WILLIAM ANSELMI

ARS BELLICA,
OR HOW SPIELBERG READ PINOCCHIO TO BENIGNI
IN THE LAND OF THE FREE

Part One, to be known as Empire Dreams of Stringless, Lying Puppets—Trans-contexting, and Oblivion (a detective analysis). Where the reader is introduced to a set of problems about Pinocchio, intertextuality, and the American way of life, which function as a light introduction to an analysis a tutto campo about present economic conditions, technology and the existential self as theoretical strategy in the form of a fugue.

In today's cancerous and final stage of Kapitalism, is intertextuality still a valid conceptual tool or has it been replaced by the voiding text, the text that replaces and detoxes of subversivities and impurities all other (similar) texts and condemns them to oblivion?

When John McMurtry, in his The Cancer Stage of Capitalism, addresses the fact that Kapitalism has become “carcinogenic in the properties of its relationship to its social life-host” (p. 187), does this also involve the life-host's cultural and artistic production? If it does, then we can safely assume that in our present age, variation on a reproduction (simply, the text that calls forth another text) has finally emancipated itself to the level of undoing the host by a process of technological substitution. That is, in concrete and final terms, as far as Steven Spielberg's AI (Artificial Intelligence) is concerned, not only does it substitute the original—Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio—it pre-empts any other intertext from entering into the consumption mechanism, and therefore relegates the intertext to the matrix of oblivion. Recall the reception of Roberto Benigni's Pinocchio in North America to witness the mechanism at work. The process is perversely analogous to a recent historical event: as the war in Iraq (19 March 2003, – ?) was toning down, Iraq's museums—the depository of a civilization that includes our so-called Western Lighthouse—were depleted of their materiality.

The President of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), Jane C. Waldbaum, in the magazine of that institution, Archaeology, launched a warning before the war. Her article mentions the “Open Declaration on Cultural Heritage at Risk in Iraq,” passed by the AIA's executive commit-
tee after the 1991 Gulf War. The Open Declaration called on all governments to abide by the terms of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol, and to abide by Iraq’s Antiquities Law. Her final words, for the article, were easily dismissed by the looting and the destruction that accompanied the ending days of the war:

Ancient Mesopotamia gave the world many of the hallmarks of civilization including some of the first cities, writing, monumental art and architecture, and organized religion. Iraq’s cultural heritage is of value to all of us, and the Open Declaration is a call for the world’s governments to protect and preserve it. (Waldbaum, 5)

Few have realized what process of substitution has been put into place. For the sake of not living outside of history (let us leave that simulacra of living la vida loca to the Jennifer Lopez and Jerry Springers of that world we must leave) let us not forget what happened. And, let us remember by using that world’s words, so that no fundamentalist neo(ex)-con can label us ideologues. In The New York Times on-line edition Frank Rich admits to a particular American practice:

Let it never be said that our government doesn’t give a damn about culture. It was on April 10, the same day the sacking of the National Museum in Baghdad began, that George W. Bush went on TV to tell the Iraqi people that they are “the heirs of a great civilization that contributes to all humanity.” And so what if America stood idly by while much of the heritage of that civilization—its artefacts, its artistic treasures, its literary riches and written records — was being destroyed as he spoke? It’s not as if we weren’t bringing in some culture of our own to fill the unfortunate vacuum. It was on April 10 as well, by happy coincidence, that the United States announced the imminent arrival of nightly newscasts from Dan Rather, Jim Leher and Brit Hume on the newly liberated Iraqi TV. Better still, the White House let it be known, again on that same day, that it was seeking $62 million from Congress for a 24-hour Middle East Television Network that would pipe in dubbed versions of prime-time network programming. (Rich, online)

The non-Imperialist in some of us would see in that process many other conveniences in store for them, the Infidels. Apart from the anthropological work in the field by the majority of American evangelists, whose motto could be “we’ll give you toys (and food) only if you take our Bible” —as made evident in an article for Time magazine by David Van Biema, where he mentions a “troubling contingent of indeterminate size that com-
bines religious arrogance with political ignorance … talking about Christ to children while distributing toys.” (Van Biema, 45), a certain representational work is also needed in order to sustain the investments of the future SoftDrink & ExtraBurger joints.

In short, the systematic attack against the cradle of Western civilization seemed a cohesive project of speed-fire modernization American style, without the baggage of history. In order to become a “democratic” country, Iraq had to forego its own material past (which is also part of the western mind-set) and substitute it with whatever mechanisms of up-to-date representation the USA deemed importable. What is striking about the process is the voiding (history erased) and substitution (replacement with American culture) of one’s lifeworld, and that this process was not exposed in the media, given the pervasiveness of commodity fetishism in our daily lives. But the problematic representational power of “other” news sources can also undergo a process of substitution. For example, consider this article from the Tuesday, 8 April 2003 edition of Eyewitness News:

Coalition forces have bombed the Arab television station Al Jazeera in Iraq in an air raid this morning. One cameraman was killed in the bombing. The attack hasn’t stopped the broadcaster from reporting from another location. The head of media relations for Al Jazeera TV network, Jihat Bailout, says the show must go on. (Eyewitness News, online)

We can safely assume that this process of substitution is a familiar one. In the Iraqi case, we are talking only about Mesopotamia (what history books used to call the cradle of civilization), domesticated into the eternal present of our Empire. What I mean by eternal present is the following:

... a process of fossilization [of the lifeworld]. Any degree of cultural and social mobility is reduced to the continuous experience of the same. Instead of representing itself as a living and mobile experience, it is reduced to immobility, to a rigid and static self-representation (Anselmi/Gouliamos, 121)

or, to put it in a contextual practice:

Thus, a particular manipulation is manifested in the nomadic experience, one where history is denied and/or rewritten in favour of Kapital’s cannibalization of the subject’s consciousness through a nostalgia for the future. More precisely, this nostalgia for the future entails a reductive process where history becomes a commodity. (Anselmi/Gouliamos, 122)

Of course, the ludic pattern that insinuates itself in the intellectual dis-
course has a demonstrative value; it keeps at once postponing the extrapolation from the dual tangents on Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, the Spielberg and the Benigni variations (anticipation as virtual consumption), while showing rather than telling that everyday control practices (in the form and practice of the media) are the communion in everyday people’s lives. Yes, the media is the sacred—in the sense of a metaphysics of the communal—an auratic reverberation that occupies our existential life.

If history can be—no, not reformulated—but re-envisioned, in other words, if the image can be continuously altered to fit finely the present ideological cast (as was the case for the May First parades in the former Soviet Union with the pictures of the nomenclature changing depending on the political alliances of the times) where words vanish in front of the image, and if ours is the final stage of the society of the spectacle, is it any wonder that Benigni’s *Pinocchio* was a flop in the USA?

Let us reconsider the spectacle of Oscar night, 1998. Spielberg did not welcome Benigni’s expansion into the American market with a film that also dealt with the Holocaust. According to Luca Simonato:

> Quando *La vita è bella* uscì nelle sale americane non mancò di attirare le polemiche della comunità ebraica, che ammonì a non trasformare il più grande dramma del ventesimo secolo in un’industria da sfruttare. Fra i più critici nei confronti del comico di Vergaio, si mise in luce Steven Spielberg, il grande regista di “E.T.” e “Schindler’s List.” (Simonato, online)

When Benigni is called to the stage to be blessed with his first Oscar, he jumps over chairs and people, and Spielberg, who happens to be one of the people Benigni climbs over, appears visibly disgusted. Benigni is a body aware of itself; Spielberg has a problem with the *physique du role*, if you consider the portrayal of human bodies in his films. Take for example *Saving Private Ryan*, which at one level is a full immersion in swimming pools of blood interspersed with the language of sound and fury. Benigni prefers, if we can paraphrase him, “to suggest rather than mimic,” to use the imagination rather than attempt a realistic portrayal which (as the nineteenth-century *veristi* were later to find out) is nevertheless an interpretative construct, as we are told in an interview for CNN:

> Comparisons, and contrasts, to Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* are inevitable, but Benigni says it’s apples and oranges. “This is very different, this movie,” says Benigni. “*Schindler’s List* is a wonderful movie, but I am a comedian and my way is not to show directly. Just to evoke. This to me was wonderful, the balance to comedy with the tragedy.” (CNN, online)
Another description of Benigni’s poiesis can be found in an interview for the Guardian with journalist Brian Logan, about his film La vita è bella:

Only documentaries of survivors, and the majesty of truth can tell us what is this tragedy. Otherwise you are imitating, which is not respectful. I respect this tragedy so I stayed far away from it. It’s more strong if you evoke. I don’t use tomato soup, I don’t make fake blood. (Logan, online)

In the same interview we learn that Fellini wanted to do a movie with Benigni as Pinocchio. Not long after the interview, Benigni starts working on his version of Pinocchio. Is it stochastically improbable not to perceive in this series of events the long hand of the Empire’s deus ex machina? By this I am not responding to Spielberg’s support for Bush or the war in Iraq—I’m not even going to say that Minority Report (2002) as a movie, as a mediatic text in a mediatic circuit (our everyday life), works to prepare the American global to justify and accept American pre-emptive military intervention throughout the world. As Rossana Rossanda writes in Il Manifesto

La guerra umanitaria ha reintrodotto la guerra giusta, con un salto indiretto di quattro secoli, a prima di quel trattato di Westfalia che ci ammorbo al ginnasio e aveva messo fuori dalla storia le guerre di religione. ... Con la guerra umanitaria è stato reintrodotto un primato morale sul diritto ... pretendendo che la guerra possa restaurare un diritto umano ... Proprio mentre colpisce il diritto alla vita. La morale è il cavallo di Troia per introdurre il diritto del più forte. ... La guerra umanitaria, fattispecie della guerra giusta, è lo strumento di esportazione del modello occidentale, la prima delle guerre di globalizzazione. (Rossanda, online)

In this context, what I want to propose is the following: with AI Artificial Intelligence, Spielberg declares a pre-emptive—à la Minority Report—strike on Benigni’s future work and reputation.

AI was a project on which Stanley Kubrick had been working on and off since the early seventies. Kubrick apparently had envisioned Spielberg working on it since “the movie was better suited to the younger director’s sensibilities and urged him to take over” (USA Today, 21 June 2001 online). After taking on the project, the “war” between Spielberg and Benigni after Oscar night was to be resolved (according to Luca Simonato), by working together on a movie, guarda caso, about the famous Italian puppet:

La pace fra questi due grandi dell’arte cinematografica fu siglata nel 2000 a Roma, quando si incontrarono per discutere di un progetto caro ad entrambi: narrare la storia del più famoso burattino di legno del mondo.
At the same time, let us not forget that the technological parameters and the financial support available were visibly different in the production of *AI* and *Pinocchio*. Hollywood is not exactly the now-defunct chemical plant of Papigno, near Terni in Umbria, where *Pinocchio* was shot. By the time Benigni's movie was released (Christmas, 2002) not only was *Pinocchio* competing with *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (in which director Peter Jackson perfects the binary system, allowing no shade to enter the infernal division black/white), but also the North American public had already been inoculated against Benigni's *artigianale* workmanship. *AI*'s technological wizardry and metaphysics voided the American public who dared to see Benigni's *Pinocchio* of that naïve materiality—and, most of all, the role of the growing body—which is in Collodi's work. Benigni is quite faithful to the original, (though various Italian critics point to a Benigni less transgressive than usual). Spielberg, on the other hand creates a *Golem* that feeds on all previous and future variations on the theme. *AI* is perfectly cast in an oppositional world, where the sublime morality of the binary process triumphs (a process that seems to be constant in Spielberg's *oeuvre*). The artificial boy, at the end of the movie, is the sole messenger of humanity's fall from existence. The aliens—the angel-like evolution of the *mecha*, the artificial man—will grant the boy's one dream: obsessive motherly love. And in so doing, they trick the spectator into believing that the boy has actually grown. But, contrary to Collodi or to Benigni's narrative, Spielberg's "child" cannot outgrow its particular, frozen-in-time, functionality: machines cannot grow (and, so, the movie's conceit is ironically spent). By a simple process of substitution, Spielberg charms his public into loving the alien, while making them forget that machines are, at best, the mirror of our capitalist, exploitive "nature."

A guilty sentimentality pervades *AI*, but, more than that, what is spectacular is the removal of the human from the everyday world, with the full acceptance and blessing by the public. As if, by paying homage to the God in each of us, humanity is merely a step in the evolution of (mechanical) intelligence, which starkly reflects the same arrogant, binary, "intelligence" already at work in the entourage of Bush Junior during his first mandate.
Coda

In Crash (1997), David Cronenberg faithfully renders J. G. Ballard's novel about sex and technology. The Canadian director successfully transplanted the words into image, showing us how the car — an archetypal American symbol of speed and progress — is actually the borderline, marking the liminal reality between life and death. Further, the automobile is the erotic surplus in the realm of the spectacle (and this, before the constructed 4 by 4 fetish of the new millennium: the SUV). But, George Bataille or Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for that matter, do not exist in the Spielberg world-to-be. The boy's male guide, Gigolo-Joe created, as is everybody else, by Cybertronics Manufacturing, is not "a robot who can love ... a robot that dreams," like the boy David. In reality, our Gigolo-Joe is a robo-stud, a charming talking and singing vibrator. We see here that the two sides of artificial intelligence are a schizoid reality of Spielberg's human vision: on the one hand the machine as the perfect fornicator (automata orgasmic automata); on the other, a parody of the desiring machine, à la Deleuze-Guattari, but victim of a peculiar mammismo. It adds little to our discourse on Pinocchio to witness in the "I am David" sequence (scene 24 – Special and unique) a total recall of a well-known novel for young readers by Anne Holm, I am David, published as North to Freedom, in 1963. The clever reference seems to serve only Spielberg himself, in that the original David in Spielberg's movie competes with his copies and destroys them. Nor does it help us to notice an inverse affinity with the David and the bear of Philip K. Dick's short story "Second Variety." As if Spielberg's David and smart bear team would ironically re-humanize the destructive war machine, Variety Three (a David with bear) which prays on both sides of the war between Americans and Russians by appealing to the idea of innocence; a weapon created by war factories that have emancipated themselves from human control in Dick's apocalyptic world. Spielberg ends up in a closed, self-referential circuit that pomo lovers might call postmodern — all stories being equal, though some more than others—but that Walter Benjamin had already framed as the process of the aesthetization of political life.

In the end, Benigni's Pinocchio enters into a circuit that sees an artisan/artistic product necessarily fail face to face with hyper technology, while history becomes a matter of oblivion. We are left with asinine questions, such as those by certain American reviews that asked if a middle-age man could play a young boy (what about Robin Williams as Peter Pan?). Or, the constant fear and perceived threat of homosexuality in the sequence where Pinocchio and Wick (the American version's name for Lucignolo) share a lollypop; while others fretted over the purplish hairdo

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sported by the fairy. In this context intertextuality vanishes as a narrational strategy while the Empire, a.k.a. American global, is affirmed: the very postmodern conceptual frame erases the intertext in favour of technodivinity, and the Absolute transcends us in a sprint towards infinite devolutions (if we are to believe and re-read Devo not only as an innovative band, but as a cohesive philosophy).

**Part Two**, where certain themes about Pinocchio proposed in the first part are dually expanded, so as to invite the reader to discern the false interpretation from the true, while suggesting that this is the encoded spiral of our narratives and bias, given the more sombre and philosophical tone of the shorter second part as a belated *prelude*.

**Spielberg’s AI**

In the more than brave new world to come of *AI*, Spielberg proposes that the role of the machine (as the epigone of technology) is to act both as a backdrop and a foregrounding device. This portrayal, then, a saturation point for everyday life, short-circuits reality as we still know it (the binary system of nature versus culture) by erasing the distance between what is human and what is artificial in the vestiges of the mecha-boy David. We should not see in David a liminal point, or the constantly volatile potential of becoming either fully human (the ability to love and be loved) or fully machine (emancipation from emotive constraints); rather, we should interpret David as the static, emblematic relation between religious belief and creative, though closed, systems of representation. In other words, in David’s world, the differentiation between *mecha* and *orga*, or between inert and organic, is secondary to the will to believe and to the creative potential of humanity, which ultimately finds its expression in Spielberg’s joining the two processes as a sort of post-Hegelian synthesis. Of course, it could be argued that David’s creation is a parable for the book of Genesis, in which a lonely God decides to create, materialize Its own (mirror) image in the shape of Man so as to be loved, but with a limit: mortality. After all, David is created in the spitting image, a replica (or *simulacrum* according to Baudrillard) of the dead son of the film’s founder-scientist (Cybertronics Manufacturing). The theological innovation that Spielberg brings to this question: how is life created?—is disguised as technological progress that ultimately emancipates itself from the constraints of bio-differentiation to achieve ultimate spirituality (the ability to fulfill wishes, if only for the duration of a day). In the end, we are back to a form of trans-humanism.
that postulates, cynically, the act of creation as the ultimate technological development and, in doing so, set the proverbial cart before the ox (*mettere il carro davanti ai buoi*). Of course, Spielberg does not question (false consciousness) how and to what purpose technology is invested with economic meaning, because the world depicted in *AI* is a substantially classless one (hegemony); the only pseudo-class is the discarded mecha, who are hunted, imprisoned and victimized in the Flesh Fairs. At the same time, at the Flesh Fairs, the would-be humans are sacrificed so that Humanity might realize its own actuality in the Circus of would-be Reality - *Panem et circenses*. This becomes another of Spielberg’s leitmotifs: the Other as victim, the persecuted Jew of the Nazi era and beyond. Thus, this rewrite of *Pinocchio*, although projected irremediably in the future (and leaving no history behind but a story) is anchored in one of the major global traumas of the twentieth century. Although Spielberg’s point is obviously justified—pre-validated, ironically, by the intertext of the Holocaust—that no human should harm any “living” creature (see, as counterpoint, Isaac Asimov’s idealism in his formulation of the Three Laws of Robotics), it is hardly applicable, in the end, to non-living artefacts. Spielberg himself involuntarily provides a clue. Since mechas do not emanate heat, sentient existentiality could be ascribed to heat-emanating beings, given the second Law of Thermodynamics. Entropy is the tendency of all moving particles to settle down, which we take to mean, ultimately, death. Of course, the intertextual recourse to the Holocaust is not the only strategy by which public empathy and affection are ascribed to David, who is, after all, an innocent child on a common, human, quest: to find out where he comes from. But, David is nevertheless a mirror image in 3-D. The fact that it is created to elicit certain responses from the public engenders another problem—objects invested with an emotional resonance usually ascribed to other human beings. The Japanese craze that affected the entire world—Tamagotchi, the original virtual pet—is an example of this continuous divestment of emotional capability. Simply put, as technology becomes more and more friendly it is not the case that objects and tools acquire intelligence—they do not reveal themselves to us as a living extension; rather, they subtract humanity by their appearing outside of their performance from our homological being-in-the-world. As already stated, this process of substitution is fundamental to a contextual reading of *AI*, except that, in this case, what is being substituted is the possibility to refer to a similar text, so that by the end of the American film, Collodi’s *Pinocchio* is now Spielberg’s *AI*, and there is no going back to the origin, since both past and future are at stake within it.
Roberto Benigni's *Pinocchio*

In the beginning there is darkness, and one must decide whether or not to move through it, for darkness fades contours into a primordial amorphous reality. Limits are dissolved, margins erased, perimeters are no more than infinity and limitless possibilities. On the other hand, we have two versions of the film: the European and the American. All in all, nine minutes are cut from the American release, which, in the author's opinion, actually scrambles the narrative. Then again, why not the *visual exercise* if one has a comfortable couch and *plasma reality*?

To begin (the real realized), we have white mice; both the American and the Italian versions of *Pinocchio* agree on that (yet, these two versions of the same movie indicate that Benigni, ironically, still values cultural differences in the age of 'sameness'). Mice—the European reminder of the carriers of the plague from a continent that, ironically, exterminated cats as the living simulacra of evil, so as to succumb, unknowingly, to death.

But, as the film begins, the paths diverge: the American version shortchanges itself by removing key linking parts whereas the Italian version carries the original meaning to its unresolved conclusion. In the American version, entrance of the coach (that carries the Blue Fairy) led by the white mice occurs in the second camera shot, while the Italian version introduces it on the sixth shot. What disappears in the American version is the sequence of stills of the streets of a small European medieval town. Typography is sacrificed in the name of a speedy introduction to the beginning of the movie; in other words, the geo-psychological reality to which the International Situationists (IS) had laid claim to in the Fifties (and Sixties, according to a particular reading of France's May '68)—how environmental architectonics befits human existential conditions—is eliminated from the American spectator's eyes so as to initiate the narrative by discarding the context, voiding the intro. In this, one cannot fail to understand a specific European reading of American culture: history, in terms of geo-physical reality, the accumulation of ways by which a space is peopled and partitioned (property as anthropological space), is unnecessary to the final narrative since, and here is the second assumption, the story of Pinocchio is, by now, a shared story that crosses borders, as illustrated in a detailed and critical analysis of the subject in English: *Pinocchio Goes Postmodern—Perils of a Puppet in the United States* by Richard Wunderlich and Thomas J. Morrissey. Perhaps, it is an Italian and, therefore, a foreigner's (Benigni and accomplices) reading of the power behind Walt Disney's cinematic representation of Pinocchio that guides the passage from the original to the American theatrical release with meaning-laden sequences.
of various streets removed from the public’s view. After all, Disney is the ultimate rewriter—in domestication—of North American and foreign consumption of the story. Notwithstanding such a powerful process, it could be possible to associate an ironic reading in the encounter between Benigni and Disney, where Benigni, aware of how much the Great Depression of 1929 had an effect on Disney’s re-reading of Pinocchio, associates the plague with the capitalistic downturn and, hence, the mice become an analogy for Disney’s removal of any hints of poverty in Pinocchio’s family.

According to Benigni’s reading, one does have to situate himself/herself properly (space as history) for the beginning to take place. Of course, one cannot fault the Italian director and actor’s vision, since one of the most common generalizations about America is its possibility to continuously re-invent and restructure its inhabited spaces (the frontier as an expandable metaphor). Perhaps the most emblematic realization of such a process is to be found in another film, Dark City by Alex Proyas, 1998, where every midnight the city changes not only in shape but also in its characters and identities: today’s banker is tomorrow’s murderer; yesterday’s easy and melancholy Cabaret singer is today’s puritanical housewife. Yet, the missing links from the American version of Benigni’s version have quite an overall effect because they lead the film into a narrational frenzy, which the English-language dubbing accentuates.

What Benigni introduces in his re-reading of Collodi’s text is an innovative, if not perplexing, framing device that takes place on at least three planes. After the apparition of the coach that carries the Blue Fairy and before we begin Collodi’s story proper, the Blue Fairy says while releasing a butterfly “Spreading joy is the best thing you can do in this world” (Pinocchio, first scene). If, in such a movement, we can perceive homage to a bygone era, the Age of Aquarius, we can, at the same time, question if the joy of which the Fairy speaks is not the creative act itself.

Trailer
We can safely assume that Benigni and Spielberg both read the classical text. Pinocchio, the original puppet, gives them a chance to explore their particular reading within contemporary conditions in terms of a past reality (artisanship) and future displacement (hypertechnology). Of course, each director has his own reading and a poiesis; we can question, however, why certain choices were made and how they end up affecting us in our practices of daily life.
Let us delve into heresy: if the role of the artist is not only to entertain, a reduction mechanism that Kapital has put into place as continuous consumption, but to explore and inform an attentive public, what then of the above two. And is there a communicative strategy taking place between Benigni and Spielberg that uses the cinema as the medium by which certain messages are passed to and fro in response to each other's take on Pinocchio? The various attempts to formulate a possible narrative as a set of tentative answers lie in the postulate that Pinocchio became for the two directors an incomplete construct in the sense that both provide an update for the very same template, given that the attempt to work together on the same project did not happen. As already stated, the two Pinocchi seem to go in the opposite directions: Benigni's addresses a reformulation of the past as basic continuity in terms of a creative endeavour centred on history, while Spielberg's sees advancement in the human spirit as technological differentiation in the future. The plot of these two renditions unfolds in terms of an aesthetical process, which might or might not resist critical contextualization.

Part Three, where the plot is plotted, story twists are entwined, and lost ends are transmogrified so as to provide a morphology of Pinocchio's reading, and where the author of this article has found seven! (7) rubrics (to please the pomos in the audience) as is and was the custom that will enlighten the reader, delight his eyes, and generally bring good feelings to his heart, though the author be too critical towards one director while showing compassion for the other.

In this analysis, we have developed a “morphological reading of the fantastic” whereby the two texts — from the sci-fi to the fable — meet under the development line of seven rubrics, which, finally, act as a critical narrative. The seven rubrics are creation, detachment, death, quest, return, stasis and rebirth. This paper will focus on creation, with the other rubrics showing the developmental process.

Creation

In both texts, the act of creation/appearance of the puppet offers an alternative reading to the original Pinocchio. Whereas in one of the best English translation of Collodi's Pinocchio, by Carole Della Chiesa, the immediate set up is a contrast between the children's expected story about a king and a new story dealing with "a piece of wood," the two film versions make use of framing devices indicating the trajectory that each director will give to
his own rendition of the children's work.

Once upon a time, there was ... "A king!" my young readers will say immediately. No, children, you are mistaken. Once upon a time, there was a piece of wood. It was not an expensive piece of wood, not at all. Just an average block of firewood, one of those thick, solid logs that are put on the fire in winter to make cold rooms cozy and warm. I do not know how this really happened. However, one fine day this piece of wood appeared in the shop of an old carpenter. His real name was Maestro Antonio, but everyone called him Maestro Cherry, because the tip of his nose was so round and red and shiny that it looked like a ripe cherry. (Collodi/Della Chiesa, 5)

The narrative strategy in the book introduces the young public—evidently part of a community of readers—to question the basic assumption about stereotypical storytelling involving kings and their narrative field, while introducing the fantastical into the everyday by making an "average block of firewood" the source of all wonders. Already, the incipit sets up a call to abandon the usual, detached, realm of fairy tales to re-enter the world through the ability to recognize the creative potential residing in everyday objects. Doing so, places Collodi in the same realm as the English poet William Blake in terms of the process of creation: "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names ... " (Blake, 47).

In Spielberg's case, the framing device is an ecological catastrophe that leads to licensed, controlled reproduction, which, in turn, leads to the economic essentiality of robots (the link) in "the chain mail of society," because they do not consume resources other than the original manufacturing materials. As the film's voice-over introduces us to the above scenario, the scrolling images in the very first scene take us from the crushing waves of a sea scene to a human-like form with arms extended downwards.

Those were the years after the ice caps had melted ... because of the greenhouse gases, and the oceans had risen to drown so many cities ... along all the shorelines of the world. Amsterdam, Venice, New York, forever lost. Millions of people were displaced. Climates became chaotic. Hundreds of millions of people starved in poorer countries. Elsewhere, a high degree of prosperity survived... when most governments in the developed world ... introduced legal sanctions to strictly licence pregnancies, which is why robots, who were never hungry and did not consume resources, beyond those of their first manufacture, were so essential an economic link ... in the chain mail society. (Spielberg, AI)
The human-like form is standing behind a transparent glass, water trickling down on top of the glass. We later discover it to be the symbol of the company that builds robots, Cybertronics Manufacturing (CM). The camera pans, it shows a distinctive, middle-aged man speaking to an audience of younger people in a setting that resembles a university classroom, talking about artificial intelligence. The man is the scientist and director of CM, Techno-Cherry, Professor Hobby (a.k.a. Frank Geppettstein). Already, departing from the original Pinocchio, Spielberg sets up a problem that finds a possible solution (circular narrative) in creating a child robot capable of loving its parents. Through love, it is postulated, the David-boy will acquire a subconscious, the inner world of metaphor, intuition, self-motivated reasoning and will learn to dream and to love unconditionally, thereby satisfying the market needs of childless couples. These, then, are the steps presented to introduce us to the young mecha David, his most perfect creation, the simulacrum Pinocchio on invisible strings.

As already stated, Benigni places his story on three planes. On the first, he introduces the viewer to a physical typo/topography of the story, including shots of deserted streets in a small town in Italy; then he introduces the act of creation by having the Blue Fairy proclaim the news about spreading joy in the world; and, finally, the block of wood, soon to be Pinocchio, is brought into the film. The framing discourse is woven together by the relationship between the Blue Fairy and the butterfly. In the second sequence of the first part, after the appearance of the coach that carries the Blue Fairy, we arrive in a square with a fountain and notice a Pinocchio-like shadow on the wall, as well as the shadow of a flying butterfly. The voice-over narrates from the appearance of the coach to the square:

“Once upon a time there was a king, our viewers will say. No kids. In this tale, there is a place where animals can speak, a child can look like a grown-up, and, very often, grown-ups can act like children. Once upon a time there was a simple piece of wood. (Benigni, *Pinocchio*)

As the coach stops, the Blue Fairy descends and the butterfly rests on her index finger. As Medoro, the coach driver, mumbles to himself about asking the Blue Fairy to bring light, she exclaims: “Spreading joy is the best thing you can do in this world,” to which, Medoro, answers: “A thing that comes into the world and spreads no joy or happiness might just as well never have been born at all.” After a chat about the non-existence of time, the fairy steps back into the coach and lightly blows away the butterfly, as night turns to day. Medoro thanks her for the light as they leave through the gate, over the bridge, and water sprouts out of the fountain. We then
follow the butterfly through the streets, leading to the populated main square. It is now full day and the butterfly touches one of the logs on a cart leaving town, about to go over the bridge. The log goes bouncing along until it arrives at Geppetto’s door, the soon-to-be Pinocchio is about to meet his “father.”

The framing devices that Spielberg and Benigni use posit two very different points of emphasis on the mainframe of their narrative about the process of creation. For Spielberg, the origin must be found in a catastrophe, whereas for Benigni it is found in spreading joy. The former positions him in a traumatic and didactic world, the latter in a life-affirming and ludic process. Interestingly, the process of creation for the Italian director is precisely a network, a set of links: the street, the coach, the shadow, the butterfly, the Blue Fairy, the crowd, the cart, the log, Geppetto, the very network that the voiceover in Spielberg’s intro didactically announces as a “chain mail society.” We go back to what Benigni said about *Life is Beautiful*—that he prefers to evoke rather than to mimic reality, a belief that he exhibits in his artisan quality of his films (clearly, the European film industry is hard-pressed to compete with Hollywood-style budgets) and that he preferred to be faithful to the original text rather than to re-invent (so as to claim *à la* Spielberg) the story. What appears as a minor point in Benigni’s intro actually assumes a poetic discourse and the viewer finds it in Medoro’s remark to the Blue Fairy about the importance of spreading joy or happiness. If a meta-dialogue of sorts can be seen taking place between the two movies (where one comments on the other’s intentions and realization), it rests on the fact that Spielberg’s film which opened on 29 June 2001, about a year-and-a-half before Benigni’s (25 December 2002). And if we remember the failed attempt at reconciliation in 2000, we can see how each director positions himself with regards to the other. *AI* posits itself as a demarcation point between our everlasting present, enveloped in its technological aura, and the historical world. In a recent article in the Italian weekly *L’Espresso*, Francesca Tarissi in interviewing Kevin Warwick—a maverick would-be-mecha-English scientist—, is befuddled by his transhumanism:

In molti si chiedono perché lei ami tanto gli ibridi uomo-macchina. Non le piace la natura umana? Che cosa ci trova di sbagliato?

“Franamente trovo che gli esseri umani siano assai limitati in ciò che possono o non possono fare. Soprattutto se li confrontiamo con le capacità di un computer [...] Per non parlare dei nostri modi di comunicare: sono semplicemente terribili. Personalmente non vedo l’ora che arrivi il tempo in cui gli ibridi saranno un fatto del tutto normale [...]”

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Ma perché un cyborg dovrebbe essere migliore di noi?
"Io considero il cyborg in termini di upgrade mentali [...] i cyborgs avranno anche dei sensi extra. E saranno capaci di pensare in più di tre dimensioni. Se ci si riflette un attimo è il grande limite delle capacità intellettive degli esseri umani." (Tarissi, 41-42)

Technology reflects back into the human, altering not only its consciousness, but making the internal body the space where the mecha meets the orga (in AIs terms). Already, the World Wide Web provides an extension of our communicative self in terms of ubiquity and extended referentiality in a dramatic increase in the speed of such architectonics. The eye, the ear, the nose, and now with Warwick even the hand have been put through a biofeedback process that acts as the working foundation for its final dream: the Other as a human machine (the David in us). In this, we have the final realization of the Enlightenment, the rational being as master of a clockwork universe, whose ultimate realization can, ironically, be only the intrinsic Other, and, therefore, a human simulacrum.

Benigni’s *Pinocchio* is perhaps the last vestige of the connection between the ontological grounding of the Middle Ages (via the Enlightenment reductive link) and European Romanticism’s gestalt, which we have come to claim as modernity. It would be erroneous simply to summarize that discursive triad to a Baroque piece into “gone *troppe* bad” (as if the almost completely negative American reviews supplied any critical discourse rather than an ideological/Ameri-centric one). Gianni Vattimo’s intervention in Tarissi’s piece on the coming cyborg (*Ma io sto col “pover’uomo” che siamo*) simply and clearly identifies the innate danger of the cyborg: “i loro microchip li renderanno anche infinitamente più controllabili da ogni genere di agenzie e di poteri.” (Vattimo, 43) The wooden puppet, we must remember, is born without strings. It actually summarizes the potential for freedom inherent in creation. As in Benigni’s work and in the original, the log finds its own shaper, the process that will give it form but not meaning, since meaning already resides in, and is the critical potential of, the artistic work. David, on the other hand, is born as a boy-replacement, a substitute that monitors and is constantly monitored. In this, the act of creation is rendered not as a diminished potential; rather, it seeks a surrogate and portrays it as the overcoming principle, the finality of humanity, though, we infer, it is as the tremendous stasis of unrealizable desire, a Lacanian thing. In other words, unbeknownst to Spielberg, who is awash in sentimentality, though he masks his work with special effects, the machine does not become the bridge to a new-found spirituality. The thing in itself does not possess its story, except through human consciousness. David, or the “beloved” (the
Hebrew meaning of the name) is a derivative of humanity, a fact that the final sequences in the film cannot alter. The beloved is at once a sterile and frozen (no pun intended) action in its manifestation, and trans-humanism falls flat in its karma (the word action is Sanskrit in origin and originally included notions of both causality and consequences).

Detachment

After the image, the word. As David is introduced to its new family we hear “he is so real,” which the critical viewer realizes means that life exists on the surface only. But, can surfaces acquire depth, materiality? After the exaggerated emotive displays, after having been given Martin’s (the comatose boy David replaces) Teddy (a talking bear that accompanies him throughout the story as a thinking guide/reflection tool, a sort of techno-cricket), after having been read Pinocchio’s story (desire’s imprint — changing from a puppet to a real boy), David is still only a competing machine. In fact, his actions misread, it is abandoned by its would-be human mother in the woods. This happens after it, seemingly, almost drowns Martin in the pool (Martin miraculously recovered from his disease, only to find a mecha competitor at home, which brings him closer to death than his coma). In the woods, alone with his Teddy, David soon discovers his kind, the discarded techno-plus of a consuming world.

Benigni’s Pinocchio (meaning literally eye-of-pine) is in Geppetto’s words, self-making; “it’s as if it’s making itself” and “the son I never had.” Pinocchio is already speaking even before he acquires a form. As soon as he is made, in Benigni’s interpretation, he disrupts everything; he is energy yet to be channelled and harvested, a child. Yet, his early phrases: “there’s a whole world out there,” “it’s good to be alive,” “what a wonderful world this is!” point to a consciousness. In a way, this coming-into-being mirrors the shadow near the fountain of the beginning sequence, as if Pinocchio already pre-existed in living form he assumed. Thus, Benigni acknowledges the original text while giving it a new life in the movie. In contrast, AI’s world is not to be celebrated, but to be feared at all levels. It is a closed, hateful society, perhaps, a mirror of the always entertaining, present-day America, scared into submission by the Other, which pre-dates the events leading to the war in Iraq. For the eye-of-pine, the world is continuous discovery, and through interaction with it, one acquires the realization of the creative process, the joy of being at its full potential. A process that, perhaps, music has best been able to render if we were to think of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Of course, the potential is yet in its development stage, it is both destructive and creative, a Shiva dance without full knowledge. As Pinocchio meets the cricket, the wisdom and limits of the world, we see
this effect taking place as the cricket is pursued with a hammer, as we hear that “books are vile.” Benigni gives the puppet a child quality completely free of the saccharine; Pinocchio is simply a hyperactive child, at times, a pest. This is where the American critics failed to realize the true essence of Benigni’s Pinocchio. It was not meant to be faithful to the original (the whale, copyright or not, is once again a pesce cane—a shark in Benigni’s work), to be sugar coated à la Disney. Rather, it is meant to show the various, complex stages of human growth. The removal from representation of the purely destructive forces, the sadistic moments that animate each child as s/he comes to terms with the greater “I” of society (the superego), are quite harmful since in the mirroring effect the young viewer is given an impossible goal to attain. This is a characteristic that the American way of life continuously presupposes for all ages and people, as the technique by which Kapital exercises full control on the everyday life of living beings by way of the spectacle—as Debord in 1967, and then in 1987, made us ludically aware. Finally, Pinocchio, refuses to attend school and instead steps into the space of his own kind—the puppet theatre where characters from the Commedia dell’Arte give their static representations to the common public. Yet the difference is immediately visible: the puppets are on strings, while Pinocchio is stringless. He is immediately recognized by name as one of their kind, again as if he actually pre-existed. Perhaps Benigni is making an ironic statement or commentary on the Oscars as he (Pinocchio) approaches the stage where the puppets are. In an interview with Davide Grieco for the Italian newspaper l’Unità, Benigni says:


On the stage with the other puppets, Pinocchio is among his brothers and sisters in a world before the world he has stepped into. When the puppets’ proprietor, Fire-Eater, frames him as an intruder in the story represented on stage, and in his world, and is about to eat him, to swallow him back in the potential chaos of origins, Pinocchio escapes by telling fibs,
exaggerated stories about his own poor origins. Pinocchio discovers that he can move authority to compassion through a narrative conscious of its public. Amongst the various intertextualities present, the richness of all the texts that resonate within Collodi’s fable, this particular event is closer to Boccaccio’s Decameron than most people in an American audience would realize. The compassion of which Boccaccio writes, as a marked record of the base of humanism, in his proemio: “Umana cosa è l’aver compassione per gli afflitti; e come che a ciascuna persona stea bene, a coloro è massimamente richiesto li quali già hanno di conforto avuto mestiere, e hannol trovato in alcun” (Boccaccio, 26) requires that particular I-Thou relationship of Buberian fame, the Other-in-I recognition. Fire-Eater is, then, a form of authority within a humanistic construct, capable of resonating to stories, however stretched they might be. It is the triumph of logos, the word, which forms the world with understanding that provides the connective link between beings. By virtue of narration, Pinocchio becomes the Everyman—“I never knew my name,” as in Homer’s Odyssey, when Ulysses escapes death thanks to his story-telling abilities (and Pinocchio is rewarded for it with five pieces of gold). We must refer to Maurice Blanchot’s work, especially L’espace littéraire, to see in the artist’s creation the process by which death is contained.

Death

When Benigni’s Pinocchio meets up with the cat and the fox, his fortunes have just turned. From rags to a modest bit of gold, he is nevertheless tempted by the idea of investment, to turn five gold pieces into 10 million. The get-rich-quick scheme is the folly of the gullible, of those who have no savvy about the mechanisms of Kapitalism. In fact, the address given to Pinocchio by the two criminals is Nincompoop Land, Miracle Meadow. Only a devoted and uncritical believer would fail to see a critical assessment of the performance of “miracles” in a religious space and the relationship between religion and the economic order. When Pinocchio meets his momentary friends, who are actually assassins, he is, finally, alone in meeting with his naïveté in the soul’s darkest hour (la noche oscura of the soul). The Blue Fairy’s refusal to help and to give him refuge in her safe house is the announcement that he is alone in the world. Hanging by the neck (but, can a puppet really die?) from a tree branch at midnight, the scene is stark and brutally real—no evoking in this context, just the irremediable violence represented. The assassins’ comment upon departing—“Remember, puppet, there’s always the possibility of a second chance when life leaves you dangling”—is the ultimate, sarcastic commentary, given the
context. In Collodi’s text, there is no mention of a full moon, only that the assassins tied and hanged him from an oak tree.

The image of Pinocchio’s death offers us, diffused in a dark blue, a robust tree on the left of the screen, a full, swollen moon in the background that occupies about a third of the frame. The puppet is hanging from the branch with his feet seemingly touching the circumference of the moon’s circle, coming to rest, after some struggling, at the bottom of the circle.

In AI, David and the bear are in the woods looking for Fairy (just before he is discarded by his adopted mother, David pleads: “If Pinocchio becomes a real boy, and I become a real boy, can I come home?”). They then meet up with Gigolo-Joe. The singing Gigolo-Joe is a pleasure mecha on the run for a murder he did not commit. They meet up in the dump, in the night, with a host of other discarded mechas looking for parts, cannibalizing other discards. As the scene unfolds, an ominous full moon rises in the background, the same full moon we see in Benigni’s work, except that in AI the full moon is actually a hot-air balloon used by a bounty hunter/orga fanatic of sorts hunting for mechas to capture and bring to the Flesh Fair. The mecha hunter Lord Johnson-Johnson, though, is a particularly constructed character and seems physically to mimic Fellini —same body type, same hat, same cape. And, what is more Fellinian than a circus, with its clowns and joyous atmosphere?

In one, desolate moment the two films come together. The same stark image: the full moon in the background, trees in the foreground, bushes all around, The difference is Gigolo-Joe, who is underneath the rising moon. There is also the same ominous result: death awaits the would-be real/human child. It is as if Pinocchio were talking back to AI (perhaps this recalls Fellini/Benigni’s collaborative Pinocchio project), providing a metadiscourse on the trajectory of Spielberg’s version, and the inversion of light and dark between scenes (Medoro asks the Fairy for light, the moon reflects light) recalls Medoro’s words: “A thing that comes into the world and spreads no joy or happiness might just as well never have been born at all.”

With the Flesh Fair, Spielberg illustrates racist practices against the Other, but the Other here are the mechas of the world. The discarded and illegal mechas are rounded up by the Hounds (men on motorcycles who resemble wolves), another fairy element that collapses the science-fiction narrative into a moral play. The Flesh Fair is a mix circus and World Wide Wrestling atmosphere, a poor man’s circus, where the human public comes to celebrate itself. The spectacle is provided by the various ways mechas are killed and life celebrated. “We are alive and this is a celebration of life!” we hear in the background, as the M.C., who is also the person responsible for
the hunting (again, the Fellini-like type), prepares to stir up emotions.

The mechas' point of view is quite different. David is told a different version from two of the older mechas in the cage (yet, David belongs in no man's land because he is the first of its kind): "History repeats itself. It's the rite of blood and electricity." (AI) and, "So, when the opportunities avail themselves, they pick away at us ... cutting back our numbers so they can maintain numerical superiority." (AI) In this sequence, Spielberg stretches his rhetoric to the point of damaging the story: it is not that mechas are reproducing, but that they are being produced. Ultimately, it is human agency and economic production that bring more mechas into the human world. The flawed analysis that is offered to and through David becomes an expedient to capture our sympathy for the boy-machine. The narrative strategy, instead, works on a collective flashback, where the vicissitudes of the lives of Afro-Americans, Jews in Europe, and the various witch-hunts throughout the Western world, come together in the mecha vessel to remind us of our collective, social guilt. Interestingly, the rage against the machines turns against Lord Johnson-Johnson, the orga preacher, when he brings up David to "trial." Undoubtedly, the fact that for the first time the public sees a mecha in child form accounts for the refined mecha spell. When he is brought into the circus's centre ring (with Gigolo-Joe tagging along for protection) and is about to be destroyed, David cries out a desperate chant: "Don't burn me. Don't burn me. I'm not Pinocchio! Don't make me die! I'm David. I'm David!" One woman, in affirmation of the difference, responds, "Mechas do not plead for their lives." Then someone else shouts out the well-known New Testament phrase: "Let he who is without Sim cast the first stone!" (author's italics) and the crowd turns, pelting Lord Johnson-Johnson with stones then attacking him, and a revolt of the common folk ensues (volatility of the spectacle); they cannot bear executing David, who is so like a real human child.

The Quest

Both David and Pinocchio, after their respective encounters with death, proceed to search for the way back to the "father" (Professor Hobby; Geppetto), with their helpers (Gigolo-Joe and Teddy; Blue Fairy and the Cricket) watching over them. They embark on their quest as an educative process and through the acquisition of knowledge (Dr. Know, school proper). Again, it is David's desire to become real through the Blue Fairy that will eventually lead him full circle back to his creator. In Pinocchio's situation, the various tangents off the main course towards his father make him understand, on each occasion, something more about his relationship with
his father as, with each event, he becomes less a “child” and more human. Of course, Benigni does not follow the original text to the letter, in that the child is not replaced by a proper adult at the end of the quest, as happens in Collodi’s text. Both Benigni and Spielberg make frequent cross-references to each other’s vision of the original text. For example, David’s “educative space,” Rouge City, is intentionally and ironically analogous to the “space of entertainment” in Playland and, also, to the circus where Pinocchio as a donkey is brought to perform. The passage from puppet to animal to puppet again is similar to the passage from a David before knowledge (in David’s questioning of how can the Blue Fairy turn a robot into a real boy, and where she can be found) to a David who, using reason, acquires sufficient knowledge to ask Dr. Know the right question, and in so doing becomes more human-like. Both the riddle, where to find the Blue Fairy, and answer lie in the following pseudo nursery-rhyme from *AI:

Come away, O human child,
to the waters and the wild ...
with a fairy hand in hand,
for the world’s more full of weeping
than you can understand.
Your quest will be perilous,
yet the reward is beyond price.
In his book,
HOW CAN A ROBOT BECOME HUMAN?
Professor ALLEN HOBBY writes
of the power which
will transform
Mecha into Orga (AI)

David then asks Dr. Know, “Will you tell me how to find her?” and the answer is “Discovery is quite possible. Our Blue Fairy does exist in one place, and in one place only. At the end of the world where the lions weep. Here is the place dreams are born.”

Return
In meeting with their respective fathers, David and Pinocchio undergo different changes. For David, his sense of uniqueness is destroyed when he realizes that he is one of many copies of a real boy: Professor’s Hobby dead son. Pinocchio, on the other hand, refuels his love for Geppetto and undergoes a transformation by his acts of self-sacrifice. Both meet their fathers symbolically, in a space surrounded by water: David in a half-submerged skyscraper in New York (that is also home to Dr. Hobby’s enterprise, Cybertronics Manufacturing, the end of the world); Pinocchio in a shark’s belly.
Pinocchio’s trial in the shark’s belly is no match for the anguished trial David undergoes. The mecha boy learns that he is one of many boys and girls and he loses his sense of uniqueness, of being. In fact, in a fit of jealousy, David kills with a lamp (light), the first David brother-replica he encounters, while obsessively shouting “I’m David,” over and over.

Professor Hobby’s appearance and explanation of how unique David’s voyage has been and what he has become—the first of a kind—literally send David over the edge. As the professor goes out of the room to gather David’s “real mothers and fathers,”—the team that created him—David sits at the edge of the cornice, unable to bear the truth that has just been revealed. To his left, we see the statue, the symbol of Cybertronics, the human-like form with arms extended downwards and seemingly about to fly off, in contrast to David’s defeated and slumped posture. His quest, his return to what he believed was the Blue Fairy, ends with his attempt at suicide. He throws himself into the waters below, almost whispering “Mommy.” Once in the water, he is magically carried by a school of fish to the entrance of what used to be a Pinocchio theme park. Rescued by Gigolo-Joe, with the infallible amphibiocopter (a helicopter that can also go underwater), he descends once again, this time with Teddy in the amphibious machine, to enter into the theme park (Gigolo-Joe has been captured by the police after he rescues David).

Benigni’s Pinocchio does not undergo the trauma of identity reclamation but of Geppetto’s repudiation in the shark’s belly, though Geppetto’s renunciation does not last long and is finally resolved through a father’s love and understanding of his son’s shortcomings. Through their love for each other, they manage to escape the shark’s belly and reunite as a family.

Stasis

The stasis that we have identified in Benigni’s and Spielberg’s narratives points to a period of non-realization, of repetitious compulsion that invests the protagonists. Visually marked in David, in Pinocchio is mirrored back as duty: he embraces the need to provide for his ailing father. In so doing, Pinocchio re-assumes the vestiges of the “bestia da soma,” the working animal that he was when he assumed the form of a donkey, but this time he is ethically motivated. In succumbing to an animal state, he replaces his best friend Lampwick (the alter-ego, the boy who could not change back from animal to human) whom he first met in prison and who became his partner in Playland. The donkey Lampwick, Pinocchio soon discovers, as he slaves away for glasses of milk at Giangio’s farm, is dying and the last thing that Pinocchio can do—again, compassion being what qualifies
Humanism—is to share with his old friend a tangerine lollipop like the one that had bonded them in prison. In a way, the narrative comes full circle as Pinocchio is brought back to consider the displaced world he would have been frozen into, had it not been for recognizing and being guided by his “helpers,” the Fairy and the Cricket. By understanding their motives, Pinocchio was able to give more and more direction to the unbridled life-energy he represented. The passage that this “stasis” represents is that of stepping out of the ludic for the ethical being, in a Kierkegaardian way.

Going back underwater to the Pinocchio theme park, David is the personification of obsessive compulsion. In this sequence, the creative process is at a standstill and, like the postmodernist process that sustains it, ends up frozen in compulsive parody. As the amphibicopter moves through the Coney Island Park, we enter through Pinocchio’s gate, over the bridge to see Geppetto’s house, with the wood-carver chipping away at a half-finished Pinocchio, in the little pseudo-Italian town (at least that’s what the designers of the set think, in Naka Bayashi’s words “Fictitious old world Italy that was Pinocchio’s world”—as he tells us in the Special Features, Disk 2 of A1) and up the steps leading to a Virgin-like figure. As the machine comes to a stop, we see that the figure is actually the Blue Fairy enclosed in an open cage shaped like a shrine. The two faces, David’s and the Blue Fairy’s, merge, eye to eye, over the transparent glass of the amphibicopter. The two are one in endless reflection. (David and Teddy had become entrapped by a dislodged Ferris wheel in that very setting, the boy and the bear inside looking out at the Fairy, underwater.)

Rebirth, or the Open Conclusion

What concludes the separate trajectories, which we have placed under the rubric Rebirth, is a becoming. In Pinocchio’s evolution, he becomes the potential but “mature” young man he had always been; in David’s epiphany, he fulfills himself by being the wish the boy, David, had been imprinted with: to be loved as a real boy by his only mother. By recognizing his ethical self, Pinocchio is rewarded by the Blue Fairy and made human; David, rather awkwardly for the narrative, is rewarded by the supreme beings by seeing the mecha evolve, as though to redeem all the bad things that have happened.

David is restored by futuristic robots, more like angels than mechanical beings, who have come to earth to retrace their origins. Since humanity has disappeared, the working David and Teddy are the last connections to the beings’ creators. In a full circle, whose concentric waves reflect back to the centre, the origin is the only categorical imperative. Like David, the beings realize their raison d’être in their search for origins, which in David’s
case is the need for love. It's as though Spielberg could not resist one last didactic act. And, since the universe is like a memory bank, David's mother can be re-created for a day (thanks to a lock of hair) and David's wish is finally fulfilled. David is complete, by living through a full day of a pseudo-mother's devotion to her pseudo-son in a reconstructed, hyper technological environment.

Benigni's Pinocchio, though he becomes flesh and bone, does not become a closed book. In the scene preceding his transmogrification, he is sleepily working away at night on his doorstep, weaving a basket (since he has another job to boot). Mice and then the coach appear, the Blue Fairy descends and recognizes his "good heart." They part, the Cricket offering to stay, but Pinocchio waves him on. As the coach approaches the bridge, Medoro once again asks for light (another circle is completed) and as night changes magically into day, we overhear the Blue Fairy say, "Tough he was such a beautiful puppet." Then the coach crosses the bridge. At once, in Pinocchio's house, everything changes. Geppetto has real hair, the house has a richer look, and Pinocchio is a boy, whereas Pinocchio the puppet lies sprawled on a chair. All this because when a naughty boy changes to good, joy is spread all around we are told.

Benigni's final intervention on the original text is to leave open the ending, that is, not to abandon the boy to his reformed, ethical ways, but to preserve a hint of the ludic in the form of a shadow. The process of creation, finally, cannot be fully governed; it must retain that chaotic element that distinguishes and saves it from extinction.

In his final consignment Geppetto hands the books over to the boy, but his shadow on the wall is still that of the puppet. As he is about to enter the school, the puppet shadow stops at the door. Instead of going in, the shadow sees the butterfly and chases it on the street, finally disappearing into the Italian countryside and becoming one again with Nature. The creative process is only the shadow of it—the individual poiesis split from everyday life joins back with the elemental energy around it, ready to burst again and to reclaim another story, another life.

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