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Babilonia Teatri. Pinocchio (2012)

By Valeria Raimondi and Enrico Castellani

With Enrico Castellani, Paolo Facchini, Luigi Ferrarini, Riccardo Sielli and Luca Scotton

An artistic partnership with Stefano Masotti and Vincenzo Todesco

Sets, costumes, lighting and sound Babilonia Teatri

Organization Babilonia Teatri e BaGs Entertainment

Graphic Design Franciu

Production Babilonia Teatri

In partnership with Operaestate Festival Veneto

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Promotion BaGs Entertainment www.bagsentertainment.com

Artistic residence Babilonia Teatri and La Corte Ospitale

Pinocchio is a joint project of Babilonia Teatri and “Gli Amici di Luca” theatre workshop at the Casa dei Risvegli Luca De Nigris, made with the contribution of the Alta Mane-Italia Foundation

Preview Casa dei Risvegli Luca De Nigris, Bellaria Hospital 7-8-9 October 2012; October 7, the 14th edition of the National Awakening Day for coma research, Bologna

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by Renata Savo

“The fact of making a performance with them has profound meaning to us. It speaks to our need to make a necessary theatre. A theatre where life bursts onto the stage with all of its power, without being mediated by fiction. Where the actor non-actor carries all of his experience, unconsciousness and sincerity onto the stage. Where what matters isn’t skill or technique but the truth of bodies and lives that speak for themselves.”¹

The character of *Pinocchio* is used by Babilonia Teatri as an excuse to give voice to the performance’s main characters, who in this case aren’t professional actors but “real” people who – just like the puppet in Collodi’s novel – have suffered an irreversible transformation. Paolo, Luigi and Riccardo, who Babilonia Teatri met through “Gli Amici di Luca” (a charity linked to the Casa dei Risvegli at Bellaria Hospital in Bologna) represent nobody but themselves: three individuals who had been in accidents and who, one day, awoke from their coma and suddenly returned to life.

As an activity included in the charity’s therapeutic programme, the three protagonists used the theatre to cross the border back into a society that had relegated them to its margins. This act of returning to reality comes with an everyday awareness of the wounds left over by the trauma of losing a part of oneself; similarly to what happens to Pinocchio, the return to life also implies an awareness of one’s desire to return, to keep playing, to not let go. From the outside, Paolo, Luigi and Riccardo have changed, like the wooden puppet who becomes a child; but on the inside they still carry the same aspirations they had before, and the theatre allows them to express this dimension. Enrico Castellani’s director’s voice, acoustically present throughout the piece like a sort of inquisitive Jiminy Cricket, guides the three through a journey through which they discover their inner child: he urges them to perform their actions the way a puppeteer performs with his voice, demonstrating step by step how an inanimate object comes alive through the relationship with the spectators.

Themes and sub-themes

Life / death

The three performers in *Pinocchio* are victims of serious accidents, that have left them unable to move and speak as they did before, undermining their ability to work and live a normal life. However, although they have been in a coma, these performers are people who have effectively escaped death: they can be said to have been partially compensated by life by having become involved with “Gli Amici di Luca”, thus embarking on a journey which leads to a sort of re-birth.

The past, the present, the future

¹ A. Castellani, R. Savo, *Sul rapporto tra scrittura, vita e palcoscenico: Pinocchio di Babilonia Teatri*, unpublished interview included in R. Savo, *Teatri del reale nella realtà del teatro: il reality trend in Italia*, undergraduate thesis in Theatre Studies at La Sapienza, University of Rome, 2014-2015.

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The past is treated as a mnemonic void, but also as a reserve of idyllic and unattainable happiness. Emblematic of this second reading is a scene in which the three performers display placards with the lyrics of John Lennon's *Yesterday* translated into Italian: "Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away, now it looks as though they're here to stay, oh I believe in yesterday."

At another point in the piece, Paolo Facchini explains how books have helped him reconstruct his memories: "I read two pages and remembered the whole book and beyond. I could even remember when I had read it, and a bit at a time I reconstructed my whole life." Still, the image of the past always carries a concern for the future: an uncertain future only partly consoled by its being lived out on stage, like a daydream².

Childhood

Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi is the children's book par excellence, and for the protagonists of the show waking from a coma has meant a return to life and a subsequent re-enactment of all of its stages, including childhood. The theatre is seen as a space of playfulness where performers can reveal the child hidden inside their "wooden bodies", and this is especially true for these three performers. When Enrico Castellani asks Paolo Facchini to describe the first images he saw as he awoke, Facchini replies that he had to "re-learn everything, like a newborn baby." Enrico asks, "like a story in which the protagonist lives through many adventures before he can start living for real?"³

Happiness

Of course, the theme of happiness underscores the whole show and its intentions. The people we see on stage are people who make theatre because as a medium, it allows them to experience and reify everything that life can no longer give them. The story of *Pinocchio* engenders exactly this state of mind: on stage, they can dance, they can look at women, they can drive motorbikes. They can speak and they can be heard. They have nothing to fear.

Love

Certain characters and places are extrapolated from Collodi's text, but they occur either mentioned in passing or completely revisited in a contemporary key. One of the topics addressed is love: the Blue Fairy appears as the dream woman for whom it was worth travelling the distance. The ethereal saviour is seen as she who can help the three performers find the men they once were.

Education

This is a theme that appears under two guises: scholastic education, and moral education. As he directs, Enrico Castellani asks Paolo Facchini how he should spend the time between one rehabilitation session and the next, and his answer is "read": because in books he can identify and re-learn, he can re-widen his shrunken mental corridors.

Transformation

Pinocchio is a novel full of metamorphoses. Beyond the main transformation from puppet to child, there are also transformations from puppet to donkey, or the transformation of Pinocchio's nose when he tells lies. However the performers' metamorphosis is mostly moral: indeed, they themselves have been victims of a transformation, both physical and intimately psychological (they have had to retrieve memories, relationships, and more). The theatre thus becomes a locus of moral redemption where, amongst other things, the performers can assess what they have learnt: at the theatre, you can show others what you are and what you have become. The show is staged as an interview between Enrico Castellani and Paolo Facchini, Luigi Ferrarini and Riccardo Sielli. The questions Castellani asks concern the performers' identity, their history and their dreams. The answers of the three "actors are not actors", which are part-composed and part-improvised, are interrupted by the director who intermittently announces a series of performative actions accompanied by music, actions loosely inspired by the events evoked in Collodi's novel.

As Alice Castellani explains:

Pinocchio is a show without a real script. And it is a show that also lives in the relationship with the audience throughout the evening and after the show. There is a plot to start with, in which actions and lines are, to an extent, fixed – but built into the script is also a lot of room for variations, which depend on a the contingencies on the here and the now of representation, and the work also functions on this freedom 'on parole'. The texts that the performers read

² Having performed a series of movements accompanied by Italian pop singer's hit *Vita Sperimentata*, the three performers are instructed by the invisible "puppet master" Enrico Castellani to slowly kneel to the ground, letting their arms hang loose at their sides.

³ V. Raimondi, E. Castellani. *Pinocchio*. Unpublished script.

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out are written in the score – but when they read them, seem to come from them, they sound genuine: their readings are authentic when they come out of their mouths, as if they had written them just before going on stage.⁴

The relationship with Collodi's text unfolds through a number of "episodes". The spectacle opens with Enrico Castellani reading the scene of the book where Geppetto crafts his puppet from a piece of wood (accompanied by Johnny Dorelli's track *Lettera a Pinocchio*); this is followed by a reference to an unsympathetic Jiminy Cricket that may have distracted one of the performers, Paolo Facchini, causing the car accident that sent him into a coma. After this, Castellani rolls off a list of all of the novel's characters and settings and asks the performers to describe to him how they might prefer their Blue Fairy to look (if "they haven't got one yet"). Then, Castellani asks Riccardo Sielli to get on his motorbike and go searching for his wife, but in the journey (leaning back on a chair, miming the gestures of driving) he collides with Paolo Facchini on his imaginary tractor, which he drives through an imaginary pumpkin field "where fairies grow".

The novel's plot hence functions as a pretext to talk about the performers' stories. As noted by Stefano Casi, the spectacle performs a reversal of the creative process: "the performers, who have come out of a coma, are not an excuse for telling Collodi's story; rather, it's the novel itself that serves as an excuse to tell the story of those who have survived a coma, and especially of these people on stage"⁵. The very idea of representation is "an excuse for a performance that speaks of an excuse."⁶

In line with this logic, when Enrico Castellani's offstage voice asks Riccardo Sielli about his accident, he attempts a parallelism with the novel, trying to craft a metaphor for the coma out of the actor's words: "could we say it was like being Pinocchio inside the belly of the whale, who could only see darkness all around him?"⁷

The predominant format used in the performance – the interview – gives the performers a margin for improvisation, which potentiates the live feel of the event: there are references to the dramatic situation of the moment that give the audience the impression of a show being constructed right in front of them, as if they were watching a rehearsal or a work in progress. This room for improvisation also allows the director to tell his actors off whenever they go "off script".

Stefano Casi observes:

[...] The interview format is important just to reiterate the authenticity of the actors on stage: every evening Enrico Castellani [...] re-performs his interventions according to a very scripted set of actions, but in doing so he also attempts to unsettle his interlocutors to avoid them falling into sheer repetition, which would feel like simulation. The call-and-response between the director's voice and the three actors contains improvisations, words that are stumbled upon, overlaps, crossed wires, and bold or irreverent words spoken by Paolo Facchini, Luigi Ferrarini and Riccardo Sielli – who histrionically play with their exhibited authenticity like consummate actors, and are brought back to order by the voice.⁸

Language

The dramatic text reflects the need to stage a twofold condition: on the one hand, the authenticity of the performers, with their real cultural and social background; on the other, the present moment of representation, the theatrical *hic et nunc* of the dramatic situation.

The format of the interview also exploits a mechanism from contemporary media: the interviews in the piece could be seen to be inspired by the 'double interviews' that are shown in Italian television show *Le Iene*, but here the double interview becomes 'triple'. Dialogues as such only take place between the three performers and the acousmatic voice of Castellani: the three hardly ever speak to each other. The dramatic text also stages a poetic function of a low, popular – and even *pop* – verbal register, in the parts both read and spoken by the actors: Italian and English are mixed together, and sentences are imbued with metaphors, repetitions, onomatopoeias. This is evident, for example, in how Ferrarini describes himself and his accident:

PAIN ATTENTION PLEASE⁹ // STAY CONCENTRATED // I HAD AN ACCIDENT // A SYCAMORE // 59
DAYS OF COMA // THIS IS THE RESULT // 30 YEARS HAVE GONE BY BUT... // I HAVE CHANGED //
BUT I DIDN'T BECOME A PIECE OF WOOD // I'M STILL MADE OF FLESH AND BONE // SOMETIMES I
FEEL LIKE A GHOST¹⁰ // I FEEL LIKE A GHOST // GHOSTS, YOU CAN'T SEE THEM // THE GHOST OF WHAT
I USED TO BE¹¹

⁴ A. Castellani, R. Savo. *Sul Rapporto...*

⁵ S. Casi, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, Titivillus, Corazzano (PI) 2013, p.158.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ E. Castellani, V. Raimondi. *Pinocchio*.

⁸ S. Casi, *Per un teatro...*

⁹ Translator's note: in English in the original text.

¹⁰ Translator's note: in English in the original text.

¹¹ S. Casi, *Per un Teatro...* p. 66

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The switches between one register and another, from the interview format to the readings or to the more lyrical and performative moments, is not reported in the script. Equally, the text doesn't include captions: the points that indicate the presence of music are annotated only by the cues of the director who, like a television presenter announcing a commercial break, exclaims: "music!".

Character-actor-performer

The vital dramaturgical element in this piece is the actor: or more accurately, what the company calls the "actor non actor". This is the definition chosen by Castellani and Raimondi to describe not the non-professional actor, but rather the actor who acts out nothing other than him/herself and his/her own personal experience. In other words, these are "actors" who don't need to act; yet, what they present is a paradox, precisely the "paradox of the non-actor".

In a sense, the actors build their own character on stage – they recite their script, despite some slight changes every night. They are characters, but we could even call them masks. They are naked above the waist, except for Ferrarini, whose body is also the most wounded by his accident: he wears a strange harness that will eventually allow him to take flight, lifting himself into the air.

In addition to the disabled actors, we have another two presences/absences on stage: one is the disembodied voice of Enrico Castellani, and the other is the voiceless body of Luca Scotton as stage hand or "stage servant", a recurring element of Babilonia Teatri's shows from *made in italy* (2007) onwards. The stage hand is almost a stylistic figure, and here he is found sitting on a bench on the far left of the stage. From here, Scotton silently observes, embodying a spectating perspective that is other to that of the spectators sitting in the audience. Scotton also carries out some minimal performative actions: he is seen rearranging the performers' chairs, and at one point sits opposite Ferrarini with his back to the audience, copying him in his movements, like a puppet.

Space

Half-empty, the space recreated in *Pinocchio* evokes the situation of the here and now: it is a real space. Ropes are strewn towards the back of the stage, as if they were a trace behind by the idea of theatre and its backstage; on the left, again in the background, the situation of representation is further made evident by the presence of Luca Scotton as spectator/stage hand, a presence whose value is also sculptural. There are no blackouts or breaks, and scene changes occur under the watchful gaze of the audience and of Scotton. The actors' movements in the space happen on three levels of depth: upstage (the space also occupied by Scotton, his back to the audience); centre-stage (the space occupied by the three performers for most of the duration of the performance); and downstage (a space occupied by a bench, also at times occupied by Scotton).

In the sonic space of the performance music plays a primary dramaturgical role. Similarly to other Babilonia Teatri performances, *Pinocchio* can be seen as a playlist-performance, or a concert-performance (although the music is played through speakers rather than live), with a repertoire that includes Ludovico Einaudi's melancholy piano music (*I Giorni*), Chic's 1970s funk (*Le Freak*), John Lennon's classic pop (*Yesterday*), the Guns N 'Roses's rock-metal (*Patience*) and Vasco Rossi's commercial rock (*Vita Sperimentata*).