

TEMA MONOGRÀFIC

Film as a source for historical enquiry in
education. Research methods and a case
study: film adaptations of Pinocchio and their
reception in Italy

*La pel·lícula com a instrument per a la
investigació historicoeducativa. Metodologies i
estudi de cas: la recepció de les transposicions
filmiques de Pinotxo a Itàlia*

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RESUM

L'article té la finalitat d'indagar quin tipus d'investigació es pot dur a terme per fer servir les pel·lícules en l'àmbit historicoeducatiu. En la primera part es proporcionen dades per a una anàlisi quantitativa i qualitativa de les fonts filmiques, subratllant la importància del tema de la recepció i de l'embolcall emotiu de l'audiència. Després s'investiga el cas de la transposició filmica d'un clàssic de la literatura infantil, *Les aventures de Pinotxo*, examinant l'adherència i la distància de quatre obres pel que fa a la novel·la: Disney (1940), Comencini (1972), Benigni (2002) i Sironi (2009). La primera i la tercera van néixer com a pel·lícules per al cinema, la segona i la quarta

són sèries de televisió transmèses per la primera cadena nacional italiana. L'anàlisi evidència la discràsia entre els judicis de la crítica i l'èxit de públic. Es proposen, després, com a documents les ressenyes dels espectadors a la web per provar la importància de l'embolcall emotiu de l'audiència infantil.

PARAULES CLAU: història de l'educació, metodologies d'investigació, literatura infantil, història del cinema i de la televisió, *Pinotxo*.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the use of film in historical-educational research. The first section offers guidelines for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of film sources, focusing on the key theme of how a film is received and the degree to which it elicits the emotional involvement of audiences. Next, selected film adaptations of the children's literature classic *Pinocchio* are put forward as a case study. Specifically, four different works are analysed in relation to their faithfulness to / departure from the original: Disney (1940), Comencini (1972), Benigni (2002) and Sironi (2009). The first and third of these were made for the cinema, while the second and fourth were TV dramatizations broadcast by Italy's flagship television channel. The discrepancy between critical opinions of these films and their reception by the public is noted. Finally, Internet audience reviews are proposed as a source that witnesses to the key role played by the emotional involvement of child spectators.

KEY WORDS: history of education, research methods, children's literature, history of cinema and TV, *Pinocchio*.

RESUMEN

El artículo tiene la finalidad de indagar en el tipo de investigación se puede llevar a cabo para usar las películas en el ámbito histórico-educativo. En la primera parte, se proporcionan datos para un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo de las fuentes filmicas, subrayando la importancia del tema de la recepción y del involucramiento emotivo de la audiencia. Posteriormente, se investiga el caso de la transposición filmica de un clásico de la literatura infantil, *Las aventuras de Pinocho*, examinando la adherencia y la distancia de cuatro obras con respecto a la novela: Disney (1940), Comencini (1972), Benigni (2002) y Sironi (2009). La primera y la tercera nacieron como películas para el cine, la segunda y la cuarta son series de televisión transmitidas por la primera cadena nacional italiana. El análisis efectuado evidencia la discrasia entre los juicios de la

crítica y el éxito de público. Se proponen luego como documentos las reseñas de los espectadores en la Web para probar la importancia del involucramiento emotivo de la audiencia infantil.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historia de la educación, metodologías de investigación, literatura infantil, historia del cine y de la televisión, *Pinocho*.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the history of education has seen a considerable broadening of its sources and areas of enquiry. Historical-educational research is no longer limited to the history of education and the history of schooling, and even these fields are being approached from novel perspectives and with the aid of new sources, such as textbooks, class registers, teachers' journals, students' exercise-books, photographs, and so on.¹ In addition to the material culture of schools, historical research in education has embraced other new fields such as: the history of disability, physical education, space and design in schools and other educational settings, and the history of emotion in educational processes. The programme of the ISCHE 2016 Conference in Chicago illustrates the richness of these new lines of enquiry.²

Children's literature is clearly crucial to the history of textbooks, as well as to the history of the childhood imaginary and the history of reading. The broadening of perspectives just referred to has meant that film is also gradually earning its place as a source.

This article explores the kind of qualitative and quantitative research that can draw on film as a source for historical-educational enquiry, focusing on

¹ JULIA, Dominique. «La culture scolaire comme objet historique», in NOVOA, Antonio; DEPAEPE, Marc; JOHANNINGMEIER, Erwin V. (Eds). «The Colonial Experience in Education: Historical Issues and Perspective», *Paedagogica Historica*, Supplementary Series, 1 (1995), p. 353-382; ESCOLANO BENITO Agustín, «Postmodernity or High Modernity? Emerging Approaches in the New History of Education», *Paedagogica Historica*, xxxii, 2 (1996), p. 325-341; VIÑAO Antonio, «Les disciplines scolaires dans l'historiographie européenne. Angleterre, France, Espagne», *Histoire de l'Éducation*, 125 (2010), p. 73-98; BRASTER, Sjaak; GROSVENOR, Ian; DEL POZO ANDRES, Maria del Mar (Eds). *The Black Box of Schooling: A Cultural History of the Classroom*. Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2011; MEDA, Juri. *Mezzi di educazione di massa: saggi di storia della cultura materiale della scuola tra 19. e 20. Secolo*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2016.

² Vid. http://conferences.ische.org/ocs-2.3.6/public/conferences/1/schedConfs/1/program-en_US.pdf; <http://www.ische.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ISCHE-38-Abstract-Book.pdf> [Last retrieved 17.02.2017].

film adaptations of the childhood literary classic *Pinocchio* and their reception by child audiences.

2. FILM AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE IN GENERAL

As is well known, during the interwar period, the French *Annales* school of historiography launched a new and fertile era of scholarship that drew on a hugely expanded range of historical sources and novel heuristic methods, as well as a strongly interdisciplinary approach that embraced historiography, sociology, demography, economics, geography, psychology, and psychodynamics.

The «documentary revolution» generated by the *nouvelle historiographie*³ opened up an entirely new perspective in which «the written source lost its privileged status, and archaeology, iconography and even oral enquiry took on fresh authority».⁴

As early as the 1940s, Federico Chabod cited radio and film among the new sources, in his lectures on methods of historical enquiry: «Radio, with its choice of programming alone, and film directors, with their themes and mode of presenting them, which are in a constant state of change, represent a hugely important «source» for understanding the mass psychology of our times and its fluctuations. And twentieth century historians cannot do without these «research instruments», which often enable them to *understand* an age more effectively than a host of documents».⁵ Nevertheless, for decades, film continued to be little used by scholars of contemporary history, who tended to overlook the importance of visual sources.⁶ The 1960s, following publication of a key work by Mura⁷, saw the revival of a theory –which had already been proposed early in the century– that posited the historical value of

³ For background on the «documentary revolution», see LE GOFF, Jacques. *Documento/Monumento. Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. 5. Torino: Einaudi, 1978, p. 38-48; BRAUDEL, Fernand. *Scritti sulla storia*. Milano: Bompiani, 1973 (Paris 1969); TOPOLSKI, Jerzy. *Metodologia della ricerca storica*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1975 (Warszawa 1973); LE GOFF, Jacques (ed). *La nuova storia*. Milano: Mondadori, 1980 (Paris 1979).

⁴ VÖVELLE, Michel. *Storia e lunga durata*, in LE GOFF, *La nuova storia*, p. 64.

⁵ CHABOD, Federico. *Lezioni di metodo storico*. Bari: Laterza, 1976 (1st ed. 1969), p. 57-58. A collection of the lectures delivered by this great historian on the courses he taught during the 1940s and 1950s.

⁶ See the reconstruction proposed by IACCIO, Pasquale. *Cinema e storia: percorsi, immagini, testimonianze*. Napoli: Liguori, 1998.

⁷ MURA, Antonio. *Film, storia e storiografia*. Roma: Ed. della Quercia, 1967.

film understood as documentary, that is to say as a faithful and unmanipulated reproduction of reality, by virtue of the immediacy with which photographic images are captured, and based on a positivistic confidence in fact and in the source as a pure and objective copy of it.

Only in the 1980s however did film come to be significantly adopted as a historical source, particularly following the work of Marc Ferro and Pierre Sorlin.⁸ The area of enquiry that initially attracted the greatest attention was, understandably, the cinema of totalitarianism, which went hand in hand with the rediscovery of documentary as a source for historical enquiry. In Italy in the 1990s, Silvio Lanaro, who had already developed a complex historical method combining a range of sources from the field of economics to that of literature,⁹ drew on film as a key source on Republican Italy.¹⁰

In the United States, the importance of film within the history of education has provided an increasing focus since the last decade of the twentieth century. Sol Cohen spoke of a new cultural history that adopts movies as sources.¹¹ Robert A. Rosenstone devoted many of his works to exploring these sources, analyzing the key role of the visual media in our era, with a special emphasis on historical film.¹² Both Rosenstone and Pierre Sorlin¹³ observed that historical films reflect the concerns of the era in which they were made.

Recent studies have turned to film as a source for building up a memory of schooling in Italy, Russia, and Greece.¹⁴

⁸ FERRO, Marc. *Cinema e storia*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980 (original edition Paris 1973); SORLIN, Pierre. *Sociologia del cinema*. Milano: Garzanti, 1979 (original edition Paris 1977); SORLIN, Pierre. *La storia nei film: interpretazioni del passato*. Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1984 (original edition Oxford, 1980).

⁹ LANARO, Sergio. *Nazione e lavoro: saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia, 1870-1925*. Venezia: Marsilio, 1979.

¹⁰ LANARO, Sergio. *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana. Dalla fine della guerra agli anni '90*. Venezia: Marsilio, 1992.

¹¹ COHEN, Sol. *Challenging orthodoxies: toward a cultural history of education*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p.125-153.

¹² ROSENSTONE, Robert A. *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Cambridge (Mass.): London: Harvard University Press, 1995; ROSENSTONE, Robert A. *History on Film/ Film on History*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006.

¹³ SORLIN, Pierre. *Sociologia del cinema*. Op. Cit.

¹⁴ POLENGHI, Simonetta. «Remembering School Through Movies: The Films of the Book Cuore (1886) in Republican Italy», in YANES-CABRERA, Cristina; MEDA, Juri; VÍÑAO, Antonio (Eds). *School Memories. New Trends in the History of Education*. Cham: Springer, 2017, p. 203-217; ALFIERI, Paolo; FRIGERIO, Carlotta. «The Memory of an Ideal School: The Work of Don Lorenzo Milani as Represented by Cinema and Television (1963-2012)», ibi, pp. 219-230; DEBÈ, Anna. «Constructing Memory: School in Italy in the 1970s as Narrated in the TV Drama Diario di un Maestro», ibi, p. 231-244; KALININA, Elena. «The Formation of the Teacher's Image in the Russian Soviet Cinema as a Social Myth About Values

3. THE AUDIENCE

Ferro wrote that: «Film is not part of the historian's mental universe».¹⁵ Indeed, historiography as a whole is clearly somewhat behind in terms of its exploitation of this kind of source. If we enquire as to why this might be the case, we are led to observe that historians' diffidence towards film has been / is due to its intrinsically polysemic nature,¹⁶ in that it is not an exclusively verbal source and may therefore be interpreted at a range of different levels.

Film must always be viewed as *polysemic*, in that it is an instrument that both transmits knowledge and interprets history: it *reproduces* reality but also *constructs* it, conveys the norms of its era but also spreads new ones: it is a historical agent in that it is an agent of cultural change.¹⁷

While narrative history is the verbal representation of the past, or discourse (based) on the past, film enables the construction of a visual history. Furthermore, as pointed out by Sorlin, a historical analysis of film cannot omit its audiences.¹⁸ How did the public for which the film was made react to it? Was it successful? Audience data is crucial information but not sufficient to fully answer these questions. The fact that a lot of people saw a film does not necessarily mean that they all liked it. Furthermore, the reception of a film may vary according to spectators' age group, gender, social class, and nationality. The competence of the target audience does not necessarily coincide with that of the broadcaster, to use the language of semiotics. Viewer experience, as Casetti has pointed out, is complex¹⁹ and the spectator, like the

Creator-Demiurge», ibi, p. 245-252; KARAKATSANI, Despina; NIKOLOPOULOU, Pavlina. «Aspects of School Life During the After War Period», ibi, p. 253-262.

¹⁵ FERRO, Marc. *Cinema e storia*, Op. Cit., p. 91.

¹⁶ On this theme see the discussions in: ORTOLEVA, Peppino. *Scene dal passato: cinema e storia*. Torino: Loescher, 1991, p. 1-9; ROSENSTONE, Robert A. *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Cambridge (Mass.); London: Harvard University Press, 1995, especially p. 19-20, where the author argued that: «for an academic to become involved in the world of motion pictures is at once an exhilarating and disturbing experience». See also POLENGHI, Simonetta. «Immagini per la memoria. Il cinema come fonte storico-educativa», in MALAVASI, Pierluigi; POLENGHI, Simonetta; RIVOLTELLA, Pier Cesare. *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2005, p. 19-52.

¹⁷ SORLIN, Pierre. *Sociologia del cinema*, Op. Cit. p. 24-25; ORTOLEVA, *Scene dal passato*, p. 37-98.

¹⁸ SORLIN, Pierre. *Sociologia del cinema*, Op. Cit. p.118-152; ID., *L'immagine e l'evento*, p. 29-41. On Italian audience see ID., *Gli italiani al cinema. Immaginario e identità sociale di una nazione*. Mantova: Tre Lune, 2009.

¹⁹ CASETTI, Francesco. *Dentro lo sguardo: il film e il suo spettatore*. Milano: Bompiani, 1986.

reader, may no longer be viewed as the mere passive recipient of a message, nor may the public be viewed as a single uniform group.

Hence the audience must necessarily be included in our analysis, while distinguishing between the specific target viewer for whom the film was originally produced and the contemporary viewer, whose sensibility may significantly differ. Given that cinema is a medium of communication, the target audience's perspective must be analysed using the other sources available such as posters, trailers, and reviews.²⁰ Frequently, the opinions of film critics and the general public do not coincide and this is an interesting piece of date in its own right: the historian whose focus is on reconstructing the mentality of an era will be more interested in a film of lesser artistic merit that was enthusiastically received by wide audiences,²¹ than a cinematic masterpiece that was only enjoyed by a small elite. To what extent were the director's intentions understood?²² What mark did the film leave on viewers? Spectators' accounts may be written, oral or sourced from the Internet.

The historian of education must also bear in mind that film is a medium that elicits emotions. Relationships and communication are not exclusively based on logical-rational processes, but also express emotional dynamics and unconscious drives. Specifically, watching films, particularly in the movie theatre setting, is known to arouse strong emotional involvement on the part of audiences, an involvement that is both participatory and projective. Morin and Metz have argued that the impression of reality elicited by the stereokinetic effect of film sets off a mechanism of perceptual and affective

²⁰ DELLA TORRE, Roberto; MOSCONI, Elena (Eds). *I manifesti tipografici del cinema: la collezione della Fondazione Cineteca Italiana 1919-1939*. Milano: Il castoro, 2001. However, see also the detailed analysis by DELLA TORRE Roberto and MOSCONI Elena, which examines the Fascist period, but remains of great interest from a methodological point of view, *Consumo cinematografico e funzioni sociali del cinema: critica, dati di consumo e manifesti*, in FANCHI, Mariagrazia; MOSCONI, Elena (Eds). *Spettatori. Forme di consumo e pubblici del cinema in Italia 1930-1960*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2002, p. 23-61, p. 23-61. The entire work provides a key interdisciplinary analysis of the function of film audiences, and thus of popular cinema, as well as of the social and national-ideological functions of film. See also FANCHI Mariagrazia's literature review of the consumption of film, *Le tappe del dibattito e i principali contributi teorici e di ricerca*, ibi, p. 265-277.

²¹ On the forms in which popular cinema is consumed, see BRUNETTA, Gian Piero. *Buio in sala. Cent'anni di passioni dello spettatore cinematografico*. Venezia: Marsilio, 1989.

²² There is always a gap between a film and any understanding of it; it is always grasped with some degree of approximation, which varies as a function of the characteristics of the audience, and of the film's own intrinsic intelligibility, among other factors, METZ, Christian. *Semiologia del cinema: saggi sulla significazione nel cinema*. Milano: Garzanti, 1989 (original edition Paris 1971), p. 107-109.

participation in the spectator.²³ The emotions and inner change inspired by a film is a key aspect to be taken into account, especially in the case of child audiences.

4. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

A first method of enquiry, that has already been used, for example, to analyse textbooks and educational-literary works, is quantitative analysis. Just as to assess how a text was received, the historian studies its successive editions, with the relative changes and additions to the text, so a similar form of analysis may usefully be brought to bear on films. In the first place, by annually recording and classifying the films brought out in the cinema, we can build up a dataset that, in the medium term, can yield significant information. For example, the extent to which the proportion of animated films, or films for teenagers, etc., increases, decreases, or remains constant over the years. This approach allows us to observe when a new theme is introduced, when a genre is increasing or declining in popularity. Let us consider, for instance, the case of films on the theme of disability, an area in which the cinema has contributed works of great educational value. The gradual growth of this genre, which was initially viewed as offering art films to a niche audience, before little by little increasing in popularity to the extent of becoming a formula for churning out box-office hits, and which has stimulated great actors to produce some of their finest performances, prompts us to reflect on our society's enhanced sensitivity in relation to the phenomenon of disability, but also to the risk of spectacularizing it or offering a softened vision of reality.

Quantitative analysis thus allows us to track themes in film, but also to identify the target audience of a given work. What level of audience did a film attract? How many viewers saw it in movie theatres, and how many on video-tape or DVD? These are key data, albeit insufficient in isolation, for evaluating the film's degree of success. Other salient data concerns how the film was advertised and the criticism it received. It is possible to observe the gap between expert criticism and popular tastes, the differences between the

²³ The diegesis of film, the «represented», which is typical of all art forms, produces an *impression* of reality, while the *perception* of reality is produced by the reality of motion within the unreality of the image. Cfr. MORIN, Edgar. *Il cinema o l'uomo immaginario: saggio di antropologia sociologica*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1982 (original edition Paris 1956); METZ, Christian. *Semiologia del cinema*. Op. Cit.

aesthetic and ethical values of critics and those of the public. Restricting one's analysis to art films would therefore risk providing a distorted view. Of course, it is of vital importance to attend to the discourse on cinema as an industry – which points up the power of the major production studios and the strategic importance of distribution, which can significantly condition the public. In sum, although due caution must be applied, quantitative analysis provides data of undoubted value and importance, especially over the medium term.

5. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The historian of education can investigate film as an educational tool, as a medium that elicits emotion. Historical-educational analysis explores a film not only in terms of what is said in it, but also in terms of what is left unsaid. This might concern, for example, sex scenes and their relative discreteness. It might also involve identifying, as in the cinema of the fascist era, the existence of a discrepancy between portrayed and effective reality. Assessment of the fiction and lies shown on the big screen confirms what other sources tell us about the fascist regime's creation of a civil religion and a state-imposed pedagogy.²⁴ At the other extreme, we find the Italian neorealism genre of the post-WWII period and its «theory of transparency», understood as the reproduction of reality without semantic manipulation, and represented by De Sica and Zavattini, and the masterpieces of Rossellini. Clearly, such films provide us with a far more direct insight into the everyday life and mentality of era in which they were made. A leading example is the representation of childhood offered by films such as *Sciuscià [Shoeshine]* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette [The Bicycle Thieves]* (1948) by V. De Sica.²⁵ Hence, film is a valuable source for constructing a history of childhood. In addition to photographing

²⁴ SAVIO, Francesco. *Ma l'amore no. Realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano di regime (1930-43)*. Milano: Sonzogno, 1975; ARGENTIERI, Mino. *L'occhio del regime*. Vallecchi: Firenze, 1979 (2 ed. Roma: 2003); GILI, Jean A. *Stato fascista e cinematografia: repressione e promozione*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1981; BERNAGOZZI, Giampaolo. *Il mito dell'immagine*. Bologna: Clueb, 1983 (particularly in relation to newsreels); BRUNETTA, Gian Piero. *Storia del cinema italiano. Il cinema di regime 1929-194*. Roma: Ed. Riuniti, 1993 vol. II; FANCHI, Mariagrazia; MOSCONI, Elena (Eds). *Spettatori*. Op. Cit.

²⁵ BRUNETTA, Gian Piero. *Il cinema neorealista italiano, Da «Roma città aperta» a «I soliti ignoti»*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2009.

of children's daily lives, films also communicate the image of the child that was historically perceived by a given society in a given period.²⁶

A further interesting line of enquiry concerns family life and its various representations: a vast number of works, for example, have addressed parent-child and husband-wife relationships. The questions to be asked here include: What kind of family is represented on the screen? When did the bourgeois family model go into decline? What educational models are transmitted? How has the image of women changed over time? And finally, how are the elderly represented in a given film?

6. THE PLACES: CATHOLIC AND SECULAR MOVIE THEATRES, PARISH ORATORIES AND FILM FORUMS

A further possible research perspective consists of examining the different places in which movies are screened. In Italy, these include parish cinema halls, which were and are independent of commercial distribution networks and therefore chose and continue to choose for themselves the films deemed suitable for young or adult audiences, with both recreational and educational aims. As is well known, the Catholic Church grasped the educational value of cinema at a relatively early stage in the history of film, and had begun to make use of this instrument long before the fascist era: the history of Catholic cinema halls and criticism dates to the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁷

As early as 1907, the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ferrari, spoke out in favour of providing every parish with its own cinema hall. The Milanese parish oratory movement identified film as a means, on a par with sport and gymnastics, of attracting the youth, and at the same time, of educating them.²⁸ The Church was not blind to the dangers to youth of watching films deemed

²⁶ CECCONI, Luciano. *I bambini nel cinema. Le rappresentazioni dell'infanzia nella storia del cinema*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006; AGOSTI, Alberto. *La rappresentazione della condizione infantile nella filmografia europea del Novecento*, in GECHELE, Mario; POLENGHI, Simonetta; DAL TOSO, Paola (eds). *Il Novecento: il secolo del bambino?* Parma, Junior-Spaggiari, 2017, p. 277-294.

²⁷ VIGANÒ, Dario (ed.). *Cinema e Chiesa: una storia che dura 100 anni*. Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 1994. But see also, for a broad-scale analysis of the Catholic Church's attitude towards the visual arts, DÉBRAY, Régis. *Vita e morte dell'immagine. Una storia dello sguardo in Occidente*. Milano: Il castoro, 1999 (2 ed. 2010) (original edition Paris 1993), and especially p. 63-86.

²⁸ On this journal, see ALFIERI, Paolo. «L'educazione ginnastica e igienica nel primo Novecento. Il contributo della rivista degli oratori milanesi (1907-1917)», *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 10 (2003), p. 305-332.

to be immoral or unsuitable for non-adult audiences. The influential Milanese oratories magazine argued in 1907 that: «Nobody can deny that the [cinema hall] is one of the most appealing inventions ever devised. And because it is so attractive, like all discoveries, the wicked have made use of it to spread evil». Cardinal Ferrari had provided a hall in the archbishop's palace to be used as a movie theatre, from a preventive educational perspective.

By the 1920s, the Church's interest in cinema had become systematic. The first Catholic congress on the theme of film was held in 1931, while in a 1936 encyclical entitled *Vigilant Care*, Pope Pius XI called for the production of moral films, attributing cinema with a specific educational function.²⁹ Movie theatres run on Christian principles continued to spread during the post-WWII period and throughout the 1950s.³⁰

Finally, by analysing the secular film forums of the 1950s and 1960s, we may compare Catholic and secular educational models in that period; similarly, examination of the films recommended and/or actually shown in schools provides us with key insight into the educational methods being implemented in schools.³¹

7. THE ROLE OF FILM IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND HISTORICAL-EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO *PINOCCHIO*

An area of enquiry that I believe to be of great interest is the adaptation for cinema of children's books. Without encroaching on the work of the literary critic, data on such films may be of interest to the historian of education. We may explore what a given adaptation tells us about the collective mentality of the era in which it was produced, or whether this mentality

²⁹ MOSCONI, Elena; CASETTI, Francesco. «Il cinema e i modelli di vita», in PAZZAGLIA, Luciano (ed.). *Chiesa, cultura e educazione in Italia tra le due guerre*. Brescia: La Scuola, 2003, p. 147-68; ALFIERI, Paolo. «Morale, moralizzatore, educatore. Pio XI e il cinema», in «*Quaderni della Brianza*». *Pio XI e il suo tempo*. Atti del Convegno–Desio, 7-9 febbraio 2014, xxxvii (2014), n. 180, p. 19-34.

³⁰ By way of example, see the history of the Bolzano film forum online at: <http://www.cineforum.bz.it/>, or the work of the Servites in Milan, who opened the San Carlo bookshop in 1945 in the Parish of S. Carlo al Corso, as well as setting up among the bombed-out ruins of the church buildings, a theatre in which –in line with the film-forum format– films were shown and then debated on. In particular, see TURCHINI, Angelo. «“Cine e balocchi”: spettacolo e cinema nella formazione dei giovani», in AA.VV. *Chiesa e progetto educativo nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra 1945-1958*. Brescia: La scuola, 1988, p. 391-422.

³¹ *Cfr.* for example: NATTA, ENZO. *Guida al cinema*. Roma: Unione cattolica italiana insegnanti medi, 1964.

was indeed represented in it; we may enquire how the film was received by child audiences and whether there was a gap between the intentions of the adults who made the film and its reception by children, as is often the case in children's literature. We may analyse the extent to which the film adaptation modifies the plot vis-à-vis the original book and whether or how, the main character has been changed, also enquiring whether the changes identified were artistically motivated or driven by changes in mentality.³² An example of this approach may be found in a recent analysis of mine of four Republican Italy film adaptations of the children's classic *Cuore* (1882), which examines the correspondence between the movies and the book and between both the movies and the book and society. These films represent an imaginary school that overlaps in part with the school portrayed in *Cuore*, whose characteristics are partly retained and partly altered to construct a model of schooling that audiences can identify as a positive traditional model that is also appropriate for the present.³³

In the current paper, I briefly examine –by way of example– the case of *Pinocchio*. Specifically, my analysis centres around four film adaptations and their reception in Italy: Disney (1940), Comencini (1972), Benigni (2002) and Sironi (2009). The first and third of these were made for the cinema, while the second and fourth were TV dramatizations. Disney's 1940 movie significantly modified the original plot³⁴ and setting (a little village in the Austrian or Swiss Alps rather than Centre Italy), softening both story and characters, including from a graphic point of view: Disney's Pinocchio is more rounded and less wooden than the elongated and angular Pinochios represented in decades of images (Pictures 1 & 2), already resembling a child while still a puppet: his movements are fluid rather than jerky (Picture 3), he is short with a round tummy, thick hair, well-defined ears (which Collodi's puppet lacks), and a small and not especially pointy nose. If we compare the inanimate puppet with the boy that he later becomes, we can observe the strong graphic resemblance between the two figures (Picture 4).

³² POLENGHI, Simonetta. «Immagini per la memoria: il cinema come fonte storico-educativa», in MALAVASI, Pierluigi; POLENGHI, Simonetta; RIVOLTELLA, Pier Cesare (eds.). *Cinema, pratiche formative, educazione*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero. Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica, 2005, p. 44-52.

³³ POLENGHI, Simonetta. «Remembering our School through Movies». Op. cit.

³⁴ For this reason, it has been harshly criticized by RONDOLINO, Gianni. *Storia del cinema d'animazione*. Torino: Einaudi, 1974, p. 155, who argued that the Disney version not only dramatically altered Collodi's story, «but to an even greater extent denatured its fairytale spirit and characteristics».

After an initial five months' work on the film, Disney had decided that it was better to give Pinocchio the face of a child than that of a puppet and the original drawing –deemed artistically ineffective– was modified. Thus, Pinocchio's woodenness, which symbolizes otherness and incompleteness, was significantly diminished in the graphic version developed by Disney. Furthermore, Disney's Pinocchio is far less naughty than Collodi's, a happy-go-lucky child rather than a likeable but incorrigible misbehaviorer. His mistakes are less serious and his *metanoia* does not require his ugly transformation into a beast (the cartoon character only receives a donkey's ears and tail). The episode of the puppet's hanging is entirely removed from the story, clearly deemed too shocking for children, all the more so if visually depicted. The minor characters are also much softened in the Disney version of the story, particularly the talking cricket, who is now the narrator, and presented as an endearing character, and almost as scatter-brained as his charge who he never abandons; in contrast, Collodi's cricket was truly the voice of conscience – though that of bourgeois society rather than the puppet's own. This bourgeois mentality imposed on children a rigid dichotomous choice between school and work on the one hand and amusement and leisure on the other, following a pedagogical perspective that dated back to the sixteenth century and still featured in nineteenth century textbooks through the stereotypical figure of the disobedient child who ends up in prison as an adult and the obedient and diligent child who grows up to be poor but dignified and therefore happy.³⁵ Such a rigid either-or was not acceptable in the United States of the 1940s, following on the spread of Deweyan thinking about education. The Disney animated version abounds in humorous episodes as well as in suspenseful and scary scenes, from Stromboli's puppet theatre, to Lampwick's transformation into a donkey, to the encounter with the whale (a shark in Collodi's version). However, the film was not warmly received, despite its technical perfection. In Italy, it was lambasted by critics as soon as it came out, because of its lack of faithfulness to the original story. But were children of the same opinion as the critics? It is not by chance that, over the following decades, Disney's *Pinocchio* continued to appear in books and stickers for children, before eventually coming out as a home video and later as a DVD that remains popular among children. On the Amazon Italia website, the most recent DVD, issued in

³⁵ BACIGALUPI, Marcella; FOSSATI, Piero. *Da plebe a popolo. L'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità alla Repubblica*. Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1986.

2012, has received 157 reviews, and an average rating of 4.4.³⁶ The reviews define the film as «a great classic that cannot be missed (2016)», a «classic Walt Disney masterpiece loved by adults and children alike (2015)». A film therefore that continues to be enjoyed by audiences of all ages. The DVD is currently at position no.1685 in Amazon's sales ranking for the Film and TV/Animation category.³⁷ The Disney child-like puppet allows children's identification with him.

Comencini, in contrast, remained far closer to the original plot in his 1972 dramatization of the story. He was facilitated in this by the fact that his adaptation, which appeared as a TV series in five, was longer with an overall duration of 280 minutes. However, alongside Pinocchio's adventures he introduced the parallel story of Geppetto, with a strong emphasis on the father-son relationship. Furthermore, in Comencini's version «the fairytale element is almost completely eliminated» in favour of a more realistic portrayal.³⁸ The setting is the rural Italian Apennines. Collodi's anthropomorphic animals (the cat and the fox, the gorilla judge, the snail) are transformed into humans. The cricket only appears as a shadow on the wall. The Fairy with Turquoise Hair becomes the spirit of Geppetto's dead wife –making explicit a meaning that in Collodi's story is only evoked at the unconscious level, in that the Fairy embodies a female maternal archetype.

By having Pinocchio played by a child, an obligatory choice at the time of production (nowadays digital technology would enable the creation of a perfect virtual puppet), the director replicated the tendency to visually soften Pinocchio's character, allowing children to immediately identify with the puppet who is already a child (see Picture 5).

Comencini's Pinocchio only becomes a puppet three times during the film, as a punishment, and on these occasions his movements are accelerated to make them seem mechanical. At the end of the film, Pinocchio does not appear to have become a completely reformed character. Although the film starred big names such as Gina Lollobrigida, Nino Manfredi, Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia, it too got a stormy critical reception, again on

³⁶ URL: https://www.amazon.it/product-reviews/B008GZVHZI/ref=acr_search_see_all?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1 [Last retrieved: 13.02.2017].

³⁷ URL: https://www.amazon.it/Pinocchio-Special-2-Blu-Ray-Dvd/dp/B0041KW2UQ/ref=sr_1_10?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1487359500&sr=1-10&keywords=pinocchio [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

³⁸ ANNIBALETTO, Stefano; LUCHI, Francesco. *Pinocchio da Collodi a Disney a Comencini*, in FLORES D'ARCAIS, Giuseppe (ed.). *Pinocchio sullo schermo e sulla scena*. Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1994, p. 21, but also the entire volume.

account of its only partial adherence to the original work. However, it was hugely successful with the general public: each episode broadcast on RAI 1, the leading national television station, was watched by 16.5 million viewers and continues to be remembered today by those who saw it as children. Both children and teenagers enjoyed the serial, as borne out by their enthusiastic response to the competition run by RAI «Ho visto Pinocchio in TV» [I saw Pinocchio on TV].³⁹ In 1982, RAI launched a repeat broadcast of the serial. Comencini had also produced a longer, six-episode version, which was broadcast in 1972 in France and this is the version that has been digitalized and marketed in home video and DVD formats, in 2002, 2007, and 2010. The DVD is currently in 821th place in the sales ranking for the Film and TV/Adventure category on Amazon Italia.⁴⁰

On the Amazon Italia website, *Le avventure di Pinocchio* has received 105 reviews and a rating of 4.6.⁴¹ The reviews, dated 2011 to 2017, unanimously concur on the following points: Comencini's work is a masterpiece of Italian television; it is a film that takes viewers back in time, evoking happy memories of a film enjoyed at home on a childhood evening and the relative sharing of values; this revocation of childhood is so strong that the adults of today buy the DVD to watch it with their own children in order to share the same experience with them. Thus, the tradition of viewing the film as a family seated around the TV is carried on and remains popular. The dramatization has therefore retained its power to engage children.

The DVD is described by its reviewers in the following terms:

«Every family should have one (2017)

For me, Pinocchio is Comencini's Pinocchio, without any doubt! In my opinion it remains unbeaten in the cinema/TV category. A timeless masterpiece suitable for all age groups (2011)

A timeless classic of Italian literature and film (2012)

An absolute masterpiece! (2017)

A truly extraordinary TV series that will always remain in the history of Italian television. I have seen it dozens and dozens of times since I was

³⁹ PELLEGRINI, Erica. *Gian Burrasca, Pinocchio & company: il racconto televisivo per ragazzi 1954-94* Torino: Nuova ERI-RAI, 1995, p. 40.

⁴⁰ URL: https://www.amazon.it/avventure-di-Pinocchio-Comencini-Luigi/dp/B0044JV1PQ/ref=sr_1_7?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1487359500&sr=1-7&keywords=pinocchio [Last retrieved:16.02.2017].

⁴¹ URL: https://www.amazon.it/Avventure-Di-Pinocchio-Special-Dvd/dp/B001EHYEU0/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1487115279&sr=1-1&keywords=le+avventure+di+pinocchio#customerReviews [Last retrieved: 13.02.2017].

a child... it is one of those films that was part of my childhood and that I still enjoy today. For me it is undoubtedly the best film adaptation of Pinocchio (2013)».

The following comments bear witness to the film's popularity with the children of yesterday and today:

«It was like being immersed in the past. We watched it with the children and they loved it too (2017).

I bought it partly out of nostalgia for my childhood and partly because I wanted to show my six-year-old daughter something different to all the silly programmes that the TV is full of!!! The result... I found it really moving and she told me that it is her favourite DVD of all!!!! For me this is the best Pinocchio of all time (2015).

For my peers who were six years old at the time, it will strike a nostalgic note. I bought it for my kids, who really enjoyed it (2014)

For a moment, I went back to being the child that first watched it many years ago, I have to say that seeing it again was not a disappointment, on the contrary. I love the music. My 6-year-old daughter loves it too (2016)».

Numerous reviews confirm the film's capacity to yield an emotional impact on children:

«I have loved this film since I was a child, as soon as I found out that a full-length DVD version had come out I bought it straight away (2017).

A thousand childhood memories come flocking back every time I hear the theme tune (2015).

I went back to being a child (2015)».

As in the case of another of Comencini's highly successful dramatizations, *Cuore*, viewers of his Pinocchio lament the loss of the values of their childhood, complaining that society no longer transmits them in the same way:⁴²

«Everybody should have it because it teaches us so many things that doesn't exist anymore in modern society (2016).

In '72, the series Pinocchio was a huge hit and was a discussion topic in schools. When kids spoke to one another and violence had no place in

⁴² POLENGHI, Simonetta. «Remembering Our School Through Movies». Op. Cit.

homes, in which the core values were dignity and honesty. It's not rhetoric, but people attached more importance to social values back then (2014)».

Compared to Disney's, Benigni's and Sironi's *Pinocchio*, Comencini's is viewed as superior, perhaps precisely because of its power to re-evolve viewers' own childhoods:

«All the other *Pinocchio*'s that have come out since, no matter how modern, will never be of as high a level as this one (2014).

Timeless, better than any cartoon (2012)».

The reviews on another website that sells books and DVDs, IBS, are few in number but in keeping with the reviews on Amazon:⁴³

«I am 38. As a child, I couldn't wait for evening time to come when they would show the episode of *PINOCCHIO*. Times were poorer than now. We only had the two RAI television stations so there was no such thing as being able to choose. At around 10 p.m., we went quietly to bed. We were poorer but we had a better quality of life. Today we lack nothing and we are worn out. *LUIGI COMENCINI*'s *Pinocchio* is a wonderful souvenir of those tender years that we miss so much. It is simply beautiful. Today, many wonderful films are made with special effects that are out of this world. But within a very short space of time they are forgotten because there are new digital effects that kill the previous film. *Pinocchio* on the other hand will always be *Pinocchio* and will never be passed out by anybody, because nobody will succeed in making a version that is so beautiful, appealing and engaging. The camera work, the landscapes, the actors, the music. A true miracle in its day. I have seen *BENIGNI*'s new version of *PINOCCHIO*. It is wonderful fantasy, and having the cat and the fox played by the Fichi d'India [a duo of comedians] was really inspired. But *FRANCHI* and *INGRASSIA* are unbeatable. A film that I recommend to parents for watching with their children, to gift them with that serenity and feeling that the modern world seems to have forgotten (2007).

I was a youngster then and now I am 47. It made me dream when all I wanted to do was dream and I find it even more moving now that I am watching it more critically and mindfully. I hoped that the unedited (six-episode) version of *Pinocchio*, and its wonderful soundtrack, would

⁴³ URL: <https://www.ibs.it/avventure-di-pinocchio-film-luigi-comencini/e/8013147480019> [Last retrieved:16.02.2017].

do good things for my children too. In an age based on speed and superficiality, it was touching to see my children experience the same feelings that I experienced 35 years ago (2006)».

The film *Pinocchio* directed by Benigni (2002) essentially remains faithful to the original plot (shortened and adapted in order to make a film of suitable length for the big screen) and mirrors Collodi's Tuscan style of speech. Benigni chooses a setting and costumes that are more «fantastic» in nature, contrived and with unnaturally bright colours, in a way that is reminiscent of Fellini (see for example the abstract brilliance of the Land of Toys). He reintroduces the anthropomorphic animals. The harshness of the original tale is maintained, with its irreconcilable educational opposition between good and evil, child and puppet: the talking cricket is often unbearable, just as in Collodi, but today this irreducible ethical/anthropological dualism is no longer part of our twenty-first century consciousness, which is far more accommodating of the shadow zones and dark-light contrasts of the human spirit. The deliberately imaginary and ultimately timeless setting helps to situate this Pinocchio in a faraway world, which however seems false rather than fairy-tale-like.

The part of Pinocchio is played by an adult in his 50s (Picture 6): despite Benigni's giftedness as an actor, this makes it objectively difficult for child audiences to identify with the main character. This may explain why the film has proved more attractive to adults than to children –as borne out by the large number of adults that turned out to see it in Italian cinemas. It did not receive particularly favourable critical reviews and it was relatively unsuccessful on its launch in the United States. Despite the significant advertising effort and merchandising campaign surrounding the film, it seems that children go on preferring Collodi's dear old wooden puppet,⁴⁴ or Disney's softened version which nonetheless retains a childlike charm and is easy to identify with,⁴⁵ or the more realistic yet fairy-tale version by Comencini. On the Amazon Italia

⁴⁴ See for example, the national research project conducted by the Fondazione Nazionale Carlo Collodi with a sample of 2.500 primary school children in 1980. In answer to the question: «Who do you like best Pinocchio or Robots [then popular Japanese cartoon characters]?», 68% stated that they preferred Pinocchio to Goldrake, Mazinga, Gig, etc. See: CENTRO STUDI PROBLEMI GIOVANILI. *Pinocchio o i robot, inchiesta tra gli alunni della scuola elementare condotta dal Centro studi problemi giovanili*. Milano: Motta, 1982.

⁴⁵ The US scholar of children's literature, J. Zipes exhorts American children, who love Disney's *Pinocchio* but are not familiar with Collodi, to read the book: «They will realize that Collodi let his imagination run wild more than Disney did, and that he developed his puppet in more extraordinary ways», ZIPES, Jack. *Oltre il giardino. L'inquietante successo della letteratura per l'infanzia da Pinocchio a Harry Potter*. Milano: Mondadori, 2002 (original edition New York 2000), p. 118.

website, Begnini's version is in 972th position in the sales ranking for the Film and TV/Fantasy category and 5104th place in the Film and TV/Comedy category; it has only received 13 reviews (average rating 4.3),⁴⁶ which are positive, although they point out that the film «does not compare with Luigi Comencini's masterpiece (which remains the best adaptation of Pinocchio at the international level) (2016)».⁴⁷

In 2009, RAI Uno broadcast another version of Pinocchio in two episodes, a series directed by Alberto Sironi co-produced by Rai Fiction, Lux Vide and the English Power group. Geppetto was played by Bob Hoskins, and the talking cricket by the female comedian Luciana Littizzetto. Collodi, played by Alessandro Gassmann, was given a part in the dramatization. In this case too, Pinocchio was played by a child (Picture 7) and the plot was mainly faithful to Collodi's original work. The fairy is portrayed as Geppetto's dead wife.

This dramatization too was highly successful in terms of audience, even if much less than Comencini's one: the first episode on Sunday 1 November 2009 attracted 8 million viewers (32% share), soundly beating Ocean's 13 with a share of only 11%.⁴⁸ The second, broadcast on Monday 2 November 2009, was viewed by 7.5 million people (26% share), ahead of Grande Fratello 10 [Big Brother 10] with 5.5 million viewers and just under 25% share.⁴⁹ However, on Amazon Italy, the DVD has only received two reviews in Italian and six in English, all of which are positive; in terms of sales, it occupies 1128th position in the Film and TV/Fantasy category and 2836th in the Film and TV/Children and Teenagers category.⁵⁰

Each of these four film adaptations of Pinocchio is of great or good artistic value, but what emerges from the comments of the adult viewers is the importance of the emotional involvement aroused in them when they were children and the power of a given film to carry them back to their childhood: Comencini's dramatization is thus that which –more than the others– appears

⁴⁶ URL: https://www.amazon.it/Pinocchio-Roberto-Benigni/dp/B005LZW7OG/ref=pd_sim_74_1?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=36MVMY4E1PJB2G8FZC12 [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

⁴⁷ URL: https://www.amazon.it/Pinocchio-Roberto-Benigni/dp/B005LZW7AA/ref=sr_1_22?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1487359500&sr=1-22&keywords=pinocchio [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

⁴⁸ URL: <http://www.tvblog.it/post/16479/ascolti-tv-di-domenica-1-novembre-2009-pinocchio-fa-boom-di-ascolti-con-8-milioni-e-il-32-e-straccia-oceans-13-fermo-all11> [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

⁴⁹ URL: <http://www.tvblog.it/post/16494/ascolti-tv-di-lunedì-2-novembre-2009-grande-fratello-10-con-5-milioni-e-mezzo-il-24-frena-la-corsa-di-pinocchio-75-mln-e-il-26> [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

⁵⁰ URL: https://www.amazon.it/dp/B002XV92EY/ref=pd_luc_rh_sim_03_02_t_img_lh?encoding=UTF8&psc=1 [Last retrieved 16.02.2017].

to have won a place in the hearts and in the imaginary of many thousands of Italians, thanks to its artistic merit, its capacity to engage young viewers, and the fact that it was viewed in the home as a family. It is not a coincidence that the film's original viewers, now adults, choose to watch it again as ideal home viewing to be shared with their own children.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Addressing the topic of film as a source for historical enquiry in education, this paper shows how different methodologies can be used, from a quantitative approach to the study of different places in which movies are screened (parish film halls, secular film forums, schools). The polysemic nature of film makes this source a very intriguing one, as well as one difficult to deal with, considering it is both an historical agent as well as an agent of cultural change. From an educational point of view, the movie's capacity of soliciting emotions is relevant⁵¹ and has to be taken into account in historical research. Visual forms and soundtracks stimulate emotional feed-backs that play a significant role, particularly when the audience is composed of children, who are more sensitive to these messages. The case of film adaptations of classics of children's literature may be considered an interesting tool that allows us to detect changes in child mentality through historical times, and to analyze how adults and children may react differently to a film. As has been seen, audience response in fact plays a key role in the history of films and particularly in their educational history. Spectators' account, written, oral, or sourced from the Internet are therefore to be used.

The presented case of four adaptations of Pinocchio has shown that the emotional involvement which was provoked by the children's identification with Disney and Comencini's Pinocchio exerted a prolonged impression, favoured by family viewing of the Comencini TV serial, that implies the sharing of values and a warm and dreamy atmosphere which today's parents offer in return to their own children. Watching a film together proves to be a strong bond between generations, as was formerly the case when adults read books aloud to children. Lastly, the power of certain films to re-evolve viewers' own childhoods is also relevant in history of education and pedagogical

⁵¹ GROSS, James J.; LEVENSON Robert W. «Emotion Elicitation Using Films», *Cognition and Emotion*, 9/1 (1995), p. 87-108.

programmes. As Agustín Escolano Benito has proved, the power of their own childhood memories helps elderly people, even those with Alzheimer's, to recover identity and restore memory: films as well as school memories can be effective.⁵²



Picture 1. «Giornale per bambini», 1881-83, first edition in installments of the *Avventure di un burattino*.



Picture 2. Attilio Mussino, 1911 edition of *Le avventure di Pinocchio*.

⁵² ESCOLANO BENITO, Agustín. *La cultura empírica della scuola: esperienza, memoria, archeologia*. Ferrara Volta la carta, 2016, p. 141-184.



Picture 3. Walt Disney's Pinocchio: the puppet.



Picture 4. Walt Disney's Pinocchio: the boy.



Picture 5. Comencini's Pinocchio (1972): The child actor Andrea Balestri.



Picture 6. Benigni's (2002) Pinocchio.



Picture 7. Sironi's (2009) Pinocchio: The child actor Robbie Kay.