Fernández, Susi Sánchez, Bárbara Lennie and José Luis Gómez.

## **THE BLOODSTAINED MOTHER**

While she removes the blood-soaked sheets from the bed, soaking herself with the blood that at one time was hers, the blood of her son Zeca, Marilia explains to Vera that when she was young she bore two sons by two different fathers, but both were born insane. ("I've got insanity in my entrails", she confesses.)

Insane, monstrous and fierce, Marilia's two sons lived and behaved like callous swine and, at the end of their lives, their parallel destinies led them to run aground against the dark blind alley of Vera's new sexual organs. An identical ending for two such different lives as those of Dr. Robert and Zeca, the bandit dressed in a tiger costume.

Although they had the same mother, Robert was the rich boy and Zeca the poor son. Zeca was still a child when he started roaming the labyrinthine streets of the “favelas”, transporting drugs and guns. Robert, however, was experimenting in a shady corner of the garden with all the animals he had within his reach: toads, rabbits, butterflies, larvae. He moved on in record time from animals to people and, when still young, was already a renowned plastic surgeon in a country like Brazil, a pioneer in this area.

Marilia always stayed with Robert. Zeca belonged to the street, she gave birth to him, but it was the street that took him to its bosom.

After Gal, Robert’s wife, died slowly (her entire body burned in a car crash) and also in a devastatingly immediate way (she threw herself out the window when she saw her deformed, wrinkled body reflected in the glass), Marilia came with Robert and his daughter Norma to Spain, where the plastic surgeon settled and continued with his successful career, alternating surgery with investigation into the cultivation of a new skin that could have saved his wife.

During the writing of the script, while I was seeing the development of these amoral characters (always driven by a complete moral autonomy), I decided that Marilia and her two sons should come from a distant country, whose culture was not based on a guilt or sin complex, in short, a place where they wouldn’t have received a Judeo-Christian education. That’s why I chose Brazil.

Marilia is a mother without scruples (none of the three has any) and, in the style of Lorca, a tragic mother. Marisa Paredes is the perfect actress to play her. In her extraordinary monologue in front of the bonfire, when her dead son’s blood is boiling amidst the flames as when he was alive, Marisa breathes (and how!) the tragic breath that her family’s story needs.

As a mother, when she engendered them, she felt life seething inside her, but she also felt how she was gestating death. And although she unhesitatingly became an accomplice to Robert’s abuses, she feared that the curse that was already weighing on them had accompanied them to the new Spanish mansion. Fatality was part of their luggage.

Marilia prayed to her saints every day so that the curse would disappear. It had already claimed the lives of Gal, little Norma and Zeca. She didn’t want to lose hope but, ever since she saw, on the surveillance screens installed in the kitchen, the image of Vera determined to survive, she had the foreboding that that captive animal, whose face reminded her so much of Gal, would lead them to their fatal destiny. A being who had withstood so much, and who in her captivity had developed such a desire to live, had to have a superhuman force within her. When she saw Robert falling into her arms and opening the door behind which she had spent years confined, Marilia knew that there was no salvation, Vera and Robert’s new life was the beginning of the end. And although she was willing to fight tooth and nail, she could do nothing to prevent it.

## VERA AND THE SCREENS

We live surrounded by images, framed in screens of all sizes. From the immensity of the façade of a building to a tiny cell phone whose screen is no bigger than a box of matches, we are bombarded by images of very varied origins and intentions: all kinds of control; exhaustive information, at times in its most sensationalist form; we can see a war as it is happening, death and desolation being broadcast live; of course there is also the cinema (the cinema and its reflections in the multiple screens that there are on a shoot was one of the bases of my previous film), films and the multiple ways of promoting them and stealing them, espionage on an institutional or domestic scale; we can see our friends and relatives who live in distant countries on a little computer screen while we talk to them. The computer screen is an open window to everything imaginable. There are cameras on the streets, on the roads, in elevators, in our own homes. The skyscrapers in *Blade Runner* whose surfaces showed endless advertising images have been surpassed by any façade in Times Square. We get the impression that something is only alive when it has been previously filmed and can be projected uninterruptedly, obsessively.

Graphic documentation could be obtained of every moment in the lives of the generation that today is around forty years of age, from the moment they came into the world, and in some cases to their dying breath. The sick obsession in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (that of the protagonist's father who filmed him constantly when he was a child, even when he was sleeping) couldn't be qualified as such today. Constantly filming one's own family is now an everyday occurrence. The family photo album has been replaced by the film of the family members' lives. We live surrounded by living, moving images. Bad times for civil rights, it's so easy to violate them and so difficult to defend them. We're not safe even in our homes, in many cases we are being filmed by security cameras to prevent robberies or any kind of domestic incident, a slap from your husband, the babysitter who could abuse our children, or steal from us, or obtain the detailed document of how we've had sexual relations with someone who didn't know they were being filmed. Not to mention television reality shows, families or groups of people who live in isolation, surrounded day and night by cameras and spotlights.

We are watched and we watch. There are cameras filming everywhere. Death is a deactivated screen, empty, without images.

Vera is a captive in a grey room. The room has two windows whose reticular glass panes are like a shield. There are also iron bars. The grey of the floor is only slightly greyer than that of the walls. In the upper corners of the room there are two surveillance cameras which broadcast her image on two screens installed in the large kitchen, where Marilia, the housekeeper, spends practically the whole day. On one of the walls, there is a kind of dark, almost black, circular bubble, which hides the eye of another camera. This eye is set at a height of 67 inches above the floor. It's another kind of camera, its image is broadcast on a colossal screen (103 inches) which covers half the wall of Dr. Robert's room.

The screens in the kitchen broadcast in black and white, always general shots which take in the whole room, they are vigilant, complementary images. The other camera, whose images

only Dr. Robert can see in the privacy of his own room, broadcasts in colour and is on a level with Vera. Robert can enjoy the life size image of her, or draw her towards him with the zoom, in which case Vera's face takes over the whole room.

Cameras are present in Vera's life, as they are in people's lives today. But, as well as showing her like a captive animal, depending on her size in relation to the frame Vera's image on the screen adds subtle, significant information to the narrative. For example, when the Tiger Man discovers her on the screens in the kitchen, Vera is doing yoga with a rubber ball (the kind used in gyms). Her size on the screen is insignificant. Especially when the Tiger Man comes into frame and brings his face close to the screen, we get the impression that he could eat Vera (and that's what he'll try to do in the following sequences). The relationship of strengths recalls that of the blonde who won King Kong's heart and the gigantic gorilla.

Nevertheless, when Robert comes into his room and switches on the television through which he can see all of Vera's room with the bed in the middle, the first thing we notice is the size of the plasma screen; centred on the wall, the screen becomes a kind of transparent partition.

When Robert goes up to the chaise longue in front of the screen and zooms in on the image of Vera until he sees only her face, Vera's face is colossal, gigantic, compared to Robert's body or the dimensions of the room. Vera's face dominates the room, and certainly its inhabitant, although he is the last to realize that. In those moments of close, intimate surveillance, although Vera is the victim, her disproportionate face gives off a much greater power than that shown by Dr. Robert, who is contemplating her, entranced. It is she who seems to be watching the surgeon, and not the other way round. It is she who gives the impression that she could devour him if she wished.

## UNEXPECTED GUESTS

I mentioned at the beginning the path free of references that I imposed on my technical collaborators when developing the film. But that doesn't mean that the film is an island. Over the course of the subsequent processes, some unexpected guests appeared, obvious echoes that have to do with literature and fantasy cinema. It's impossible not to think of *Frankenstein* by James Whale or *Vertigo* and *Rebecca* by Alfred Hitchcock. Even Buñuel has his own quote, in the first image of the film. It is a general shot of the city of Toledo, which situates the space and time of the narrative. El Cigarral is 4 km. from Toledo. In order to present the city I placed the camera, after obtaining the necessary information, in the same place where, forty years before, Luis Buñuel had placed it in *Tristana* for a general shot of the city. I've tried to repeat that shot, as a tribute to the maestro.

Probably the first conscious reference was *Eyes Without a Face*, by Georges Franju. Franju led me to *Judex*, of which I only have a phantasmagorical recollection, like that of *Fantômas*, starring Jean Marais, and *Danger: Diabolik*, a comic with a masked hero which



Mario Bava filmed in the 60s. Elena Anaya, dressed in the black body stocking, and with her face covered by a silicone mask, running desperately down the stairs, evoked in me the childhood memory of all of them. All those fantasy characters were part of my puberty and they wore masks and black tights.

And as for the wizard of suspense, it's very difficult to avoid Hitchcock's influence, and that of *Vertigo* in particular. In *Broken Embraces*, when the director Mateo Blanco directs Lena in whispers during the hair and make-up tests, he is creating a new woman for his own pleasure and, so that Lena can escape from her disastrous life and take refuge in that new woman, he suggests the character of Pina to her. *Vertigo* was already there, with James Stewart taking charge of Kim Novak's appearance, her hair colour and style, her clothes, until he transforms her into the dead woman he loved so much. When I see Stewart rejecting outfits in a clothing store and the assistant saying to him "I see that the gentleman knows exactly what he wants", I see myself with my actresses, deciding on and trying out the clothes that will help them become the "other woman" for me. James Stewart represents the figure of the director. In the same way that I also see myself in the faces and the concern of soccer coaches when they watch their teams playing. I'm not a big fan but, when I happen to see a game and I look at the coach, sitting or standing, a tense, furious look in his eyes, suffering and deranged, as if there were no one else on the field except him and the bodies of his players, I see myself while filming a shot.

## **THE ONENESS OF THE DOUBLE AND THE MYTHS**

The Double, so present in *Broken Embraces*, also appears in *The Skin I Live In*, but with a radically different meaning. The Double as an example of Unity. Or the "oneness of the double". *Vertigo* takes us to the double, to the repetition, or recreation, of the loved one. For Dr. Robert (an eminent surgeon and a brilliant, amoral scientist) it is more fitting to recreate his beloved wife Gal from a living being (just like James Stewart) than to make a patchwork with the skin and organs from one or various corpses (as Dr. Frankenstein does) and as Dr. Robert himself has been doing, along with a team of experts, in the first face transplants performed in Spain, working from a dead donor. Dr. Robert already knows from his own experience how much the skin from a corpse can give. "The face is not the mirror of the soul", he says in one of his classes, "but of its humanity". This simply shows that what we have here is a man familiar with the skin of the dead and of the living, skin is for Dr. Robert what the canvas is for a painter.

But the dream which Dr. Ledgard has cherished for so long, ever since his wife died from the burns to her body caused by a car crash, is to create an artificial transgenic skin. (Twelve years before he could have saved her, but the genome still hadn't been discovered and cell therapy didn't exist). Modern science makes that dream possible. Dr. Robert only needs a guinea pig whose skin he can burn and erode in order to be able to cover the dermis with pieces of the new skin and thus test its qualities and defects. It is a process that takes years, and Dr. Ledgard uses that time not only to successfully cultivate a new skin that is stronger, cleaner and more resistant than human skin, but also to change the sex and face of

the guinea pig, with the excuse that he is taking his revenge for a non-existent rape, that of his daughter Norma at the hands of young Vicente. He has sculpted the face of his dead wife, Gal, over Vicente's face (we again have the distorted myth of *Vertigo*). Nevertheless, Dr. Robert doesn't call the new being created in his operating theatre by his wife's name. He gives the name Gal to the new skin, but he calls the new woman's face Vera. A name that means "true" for a face that is just the opposite.

When the surgeon advances in his research and draws on Vera's body the different provinces into which he will divide her skin, the result of the multiple pieces of new skin sewn together, it is impossible not to think of Frankenstein. Not the film by James Whale, but the icon represented by his creature. Mary Shelley, the author of the novel on which the film and the myth are based, called Dr. Frankenstein the new Prometheus, because Frankenstein's creature was transformed from a compilation of different pieces of flesh crudely sewn together into a living being by means of electricity. The lightning bolt. In the same way that the Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to mortals (and was punished by being chained eternally to a rock while an eagle ate his liver, which continually renewed itself), Dr. Frankenstein managed, with electricity, to give life to a new being.

In the case of *The Skin I Live In*, transgenesis is the equivalent of the miracle of electricity two centuries ago. It represents the same thing, an attack on the power of the gods, as these characters (Dr. Frankenstein and Dr. Ledgard) are competing with something that by definition is a divine gift, the ability to create life.

I didn't write the script with Frankenstein, Mary Shelley or the Titan Prometheus in mind, but they all suddenly appeared during shooting. And perhaps as a result of fusing, and confusing, the myths, the image of the Titan Prometheus appeared before my eyes when we were filming the scenes in the cave where Vicente is living chained to a rock. There is no eagle eating his entrails, but his powerlessness when he rises up and tugs helplessly with his four limbs and calls for help reminds one immediately of Prometheus Bound. That's what Mary Shelley called the creator, Dr. Frankenstein, but it was Dr. Robert's victim who reminded me of him.

Marilia warns Dr. Robert about the danger of having put Gal's face on Vera. Robert defends himself saying that Vera is very different. Suddenly he realizes that for some time he hasn't thought about his adored, unfaithful dead wife, the reality of Vera has gradually erased her memory. Even for a lunatic like Dr. Robert, Vera isn't Gal, his wife. Vera is a born survivor, and if there was something his wife didn't know how to do it was to survive. Also Vera doesn't move like Gal did, she doesn't despair like Gal did, she doesn't desire any man like Gal did, Vera is not Gal. From looking at her so much through the plasma screen that separates his room from hers, Dr. Robert falls in love with his work. Dr. Frankenstein couldn't fall in love with the monster he created, but Dr. Robert can. And here the myth of Galatea, of the sculptor who falls in love with his work, displaces the other myths.

## VICENTE AND VERA, TWO FACES OF THE SAME COIN

These two characters, who are one and the same, come face to face on two occasions. When Vera is dreaming/remembers how she met Norma, Dr. Robert's daughter, a close-up of Vera in profile, in bed, after she has become reconciled to her kidnapper, dissolves into another one of Vicente. The two faces share the screen for a few brief seconds during which Vicente looks intensely at the sleeping Vera although, when the dissolve finishes, he is really looking at Norma. I wanted, as narrator, that the two should share the screen at some point, Vicente and the being he would become six years later, Vera.

There is also another moment when, as if she was looking at her reflection in the quiet waters of a river, Vera sees a photo of herself when she had Vicente's face. I'm referring to the sequence when she goes down to Dr. Robert's office for her purse. The surgeon has left a newspaper lying open on his desk. In an article about various people who are missing, there is a photo of Vicente. Vera looks at herself, with the appearance she had six years before, in the paper mirror of the newspaper. Two faces, two bodies, two sexes, but the same identity.

There is a sequence in which both Vera and the spectator discover how far Dr. Robert has gone in his manipulation: at the end, when Vera goes back to her mother's shop, a boutique that sells vintage women's clothes, she goes in hesitantly. Women's dresses, in different colours and from different periods, are hanging from the walls and ceiling. Because of the way they're lit, they look like ghosts of women. It's just at that moment when the ghost of her own femininity disappears. As soon as she steps into her mother's shop, Vera feels that she's Vicente; or rather, she "knows" that she's Vicente, the same boy who, six years before, went out for a spin on his motorbike and never came back. If she still had any doubts, these disappear when she goes over to the passageway and, at the far end, in the back room, sees her mother, who has aged badly, doing accounts with Cristina, the shop assistant. Vicente always desired Cristina, but he never managed to seduce her because Cristina likes girls. When Vera, from the other end of the passageway (a metaphor for the time that has passed), looks at Cristina, she desires her again, just as she did when she was Vicente, and she melts with emotion when she sees that the shop assistant is eying her up and down, returning that look of desire. Vera feels she is Vicente even though she is dressed in a retro model by Dolce & Gabbana, a very tight fitting dress that shows off all her feminine charms.

Speaking of this dress, a possible synopsis of *The Skin I Live In* would be the following. It is the story of a dress with a round neckline, very tight-fitting, in a light coloured flowery material, a Dolce & Gabbana design. One day Vicente offers Cristina the dress as a gift. He'd like to see how it looks on her. Cristina refuses it. Vicente insists, emphasizing the qualities of the garment. Cristina replies: "If you like it so much, you wear it". Vicente disappears in strange circumstances and comes back six years later to the same spot in the shop where he offered her the Dolce & Gabbana dress, but now it is he who is wearing it, as a sign of identity. So that Cristina will believe everything he's going to tell her. *The Skin I Live In* tells of the unimaginable sufferings Vicente has to undergo before he manages to

get back to his mother's boutique, wearing the Dolce & Gabbana model on a body that has been forced upon him.

## FACES

One of the films I suggested that Antonio Banderas should see before shooting started was *Le Cercle Rouge*, by Jean-Pierre Melville. His character doesn't bear any relationship to the icy thieves in the film. What I was interested in showing Antonio was the "inexpressiveness" of the characters. Alain Delon has never been better in his brilliant career than in the three films he made with Melville, based on minimal facial expression. I asked Antonio, particularly for the more brutal scenes, to empty his face of any expression, and I gave him the example of the heartless criminals in *Le Cercle Rouge*. But it was to show not Dr. Robert's evilness, but rather his total lack of feelings.

What defines psychopaths is their inability to put themselves in the place of the "other". That is why they can carry out unimaginable cruelties, because they are unable not only to feel but also to imagine the pain of others. Psychopaths like Dr. Ledgard are not sadists, they don't enjoy causing pain, they simply don't know what their victims' pain is.

For Jan Cornet it was hard to find a character or an image taken from reality that would help him find the face of horror, without any grimaces, that the character of the beaten Vicente needs in some sequences. I don't know anyone who has lived through an experience similar to that of his character. We were still rehearsing when I found the face I'd been seeking for his character, particularly in the period when he has been living with horror for months.

Two weeks earlier I had seen on the front pages of all the national newspapers a horrific photo of the goring of the bullfighter Julio Aparicio in Las Ventas. The bull had gored him through the chin, and the horn came out through his mouth, a considerable length of horn ... It is one of the most dreadful images I have ever seen in a newspaper.

Two weeks later, in record time, with that amazing capacity for recovery which sports people and bullfighters have, Julio Aparicio walked out of the hospital. I wrote then in a kind of ship's log of the preparation for shooting: "Today I saw the eyes I want for Vicente in *The Skin I Live In*. I was talking about the eyes of the bullfighter as he came through the hospital doors. It wasn't fear, it was something beyond that, when horror is living inside someone's eyes, constantly, independently of the muscles in the face and in the body. Naturally, the bullfighter was happy to have survived and was almost smiling, but the horror was shining in his eyes and it didn't look as if that gleam was going to be extinguished in the next weeks or months.

Naturally, that same afternoon I showed Jan Cornet the photo and gave it to him as an example.

At times indications to actors are as oblique as that.

## THE WALL-DIARY

The day that Vera receives in the dumbwaiter a pile of eye pencils and lipsticks, and a book about how to apply make-up, she keeps two of the pencils and returns the rest to Dr. Robert in the same dumbwaiter they use to send things to each other.

Vera doesn't have the slightest interest in learning to make up a face that she doesn't accept, much less so that she can look as if she belongs to a sex that has been forced on her. Nevertheless, she uses the eye pencil to keep a record of the days on the wall. The first thing she draws is a vertical stroke, one day in prisoners' language. One stroke on the vast wall that at first seems as lonely as she herself in the aseptic grey room.

Two weeks later she sees a yoga master on television, talking about a place that we all have in the deepest part of our being, an intangible place for everyone else and our best refuge, the only place in which we can feel free. In order to access that place there is the ancient technique of yoga. The practice of yoga is based on breathing, *prana*. Breathing is energy, it is life and it is the main instrument for transcendental meditation. Meditation doesn't detach you from the world in which you live, but it helps you to live in the present. Vera's present is that of a double prisoner, a prisoner in a place and a prisoner in a skin that is alien to her. Meditation helps her to concentrate on her breathing, on the moment when the air enters her throat and spreads throughout her body, flooding it with life. By means of exclusive concentration on the flow of breathing entering and leaving (if she transforms that constant two way journey into her only present), everything that surrounds her ends up disappearing. Vera has a lot of time to exercise, if she has an abundance of anything it's time. But she doesn't know the technique. After several strokes (the passing of several days), the first words she writes on the wall are "yoga books". In the following sequence we see her imitating the first postures in a book. She'll never stop practising the *asanas*, and with time she becomes an expert yogi. At times she draws some of the postures on the wall. Or she writes, as a summary, the key words "I breathe". Those simple words mean that she has survived one more day.

Dr. Robert doesn't send her only books and food in the dumbwaiter. Once she has become Vera, he sends her very feminine, light dresses, so that she can get used to them. It's the only time when the character reacts brutally against the gender imposed by the surgeon. There are three dresses laid out on the bed, like reclining female figures. Vera looks at them with loathing, she pounces onto the bed, like a cat, and using her hands and feet, even her teeth, she tears the dresses apart in a fury until they are reduced to a pile of pieces of material. She does it as if she were skinning an animal.

Vera has a television set, attached to the wall by the four corners. She only has access to three channels, none of them shows news programmes. One where she saw the yoga teacher, one which deals with art, and another which shows wild life documentaries. One

day, the art channel shows a report on the work of Louise Bourgeois, sculptures with both sexes, with heads made of sacking, and lots of dolls, some made with material from the artist's own underwear.

She is immediately captured and moved by all that. As always when we see something that touches us, Vera has the impression that Louise Bourgeois created her striking work thinking exclusively of her. In the following shots, Vera already has two of the artist's books on her white table with curved edges. In his mother's shop, Vicente used to make scarecrows on which he'd hang dresses and jewellery, and decorate the store window with them. It was a way of starting out in the world of sculpture. With some harmless Plasticine and a nail file, with which she cuts little pieces of material from the dresses, she makes different sculptures, basically heads, or women's torsos. She also "dresses" some of the balls she uses for practicing yoga, with different pieces of material from different dresses, all of it inspired by Louise Bourgeois or by her own skin.

Some drawings start to appear on her wall, copied from the artist's books, some phrase which "she clings to like it was her last hope", the famous "art is a guarantee of health". Or the day's little happenings. And phrases about yoga. And I breathe. I breathe. Time and again. The wall palpitates like a living being.

Marilia comes back to El Cigarral, after an absence of four years, four years which Dr. Robert has used to kidnap Vicente, tame him, experiment with his skin, transform him into Vera, and carry on testing the skin he is perfecting. Although Vera can't see Marilia, she hears the noises she makes in the house. Through the interphone she asks her who she is and what day it is. Marilia tells her. At that moment Vera gets up on her wooden chair and starts to write and testify to her past. Until then, she had written and drawn on the wall at eye level, and then continued successively downward. When Marilia tells her the day she's living in, Vera starts to write on the upper part of the wall, on the left. If the wall were a page, let's say she starts to write from the beginning. The first date she writes is 10-09-06. The day she was kidnapped. And she carries on with the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>... and so on until she finishes, on the lower part of the wall, until she arrives at the present, February 2012.

When Dr. Robert comes into the kitchen and sees her, through the screens, frantically writing dates on the wall, he doesn't understand what she's doing. Vera doesn't want to lose a single one of the days she has lived, even though many of them were spent in sub-human conditions. Recovering past time is to recover memory. The wall becomes her diary, although at times the days are represented by a single vertical stroke. "The tiger waiting in his cage for the fleeting instant of his salvation" doesn't want to forget (if that instant finally arrives) the awareness of himself, or the time he has lived in captivity. While he still has memory, he will still be himself.