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Metamorphosis at the Window
(Stevenson, Kafka, Cronenberg)

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In narrative texts windows present a complex and specific form of communication between interior and exterior. In opposition to doors, that always mark a strong and fixed border, they are a much more fluid element, allowing visual and verbal exchanges, but also effective strategies of concealment. Therefore, windows are at the same time textual devices aimed at producing suspense and mystery, or at framing extraordinary events; and thematic elements, linked to nostalgia of the elsewhere, to oneiric contemplation, and to other similar kernel points. These general features become more pregnant and productive if in the narrative context interior is the place of monstrosity, of unspeakable events, of a total transgression. Such is the case in general of phantastic narrative, and in particular of metamorphosis: a theme that keeps challenging the visualizing power of literature.

Generally speaking, metamorphosis is a long-lasting literary theme, that has at its core two conflicting factors: on one hand, a rationalistic one, which aims at explaining the variety of human and natural forms through the telling of various mythic stories; on the other hand, an uncanny one, which subverts the basic principle of identity, and expresses a primary fear of dissolution and non existence. Both factors are already present in the most canonical ancient work on this theme, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. At the end of the poem, Pythagora's long speech enounces the law of a universal and perpetual transformation, which undermines even Rome's political power. This philosophical background characterizes Ovid's encyclopedic and systematic approach: his program of describing the entire universe of nature – human, animal, mineral and vegetal – through the telling of the entire classical mythology. At the same time the identification with the victims of metamorphosis, especially in the episodes which involve a continuous and gradual process, gives expression to identity crisis, loss of language, conflict between a persisting human conscience and a new bodily form.

The second, uncanny element, becomes stronger and stronger beginning from the romantic revolution and from the spread of fantastic literature; that is to say when the literary representation of metamorphosis definitively

detaches itself from a direct, classicist rewriting of Ovid's poem. This new phase involves several literary genres: lyric poetry (Keats, Rimbaud), fantastic short story (Beckford, Merimée), children literature (Collodi), fable (Andersen), science fiction (Matheson), and lasts till our postmodern age, when metamorphosis shows a highly deconstructive and metaliterary character, from Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* to Ransmayr's *Die letzte Welt*, from Roth's *The Breast* to Darrieussecq's *Troismes*.

In the history of our theme *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is certainly a crucial moment. Here the metamorphosis is no more produced by supernatural or unexplainable causes, but by a deliberate scientific experiment, directly linked to the parallel theme of split personality, so intensely beloved by Stevenson because of his psychological deep interests (it suffices to mention Markheim and Deacon Brodie). The prometheic scientist takes the place of Ovid's ancient gods, or of the Pythagorean universal law of nature: his figure allows Stevenson to attack and subvert Victorian mentality and Victorian puritanism, even if under the consolatory form of a manichean, universalistic opposition between good and evil.

The extraordinary success of this short novel is partly due to its narrative strategy, full of mystery and suspense, and strictly based on an internal focalization on the character-witness, Mr. Utterson. In such a strategy the category of space in general, and its textual devices doors and windows in particular, play a significant role. In fact, the centrality of space affects not only the narrative level, but also the thematic one: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is unconceivable without the foggy images of London, described as a grey, labyrinthic, dirty and degraded city. On one side this background (a true protagonist, in fact) deeply roots the story in a clearly defined social context: in that accumulative, hyperproductive industrial society which was Stevenson's strongest polemic object. On the other side it constantly evokes an oneiric state of undifferentiation, which sounds as an effective correspondent to the unconscious logic, described by Matte Blanco as extraneous to the categories of space and time. This kind of image is the perfect premise for the

development of a split personality story and of a new version of the metamorphosis theme, since both attack the basic principles of identity. As Jeremy Hawthorn writes in his *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character*, «London is the natural setting for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, both because of its physical extensiveness and complexity and also because of the ethical and moral ambivalences which its Victorian expansion revealed and enacted. We cannot imagine this tale set in a quiet country village, or in a pre-industrial society; its links with nineteenth-century London are radical» (p. 65).

At the beginning of the novel we meet a door without windows: the title of the first chapter, *Story of the Door*, stresses the centrality of this element; in fact, it is the disturbing vision of this door that produces the first act of metadiegetic narration about Hyde's crimes, made by Richard Enfield, Utterson's friend. The description is characterized by that poetics of the anti-functional, and by that literary passion for outworn and shabby objects and spaces so brilliantly described by Francesco Orlando in his essay of thematic criticism:

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storey high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell or knocker, was blistered and distained. Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings; and for close on a generation no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages.

In the heart of a busy and lively quarter of London, described as made of «ancient, handsome houses, now for the most part decayed from their high estate», the backyard of Jekyll's house is a sinister island of degradation. This is actually the door used by Mr. Hyde in his nightly raids: it

visualizes the dark side of Jekyll's respectability. The absence of windows enforces the uncanny effect, and increases the suspense: the fact that Hyde could get in Jekyll's house at night and come back with a check signed by the famous doctor represents the first mystery for the characters and for the reader. In a supplement of description we learn, at the end of the chapter, that the strange house does have windows, but just inside the court: «It seems scarcely a house. There is no other door, and nobody goes in or out of that one, but, once in a great while, the gentleman of my adventure. There are three windows looking on the court on the first floor; none below; the windows are always shut, but they're clean». It is interesting to notice that the windows are here the only clean element in a dirty and shabby context, which arouses the impression of a mysterious interior, totally closed to the communication with the exterior. And in fact just one of these windows will be, as we shall see soon, the vehicle of a peculiar communication between the monstrous universe of double and metamorphosis and the ordinary universe of Utterson and Enfield. When later in the novel, in the Chapter entitled Incident of the Letter, Mr Utterson is received for the first time in Doctor Jekyll's cabinet, we see through his eyes the same space from inside, again with the same connotations of an outworn and no more functional context: «he eyed the dingy windowless structure with curiosity, and gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness as he crossed the theatre, once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent, the tables laden with chemical apparatus, the floor strewn with crates and littered with packing straw, and the light falling dimly through the foggy cupola». After this first approach Utterson trespasses a last border, the door, and enters the large room of the cabinet, where he sees a functional and symbolic element, the mirror (a «cheval-glass»), and «three dusty windows burred with iron». After Utterson's first encounter with Hyde and after an intermission of one year of quiet and happy life, Hyde's worst crime, the murder of Sir Carew, is told adapting the perspective of a Jekyll's maid servant. Here Stevenson re-uses a long-lasting topos of the literary and visual tradition about windows, fully analysed by Curletto in his essay

Finestre, from Aristophanes to Dante, from Petrarca to Gozzano, from Flaubert to Proust, and to Bonnard's fascinating paintings: the dreaming maid at the window. As the famous French psychoanalyst Pontalis points out, it is a gendered motif: men do not seem to be attracted by the elsewhere in our imagery. With some significant exceptions: poets (Leopardi), dreamers (the prince Andrej in Tolstoj's War and Peace), old men, flaneurs, especially in the 20th century, when literary topoi are often subverted and reinvented, if we think of Sartre's Roquentin watching at the window in *La nausée*, or of Kafka's Samsa, with whom we shall deal later, or of Tomasi di Lampedusa *The Leopard*, where windows are the beloved place of the prince's dreaming phantasies. The most typical attitude of men at the window is, on the contrary, voyeurism: from Pirandello's *Il lume dell'altra casa* to some famous movies, such as *Rear Window*, Malle's *Atlantic City*, and so on. In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde's Chapter Four the topos of the dreaming maid has a clear narrative function: the servant is a good focalizer for the narration of this central episode, especially because she is capable of recognizing Hyde. Nevertheless, there is still some room for the representation of her subjectivity, which is a contrasting element to the bloody scene she is going to watch from the window:

A maid servant living alone in a house not far from the river had gone upstairs to bed at eleven. Although a fog rolled over the city in the small hours, the early part of the night was cloudless, and the lane, which the maid's window overlooked, was brilliantly lit by the full moon. It seems she was romantically given: for she sat down upon her box, which stood immediately under the window, and fell into a dream of musing. Never (she used to say, with streaming tears, when she narrated that experience), never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world.

In the entire sequence we read about the maid's emotive reactions and about her vivid perceptions thanks to the full moonlight, till the culminating point, when Hyde shows a «ape-like fury» (a notable recurrent theme) in trampling

under his feet his victim: «At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted».

Immediately before the long chapter *The last night*, which presents the dramatic denouement, followed by the two explanatory texts, we read a very short chapter, *Incident at the window*. With an effect of Ringkomposition, this episode recalls the first one, marking the end of a preliminary phase, which accumulates signs, clues, incidents. Enfield and Utterson come again by chance in front of Jekyll's backdoor; this time they enter the court, which appears «cool and a little damp, and full of premature twilight, although the sky, high up overhead, was still bright with sunset. The middle one of the three windows was half way open; and sitting close beside it, taking the air with an infinite sadness of mien, like some disconsolate prisoner, Utterson saw Dr Jekyll». We have here the reverse situation of the previous more topic scene, the murder view from the window: here the ordinary viewer is on the street, and watches from a distant perspective the extraordinary event, that takes place inside. Jekyll shows the topic melancholic attitude of the characters at the window, but, compared to his maid servant, his dissonance with the exterior world is absolute: he is prisoner of the interior space, and tortured by compulsion. After this first image at the window, a verbal exchange takes place, in a polite and quite embarrassed way. Jekyll refuses to join them for a walk, but accepts to have a conversation in such an unusual position. Nevertheless, their dialogue is abruptly interrupted:

But the words were hardly uttered, before the smile was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below. They saw it but for a glimpse, for the window was instantly shut down; but that glimpse had been sufficient, and they turned and left the court without a word. In silence, too, they traversed the by street; and it was not until they had come into a neighbouring thoroughfare, where even upon a Sunday there were still some stirrings of life, that Mr Utterson at last turned and looked at his companion. They were both pale; and there was an answering horror in their eyes.

Metamorphosis is a powerfully visual theme, that not by chance has a very rich iconographic and cinematographic tradition. In Ovid's poem the processes of transformation are often spectacular, and involve some surprised spectators. In Stevenson's novel there is just one metamorphosis from Hyde to Jekyll made in front of a spectator, a horrified Dr Lanyon, who will describe the sensational event in the letter to Utterson and will shortly survive to the trauma. This passage at the window shows just the very beginning of the metamorphosis process: thanks to the focalization on Utterson and Enfield, the reader perceives only an extremely short image of terror. Stevenson exploits here all the expressive potential of the window as narrative device: its mixture of ostension and voyeurism, communication and concealment; its stressing the acts of framing and watching. The impressive flash of Jekyll's terror – a true cinematographic shot – arouses in the two characters a long-lasting reaction of terror and silence, and will be for Utterson the last living image of his friend. This incident at the window certainly aims at increasing mystery and suspense, immediately before the dramatic conclusion. But at the same time it has also a thematic relief, since it shows Jekyll's metamorphosis as an internal psychic tension, not as a simple alternation of good and evil (Hyde is in fact the personification of internal drives that Jekyll has always kept in his double life, even before the experiment).

In the most famous and most fascinating version of the metamorphosis theme, windows play again an important role in terms of mediation between the interior space of monstrosity and the exterior world. At the beginning of Kafka's short story – an incipit that directly recalls Gogol's *The Nose* and Dostoevskij's *The Double* – the process of transformation is notably already concluded. We follow the protagonist's perceptions of his new state through an extremely strict internal focalization. The text stresses in fact the framing of Gregor's gaze: after the first sequences on his body, on the objects of his every-day life, and on the fetishist element of a lady's picture, «Gregor's eyes turned next to the window, and the dull weather – raindrops could

be heard beating on the metal window-ledge – made him feel quite melancholy» («Gregors Blick richtete sich dann zum Fenster, und das trübe Wetter – man hörte Regentropfen auf das Fensterblech aufschlagen – machte ihn ganz melancholisch»). The first occurrence of the window theme has then a clear psychological tonality: it is the topic association with melancholy.

In the extraordinary crescendo of the first chapter the same theme is resumed and developed, after the first traumatic contacts with the family universe; contacts that take place through the marked border of the closed door. In this occasion we face the first part of the only metamorphosis process described by Kafka: the gradual loss of the most defining element of human identity, language; a very crucial scene, not by chance frequently exploited in the metamorphosis tradition, from Ovid's poem (for example in Acteon's episode, sometimes compared to Kafka's short story because of the focussing on the persistence of human conscience), to Dante's impressive Inferno 25. Since the contact with the family impels Gregor to make a decision about his future behaviour in his new state, he tries, as usually, to get some help from the contemplation outside the window, but in vain: «At such moments he fixed his eyes as firmly as possible on the window, though unfortunately there was little by way of good cheer and encouragement to be gained from the sight of the morning fog, which was thick enough to obscure even the other side of the narrow street» («In solchen Augenblicken richtete er die Augen möglichst scharf auf das Fenster, aber leider war aus dem Ausblick des Morgennebels, der sogar die andere Seite der engen Strasse verhüllte, wenig Zuversicht und Munterkeit zu holen»). As in Stevenson's novel, fog plays here an important role as a counterpart in the landscape to an identity crisis: as a visualization of an undifferentiated unconscious logic.

Even when Gregor's view will focus better the same image, we will find the same connotations: towards the end of the chapter, the protagonist finally manages to open the door of his room, producing obviously a strong emotional reaction in all the viewers. The text focalizes then his new perception of the exterior:

Es war inzwischen viel heller geworden; klar stand auf der anderen Strassenseite ein Ausschnitt des gegenüberliegenden, endlosen, grauschwarzen Hauses – es war ein Krankenhaus – mit seinen hart die Front durchbrechenden Fenstern; der Regen fiel noch nieder, aber nur mit grossen, einzeln sichtbaren und förmlich auch einzelnweise auf die Erde hinuntergeworfenen Tropfen.

[Meanwhile it had grown much brighter; clearly visible now across the street was a section of the endlessly long, dark-grey building opposite – it was a hospital – with its regular row of windows starkly painting its façade; the rain was still falling, but only in huge drops that could be seen individually and seemed almost to be flung individually to earth].

Even with less fog and more visibility, the psychic dimension remains that of an agonizing, grey infinity; moreover, here the regularity of the hospital's windows adds another touch to the general sense of oppression. In the hectic conclusion of the first chapter Gregor's mother opens a window wide, producing a strong blast of air, that subverts the interior order of the house. It is another concretization of the hostility of the external world towards Gregor. Although the mother suffers of asthma, her gesture is part of a common reaction of the family: the need to avoid the monstrosity inside the house through a direct and liberating exchange with the exterior, a topos in the literary tradition of windows. The very ending of the chapter, with the extremely impressive image of the multiplied father pursuing Gregor, involves once again the closure of a space: it is an impersonal sentence about the closing of the door and the subsequent silence: «The door was slammed to with the stick, and then finally all was still» («Die Tür wird noch mit dem Stock zugeschlagen, dann war es endlich still»).

From the point of view of Genette's narratological category of frequency, the first chapter of Kafka's Metamorphosis can be defined a «récit singulier»: it depicts a unique traumatic event, the birth of a monster inside Samsa's house. The second chapter is instead for the most part a «récit itératif»: through a series of representative actions, it tells us the family's new way of life, which naturalizes and exorcises

the abnorm event. Several scholars – among them Giuliano Baioni – pointed out that this second phase has a dominant erotic and incestuous character: after birth, copulation. Gregor is able to communicate in fact only with his sister, who takes care of his new life as an insect. In this complex communicative dynamics the window plays again a central role. We read that Gregor is often victim of a total prostration and frustration, because he learns from his constant eavesdropping his family's financial problems. In this cases the contemplation at the window is a precious form of relief:

Oder er scheute nicht die grosse Mühe, einen Sessel zum Fenster zu schieben, dann die Fensterbrüstung hinaufzukriechen und, in den Sessel gestemmt, sich ans Fenster zu lehnen, offenbar nur in irgendeiner Erinnerung an das Befreiende, das früher für ihn darin gelegen war, aus dem Fenster zu schauen. Dann tatsächlich sah er von Tag zu Tag die auch nur ein wenig entfernten Dinge immer undeutlicher; das gegenüberliegende Krankenhaus, dessen nur allzu häufigen Anblick er früher verflucht hatte, bekam er überhaupt nicht mehr zu Gesicht, und wenn er nicht genau gewusst hätte, dass er in der stillen, aber völlig städtischen Charlottenstrasse wohnte, hätte er glauben können, von seinem Fenster aus in eine Einöde zu schauen, in welcher der graue Himmel und die graue Erde ununterscheidbar sich vereinigten.

[Or he would embark on the strenuous task of pushing an armchair over to the window and then crawling up to the sill, where proper on the chair he would lean against the window-panes, evidently inspired by some recollection of that sense of freedom that looking out of the window used to give him. For now, in fact, he found objects only a short distance away becoming daily more indistinct; he could no longer make out anything of the hospital across the street, the sight of which he used to curse because he saw it all too often; and if he hadn't known perfectly well that he lived in the peaceful, but decidedly urban Charlottenstrasse, he might have supposed that he was gazing out of his window into a

wasteland in which the grey sky and the grey earth run indistinguishably together].

The topos of the rêverie at the window is here radically transformed and reinvented, re-echoing also the topic animal attraction for windows. The liberating force of the contemplation is now altered by a gradual change in Gregor's perception (another process of metamorphosis), which becomes more and more confused, and lets disappear the uncanny vision of the hospital. In particular, the very last sentence of the above quoted passage is an extremely clear formulation of the principle of the undifferentiated we already dealt with: it seems to visualize the uncounscious logic, which, according to Matte Blanco's rewriting of Freudian theory, can be described in terms of an undivided, homogenous totality.

Gregor's sister immediately understands the importance of the window for his brother's new life: «His observant sister only needed to notice twice that the armchair was standing by the window; from then on, every time she cleared up the room, she pushed the chair carefully back to the window and even began leaving the inner casement open» («Nur zweimal hatte die aufmerksame Schwester sehen müssen, dass der Sessel beim Fenster stand, als sie schon jedesmal, nachdem sie das Zimmer aufgeräumt hatte, den Sessel wieder genau zum Fenster hinschob, ja sogar von nun ab den inneren Fensterflügel offen liess»). But the same window has a liberating force for her too: every time she gets in the room, she immediately opens the window wide, oppressed by a sense of suffocation, and remains there for a while breathing deeply. Gregor understands that it is impossible to stay in his room with a closed window: the exchange with the exterior world is then the only way to make monstrosity acceptable. From this iterative narration we turn to a single episode: once the sister comes a little bit earlier, «and discovered him propped up at the window, motionless and at his most terrifying, gazing out» («und traf Gregor noch an, wie er, unbeweglich und so Recht zum Erschrecken eingestellt, aus dem Fenster schaute»). She runs away, terrified, and does not come back for hours. In order to avoid another traumatic vision, Gregor makes a titanic

enterprise (it takes four hours): he transports on his back a sheet from the bed to the sofa, and obtains a perfect covering of his body.

The ambiguous pleasure of contemplation at the window does not last long: Gregor refrains from showing at the window during the day, as a act of respect towards his parents, and looks therefore for other forms of entertainment; he discovers then the pleasure of crawling all over the walls and the ceiling: that is the pleasure of another body and another identity, which brings to him an «almost contented distraction» («in der fast glücklichen Zerstreuung»): and I think that in the sharp addition of that «almost» one can feel all the unique, incredible expressive force of Kafka's style). This new activity will bring to the second chapter's tragic conclusion, again with the image of the pursuing father.

In the last chapter, dominated by dirt, degradation and decay, the window reappears just at the very crucial moment of Gregor's death. We find the same stylistically sharp and effective brevity we already noticed, and that will characterize also The Process's great ending: «He was still just conscious of the first signs of the general brightening outside his window. Then his head sank fully down, of his own accord, and his last faint breath ebbed out from his nostrils» («Den Angang des allgemeinen Hellerwerdens draussen vor dem Fenster erlebte er noch. Dann sank sein Kopf ohne seinen Willen gänzlich nieder, und aus seinen Nüstern strömte sein letzter Atem schwach hervor»). Left alone in his room, which is gradually transformed from a hole into a tomb, full of outworn objects, and refused even by the beloved sister, who finally denies his human conscience, Gregor dies after a last visual exchange with the exterior world through the window, Silvio Curletto reports the same association between dawn, death, and the light of the window in Svevo's *Senilità* regarding the protagonist's sister, Amalia, and, more implicit, in some passages by Flaubert and Pavese. After the discovery of Gregor's dead body the charwoman opens the window, as a last gesture of liberation; later, the mother and the sister stare at the dining room window before going out for a walk. Here the window finally condensates the sense of liberation from

monstrosity which characterizes the very controversial ending. Kafka exploits then all the ambivalence of the window theme, already expressed especially by one of his favourite authors, Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*: an ambivalence between dreaming expectation and sense of void, illusionary freedom and oppressive reality, nostalgia of the elsewhere and abyss of an unbearable reality.

Metamorphosis and windows are both themes of a strong visual nature, connected with the process of perception and with the act of framing. Therefore, the last leg of our critical journey will be inevitably a movie. It is not by chance that both themes are extremely successful in film history: windows in particular have a strong metafilmic potential, exploited by many directors and in many genres, from René Clair to Hitchcock, from Bergman to Kieslowski. Regarding metamorphosis, the fact that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde became almost a myth of modern imagery, detached from Stevenson's text, depends mostly on its several filmic versions (usually based more on Sullivan's theatrical adaptation), which introduce the sexual and the feminine element, and variously visualize the protagonist's transformations. Very famous is the final metamorphosis from Hyde to Jekyll after the suicide in Rouben Mamoulian's 1931 version: a spectacular ending added to Stevenson's plot. A proof of Jekyll's successful textual vitality comes also from parodies and rewritings, for example the version told by the governor's perspective, Stephen Frear's *Mary Reilly*, based on Valerie Martin's novel.

Generally speaking, metamorphosis is a common theme in different cinematographic genres: in science fiction (*Terminator*), action movies (*Spider-Man*), or in horror or neo-horror movies. At a more profound level, David Cronenberg's entire production gives expression to crucial obsessions of contemporary imagery and culture, such as the technological mutation of body, the perturbation of sexual identity, the contamination of mind and perception, the fetishism of immaterial communication. Together with some provocative visual artists, such as Orlan, Jana Sterback, Cindy Sherman, Cronenberg represents in my opinion a new post-modern version of the metamorphosis

tradition, which undermines the basic borders of human form in a most uncanny way.

Contagion and transformation of bodies are then general constants of his production, but Cronenberg filmed also a highly personal version of the metamorphosis theme, which owes much to Stevenson and Kafka: I am referring obviously to *The Fly*, a 1986 remake of Kurt Neumann 1958 movie. Compared to Langelaan's short story, to its first filmic version, and to the first version of the script, Cronenberg's movie stresses much more the process of metamorphosis and the hybridization between human and animal identity. Langelaan conceived a scientist who, in his experimentations of teleportation, undergoes a fusion with a fly, that got by chance into the cabin. It is the topic tale of prometheic science defeated by the power of chance. Here and in Neumann's movie the process of exchange between the protagonist and the insect is immediate, clear and abrupt. Even in the first version of the script subdued to Cronenberg the fusion should have produced a head of insect on a human body. On the contrary, the Canadian director prefers to film – and to let film inside the story by a journalist, Veronica, who falls in love with the scientist: one of *The Fly's* many metalinguistic feature – a very gradual transformation, which produces a total hybridization between Seth Brundle and the fly. It is not the body of an insect provided with a human conscience, as in Kafka's masterpiece (or already in many Ovidian tales or in Apuleius' novel); here human and animal bodies and minds are completely fused, and produce a new hybrid being, Brundle-fly, as the computer calls it.

After the experiment, the scientist does not realize yet what happened. He just needs a great quantity of sugar, feels a new animal energy and a strong sexual desire. As a new Hyde, he goes to rough bars and picks up prostitutes, theorizing his new identity – previously, he is depicted as the topic asocial scientist, with no private life – as a kind of purification. When he finally realizes the strange form of fusion he underwent, he tries to keep his mental human activity alive (he aims at becoming «a political insect»), but his animal element prevails more and more. Even at the very ending, when Brundle-fly undergoes a second,

extraordinary fusion with the machine, and becomes a true Cronenbergian cyber, the protagonist still shows his human conscience, expressing with a final gesture his desire of death.

As Gianni Canova points out, Cronenberg has a very original and peculiar poetics of space. His environments always appear dusty and dirty, as they would have been inhabited for years before the shooting. In *The Fly* Brundle's laboratory is a sinister and isolated loft, which gets an unforgettable blue-grey, dusty, spectral light through a series of several huge windows. They are a constant, significant presence in all the movie, that has a clear claustrophiliac character; but they also play sometimes a sharper narrative and symbolic role. In the scene of the first sexual intercourse between the scientist and the journalist, for example, a dolly movement frames and goes up to the large roof window, marking at the same time a topic ellipsis (we see first the dressed and then the undressed couple in bed). This relationship represents in fact for the protagonist a first overture to the external world and to social dynamics, symbolized by the window shot.

The most original and fascinating scene of the movie – far more impressive than the special effects of the last scenes – is in my opinion Brundle's first awakening after the fusion with the fly. With almost no visible changes in his body, he does an incredible series of acrobatic exercises in front of his astonished lover, also touching the roof at the end of the scene: a prolepsis of the later phase, when he, like Kafka's Gregor, will discover the pleasure of walking all over the walls. The hybridization with the insect implies a discovering of a new physical energy, and another overture to the external world. Thanks to the dominant use of long shots, that show the protagonist as a small flying figure, we perceive more than usually the presence of the large windows. As it has been often stated, Cronenberg's cinema has a peculiar, bodily flavour: here we really feel the strong external light, we almost breath the morning air.

The Fly contaminates horror with melodrama: it is also a topic story of impossible love. In the second part of the movie a large part of the plot is about Veronica's pregnancy: she obviously wants to abort, while Seth, closed in his

hybrid universe, hopes to receive a last part of his human nature. There is a strong conflict between the ordinary, external world, that wants to kill a future monster, and Brundle internal world, desperate and obsessive: a conflict often expressed and visualized by windows.

The protagonist catches the story of his son, spying on Veronica and his ex partner not through a window, but through a typologically similar space: the merlons of the roof terrace, that is from a quite distant perspective. When he reaches them at the hospital in order to interrupt the abortion, he gets in through the window, breaking it in a spectacular scene. After this melodramatic love kidnapping, Brundle tries later to kill the rival, Veronica's ex partner, using his corrosive enzyme, but the journalist suddenly arrives again through a window, an oblique, lateral one situated in the above position. This will be the final rescue, the last immission from the external world: after a long suffering hesitation and after an explicit request, she will kill the monster which is at the end a mixture of animal, technological, and human being: a hybrid product of postmodern imaginary, far beyond Ovid's metamorphosis technique, although born from the same desire and fear of trespassing the borders of natural forms.