

Chapter 14

The Inversion of Europa: Reconfiguring the Utopia through the Gaze of the *Femminiello* in *Mater Natura* (Andrei, 2005)

Victor Martín García

Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain.

vmartingmarin@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-7811-4119

DOI: <https://doi.org/org/10.54103/milanoup.213.c417>

Abstract

This chapter analyzes the *femminiello* Europa, a character in the film *Mater Natura* (Andrei, 2005). Due to the main task of Europa, who proposes to escape from the metropolitan context together with the rest of the collective to materialize their utopia on the slope of Vesuvius, the research hypothesis is based on clarifying the symbolic function of both the identity conditions of the character and the utopian project itself. In order to achieve the objectives, a contextualization of this case of non-normative gender and its link to the Neapolitan cultural environment and its representation in the cinematographic discourse is carried out. In this way, the aim is to identify some of the representative signs of its intersectionality of identity and, subsequently, to examine how they are recoded through the character in order to devise its utopian proposal.

Keywords

New Neapolitan Cinema; non-binary gender; community; resemantization; territory.

Introduction

Mater Natura (Andreì, 2005), a choral film framed between comedy and melodrama¹, focuses on the vicissitudes of a group of transgender people living in Naples. Desiderio (Maria Pia Calzone), Massimino (Vladimir Luxuria) and Europa (Enzo Moscato) are part of a close-knit community where each of them lives their gender dissidence in a different way. As for Europa, the character embodies the figure of the *femminiello*, a notion that defines this case of non-normative gender identity and its traditional presence in the sociocultural context of the Campania region². Their participation in the plot is based on the proposal they make to the rest of the companions with the intention of putting an end to the common social, political, and economic marginalization experienced by each of the characters from different circumstances. The idea they intend to carry out has a marked utopian character: to open an «agro-futurism» in the vicinity of Vesuvius, thus distancing their self from the metropolitan environment and «inventing a paradise without sin». For the realization of the project, Europa finds in an old abandoned farmhouse the perfect place for its new location. It will bear the name «*Consulenze esistenziali trans all'ombra del Vesuvio*» (*Mater Natura Trans Vesuvian Counseling*)³. The community progressively renounces its life in the city of Naples to move to the idyllic location organized by Europa.

In this way, the proposal of the *femminiello* Europa evidences in turn a marked strategic value that generates new ways of linking with the space and inhabiting the territory within the cinematographic fiction. Such strategies structure the utopian sense of their project which, on the other hand, arises as a response to the character's own evolution, conditioned by their intersectionality of identity. Factors such as gender dissidence, belonging to the Neapolitan cultural context, as well as the economic precariousness in which they live, make up the critical positioning that underlies the decision led by Europa to leave the city. Lewis Mumford considered how the creation of these narratives based on imagining possible alternatives beyond their degree of feasibility, were themselves «an

1 These two film genres are considered to categorize *Mater Natura* following the studies conducted by Alex Marlow-Mann and Giuseppe Borrone since, while Borrone defines it as melodrama (2020: 32), for Marlow-Mann however it is a comedy (2011: 137). It is significant that, as Marlow-Mann in turn develops, both comedy and melodrama are the two genres par excellence of traditional Neapolitan cinema (2011: 41).

2 The term *femminiello/femminielli* is masculine singular and plural respectively. There are also other versions of the same in feminine: *femmenella/femmenelle*. Given the complexity of this case of non-normative gender, where the modes of naming flow from feminine to masculine, it is opted to use the term in masculine, more linked to the academic context (Mauriello 2021: 47); however, as far as pronouns are concerned, it is chosen to employ those of gender that refer to the non-binary character of such identity. Regarding the term *femminiello*, see, for example, Marzia Mauriello's study on the subject (2021).

3 All the translations from Italian are my own.

implicit critique of the civilization that serves as its background» (2013: 11). Consequently, Europa, «an emblematic figure, capable of condensing the whole imaginary about the *femminielli* and of erecting a symbol that transcends regional confines» (Vesce 2020: 71), materializes through their utopia a relevant contesting position determined by their own subjectivity, and that has repercussions especially on the symbolic plane according to the elements that compose the character.

Following such premises, this chapter examines how the symbolic formalization of the *femminiello* Europa within the plot of the film *Mater Natura* fosters a critical positioning and grants a series of strategies that reconfigure, on the one hand, the social relationship with the territory in the diegesis of the film, while, on the other hand, it acts as an interpellation to the very conformation of our imaginary. In this way, the symbolic value of the project of Europa transcends the alternative social organization present in the cinematic fable to directly interpellate the spectators through the character's own capacity to devise utopia as a result of their subjective experience: the insurrection of Europa is thus a rebellion grounded in the very act of imagining. The philosopher Paul B. Preciado considered that «to imagine is already to act: to claim imagination as outside of political transformation is already to begin to mutate» (2022: 56). Thus, how does Europa use their identity intersectionality to devise other possible worlds? In what way do they apply the experience gained from their gender dissidence as a «revolutionary platform» (Preciado 2022: 530)? What role do the signs that evidence their link to the Neapolitan cultural milieu play and how are they resemanticized at the basis of their utopian project?

In order to answer these questions, the signs that shape the character and that link Europa both to the cultural context of origin, as well as to the queer theory developed at international level are analyzed. For this reason, the parameters of semiology or, rather, of the «semiological guerrilla» are applied as a methodology, according to the notion coined by Umberto Eco and picked up by Preciado (2022: 409), to emphasize the importance of the *detournement* around the processes of symbolization (2022: 74). In turn, this chapter is structured in two parts. In the first section, some of the key aspects of the *femminiello* and its link to the Neapolitan socio-urban context are presented, especially those particularities that have an impact on the shaping of the character. Subsequently, a cinematographic cartography is made around the representation of this *transgender* manifestation under the objectives of framing *Mater Natura* in relation to these other productions and identifying the critical positionings in which such representation participates until concluding in Europa. In the second section, an analysis of the character and its utopian proposal is developed, with special emphasis on the signs of their intersectional identity and how they are re-signified to question our own imaginaries.

Contextualization of the *Femminiello*: Aspects of Its Social Sphere and Cinematographic Representation

The case of the *femminiello* as a dissident gender identity determined by its close cultural link to the Campanian sphere, testified since the sixteenth century (Mauriello 2021: 47), has been analyzed in the academic context in an interdisciplinary manner by sociology, ethnography, anthropology, and psychology, and taking into special consideration the cultural representations in literary or filmic texts of this case of transgender identity. Authors such as the aforementioned Maria Carolina Vesce, along with other scholars such as Marzia Mauriello, Eugenio Zito or Paolo Valerio, have delved into the conditions and circumstances around *femminiello* which, concisely, entails «a way of being and an experience of the self linked not so much to sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation) as to gender identity» (Mauriello 2017: 208). Consequently, and following the considerations made by Mauriello, the historical characteristics of this «fluctuating gender identity» (Mauriello 2018: 306) and its legacy to the present day as a referent of gender dissidence, does not lie in a

transformation of the body, but in the “performance of the feminine”, in its staging, both in the sense of reproduction of certain roles and practices associated with women, and in the literal sense of a true spectacularization of those elements. (2017: 209)

One of the peculiarities of the phenomenon lies in its traditional acceptance in the social fabric and is particularly linked to the city of Naples, finding its «ecological niche» in «popular neighborhoods, where they have always been accepted as a recognized social reality» (Zito 2017: 420). In turn, it should be noted that such inclusion is due to the prominence of this group in certain folkloric rites of the region⁴. The study around the idiosyncrasy of this type of rituals has evidenced the semiological persistence of certain signs coming from the pagan past of the area, giving the *femminiello* its borderline character between «archaism and postmodernity» (Zito and Valerio 2019: 19). In this way, and through this «liminal identity» (*ibidem*), the survival of certain mythologies around fertility cults in agricultural matriarchal societies developed on the shores of the Mediterranean is legitimized in the present (Zito 2017: 429-430). Consequently, the figure of the *femminiello* manifests a deep and stratified connection with the Neapolitan social fabric, and through this transgender phenomenon it is possible to observe, as Vesce notes, a «dualistic and oppositional reposition between concepts and experiences such as modernity/tradition, present/past, virile/effeminate, rich/poor, bourgeois/popular, etc.» (2020: 70).

4 Regarding the inclusion of the *femminiello* through the different rites, as well as a deepening of the same, see for example Mauriello's study (2021).

However, the social status traditionally held by the *femminiello* in the Neapolitan context was markedly altered since the last decades of the twentieth century. Due to a multiplicity of factors linked also to the city of Naples itself, a series of structural variations originated around the cultural conditioning factors where this case of non-conforming gender was sustained. The urban reforms, the progressive touristification of the historical center of the city, added to the repercussion of other types of transgender manifestations associated with the «biomedical culture», are some of the aspects that according to Zito motivated a process of transformation — defined even as disappearance by authors such as Zito himself — of the *femminiello* in the Neapolitan environment (2017: 423). Nevertheless, such circumstances paradoxically coincide with a revitalization of artistic creation where a «historical and cultural rediscovery of the southern identity» (Conelli 2022: 10) is manifested and in which, on the other hand, the figure of the *femminiello* emerges recurrently from a symbolic function. For this reason, this case of Neapolitan dissident gender and the historical circumstances to which this phenomenon is subjected, acquire a great metaphorical relevance in the artistic discourses to argue about the already mentioned urban and social transformations and how these have repercussions on the Neapolitan identity itself. In this way, it has been analyzed in the field of the *Nuovo teatro napoletano* (New Neapolitan theater), given its significant manifestation in the works of authors such as Annibale Ruccello or Enzo Moscato (Libero et al. 1988), the latter studied in a particular way by authors such as Mariano D'Amora (2019). The theatrical productions of both playwrights evidence a revealing use of characters characterized by their non-normative sexualities or dissident genders as «cardinal point of a metaphor of mutation, difference, alteration (of the mind, as well as of the body)» becoming a «most potent and frequent sign» (Pizzo 2001: 81). For her part, Mauriello pointed out how the stories of these two authors, «in which hybrid figures and alternative genders abound, are stories of marginality, marginalization, violence, and death», and are based, on the other hand, on a theatrical strategy «to bring gender ambiguity to the stage», embedded in «the theatre game, which is not one of identity but a continuous *un-identity* game» (2021: 59-60).

For such reasons, if the symbolic function of *femminiello* and other manifestations of gender and non-normative sexualities within dramaturgy are employed «by the authors as a key to the opening of hells to the Neapolitan subculture» (Pizzo 2001: 82), due to their ability to «elevate to the maximum the symbiotic relationship between city and theater» (D'Amora 2019: 205), in the same way it happens in the cinematographic narratives and specifically in the *Nuovo cinema napoletano* (New Neapolitan cinema). For their part, filmic discourses assumed both local and international aesthetic parameters, in what was a revisiting of certain identity aspects around the crisis of *napoletanità* (Marlow-Mann 2011). As Borrone considers in turn in his study on the *Nuovo cinema napoletano*, the

nomenclature does not only designate a group of filmmakers with the same territorial origin, but especially manifests a common «awareness of being at the center of a profound process of renewal» (2020: 13), and where the *femminiello* is again involved from its metaphorical value to describe the mutation and transformation process of the same socio-urban context.

Making a brief cartography around the persistent appearance of this fluctuating genre in the cinematographic discourse, it is appreciable how since the beginning of the 1980s, period of transition to the *Nuovo cinema napoletano* (Marlow-Mann 2011), we find films that metaphorically employ the figure of the *femminiello* and its particular circumstances as an emblematic element of the Neapolitan cultural context. Productions such as *La pelle* (Cavani, 1981), *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (Wertmüller, 1986) or *Le occasioni di Rosa* (Piscicelli, 1981) show the complexity of the case and its social and historical circumstances in an episodic way, inserted in turn in the main plot. As for *La pelle*, the film is an adaptation of the novel of the same name written by Curzio Malaparte. Set in Naples during the Allied military forces' campaign in the area, Vesce's analysis affirms how the literary text evidences a significant testimonial character about the social circumstances in the early post-war period (2020: 64). Within this prolix description, one of the passages is dedicated to the rite of the *figliata* (litter) of the *femminielli*, with a «meticulous description of the rite» (Vesce 2020: 64). In its film adaptation, the elements described in the novel are staged in detail, reaffirming the performative character of this tradition where the young *femminiello* stages the birth of a phallic figure. In contrast, the film directed by Lina Wertmüller, *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*, which revolves around the rebellion of a group of mothers to safeguard their children from drugs in Neapolitan neighborhoods during the 1980s, features fluid gender representations as a reinforcing element of the cultural context and confirming in turn, according to Annalisa Di Nuzzo,

the significant role that the city assigns to the liminal ambiguity constituted by a polymorphous sexuality such as that of the transvestite-femminiello [...], which enters into relationship, not only with other marginal cultural aspects, but with the whole reality. (2019: 172)

But while in the case of *La pelle* and *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*, the appearance of the typically local transgender collective is materialized according to classical narrative codes that reinforce the sense of *mise en scène*, as far as Salvatore Piscicelli's *Le occasioni di Rosa* is concerned, the formal approach denotes a significant inheritance of neorealist aesthetic parameters. Thus, the filmmaker opts for non-professional actors for certain roles, as in the case of the *femminielli*. In this portrait of the city through the personal circumstances of its young protagonist, Rosa (Marina Suma), who chooses prostitution over

her job at the factory, according to our object of study, the sequence in which a group of *femminielli* share a dinner during the night stands out in particular. The scene has a markedly documentary character, bearing witness to the everyday life of these people chatting in a relaxed manner. Moreover, it is in itself a document of transgender society in the early 1980s.

On the other hand, at the end of this same decade, the film adaptation of the theatrical text by Annibale Ruccello, *Le cinque rose di Jennifer* (1989), stands out. Directed by Tomaso Sherman, the film is, in the words of Borrone, a precedent to «the thematic and linguistic revolution that was soon to hit the world of Neapolitan cinema» (2020: 307). The film, following Ruccello's text, has as its main plot the desperation of Jennifer (Francesco Silvestri), a young Neapolitan transvestite who, from her new residence on the outskirts of the city, awaits the call of her lover Franco. Thus, the film version takes up the change made by the playwright in the rewriting of the theatrical text in 1986, when the location of the plot moves from Quartieri Spagnoli to the outskirts of the city, and that in the film will materialize in the residential complex of Le Vele in Scampia⁵. On the other hand, according to Mauriello, it is revealing that the main character is not a *femminiello*, but identifies with a more internationally recognized notion such as the transvestite, since in this way he symbolically responds to the changes that have occurred in the cultural context. Thus, the scholar indicates that coinciding with the transformation of the conditions that fostered social inclusion, Jennifer manifests a significant desire to become «a pseudo-bourgeois housewife, by virtue of the advantages that belonging to this social group assures her» (Mauriello 2017: 220).

However, it will be from the 1990s and the consolidation of the *Nuovo cinema napoletano* when the profusion of new perspectives according to the diversity of new authors, as advocated by Borrone from the film adaptation of *Le cinque rose di Jennifer*, queer themes acquire greater relevance. Although it should be pointed out that this situation is especially due to the irruption of the filmmaker Pappi Corsicato within this movement, following the premises of the object of study, I highlight some cases where the valorization of this theme is related to the cinematographic participation as an actor of the playwright Moscato, who played Europa in *Mater Natura* and, above all, a fundamental referent for his authorial work on the theatrical stage. As he himself declared, his entry into the cinematographic field is produced by Mario Martone to represent the *femminiello* in the film *Morte di un matematico napoletano* (Martone, 1992) (Addonizio et al. 1997: 107). It is a small participation, in the same way as in his appearance in *Libera* (Corsicato, 1993). However, it will be in the episodic film *I vesuviani* (Corsicato

5 Mauriello points out how this change is due to the consequences of the earthquake of 1980, the year of the premiere of the first version of *Le cinque rose di Jennifer*. For this reason, the scholar considers how there are two versions of the theatrical piece, one before and one after the earthquake (2021: 60).

et al., 1997) where he develops a more complex role in the episode *Maruzella*, directed by Antonietta de Lillo. In this case, the character of fluctuating gender played by Moscato, enjoys a practically phantasmagorical existence among the images of an erotic movie theater where she works. The proposal has an impact on the marginality of the *femminiello*, a key aspect that in *Mater Natura* will be one of the main characteristics of the character.

Consequently, beyond the film version of *Le cinque rose di Jennifer* and the episode directed by De Lillo, *Maruzella*, the figure of the *femminiello* in the rest of the analyzed productions generally holds a secondary character that evidences however the process of patrimonialization of this *transgender* phenomenon as a symbolic manifestation capable of encompassing in its own identity certain aspects of Neapolitan culture (Vesce 2020). In fact, these same dynamics are identifiable in more recent productions, as is the case in *Napoli velata* (Ozpetek, 2011) or the Netflix adaptation of Elena Ferrante's novel *La vita bugiarda degli adulti* (De Angelis, 2023), where the introduction of the *femminiello* in cinematic fiction relapses into the allegorization of issues such as the pagan mythical heritage and its contemporary persistence, the liminality characteristic of its identity or its metaphorical function to expose the sociohistorical transformation of the city. However, within this filmic cartography around the representation of the *femminiello*, in what way is *Mater Natura* inserted in relation to what has been exposed so far? The film, included within the *Nuovo cinema napoletano* by authors such as Borrone (2020) or Marlow-Mann (2011), presents a series of characteristics that evidence its relevance in the representation of the *femminiello*: the leading role it manifests throughout the film; the symbolic construction of the character from cultural elements that give it an emblematic nature following Vesce's estimates (2020: 71); Europa's relevant participation in the plot through the character's ability to generate alternative ways of inhabiting and relating as a consequence of her own subjective experience; and, even from an aesthetic point of view as Borrone considers, the formal assumption by the director of certain local and international queer-themed discursivities (2020: 32). All these factors individuate Andrei's film in the representation of the *femminiello*.

Shaping of the *Femminiello* Europa and Symbolic Valorization of the Character

With a screenplay by Massimo Andrei in co-authorship with Silvia Ranfagni, Andrei's film proposal consists of a «pop melodrama, colorful and musical» (Borrone 2020: 32) in which the marginal situation of a group of transgender people in Naples and their response to such circumstances are witnessed through cinematographic fiction. The film *Mater Natura*, winner of the Audience Award at the 62nd Mostra del Cinema di Venezia, is not the only occasion in

which Andrei works on the theme of *femminiello* through the medium of film. As Vesce's study reports, in the documentary short film *Cerasella: ovvero l'estinzione della femminella* (2007) the filmmaker repeats the idea of the disappearance of the phenomenon linked to the Neapolitan cultural context that he developed through the character of Europa (2020: 71).

The creation of the character of Europa, where some of the elements mentioned above materialize as well as the weight of their project in the diegesis of the film, is structured in parallel to the other two plot lines that structure the entire film text. These plot lines, linked to their own main characters, show a convergent progression that ends up converging with Europa's proposal. On the one hand, the plot of Desiderio, with a greater protagonist depth, provides a markedly melodramatic tone. His narrative arc focuses on his sentimental relationship with Andrea (Valerio Foglia Manzillo) and the consequences of their falling out after realizing that the young man is about to marry a cis woman. On the other, there is Massimino, who alternates his work as a theater director with attending the election campaign of lawyer Stefano Sacco (Luca Ward). The harassment that prevents him from premiering the play is compounded by the politician's betrayal. Massimino feels used when he realizes that the demands that defended the rights of the group have been ignored in order to safeguard the normative family. After the disenchantment suffered, both join the utopia led by Europa on the slope of Vesuvius.

As far as Europa is concerned, we can divide the character's evolutionary journey into three key moments. Firstly, there are the sequences where the character is introduced and the conformation of the character is exposed. Europa is an elderly *femminiello*, in charge of taking care of the children in their neighborhood. As part of the education they impart to the little ones, it is evident from the first moments the way in which their own experience as a non-normative gender determines their relationship with the world, emphasizing the importance of language and its performative function, following the notions developed in Judith Butler's thought (2007). On the one hand, they invite children to choose their own names: «everyone has the name they want and that the world and people who know why have never given them. Either it is the name we want or the name of our favorite heroes». On the other hand, this function is developed to intervene in the perception of the environment. This is evident when, on their excursion with the neighborhood children to a beach in Naples, they describe the environment as if it were a distant and exotic place, which above all has to be respected ecologically, or describing Andrea's lover who bursts into the sequence as if he were the Homeric hero Ulysses himself.

However, Europa does not get any financial return from their work in the care and education of the neighborhood's children. Europa lives in a marked precariousness, materialized especially in the fact that they do not even have electricity in their house. According to the character's own comments, they are

aware that their situation is due to the freedom they self have chosen, which leads to the words that represent Europa's *leitmotif*: «We existed before electricity, and regardless of electricity, we will continue to exist and will still exist». Despite such statements and their desire for «a romantic life» as «the Maria Montessori of all the children in the neighborhood», to counteract the lack of money they ask for help from one of her companions and tries to become a prostitute, this being the second decisive moment in the character's narrative arc. But Europa, in the opinion of their friend, does not meet the parameters of an «erotic woman» according to the tastes of the clientele: they are neither operated nor hormonal and have even lost their stereotypically feminine voice. Despite their attempts, and after a disagreement with a regular client (according to their own words, the client is not clear about who plays the feminine role in the relationship), Europa ends up rebelling and instigates the rest of their companions to do the same, inciting them to claim their own subjectivities in the face of the objectualization and fetishization they constantly suffer.

After Europa's insurrection, the third key moment in the plot is reached, where their main task is developed: to create a new space for the community far from the city and the circumstances in which they live. The «agro-futurism Mater Natura Trans Vesuvian Counseling» which, for its part, again evidences the importance of language from its performative function, is the new and dreamed-of location on the slope of the volcano, described by Europa as follows:

We could not have chosen a better place to be reborn. The mountain that breaks and gives birth to tongues of flame. The female that captures and frightens. And down there, the sea, a calm and irascible god, a strong and tenacious male. And between these two extremes, which if they get angry scare everyone, we include ourselves, between the male and the female, the yin and the yang. Because we are particular creatures, not common, not like the others. We are typical products of this land. Geography also has its importance. We are properly typical and local products of this land, of this area.

Europa continues their reflection, concluding with a definition for the case of this properly local gender identity that falls back on the evocation of the Mediterranean mythological past: they are «chthonic creatures», between two realities, a veiled evocation of the mermaid Parthenope herself, the myth of the foundation of the city of Naples. In this new location they manage to realize what had been unfeasible in the urban context. Desiderio and Massimino go to live in «Mater Natura», where the latter continues with his play, which he performs for his companions and for the rest of the inhabitants of the area. But, above all, Europa manages to carry out their desire to sublimate what they have learned through their own personal experience into the development of some kind of instructive work for the rest of society. Together with the rest of the

other members of the collective, psychological consultations are provided to people in need, as is the case of «criptochece» and other individuals confused in the laws of desire. The final sequence, which takes place while the character played by Moscato is in one of these therapeutic sessions, closes with a plea based on the aforementioned *leitmotif*, questioning the viewer with a direct look at the camera while pronouncing the following words: «We existed before loneliness, and regardless of loneliness, we will continue to exist and we will still exist».

Consequently, during the film's diegesis, the utopia of the *femminiello* Europa redefines both the internal social relations of the collective and the external links with the rest of the population groups in the area. However, their decision, based on leaving the metropolitan context and «being reborn» in an isolated place between the sea and the volcano, shows an escapist character that has been considered by some authors as evasive of the political reality, especially in relation to the plot starring Massimino. This is found in the reflection made by Marlow-Mann, who puts it as follows:

this resolution necessitates a withdrawal from the society that marginalised her to the slopes of Vesuvius, and this constitutes not a political act but a renouncing of politics, something that is rendered explicit by Massimino's rejection of the MP, when he reneges on the promises he made to the transgender community. (2011: 138)

It is clear that the utopia devised by Europa, as Marlow-Mann claims, has an elusive sense and a priori appears to be a decision that renounces the political act. However, such political implications of the project rather underlie how utopia acts from the symbolic realm. That is, it is not so much a question of how the cinematic fable reflects reality or a given ideology, even if the utopia is viable or not, but rather how the fictional narrative draws from that same reality or ideology to participate in the process of symbolization and reconfigure the collective imaginary itself.

Therefore, Europa's political rebellion is fought in the field of the shaping of that same imaginary, because taking into consideration Butler's reflections on the importance of that capacity, «the crucial promise of fantasy, where and when it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be designated as reality» (Butler 2007: 51). In this way, and assuming Butler's thought along with other references within queer theory, Wibke Straube delves into the importance of such narratives in her monograph *Trans Cinema and Its Exit Scapes* and considers that the narratives about other possible worlds for the transgender collective from this very character of evasion, actually generates a process of reflection through the qualities of the filmic device that activates certain sensibilities to relate to the world in different ways, as these «exit scapes» are, in her own words:

they are the elsewhere and elsewhens and the “away-from-from-froms” for a heteropatriarchal, cisgender paradigm. For the characters, they allow the experience of feelings of, for example, reassurance, comfort or belonging, that for a short duration stop reproducing the continuous flow of danger and constraint. Hence, for the entrants, these scapes work not only as a coping strategy towards the otherwise violent elements of these films but also, and most importantly, as a space as well as time within the film that allows them to relax, to gain strength, a short moment of cinematic enjoyment without fear of discovery, violence or threat; a moment that enables the envisioning of the world otherwise. (Straube 2014: 57)

Consequently, the utopia of Europa responds to the criteria that Straube estimates in terms of its function in the processes of symbolization, being in the very escapist sense where its potentiality to generate a critical positioning lies. In turn, such potentiality is determined by the character’s own characteristics. The ideation of utopia, therefore, is a consequence of their own experience as a non-normative gender, considering the way in which, from the intersectionality of their identity, they resemanticize a series of signs that make up their own subjectivity. Thus, as the first instance where the character’s capacities to imagine other possible worlds are located is the strategic importance of language. Specifically, such instance is recognized in the value of the choice of one’s own name, since «to be called by a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language» (Butler 2009: 17). Therefore, one of the elements of the character that implies a resemanticization of the signs that make up their subjectivity, capable of encompassing in turn the rest of such identity signs, lies in the name chosen to be named by the rest of society and that, in addition, interpellates the imaginary of the spectator themselves.

According to Roland Barthes the proper name is «to a certain extent the linguistic form of reminiscence», based on three properties:

the power of essentialization (since it only designates a single referent), the power of quotation (since it is possible to invoke at will all the essence enclosed in the name, to utter it), the power of exploration (since we “deploy” a proper name exactly as we do with a memory). (2022: 24)

The choice of Europa as a proper name suggests a series of reminiscences that determine the symbolic function of the *femminiello*’s own character. On the one hand, it implies a direct reference to the myth of orientalist nature about the Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus from the coasts of Sidon or Tyre (Grimal 1989: 188) and that gives name to the continent. On the other hand, it underlines the fluid and liminal nature of the character alluding to the complexity of the very idea of Europe. According to the estimations of authors who have dealt with the subject such as Eric Hobsbawm or Anthony Pagden, European identity does not respond either to the confines of a geographical space or to a

specific human collective, since it is rather «a process» (Hobsbawm 1998: 227), that is, an «uncertain and imprecise» entity shaped as a «palimpsest of stories, images, resonances and collective memories» (Pagden 2002: 33). Likewise, one of these layers that make up such an identity palimpsest is located in the narratives around the city of Naples and its persistent legacy of antiquity. In this way, the case of philosophers such as Walter Benjamin stands out, who take as reference the Parthenopean city itself to «locate the Mediterranean origins, the childhood wrapped in the myth of western civilization» (Buck-Morss 1995: 43). Benjamin together with Asja Lacis coined the concept of «porous» from the material characteristics of the volcanic rock predominant in the architecture of the city. This notion, which in turn alludes to the fluidity of daily life in Naples, avoids «the definitive, the formed. No situation appears as it is, thought forever, no form declares its “thus and not otherwise”» (Benjamin 2007: 6), comes revalued in the 1990s as a mythical identity narrative of one’s own *napoletanità* (Di Costanzo 2015: 37). Thus, in the Neapolitan context Benjamin estimates through the notion of “porosity”: «[...] that the organizing boundaries of modern capitalism-between public and private, between work and leisure, between personal and communal-have not yet been established» (Buck-Morss 1995: 44).

In conclusion, the reminiscences and evocations that the name chosen by the *femminiello* entails are articulated with the very identity elements that make up the character, evidencing both its emblematic nature that transcends regional limits, as Vesce considered, and a resemantization of such elements through the symbolic value within the cinematographic fiction. The «agro-futurism» of the name «Mater Natura» implies a return to the origins in order to transcend a heteropatriarchal order from the recoding of the matriarchal mythical past that this case of transgender identity shows as the foundation of its own subjectivity. Moreover, if, as Zito considers, «the archaic character of this figure, for its part, lies in the preservation of a certain “primitivism” linked to the survival instinct, which translates into the *art of getting by* (Belmonte, 1997) on a social and especially psychic level» (Zito and Valerio 2019: 274), Europa responds to such premises when, on the one hand, through the *leitmotif* that they repeat on two occasions alludes to their capacity for resistance, on the other, such an attitude leads them to devise an alternative not only for themselves but also for the rest of their companions. Authors like Zito or the director Andrei himself estimated a process of disappearance of the *femminiello* in the socio-urban context of Naples. Di Nuzzo, in her appraisal of the film, indicated how it did indeed suppose the attainment of the traditional *femminiello* model (2019: 171). However, it is the character of Europa them self with their final statement, who underlines the very persistence of this case of non-normative gender. Fluidity, change and transformation, traditional elements of their own identity are likewise her tool to legitimize her persistence both in the Neapolitan sphere and beyond regional confines. Both the utopian proposal of Europa and the conformation of the

character have evidenced after the analysis of the constituent signs of their own subjectivity a series of strategies that interpellate the processes of symbolization by the spectator. On the one hand, taking into consideration Straube's theory, in the escapist project of Europa underlies the political function that ideas are other ways of inhabiting and relating to the environment. Through the cinematic fable, a time is generated for relaxation, but also to perceive and critically question our being in the world. On the other hand, it encourages the viewer's own imagination and its performativity through language, which, from the processes of resignification, is the real strategy to reconfigure our own collective imaginary.

References

- Addonizio, Antonio, Geremia Carrara, Roberto Chiesi, Ernesto De Simone, Roberto Lippi, Eugenio Premuda, and Gianluca Roncaglia. 1997. *Loro di Napoli: il nuovo cinema napoletano, 1986-1997*. Palermo: Edizione della Battaglia.
- Aprà, Adriano, ed. 1993. *Napoletana. Images of a City*. Milano: Fabbri Editori.
- Barthes, Roland. 2022. "Proust y los nombres". In *Marcel Proust. Miscelánea*, edited by Bernard Comment, translated by Alicia Martorell Linares, 21–33. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Beato, Massimo Roberto. 2021. "Il terzo sesso a teatro. Il femminiello napoletano e l'estetica del camouflage". *Scritture della performance* 10, no. 2: 131–147.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2007. *Immagini di città*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Borrone, Giuseppe. 2020. *Dizionario del nuovo cinema napoletano*. Villaricca: Cento Autori.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1995. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2007. *El género en disputa. El feminismo y la subversión de la identidad*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Butler, Judith. 2009. *Lenguaje, poder e identidad*. Madrid: Síntesis.
- Cerasella: ovvero l'estinzione della femminella. 2007. Directed by Massimo Andrei. Italy: University Federico II of Napoli. Film.
- Conelli, Carmine. 2022. *Il rovescio della nazione. La costruzione coloniale dell'idea di Mezzogiorno*. Napoli: Tamu.
- D'Amora, Mariano. 2019. *La drammaturgia di Enzo Moscato. La scena come spazio dell'io, della memoria, dell'artificio illusorio*. Napoli: Guida.
- Di Costanzo, Gianpaolo. 2015. "Sulle rappresentazioni dello spazio napoletano". In *Discorsi su Napoli. Rappresentazioni della città tra eccessi e difetti*, edited by Stefania Ferraro, 29–58. Roma: Aracne.

- Di Nuzzo, Annalisa. 2019. "Napoletaneità e identità post-moderne. Plasmazioni del femminiello a Napoli". In *Femminielli. Corpo, Genere, Cultura*, edited by Eugenio Zito and Paolo Valerio, 149–184. Napoli: Dante & Descartes.
- Grimal, Pierre. 1989. *Diccionario de la mitología griega y romana*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1998. "La curiosa historia de Europa". In *Sobre la historia*, by Eric J. Hobsbawm, 220–229. Barcelona: Grijalbo Mondadori.
- I vesuviani*. 1997. Directed by Pappi Corsicato (episode *La stirpe di lana*), Antonietta De Lillo (episode *Maruzzella*), Antonio Capuano (episode *Sofialorèn*), Stefano Incerti (episode *Il diavolo nella bottiglia*), and Mario Martone (episode *La salita*). Italy: Megaris. Film.
- Iermano, Toni. 2012. "Denuncia, mito e oblio. Appunti di viaggio sulla Napoli moderna". In *Il Viaggio a Napoli tra letteratura e arti*, edited by Pasquale Sabbatino, 485–508. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane.
- La pelle*. 1981. Directed by Liliana Cavani. Italy and France: Gaumont Italia, and Cinefrance. Film.
- La Trecchia, Patrizia. 2013. *Uno sguardo a Sud. Vent'anni di movimenti, storie, conflitti e trasformazioni nella città di Napoli. 1990-2010*. Napoli: Liguori Editore.
- La vita bugiarda degli adulti*. 2023. Directed by Edoardo De Angelis. No. of seasons, 1; no. of episodes, 6. Italy: Fandango. TV Series.
- Le cinque rose di Jennifer*. 1989. Directed by Tomaso Shermin. Italy: Espace Production. Film.
- Le occasioni di Rosa*. 1981. Directed by Salvatore Piscicelli. Italy: Falco Film. Film.
- Libera*. 1993. Directed by Pappi Corsicato. Italy: Hathor Film. Film.
- Libero, Luciana, Manlio Santanelli, Annibale Ruccello, and Enzo Moscato. 1988. *Dopo Eduardo. Nuova drammaturgia a Napoli*. Napoli: Guida Editori.
- Marlow-Mann, Alex. 2011. *The New Neapolitan Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Mater Natura*. 2005. Directed by Massimo Andrei. Italy: Kubla Khan. Film.
- Mauriello, Marzia. 2017. "Altri generi in performance. La rappresentazione dell'esperienza trans tra rito e teatro a Napoli". *Annali 2013-2015* - Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, Napoli: 203–226.
- Mauriello, Marzia. 2018. "Corpi dissonanti: note su gender variance e sessualità. Il caso dei femminielli napoletani". *Archivio antropologico mediterraneo* 20, no. 2 (December): n.p.
- Mauriello, Marzia. 2021. *An Anthropology of Gender Variance and Trans Experience in Naples*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morte di un matematico napoletano*. 1992. Directed by Mario Martone. Italy: Teatri Uniti. Film.
- Mumford, Lewis. 2013. *Historia de las utopías*. Translated by Diego Luis Sanromán. Logroño: Pepitas de calabaza.

- Napoli velata*. 2011. Directed by Ferzan Özpetek. Italy: Warner Bros. Entertainment Italia, R&C Produzioni, and Faros Film. Film.
- Pagden, Anthony. 2002. "Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent". In *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union*, edited by Anthony Pagden, 33–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pizzo, Antonio. 2001. "Tradizione, tradimento, traduzione. Percorsi della nuova drammaturgia napoletana". *Il Castello di Elsinore* 41: 67–97.
- Preciado, Paul B. 2022. *Disforia mundi, o el sonido del mundo derrumbándose*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Straube, Wibke. 2014. *Trans cinema and its Exit Scapes: A Transfeminist Reading of Utopian Sensibility and Gender Dissidence in Contemporary Film*. Linköping: Linköpings Universitet, Tema.
- Tabanelli, Roberta. 2011. *I «Pori» di Napoli. Il cinema di Mario Martone, Antonio Capuano e Pappi Corsicato*. Ravenna: Longo Editore.
- Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*. 1986. Directed by Lina Wertmüller. Italy: Italian International Film. Film.
- Vesce, Maria Carolina. 2017. *Altri transiti. Corpi, pratiche, rappresentazioni di femminielli e transessuali*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Vesce, Maria Carolina. 2020. "'Et io ne vidi uno in Napoli'. Orientalismo e processi di patrimonializzazione dei femminielli napoletani". *Storia delle Donne* 16: 55–73.
- Wilchins, Riki. 2019. *Gender Norms & Intersectionality. Connecting Race, Class & Gender*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Zito, Eugenio. 2017. "Scene da un 'matrimonio'. Performance, genere e identità a Napoli". *EtnoAntropologia* 5, no. 2: 417–462.
- Zito, Eugenio, and Paolo Valerio, eds. 2019. *Femminielli. Corpo, Genere, Cultura*. Napoli: Dante & Descartes.