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TAPPING (INTO) REALITY:
ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN *PINOCCHIO*
AND THE PHENOMENON OF REALITY TV¹

Roberto Benigni has alluded to the popularity of Collodi's *Pinocchio* by claiming that it is the third all-time best-seller, after the Bible and the Quran. Of these three, the profane *Pinocchio* perhaps allows for greater freedom of interpretation. Benigni's representation sought to illustrate "the joy of life, of lightness, of cheerfulness in a time like this one, which is not very cheerful. It is like living in a dream."² In an interview in *La Repubblica*, Benigni claims that Federico Fellini, who had been working on a collaboration with Benigni for the film project, had wanted to interpret the story as a nightmare.³ This article brings together Benigni's film version of the story with Collodi's original text in order to determine in what ways the conceptualizations of a popular reality in these texts intersect with those in the discursive texts of today's popular Reality TV.

Pinocchio represents a pre-human entity already exhibiting the very real and human faults traditionally known in some Western religions as the seven deadly sins: he is greedy and gluttonous (ch. XIX); he is stubborn and willful (ch. XX), and he always wants his own way (ch. XXXI); his sense of pride is grounded in laziness and in his fear of being shamed (ch. XXIV); he is habitually disobedient and he dreads the thought of mental and physical work (ch. XXV); his impatience is expressed by his boredom and his anger (ch. XXIX); he is egotistical and often ungrateful; as the Benigni character, he has no manners. In short, he is a trickster and a pest.

¹This article was written in the spring of 2003 and therefore reflects an analysis of the phenomenon of 'Reality TV' and its criticisms as these were manifested up to the moment of writing.

²"la gioia di vivere, della leggerezza, dell'allegria in un momento, come questo, poco allegro. È come vivere in un sogno." "Benigni: 'Il mio Pinocchio.'"

³"Fellini aveva già disegnato il pupazzetto, eccolo qua. Lo voleva fare tutto come un incubo." Scalfari, "Benigni."

In fact, Pinocchio's character is mirrored in the seven "urchins" (ch. XXVII), whom he (unselfconsciously) identifies as "the seven deadly sins." In spite of this, Pinocchio's character cannot be polarized into the representation of "a good-for-nothing" (as he is called by a passerby in the film), since the puppet also demonstrates the range of contradictions to be found in human behaviour. Specifically, Pinocchio's curiosity and impetuosity are judged according to the standards of his modern society: that is, as delinquent qualities that must be repressed, or at least kept under control. Within this context of social order and control, Pinocchio's gullibility becomes a point of contention in the formation of the societal subject. Thus the tale of Pinocchio presents a dialectical foil to the normative functions of the television medium that excels in manipulating events and presenting them as real life by tapping into conventional fairy tale elements of cruelty, deceit and greed—even including some nasty 'in-laws,' if we consider the various representations of parental surrogates.

The question of Pinocchio's mutable nose dominates the contemporary North American popular imagination, yet the original literary text reveals that Pinocchio's nose grows longer only when certain lies are told, not just when any lie is told.⁴ Benigni's film, like Collodi's text, does not represent the puppet's nose as the main issue. Indeed, Pinocchio learns to save his own life and those of his companions precisely through trickery and imposture.⁵ Integrity, altruism and the imagination emerge as sub-

⁴This question of lying and the representational connotations of Pinocchio's nose have already been discussed in a wide range of literary, psychological, and other critical disciplines. See Perella's introduction to Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, p. 47.

⁵Benigni answers Enzo Biagi's question: "Chi è per te il bugiardo?" with the following: "Il bugiardo è un essere meraviglioso, proprio con la 'a'. Per esempio, Federico Fellini era un gran bugiardo, [...] nel senso che lui le bugie le amava. Chi dice bugie, dipende naturalmente dalla maniera con la quale si dicono – dirò delle banalità, [...] se uno riesce a dire una bugia, deve inventare una storia, c'è un senso di generosità verso l'altro." "Poi deve continuare il racconto; perché sia credibile, deve inserire delle cose plausibili e fantastiche, che lasciano di stucco, così come fa Pinocchio. Insomma, insistere sulla bugia è creare una montagna di neve che va protetta. È un regalo, insomma. Sono bugie le sue, non menzogne. Perché Pinocchio dice delle bugie innocenti, come tanti personaggi nel libro le dicono; solo lui però ha una dannazione, quel naso non gli permette di rimanere protetto dalla balla, mentre gli altri dicono le frottole. L'unica menzogna che dice Pinocchio è quando non è più lui, alla fine del libro, quando pronuncia la famosa battuta: "Come ero buffo quando ero un burattino, e come ora sono contento di essere un ragazzo perbene." È la grande frottola del libro, l'unica

stantial keys to survival in the ideal society. Although the faculties of wit and judgement appear as crucial qualities, the possession of imagination is shown as an extrinsically repressed area since it could also lead to some threateningly volatile situations in the social order.

A century later, a regular diet of lies is being consistently and uncritically consumed through the television medium, while Benigni's personal interpretation of the boy-puppet is condemned by the entertainment press as a spectacular insult to the imagination. On the other hand, the American Reality TV phenomenon maintains that it is "trying to hold a mirror up to society" (Napoli), albeit through the dubious aesthetics of young and attractive contestants, with manipulative typecasting material for the participants, and plots that are easy to follow. Yet, the activities behind the scenes reveal an "ethos of concealment" (Burt) throwing all questions of integrity to the winds. The practices of trickery and deceit that are performed on the contestants themselves, let alone on the viewers, usually turn into the reality of betrayals sometimes resulting in lawsuits that also turn into stories of interest for the Reality dependent (or, shall we say, the reality-challenged) viewer. For these consumers, reality is just not enough: "in addition to pandering to our storybook fantasies, Reality television plays to far crasser conceits—[besides] lies and manipulations, an ample display of female flesh and a sadistic interest in the rejected suitors' humiliation" (Orenstein). So, in the end shows like 'Joe Millionaire' and other relationship-based Reality shows reveal that:

Humiliation is all the rage on what is called [...] reality television. [...] with lonely single people willing to trade privacy for a television-sponsored date. We have become accustomed to laughing at, not with, our fellow [human beings with] those unknown, unrich, unhip...creatures who simply do not understand what desperate losers they are. (Golway, emphasis added)

Golway reflects on 'Joe Millionaire' in these terms:

How proud the television stations are to have tricked these young women and then showed the nation the results of its lies! [...] reality shows specialize in degradation and exploitation. A less cynical society would condemn these shows rather than celebrate them.

panzana di Pinocchio. L'unica vera fandonia è quella finale. Non è contento di essere un ragazzo per bene, tutti amiamo il burattino. Mentre gli altri personaggi dicono le menzogne, le dice la Fata, le dice Geppetto, le dicono il Gatto e la Volpe, ovviamente. Ma quelle sono vere menzogne. Invece, Pinocchio dice bugie meravigliose, che tutti vorremmo dire." Biagi, "Indovina," pp. 35-37.

Compared with Pinocchio's fear of being derided and humiliated, it would seem that certain values have radically changed along the way. Golway frames his comments with the irony that the "Fox [network] is owned by Rupert Murdoch, the conservative media mogul whose print publications feature commentators who regularly bemoan the loss of traditional values, etc."

One must wonder what lessons are to be drawn from this. The parrot informs Pinocchio that "one must learn to earn a living either with one's hands or with one's wits" (*"bisogna sapersi guadagnare [i soldi] o col lavoro delle proprie mani o coll'ingegno della propria testa."* ch. XIX). In short, as Pinocchio will painfully learn throughout his adventures, it appears that one gets only what one deserves. Yet, while he learns that he cannot get away with even the intention of transgression and that he will have only himself to blame for his subsequent disgrace, Pinocchio is also learning about the injustices and the many unlawful realities of his world. Indeed, he even sees that there are many who do not follow rules of good behaviour and get away with it. The means of acquiring the status of "a real boy" (*"un ragazzo perbene"*) correspond to a lesson of self-censorship through an internalized practice of abnegation, epitomized by the penance Pinocchio must perform at the end of the story when he must slave away for a local farmer in order to make enough money to save Geppetto and, by extension, himself. The viewer/ listener is expected to identify subconsciously with this condition of modern morality that co-opts the subject into the general morality of the societal order. Obedience and conformity mean acceptance into the human social order.

Pinocchio must first affirm his existence to himself and to his Other through negative identification. His material entity is often misidentified so that he must constantly deny imposed identities. Thus, the ascertainment of his existence depends on a selective denial of identity as a pretext to the survival of his 'family' or social group. The viewer also has the impression that children's duties are summed up in the word obedience and that any deviant conduct will certainly bring trouble. The Italian expression *'un ragazzo perbene'*—like the French *'un garçon comme il faut'*—"refers to respectability and conformity to a polite or 'civilized' social code" (Perella, 18). In addition, we are reminded that parental figures occupy a sacred space when it comes to disobedience: the rudiments of formation imply that disobedience to one's elders is equivalent to disobedience to God. In an essay on puppet theatre, Franco Ferrucci identifies Collodi's tale as an "undeclared bourgeois Catholic ideology." Such prescriptive ideology towards literacy and education is conceived toward the generation of an imagined society.

If Collodi's instructional texts shared the civic-minded notion of unifying Italians into one nation, as Perella suggests, we must also question the ideological purposes of Reality TV. A preliminary examination indicates motives of opportunism: the 'TV people' saw in the culture of passive entertainment an opportunity to use a channel of communication that is really working in its capacity to exploit their viewers' perceptions of reality through shows that present simulations without actually identifying these as such (Barnhart). It does not matter how flimsy the claims to 'reality' in these TV shows might be, the fact is that television programs are 'programs': a plan or system under which action is taken toward a goal, and addictive enough to have occasioned an expansion of the concept into The Reality Channel. The concept has been diffused into various genres to please almost everyone. The dating or so-called 'video vérité programs' with their special production aesthetics and editing features such as pop-up bubbles, propose voyeuristic and totally vicarious impressions of intimacy, while another extreme brings the 'shock' or 'gross-out' types of Reality programs—for example, showing contestants eating horse rectums—as seen in the program "The Fear Factor" (Martin). Meanwhile, producers claim that Reality programs "restore to viewers the kind of old-fashioned theatricality that can still be found on daytime soaps" (Stanley) by relying on the same melodramatic techniques.

While Pinocchio is forced to shed his gullibility before he can be admitted into society, the television realm, on the other hand, strategically deploys the credulity of the subject against him/herself while systematically inducing him/her into its own mechanism. The corresponding image would show Pinocchio performing the donkey's function at the wheel for the profit of his dominant Other, with the essential difference being that Pinocchio's lesson finally comes through in the performance of this activity. Thus, tangible connections between language, image and self-consciousness are co-opted in the performance of a varied and transitory impact on the imagination. In Collodi's tale, the language and images work synergistically to portray Pinocchio's situations. Collodi's technique employs tragico-humorous connections in the Italian language to emphasize perceptively the sensation of hunger with expressions such as "a hunger one could cut with a knife" ("una fame da tagliarsi col coltello"), or "a hunger one could pick up with one's hands" ("una fame da pigliarla con le mani"). In this manner, starvation anxieties and oral fantasies are recognizable as a ruling image and a motivating factor and even as a pedagogic weapon (Perella, 32). Benigni's film version depicts hunger as a major theme, but it is not a motivating factor for advancing the story.

Historical criticism has recognized the puppet as a stock character in the style of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Yet this conception ignores the fact that, besides demonstrating a paradoxical variety of features, Pinocchio's character acquires a faculty of judgement that is directed away from self-indulgence and towards a praxis of alterity. Along the same lines, and according to Rick Lyman, the "reality genre ... depends on introducing audiences to a stock group of real-life characters and then following them through a string of episodes, ratcheting up the tension with a series of melodramatic contrivances." Similarities and divergences are marked by the authorial techniques and goals. Benigni's film shares in the stock character notion with the addition of an original framing soundtrack composed by Nicola Piovani in order to bring "a melodramatic structure in the sense that each character has his or her own theme" ("una struttura da melodramma, nel senso che ogni personaggio ha il suo proprio tema"; Castaldo).

In a society where children are growing up with computers, making them completely at ease in their virtual worlds, and where the rest of the population is being bombarded with the various but very real 'spins' that rely on the flow of imagery to impact on the popular imagination, it may not be so surprising that we, as the audience, should come to distrust our faculty of recognition as measure of, and voucher for, our affective reality. Moreover, in questions of alterity, when language and the image no longer correspond to any reality but are only stories-viewed-as-reality, one risks the critical misrecognition of the Other in the lifeworld. The alternation between fantasy and realism in Collodi's tale integrates these two elements into a "playful and ironic synthesis in which", according to Perella, "the dominant vision and guiding spirit is the reality principle" (Perella, 475). This Freudian principle is verifiable in the realistic association between poverty and starving understood through their desirable opposite material realities of money and food. These in turn are brought into confrontation with the tension between an individual desire for freedom and the societal need for order. The practice of building up situations in preparation for the delivery of specific goals is endemic to the fictional lifeworld of literature as well as to the realm of Reality TV. Collodi uses the fantastic context to instill the sense of a concrete reality in the audience, so that while *Pinocchio* implies a 'reality principle', Reality TV creates and orbits around a 'pleasure principle'.⁶ In this case, however, the operative word is *control*, and not

⁶The newer genres of Reality TV such as Donald Trump's "You're Fired!" appear to mirror the reality principle of the lifeworld through Reality programs that are nonetheless conceived as lucrative entertainment apparatus in the service of the producers.

merely technical control, through “strategic casting and shifty editing” or through pixilated body parts and bleeped “trash talk” to produce surreal narrations. The (infrared) surveillance cameras strategically placed so as to propose real-life situations actually end up “eliciting near sociopathic narcissism and passive-aggression ... edited down to bite-size subplots that affirm ... the gender stereotypes Reality TV strives on” (Lim). Ultimately, the assumption of control is shifted away from the audience through the uncritical submission of the latter to these surreal worlds and away from a personal command over the sense of disbelief.⁷

Pinocchio’s curiosity is lured by a world of conflicting promises, such as the promise of food and the promise of becoming “un ragazzo per bene”—which would denote his entrance into the social order. Yet, his world also promises the possibility of non-stop amusement. The tension between Freud’s two systems, the reality and the pleasure principles, is illustrated as a clean division between two oppositional lifeworlds in the tale of *Pinocchio* though not in the subjective figure of Pinocchio, who is shown possessing his metamorphic qualities *a priori*. (Also proffering the pseudo-philosophy that the subject must change because society cannot or should not.) The narrating of the puppet’s misadventures thus represents a denaturalisation process of self-consciousness in the pre-societal subject. In the context of a social order that promises happiness and well-being as the result of obedience and education, Pinocchio must learn responsibility by curbing his sense of curiosity so that the tension between his subjective desires and the collective needs are held in check. Therefore, a proper sense of control must be subjectively learned according to specified and invariable conventional parameters. In contrast to this, the experimental formula of Reality TV relies on the promise of voyeuristic kicks and on the illusion of forbidden intrusions into the privacy of the Other. These pseudo-gratifications are controlled by the puppeteers of Reality programming, who in turn, are controlled by ratings and profits. Thus everyone in Reality TV is specifically cast: the participants are chosen for their ability to tell an interesting story and only their actions within their designated situations are presented as real. Moreover, people entering the visual space of the camera must sign a release—which is ultimately the release from their own authenticity within (and perhaps to a certain degree, outside) their designated performance surroundings.

⁷The example of the Iraq war coverage presents a useful demonstration of our “delusion of control” through the extensive manipulation of language and images, which simultaneously betrays our modern fears of uncertainty in “a society afflicted by the illusion of orderliness.” See Klein, “The PG-Rated War.”

Pinocchio is derided and criticized by several other characters for his gullibility, so he must learn along the way to discern the manipulation of the real through the workings of deception. He must also learn to distinguish the boundaries between the real and its image.⁸ For Pinocchio (and his audience), the lesson comes through in the form of numerous instances of verbal and situational irony. Collodi's tale derives its urgency from a realistic lifeworld of nineteenth-century Italy and there is no room for sympathy within this reality. Indeed Pinocchio is derided and even imprisoned for having let himself be cheated; moreover, this nineteenth-century audience is presumably capable of discerning between the fantastic and the realistic scenes in the story. The semiotically-challenged Pinocchio must learn to read masks and language in order to recognize the alterability of reality, while he works his way through a world of social injustices where good actions (and even his love for his *babbo*) can also get him into trouble. As Benigni states, illusion itself is "one of the central points not only of the book, but of the world" and adds "Pinocchio is an illusion and he lives on illusions, but for him nothing is more real than illusions [...] We are all born pure, a few like Pinocchio and Don Quixote remain so."⁹

In Collodi's text, as well as in serialized reality programs, episodic installments keep the audience in a sometimes all-consuming suspense until the next episode. Both *Pinocchio* and Reality TV tap into our childhood fantasies of "castles and fortunes, true love and romantic destiny" (Orenstein). One major difference, however, is the subtlety of an anti-didactic process which appears in Reality programming. Burt indicates the pervasive public appetite for seeing the "real thing" rather than viewing something that "looks real in every way"—except that what is being offered to the viewer is not real. The viewers want to be told a story. According to Mike Fleiss, co-executive producer of "The Bachelor" series, they "are more satisfied when we work the spin" (Stanley). Reality programs pretend to offer alternate realities wherein the American myth and the spirit of democracy merely appear to be exercised. In the general context of Reality programming there is an ideological collusion between players and producers which is offered in various formats:

⁸See chapter 5, where Pinocchio believes that the boiling kettle over the hearth is real, until he runs up to it and finds that it is only a painted image.

⁹"uno dei punti centrali non solo del libro ma del mondo [...] Pinocchio è un'illusione e vive di illusioni, ma per lui non c'è niente di più reale delle illusioni. [...] Tutti nasciamo puri, alcuni lo rimangono come Pinocchio e Don Chisciotte" (Scalfari).

Both parties have an interest in creating a drama, one that draws viewers into a web of associations, producing thrills, chills, and secret delight. These feelings are heightened by the belief that they convey the real meaning of actual events. The French ... call this confluence of the virtual and the *vérité* hyper-reality. It's the grand illusion of our time. (Goldstein)

A shift has occurred in the nature of the relationship between the subject and his Other: since Pinocchio must contend with the reality of hunger, the struggle to survive becomes his significant Other. In contrast, Reality programming promotes an aggressive sense of competition which is sometimes represented as personal or team struggles, for example against the elements, but it is the competition amidst the selected group that grips the audience, who is now learning to laugh *at*, rather than *with*, the Other. Secondly, these programs manifest the disappearance of irony as a teaching tool since its potential is reduced to a unidirectional weapon aimed at the unwitting spectator. Effectively, Pinocchio's trajectory aims towards reality while the trajectory of Reality TV slips away from reality. While Pinocchio must prove himself worthy of joining his human Others in the world of the real, the participants of Reality TV are urged to come out as winners *against* the other individuals of the selected group. While the new, real-boy Pinocchio looks at his discarded puppet body with ambivalence, Reality programming exploits the image of the discarded through post-rejection interviews,¹⁰ much to the delight of the audience. As Terry Golway sardonically states in *America*:

Television in particular and society in general clearly have taken a lesson that dates back to the early 1980's [sic]. There are two kinds of people in life—winners and losers. And winners are entitled to laugh at the losers.

This competition-based exercise in manipulation must, however, “have psychological as well as physical humiliation. We must see egos shattered”, as Grossberger observes in *MediaWeek*. Furthermore, the nature of competition requires that individuals “carry out single tasks on which the comfort of the group relies. Yet this introduces a blame culture and also a feeling of inadequacy for members who do not perform the required task. This can in turn lead to exclusion” (Kelly). “At home, the cruel viewer

¹⁰ Although it could be argued that rejected contestants have sometimes achieved a certain so-called positive fame following their failure within the boundaries of the ‘game’, we can also maintain that these public redemptions are strategically formulated programs for the further submersion of the viewer into a superficial mirror or reality, as well as for the perpetual regeneration of network revenues.

cackles pitilessly over the hoodwinking of these hapless babes, their voracious greed exposed for all the world to jeer" (Grossberger). And this is only the surface: the background scene is just as murky with its own stories of lies and betrayal. In a way, the contestants are just as naïve and vulnerable as the puppet, and their deriding audience does not seek to apply to them any moral concepts beyond that of a classic soap opera duality of *good* versus *bad*. An alternative audience reaction endemic to Jerry-Springer type programs would show an audience of individuals, each of whom is almost surely convinced that: "At least I am not as screwed up as that person" (Stanley).

The concept of death in Collodi's *Pinocchio* is an ambivalent one. Pinocchio's deaths and 'resuscitations' are often negotiable situations. Although speaking of death is always enough to instill terror, death itself is never final—that is, until Pinocchio achieves traditional mortality as a real boy. In Benigni's film, the notions of life and death are contained within a mythicised conceptualization of the text: "and like all myths [Pinocchio] bears an unsolvable conflict from which he cannot disentangle himself."¹¹ At the same time, the film disables a fear of loss through death, in the introductory scene where the Blue Fairy explains her motivation behind her temporary state of death: that is, as a means of attaining immortality. In comparison, the popularity of Reality television programs is said to have altered the way the viewer confronts the reality of death. Programs that show public autopsies are meant to cater to a public appetite for shocking realism, while the so-called "modern denial of death, the ethos of invisibility" continues to identify our officially sanctioned reality (Burt).

Collodi's tale addresses a primarily young and proletarian group with the aim of bringing about a progressive change without jeopardizing the fundamental social (patriarchal) system.¹² Pinocchio must learn how to be human before he may become human, but at the same time he instinctively resists to surrender his freedom in exchange for admission into an adult utilitarian society—a typical 'tweenie' state of ambiguousness. However, until he learns to repress his vitality Pinocchio will continue to be considered an inchoate being, thus "ontologically and socially inferior" (Perella, 47). Discipline is linked to maturity and morality, and it is learned

¹¹"E come tutti i miti [Pinocchio] porta con sé un conflitto irrisolvibile; sdisintri-cabile" (Scafari)

¹²Although a large part of this populace may have been illiterate, the story of Pinocchio was able to circulate among the poorer segments of society through the oral tradition in the activity of *raccontare*, as well as through representations of street puppet theatre.

through a semiological application, that is, learning by reading and/or mimicking the signs. In nineteenth-century Italy, the street puppet theatre was a popular form of entertainment and education for its target audience: the middle-class and subaltern 'masses.' A recognizable formula, that is, the strong slapstick element, and the predetermined roles of the puppet figures ensured the total engagement of the audience. The popular dependence on the formula is shown to be powerful enough to generate a loud protest from the human audience when Pinocchio interrupts the puppet show and causes the marionettes to step outside of their character roles. In other words, it does not matter how violent or 'irrational' the content might be, as long as the framing formula remains recognizable.

Reality TV is also aimed at specific target audiences who identify with the particular formulaic systems. As it invades prime time viewing to complete its audience round-up, can we continue to pretend that Reality type programming is capturing only the lowest common denominator? Indeed, the saturation of Reality programming has already made a majority of the television audience (in North America and in Europe) captive to the fraud. In the face of so many fears to be encountered on the outside, the viewer appreciates the imposed order of the formula program that promotes a sense of well-being in the viewer who smugly contemplates the wretched state of the Other. *Pinocchio's* Blue Fairy reminds us that social order depends on its own formula of obedience and conformity. Pinocchio wants to be real because he wants to be 'like everyone else.' His desire for reality is contingent upon the productive reality of his perceived dominant species. In the reality of manufactured television, excess energy in the consumer is unwarranted, while his inertia, in the form of the couch potato, is ideal.

The Reality genre is evolving in a synergistic relationship with advertisers to capture their viewing public with "bull's eye" strategies, and offering in return "a rich source of meaningless gossip for citizens of the global village" ("How Potent Cheap"). The programs that are able to establish quick and loyal followings are designed to stir up the viewers' lower emotions (disdain versus pity, revulsion versus fear), but these emotions are consumed in the name of something that has no larger significance (Mendelsohn). Network executives call Reality TV, "discomfort" TV, as opposed to the "comfort" shows: the familiar sitcoms and dramas. This attests to the undeniable effects of Reality programming. A recent collaborative article in *Time* claims that "Reality TV ... is teaching TV a new way to tell involving human stories" and that Reality shows leave their viewers "feeling part of a communal experience." These same writers also admit that "no reality show can match the intelligence and layers of well-constructed fictions" (Poniewozik et al.).

The case against Reality TV is not merely one of aesthetics or of morality. We cannot ignore the fact that it has gone into a widespread 'overkill mode,' interpellating the majority of the TV-viewing audience through programs that exploit the lowest common denominator of human relationships by degrading their (mostly female) participants and by suscitating a paradoxical sense of shame and smugness in the viewer. There is no doubt that Reality TV brings a new form of spectacularisation to a larger-than-ever audience. Its auratic quality apparently claims the integrity and good taste even of "smart, educated people." However, one thing seems certain, and that is that Reality programs are "weapons of mass distraction ... substituting an obsession with a contrived reality for attention to the all-too-scary global one" (Conlin). More importantly, while viewers are led to believe that they are getting a new entertainment formula, they are actually being formulated into a new '(dis)order.'

So, what values are being reinforced through the 'Reality' channelling device? And how is our self-consciousness being affected as we see ourselves in our reformulated roles of performers and/or spectators? Specifically, how is the concept of alterity being experienced as it is being observed on Reality TV and as it is practised in the real world?

An article in *Community Care* (Kelly et al.) claims that the genre offers "a framework for understanding team development," since the "groups go through a series of stages according to Bruce Tuckman's model of group development, which is *forming* (the group establishes its tasks and methods); *storming* (in which there may be resistance to the demands of the task or polarised opinions or resistance of control); this leads to *norming* (in which there emerges the development of group cohesion and the open exchange of views and feelings); the final state would be that of "*performing*" when a group creates its own energy and becomes effective and is characterised by flexibility and maturity." Interestingly, however, "Reality TV gives us a lesson on how never to get to this *performing* stage", because that does not make good television. This is supposed to maintain the stress of collective uncertainties and competitiveness which will lead to conflict among the contestants. The idea is not to provide serious solutions to what is going on in the country or in the world.

In an interview, Benigni declared that with the English distribution of his film: "It will be a campaign addressed to the whole public, not only at families and small children, for the adults the focus will be on the dark side of Collodi's tale."¹³ In an article in *La Repubblica*, children and senior view-

¹³"Sarà una campagna rivolta a tutto il pubblico, non solo alle famiglie e ai bambini, per gli adulti si punterà sul lato dark del racconto di Collodi" (Ciotta).

ers were said to be the most enthusiastic group about Benigni's film version (Morgoglione, "Pinocchio, il pubblico lo promuove"). The least enthusiastic, the 20 to 40 age group, is said to be most disposed to the illusion of Reality TV while it simultaneously and gradually becomes more detached from real life experiences. Following the Blue Fairy's advice that it is never too late to learn (ch. XXV), Pinocchio sets out on his journey to prove himself worthy of being real by performing heroic-type gestures so that he might gain respect for and from the Other(s). Through drudgery and humiliation, he earns his social humanity and happiness as he toils for his Other—hence his sense of altruism directs him to take the lead and use his own wits, and to adapt his own skills and the objects around him toward the protection of his 'family' group (Geppetto, la Fata, Lucignolo) from bad influences. Pinocchio thus learns to aspire to something higher than himself. His human lesson includes the reality of love relationships: simply that he cannot always be happy, nor can he always be with those he loves. Happiness is gained through obedience and good conduct, which also implies adapting the self to the world and language of the adult conventional society. In contrast to this, Reality programs seem to cultivate meanness on the part of the contestants as well as in the viewing audience, so that ultimately Othership is undermined by so-called popular entertainment practices.

Pinocchio's experiences as a puppet demonstrate a human susceptibility to appearances. He learns about the very real effects and consequences that these misconceptions generate. On the other hand, competitive Reality programs exploit this power of the visual imaginary by promoting always new spheres of rivalry in which "no talent is required, just a bod and a face [to be] perused, criticized and dismissed by a panel of judges" (Quindlen). Even if something can sometimes be learned, for example about patience and resourcefulness, in Reality formats such as *Frontier House* or *1900 House*, for the most part Reality shows are not being served up as cautionary tales. These shows exploit the loneliness factor of single people through "television-sponsored dates" and the like in such a way that any revolutionary potential of the satire is subsumed by the fairy tale element. And when failure is experienced on these shows, it is experienced individually, personally, and publicly. In fact, real gossip is what Reality TV does provide: the audience community may preoccupy itself with certain 'truths' behind the images, but these are insignificant truths. Hence the conflictuality between real contact with the world and infantilistic practices remains unresolved within the conformity of Reality programming. The resulting product is a viewer who is "dumber, fatter, and more disengaged

from [him/herself] and from society" (Conlin). In the end, all notions of trust in the Other, or in one's own team or in one's self-esteem, or even trust in romance (and even in feminism) are systematically dismantled under the pretext of the right to the 'pursuit of happiness.' The notion of alterity devolves into a solitary exercise in rivalry and narcissistic behaviour. Moreover, we can hardly speak of a 'hero's journey' in Reality TV shows that embody a contrived lifeworld generally within the confines of a rhetoric of exclusion. And if Pinocchio relates a coming-of-age story to prepare for the adult experience, we must question Reality programming's aims to maintain the intellect of the sympathetic viewer at a pre-pubescent level of understanding of the world.

Giuseppe Prezzolini endorsed a Machiavellian vision of the world when he wrote of *Pinocchio* as a book that "shows the world as it is—led not by virtue but by fortune guided by astuteness."¹⁴ *Pinocchio* is a children's tale written for a nation in its childhood, and hence it is charged with a historical and cultural context aimed at providing a solution to mass poverty through education. A different kind of social and political consciousness defines the period that saw the publication of the story, but an underlying intentionality of creating a unifying consciousness at the social and national levels remains crucial. And if Pinocchio represents a young Italy, what do Reality shows indicate in terms of the wildly spreading American pop culture? We know that Reality shows do not foster critical thinking and that they show polarized worlds. For Pinocchio, the dramatic encounters happen in the outside world, while in Reality TV the dangers lurk within the shared sphere of pseudoplay. In such a space, the concept of home does not exist as a point of reference. Unchecked fantasy is upheld as the principal motivation so that any positive or useful contribution to society is impossible.

Pinocchio's attitude toward adulthood in the form of human reality reflects the perspective of an Italy aspiring toward nationhood. The contrast in this case is plain enough: Reality TV culture professes its infantilism through a Peter-Pan-like mind-set, seeking a pseudo-freedom (through vapid forms of entertainment) which it believes to be its due. Quindlen writes that while America was standing on the brink of war, "in television [...] the strengths and the concerns of the nation are amply matched by its most puerile impulses." The "FunForeverLand", or 'paese de' balocchi', is invading our TV screens at an alarming rate and processing its viewer-inhabitants toward an asinine (from the Italian *asino*: ass, ignoramus, fool)

¹⁴Storia tascabile della letteratura italiana, (Milan, 1976, 5th ed. 1977) cited in Perella: 169-170.

existence. The general hostility of the world appears to be held at bay, contained within the confines of the TV Reality format, while the viewer is assured of his/her safety and moral superiority. Another inverse parallel is visible in the fact that, while Pinocchio learns the necessary social skills towards the loss of his egoism and narcissism, Reality TV first teaches that the world is divided into winners and losers, and so the viewer needs to learn the competitive skills that will assure the victory of the individual (for whom the viewer is rooting) over his Other(s) (the viewer's internalized rivals). More importantly, this viewing audience is unknowingly acting out the boiling frog syndrome, like Geppetto in the belly of the monster fish, had he not been prodded to escape by Pinocchio's fearlessness and selflessness.

The cultural clashes witnessed in the reception of Benigni's film and the phenomenon of Reality TV in the USA and elsewhere in the global world—since Reality TV quickly grew into a globalized phenomenon—lend themselves to widely varied interpretations. Benigni had believed that the film would have been a nice surprise for an American audience who held a Disneyfied idea of Pinocchio (Morgoglione, "Ecco il mio Pinocchio"), but it was a flop in North America as well as in France. There are many reasons for this, but one is certainly an ironic inability to imagine Benigni in the role of the puppet. In the only version available to North America at the time of writing this article, that is, before the release of the DVD, the English dubbing rendered voices stale and failed to interpret correctly the Tuscan visual and linguistic framework which, clearly, could not be interpreted outside their Italian cultural sphere. As a result, a major aspect of the work remained imperceptible to other cultures. In this sense, the story appears to belong exclusively to an Italian culture which is familiar with what Benigni calls "the Collodian dark force" ("la potenza collodiana dark") something that is unknown in the USA ("Benigni: 'Con Pinocchio social forum a Hollywood'"). As the negative criticism came out after the release of the film, Benigni found himself having to defend his interpretation against a manifest lack of imagination and, perhaps, of patience in the general public. After all, for a fast-paced society that 'wants it all and it wants it now', it is a lot easier to believe in the sense of instant happiness that RealityTV panders, because it promises instant and eternal relationships, so that Reality shows connect our desires with this fallacious, fantasy medium. (We must also mention, however, that Benigni's film was released at the same time as high-calibre action films such as *Lord of the Rings*. *The Twin Towers*.)

At the 2002 "Nobel for Peace" mock-summit, Benigni received a peace award for his body of work from the hands of Mikhail Gorbachev

("Benigni-show"). At the same time, in the USA Benigni's film was a candidate for the "Razzie Awards" given out for the worst film of the year. The Italian television program *Striscia la notizia* then sent Valerio Staffelli as an envoy to confer to Benigni the *Tapiro d'oro* (the Italian version of the Razzies) where naturally, Benigni exceeded expectations in the reception of this award with his usual satirical humour (Morgoglione, "Striscia"). In Japan the cultural relevance is different. In a country where it is said that lies are a given, at least in the political sphere (as reported by Pio D'Emilia), Benigni's silly behaviour seems to have inspired the Japanese to accept silliness and foolish behaviour in their own culture.¹⁵ Negative public criticism cited a clash of word and image, the difficulty in understanding the dialogues while being simultaneously overwhelmed by images. Such is the importance of the image in the definition of cultures. As for the Canadian reception of the film, Jennie Punter, for *The Globe and Mail Review*, stated that a "49-year-old actor ... as Pinocchio with a 5-o'clock shadow ... borders on creepy." Punter also pointed to the drawbacks of the dubbed version (with the "annoying distraction of using well-known voices") and a subsequent loss of any subtle comic nuances of the Italian original.

The release of Benigni's *Pinocchio* (note that the word 'Pinocchio' is owned by Disney Enterprises) in Italy represents the first time in the history of Italian cinema that a film was accompanied by such massive Hollywood style merchandising as is usually seen for American films—including a promotional collaboration with McDonald's (in the form of a Happy Meal). Ironically, while Benigni was viewing the film as a giant Italian hug for all audiences, 'Pinocchio fever' was said to be generating a more Americanized Italy (Rota). Unfortunately, *Pinocchio* for the new generation appears to derive much of its meaning from American-made hype and its by-production of pseudo-iconic images, rather than from the tale's deeper meanings. The dream business needs to continue providing fresh ways to tell so-called 'true stories' with emotional impact, and the audience wants the Cinderella story, not *Pinocchio*—because *Pinocchio* is much too close to reality.

British television claims to have led the way for US programming in Reality shows with televised autopsies of human cadavers in the name of a democratic "public right to know about the process of dissection" (Burt). Variations on the impact of Reality TV are reported worldwide and in various arenas: political, religious, etc. In Indonesia, for example, Reality pro-

¹⁵D'Emilia's article also mentions that two editions of the film were prepared for the Japanese market: one with subtitles, the other dubbed in Japanese.

gramming is used to find the next president of the country (Lyman and Osborne). The religious theme has been adapted into an internet-based Reality contest (www.shipoffools.com) originating in England, that features twelve strangers together on a virtual Ark “with God Almighty at the helm” as a means to “popularize theology” (“Reality TV, Featuring God). The twelve chosen will adopt a biblical persona from the Old Testament and will have to “react as they think their character would to whatever their shipmates or God throw at them.” They will be interacting using speech bubbles. A panel of theologians is also enlisted to “interpret the shipmates’ actions and advise them on what their characters might do.”

Various cultural formative resonances will generate a variety of forms of reception throughout the world according to the degree of ‘universal’ or shared language (or signs), as well as the capacity to adopt a childlike faculty of suspension of disbelief. It is evident that Reality TV is being used to escape reality, presumably because we are not able to handle the truth, and to provide us with a ‘better version’ of it. And there is also the *fix factor* whereby the viewer gets hooked on shows that present systems that do not teach effective team work, and that focus instead on “cruelty passed off as entertainment” (Poniewozik et al.). One has to wonder what kind of cohesion is being formulated in terms of cultural groups and in the bigger picture of culture as well. (Social criticisms already abound, with the main issues for discussion being the public’s gullibility concerning Reality TV’s deceptions, and/or its naïve compliance to media messages.)

Pinocchio presents life as a series of negotiations in a world order where help always comes at a price and where lessons about respect and peaceful behaviour are to be learned. This is a ‘tit for tat’ world represented as a socialistic community in which, as the dog reminds Pinocchio, “we all know: in this world we need to help one another.”¹⁶ Even something as simple as courtesy represents a system of exchange. And although the *paese de’ balocchi* presents a virtual model of anarchy, complete with the promise of freedom and autonomy, the ultimate lesson is that all roads lead to some kind of slave existence. Hence the book teaches an economic system of exchanges and negotiations as it teaches a sense of duty and responsibility. It also undermines deterministic thought by promoting education as a means to escape a subaltern existence. Yet it teaches individual decision-making processes and a certain autonomy, but within a system of conformism. Humility (through humiliation) and subjection are the main lessons Pinocchio learns in preparation for his adult life. When he becomes a real boy, he learns that obedi-

¹⁶“Si sa: in questo mondo bisogna aiutarsi l’uno con l’altro” (Collodi, 328).

ence and good behaviour are rewarded with beautiful, material objects. The individual thus learns that s/he has a real responsibility towards a collective work ethic. This pedagogical strategy targets all age levels in the name of a productive, capitalistic, ethic. Social responsibility towards the Other—which could translate into a spirit of communism—relates to the moral, (religious), and civic values that comprise an ideal society. Yet, at the same time the text shows a dual interpretation of the dictum that “God helps those who help themselves”: that is, in a positive (self betterment) as well as a negative way (‘it’s all about me, me, me’).

Pinocchio learns about the capitalist bourgeois notion of private property and of punitive justice when that sacred line is crossed. He quickly picks up on the ‘eat or be eaten’ reality. Pinocchio has to learn to set boundaries between the demands of society and a conscious anarchy. There does not seem to be much choice for an alternative: it will either be jail or the poorhouse for the subject who refuses the ethos of social capitalistic productivity. Revolts against authority are not tolerated and are quickly brought under control. And the supposedly happy ending means the end of the spirit of fantasy and imagination—except in Benigni’s film. Collodi’s tale denounces any utopistic alternative where the fantastic is co-opted into service for the dominant system. Moreover, there is the lesson that someone, in our case Geppetto, must be held responsible for the cost of damages where there has been any threat to private property and social order. The *gran piazza* represents the site of dangerous encounters: this is where Pinocchio meets the Cat and the Fox who laugh at the idea of working for a living and who are always thinking up shifty schemes for robbing Pinocchio. It is when he begins to earn his wages at the wheel, but particularly when he begins to earn surplus money with a second job (basket-weaving)—that Pinocchio is shown as having finally attained happiness.

The actuality of Collodi’s story lies in the still unresolved conflict between the childlike instinct of wonder toward the world and the trap-pings of the societal apparatus which seeks to contain the values of fantasy and freedom within controllable parameters (Assante). Benigni considers Pinocchio’s last words as the only real whopper in the story: “How funny I was when I was a puppet, and now how happy I am to be a real boy.”¹⁷

¹⁷“Com’ero buffo, quand’ero un burattino! e come ora son contento di esser diventato un ragazzino per-bene!” (ch. XXXVI). Benigni in Morgoglione, “Ecco il mio Pinocchio” comments: “Alla fine, nel libro e nel film, lui dice ‘sono felice di essere diventato un bambino buono.’ Ma è una tremenda bugia, l’unica vera menzogna di Pinocchio: al contrario di quelle precedenti che erano bugie meravigliose, generose.”

There are no quick fixes in *Pinocchio* as there are in Reality shows that present the entertaining spectacle of the fairy-tale story for cash and network profits (Orenstein). Here the exploitation process makes up the formation of the audience who is sometimes allowed the illusion of control. Competitive Reality TV shows exploit the success of the self against all others so that alterity is no longer a social system of exchange, but rather proves itself to be a permanently and individually antagonistic sphere of action. Looking at the line up of television shows, we find Reality shows such as *Human Resources*, where unemployed people will compete against each other for a job (while the loser, naturally, stays poor); or *The Will*, in which families and friends battle one another over a deceased relative's inheritance, just to name a few. Andy Warhol's prediction of fleeting fame thus comes through in the form of public humiliations that almost certainly accompany "the pursuit of [this] shallow fame, unearned riches and artificial beauty [which] constitute reality in 21st Century America" (Golway).

The desire for freedom and independence of spirit is subjected to social, political, and affective disciplinary measures along the lines of nationalistic intentions such as Massimo D'Azeglio's famous words: "We have created Italy; now we need to create Italians" ("L'Italia è fatta; ora bisogna fare gli Italiani")—and Collodi's intentions appear to adhere to this idea. Benigni's film, however, also exploits an existential paradox within the singular identity with the final image of the puppet now divided between the schoolboy and the puppet's shadow which hesitates to enter the school and then takes off after the butterfly. This ending ties in with the Blue Fairy's enunciation of the philosophy behind the film when she says in the prologue: "Bringing cheer is the most beautiful thing one can do in the world" ("Dare allegria è la cosa più bella che si possa fare al mondo"). *Pinocchio* manifests a philosophy of being-for-the-Other that can hardly be said about Reality TV. The question of identity as a potentially nihilistic project in *Pinocchio* as well as in Reality TV would need to be developed further. Other questions prevail concerning our relationship with reality, fantasy, and the lie. Or in the aspect of the realization of 'post-modern' existence, where nothing is at it seems, and why should we care if nothing matters, anyway? In Benigni's play space, everything appears as a game and the imagination rules, while a final indeterminacy of being is professed against a monolithical entity (Lodoli). As Collodi's *Pinocchio* becomes a real boy, the world of transformations and contradictions can no longer exist since there is no room for sentimentality in the real world and the imagination must be grounded once and for all (Benigni, in Citati).

The audience prefers to surrender its faculty of imagination to the networks and "Reality TV is becoming our source for involved stories about personal relationships" (Poniewozik et al.). In the end, the question of attainable happiness appears unresolvable and Pinocchio becomes an archetypal figure of displacement in modernity, while Reality TV signifies a displacement of modern being into post-modernistic non-being. Reality TV exercises a precept of the individual against the group. As participants and audiences develop "'Stockholm syndrome' and identify with the producers' goals" (Stanley), the language of the media reduces the idea of Reality TV to simply 'reality' so that it becomes always more difficult to tell the real from the clutter.

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