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1

Bruno Bozzetto's Life and Works: From the Short Format to the Feature Film

The Italian Disney?

“The Italian Disney” or “the anti-Disney”: there is no middle ground, in the formulas the Italian press employs when talking about Bruno Bozzetto.¹ The recurring comparison with Disney tells a lot about the average Italian idea of animation and how it has been forged by the works of the American entrepreneur. However, both comparisons are misleading. It is true that Bozzetto has repeatedly voiced his unconditioned admiration for Disney: *Allegro non troppo* is directly inspired by *Fantasia*, a film the director saw in theater more than a dozen times,² and that he calls “a revelation, something essential to me, a part of my life.”³ Bozzetto has also a personal attachment to *Bambi* (David Hand and others, 1942): “[it] educated me. ... There I learned what is man to nature”;⁴ “from that moment, I think that my poetics got influenced by it for good.”⁵ Moreover, the Disney short *Toot*,

¹Massimo Maisetti, “Bruno Bozzetto: l’anti Disney,” in *Bruno Bozzetto: 1958–1988*, ed. Alfio Bastiancich (Savona: Centro Promozionale Coop, 1988), 70.

²Bozzetto in Bastiancich, *Bruno Bozzetto*, 12.

³“Una rivelazione, qualcosa di imprescindibile, una parte della mia vita.” Personal communication to the author via Skype, January 20, 2019.

⁴“*Bambi* mi ha formato. . . . Da lì ho capito che cosa era l’uomo per la natura.” Andrijana Ružić, “Un romanzo corale,” in *Allegro non troppo. Un tesoro dell’arte italiana*, ed. Chiara Cereda, Shirin Chehayed, Priscilla Mancini, and Andrijana Ružić (Milano: Agema, 2016), 24.

⁵“Da quel momento credo che la mia poetica ne fu influenzata per sempre.” Fabrizio Dividi, “Bruno Bozzetto: ‘L’ecologia? L’ho scoperta grazie a *Bambi* della Disney’,” *Corriere Torino* (July 10, 2019), https://torino.corriere.it/cultura/19_luglio_10/

Plunk, Whistle and Boom was not only among his early main sources of graphic inspiration (see the Introduction) but also a strong motivation to overcome his hesitations and see a professional future in the same field of Disney:

It was inconceivable to make films like he did, with such a rich animation, so technically advanced ... You get scared even before you start! ... [With *Toot, Plunk, Whistle and Boom*] I discovered that it was possible to make an “intelligent” film, a parody of everyday life, with a bare drawing style ... just like mine! So, after all, it was Disney again that directed me towards this job.⁶

The director never sought an artistic confrontation with his colleague in Hollywood, though. He conceded once that his own style might be “a mixture between Walt Disney and McLaren, and those two are diametrically opposed characters!”⁷ adding soon after that “I always advice to not imitate Walt Disney.”⁸ In fact, Bozzetto never did so; as Bendazzi argued, the only thing he might have in common with Disney is that “he remained in the path of the same tradition (a tradition Disney is only part of, because it was born ‘before’ Disney); that is to say, he made humorous films, with caricatural characters, whose vicissitudes are worthy of the purest slapstick comedy.”⁹

So, the recurring labeling of Bozzetto as a new Disney is just part of the easy parlance of the Italian press, which holds Disney as the only reference in animation. However, it is also true that Bozzetto has been the only popularly known director of Italian animation for many years, at least until the late-1990s commercial successes of the full-length animated features

bruno-bozzetto-l-ecologia-l-ho-scoperta-grazie-bambi-disney-910bb784-a2f8-11e9-a4d9-199f0357bdd6.shtml (accessed July 18, 2019).

⁶

Non era pensabile fare dei film come li faceva lui, con quel tipo di animazione così ricca e con una tecnica così avanzata ... Ti spaventi ancora prima di incominciare! [Con *Toot, Plunk, Whistle and Boom*] ho scoperto che si poteva fare un film “intelligente,” una parodia della vita normale, realizzandolo con un disegno scarso ... come quello che sapevo fare anch’io! Quindi in definitiva è stato ancora Disney a spingermi verso questo lavoro.

Bruno Bozzetto, Intervista, in Maria Francesca Botticini, “Allegro non troppo. Bruno Bozzetto, Cartoonist italiano” (thesis, Università degli Studi di Bologna, 1993), II, quoted in Antonio Vincenzo Boscarino, *L'estetica di Bruno Bozzetto. Teoria e prassi tra movimento e spettacolo* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2002), 16–17.

⁷Bozzetto (1968), in Bastiancich, *Bruno Bozzetto*, 12.

⁸Ibid.

⁹“È pur rimasto nel solco della tradizione stessa (una tradizione di cui Disney è solo parte, perché nata “prima” di Disney); ha cioè fatto film umoristici, con personaggi caricaturali, con vicende degne della più pura *slapstick comedy*.” Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Bruno Bozzetto. Animazione primo amore* (Milano: ISCA, 1972), reprinted in Alfio Bastiancich, ed., *Bruno Bozzetto: 1958–1988* (Savona: Centro Promozionale Coop, 1988), 30.

by Enzo D'Alò (*La gabbianella e il gatto, Lucky and Zorba*, 1998); the association with Disney's name was thus also based on his fame. Moreover, when Bozzetto started making full-length animated films in the 1960s, the only popular model of animated feature was the Disney one. Bozzetto himself, when initially prompted by Attilio Giovannini to try his skills with the long format, instinctively played the proposal down by saying, "I am no Disney company."¹⁰ As explained by Bendazzi in 1972, "whoever prepares to the one hour and half trial in animation is at a crossroad: a competition on par with Disney, to give the audience what is already in their desires, or a competition to negate Disney and try to attract the audience with innovation."¹¹ Nonetheless, Bozzetto seems to have found a third way: being innovative without negating Disney altogether, but sublimating his legacy into an alternative aesthetics. The present chapter will deal with Bozzetto's own way to animation and to the animated feature through a biographical sketch, mostly focused on the events that provide insight into the reasons of his stylistic and production choices.

The Early Years

Bruno Bozzetto's birthdate, March 3, 1938, tells that the director was born in the middle of one of the darkest periods in Italian and European history. In Germany, on February 4, Adolf Hitler abolished the War Ministry and created the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces), so to have the military power under his direct control; similarly, on March 30, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was granted equal power over the Italian military to that of the king. On March 12, the *Anschluss* happened: Nazi Germany invaded and annexed Austria. Later that year, the vicious racist side of the totalitarian regimes manifested itself in the proclamation of the Italian racial laws and the November 9–10 *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), a Nazi pogrom against Jews. Meanwhile, the Spanish Civil War, which started in 1936, was still raging. A tragic stage was being prepared for the Second World War.

However, Bozzetto does not retain dramatic memories from the war years. On the contrary, his recollections of his first eleven years of life are mostly fond. His family moved away from Milan to settle in Bergamo, a small city where the future director was to find an ideal rural and bucolic environment. That wise choice spared Bozzetto from the bombings that devastated Milan

¹⁰ "Mica sono la Disney." Dividi, "Bruno Bozzetto."

¹¹ "Chi si accinge al cimento dell'ora e mezzo in animazione, si trova dunque di fronte a un bivio: concorrere con Disney mettendosi sullo stesso piano, per dare al pubblico ciò che esso già desidera, o concorrere con Disney negandolo e tentando di attrarre il pubblico con la novità." Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 22.

in 1940, and also offered fuel to an ecological and nostalgic humanism that would have later surfaced in his films. In Bozzetto's words, Bergamo was a "city-cradle, the cotton wool of childhood, the warmth of the first friendships. ... In Bergamo, I grew up surrounded by greenery, in an idyll of natural friendships and harmonies."¹² It is the place where he still lives in 2021. A big shock was anyway bound to happen during his early years, and it was precisely about his living place: his parents moved back to Milan in 1949, to settle in an apartment in Corso Matteotti, near Piazza San Babila. Bozzetto commented,

I still remember the arrival ... at the Central Station, in the fog, with the impending city all around it. ... I immediately felt caged. In a cage of fog. For sure, my idealizations of uncontaminated nature were born from that childhood trauma. Or also because I suddenly found myself alone, an only child, without my friends of Bergamo. Maybe I started to do cinema because of that: to recreate a world I felt I had lost.¹³

Bozzetto remained an only child, and his parents gave unconditioned support to his career, both morally and financially. His family had an artist in it: Bozzetto's maternal grandfather, Girolamo Poloni (1877–1954), an academic fresco painter from Martinengo (near Bergamo), whose sumptuous and realistic use of light had him called by his teacher Lodovico Pogliaghi "a man born three centuries too late. His age would have been 1600, given how much of the air and impression of those times he manages to infuse in color."¹⁴ Bozzetto used to visit his grandfather's atelier and to be spellbound by the artist's ability to breathe life into flat figures with lines and paint. The director reckons that his own drawing style and skills are nothing like his

¹²"Città-culla, l'ovatta dell'infanzia, il calore delle prime amicizie. ... A Bergamo ero cresciuto nel verde, in un idillio d'amicizie e armonie naturali." Mario Serenellini, "Dialogo tra il Signor Rossi e il Signor B," in *Bruno Bozzetto. Cinquant'anni di cartoni animati*, ed. Dino Alois (Torino: Edizioni Il Pennino, 2005), 50.

¹³

Mi ricordo ancora l'arrivo ... alla Stazione Centrale, nella nebbia, con la città incombente tutt'attorno. ... Io mi sono sentito subito in gabbia. Una gabbia di nebbia. Sicuramente, le mie idealizzazioni della natura incontaminata nascono da quel trauma infantile. Anche perché mi sono ritrovato di colpo solo, figlio unico, senza gli amici conosciuti a Bergamo. È forse per questo che ho cominciato a fare cinema: per ricrearmi un mondo che sentivo d'aver perduto. (Serenellini, "Dialogo tra il Signor Rossi e il Signor B," 50)

¹⁴"È un uomo nato in ritardo di tre secoli. La sua epoca sarebbe stata il Seicento tanto egli sa trasfondere nel colore l'aria e l'impressione di quel tempo." Lodovico Pogliaghi in Chiara Moretti, "Girolamo Poloni," in *I pittori bergamaschi dell'Ottocento*, ed. Rossana Bossaglia (Azzano San Paolo: Bolis, 1992), now at <https://girolamo-poloni.weebly.com> (accessed July 19, 2019).

grandfather's; nonetheless, he holds dear one of Poloni's frescos, on a wall of his private studio.

Bozzetto's parents were not artists, but they were well-to-do and provided for a welcoming and encouraging domestic environment. The director remembers his mother, Maria Giovanna Poloni (affectionately nicknamed Tiny), for her "sweetness, good personality and discretion (a trait I inherited from her)," ¹⁵ but he is especially grateful to his father Umberto, "a creative and brilliant fellow like few others, ... I feel that, in respect to my human and professional education, I basically owe everything to him"; ¹⁶ "the creativity is mine, by I owe to him all about the practical side and how to face life." ¹⁷ In fact, Bozzetto considered him an inventor, "a technical genius"; ¹⁸ he recalls that "the several houses where we lived were full of his little clever technical inventions, made just for the simple pleasure of creating something new, and not for necessity." ¹⁹ Umberto studied electrical engineering. He created and directed the sales branch of an industry he cofounded with his two brothers; it produced chemicals for the production of textiles. A member of the Alpini Corps of the Italian army, he was also a lover of contemplative mountain walks, which reinforced Bozzetto's budding interest in the natural landscape and also provided him with ideas for some later works (like *Mistertao*, 1990). Umberto transmitted to his son several interests: "for classical music, for good literature and, when I was a child, for the humor of some comics, and ... for novelties and technologies." ²⁰ He was initially not interested in cinema at all, just like Bozzetto's mother, ²¹ but he slowly changed his mind as he saw how much his son cared for it. The story about Umberto building Bozzetto's first animation stand in the middle of the living room of their house with an ironing board (see the Introduction) is one of the episodes the director is most fond of; Bozzetto's second, more professional animation stand was designed by Umberto as well and built by Luciano Marzetti,

¹⁵"La dolcezza, la bontà di carattere e la riservatezza (che ho ereditato da lei)." Bruno Bozzetto, "Era mio padre," in *Bruno Bozzetto. Cinquant'anni di cartoni animati*, ed. Dino Aloï (Torino: Edizioni Il Pennino, 2005), 15.

¹⁶"Una figura creativa e geniale come poche, ... sento che a lui, nella mia formazione umana e professionale, devo praticamente tutto." Bozzetto, "Era mio padre," 15.

¹⁷"La creatività è mia, ma tutto ciò che riguarda la parte pratica e il modo di affrontare la vita lo devo a lui." Alberta Voltolini, "Bruno Bozzetto. 'Campiglio quanto m'ispiri,'" *Campiglio* 4 no. 6 (Summer 2018): 18.

¹⁸"Un genio della tecnica." Voltolini, "Bruno Bozzetto. 'Campiglio quanto m'ispiri,'" 18.

¹⁹"Le diverse case in cui abitammo erano piene di sue piccole geniali invenzioni tecnologiche, fatte non per necessità, quanto per il semplice piacere di crear cose nuove." Bozzetto, "Era mio padre," 15–16.

²⁰"La musica classica, la buona letteratura e, da piccolo, anche l'umorismo di certi fumetti, ... le novità e le tecnologie." Bozzetto, "Era mio padre," 15.

²¹Tina Porcelli and Fabrizio Liberti, "Bruno Bozzetto," *Cineforum*, http://www.cineforum.it/rubrica/Il_film_che/Bruno_Bozzetto (accessed July 20, 2019).

who was to become an expert animation cinematographer.²² Another key moment in this father–son relationship eased Bozzetto’s crucial decision about making a full-length feature. *West and Soda* was going to cost about a hundred million liras. “If we make the film and then it is a total fiasco, will we be able to go on living, afterwards?”, asks Umberto. ‘Yes’, is Bruno’s answer. ‘Then let’s do it!’, says his father.”²³

First Attempts

Bozzetto’s earliest attempts at cartooning were the illustrations that he drew in the spur of the moment, out of the inspiration he took from the books he read during his youth.²⁴ Even though Max Massimino-Garnier called him “a cultured man without books,”²⁵ because of the charming naiveté that his films use while conveying a sharp and well-informed vision of the world, Bozzetto has always relished reading a wide variety of literary texts, from narrative to popular science essays. Ernest Hemingway was among his early favorites, because of his attitude to “stylization”;²⁶ then came J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow’s *Herzog* (1964), and Bernard Malamud, among others. He said to have read twelve times Dino Buzzati’s *Il deserto dei tartari* (*The Tartar Steppe*, 1940). He used to be a comic book fan, too; among his favorites there were Hal Foster’s *Prince Valiant*, Lee Falk’s *The Phantom* and *Mandrake*, Lyman Young’s *Tim Tyler’s Luck*, and the Mickey Mouse daily strips by Floyd Gottfredson. He claims that the Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge comics by Carl Barks liberated his imagination much more than classics of children literature like *Pinocchio* or Ferenc Molnár’s *A Pál utcai fiúk* (*The Paul Street Boys*, 1906).²⁷

Bozzetto’s distinctive curiosity and need for gathering firsthand knowledge nurtured in him a keen ability to observe and interpret his surroundings; this is why several of the amateur films he shot before and

²²Bozzetto, “Era mio padre,” 16.

²³“Se noi facciamo il film ed è un fiasco totale, possiamo continuare a vivere dopo?”, chiede Umberto. ‘Sì’ è la risposta di Bruno. ‘Allora facciamolo!’ dice il padre.” Roberto Davide Papini, “Tutto iniziò da un’asse da stiro,” in *Bruno Bozzetto. Cinquant’anni di cartoni animati*, ed. Dino Aloï (Torino: Edizioni Il Pennino, 2005), 38.

²⁴Bozzetto, “Adagio, accelerando,” in *Fantasmagoria. Un secolo (e oltre) di cinema d’animazione*, ed. Davide Giurlando (Venezia: Marsilio, 2017), 79.

²⁵Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 32.

²⁶Paolo Di Stefano, “Bruno Bozzetto: ‘Ora il mio signor Rossi diventerà un blogger,’” *Corriere della Sera* (september 29, 2018). https://www.corriere.it/cronache/18_settembre_29/bruno-bozzetto-ora-mio-signor-rossi-diventera-blogger-fb6c27ec-c420-11e8-af74-9a32bd2d1376.shtml?refresh_ce-cp (accessed July 21, 2019).

²⁷Giannalberto Bendazzi, “Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto,” in Roberto Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto. Sequenze 9* (Verona: Nuova Grafica Cierre, 1990), 53.

soon after his 1958 professional debut are short live-action documentaries about nature (*Piccolo mondo amico*, *Small Friendly World*, 1955; *I gatti che furbacchioni*, *The Cats Are So Slick*, 1956; *A filo d'erba*, *On a Blade of Grass*, 1957; *Il solito documentario*, *The Usual Documentary*, 1959). Before making those films, however, Bozzetto was to refine his self-taught graphic and storytelling abilities by providing with satirical cartoons a column ("Dietro la coda del cavallo si mormora"; "Behind the Tail of the Horse, Rumor Has It") of the high school paper *Il rudere* (*The Wreck*),²⁸ while he attended the high school "Cesare Beccaria" in Milan. Bozzetto considered himself a rather lazy student, but several experiences he did in his high school years decisively stimulated his interest in film and animation. During a school trip to London, Bozzetto deserted usual destinations like the British Museum and instead sneaked into cinemas to watch animated films.²⁹ It was at the Cameo-Poly Cinema³⁰ (now Regent Street Cinema), a theater then specialized in up-market foreign films, that he enthusiastically discovered Tex Avery and the MGM "Tom & Jerry" series:³¹ for the first time, the horizon of his cartoon knowledge went beyond Disney.³² From history classes, instead, he received a rather drastic impression: he felt that mankind was not into anything else but building weapons. This conclusion would have later blossomed into *Tapum! The History of Weapons*. Outside of the classroom, he nurtured his passion for cinema by joining the Cineclub Milano, a social circle whose members shared in turn their homemade films. Its programs included also animation, giving thus to Bozzetto the impression that the Italian interest in this medium was growing.³³ In particular, the director remembers some cartoons by a Cineclub member, Turolla,³⁴ who suggested him to contribute to the club with animations of his own.³⁵

Those were in fact also the times of Bozzetto's first probing into the territory of self-made amateur films. When he was about 15, he started to make flipbooks out of bloc-notes. Around 1953, his father came home with an 8mm camera; Umberto never had a chance to use it for himself, as Bozzetto confiscated it for his cinema experiments. The first of Bozzetto's homemade animated film was born soon after: it was not based on new

²⁸Papini, "Tutto iniziò da un'asse da stiro," 39.

²⁹Di Stefano, "Bruno Bozzetto."

³⁰Ivan Manuppelli, "Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto," *Piero Tonin Blog* (December 12, 2014), http://pierotonin.blogspot.com/2014/12/intervista-bruno-bozzetto_12.html (accessed October 17, 2019).

³¹Bozzetto, "Adagio, accelerando," 79.

³²Di Stefano, "Bruno Bozzetto."

³³Bozzetto, "Adagio, accelerando," 79.

³⁴Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

³⁵Boscarino, *L'estetica di Bruno Bozzetto*, 129.

characters, but it was an attempt at a Donald Duck cartoon (1953).³⁶ The black and white film features Donald walking in a street, who suddenly stops when he reads a title on a newspaper abandoned on the ground: “The Martians are coming.”³⁷ He then raises a sign that says, “Let’s flee, then.” The ending titles promise a next episode. Bozzetto did not have any knowledge about cel animation, so he had to redraw the background in each image. That is why all the lines are continuously wobbling, and Donald has an oversimplified and rough design; notwithstanding those shortcomings, there is a dramatic close-up on the newspaper headline (that could not be done with a real zoom, but only by recreating the camera movement image by image) that reveals how Bozzetto had already a grasp on some basics of film cartoon storytelling. In 1954, he animated *Fantasia indiana* (*An Indian Fantasy*) that foreshadows the theme of one of his “Carosello” series with the American Indian Unca Dunca and shows a more convincing use of narrative rhythm; cel animation is also attempted. Then, in 1955, the director-to-be worked on an unfinished science-fiction stop-motion animated short with robot puppets.³⁸ The series of amateur animations ended shortly after Bozzetto’s professional debut with *Tapum!*; in 1958 he scratched directly on film *Tico-Tico*, a work evidently inspired by Norman McLaren and based on a musical piece, a Brazilian samba. Bozzetto saw McLaren’s films for the first time at a film festival in Rapallo, where he submitted one of his documentaries about insects, *Small Friendly World* (that also won an award there). *Tico-Tico* is probably Bozzetto’s first conscious attempt at using music as the sole rhythmic guide to an animation. While it verges on the purely abstract, the action on screen always seeks to remain understandable and communicative. A similar preoccupation emerges in *Partita a dama* (*A Game of Checkers*, 1958), a paper cut-out animation that brings to life nonanthropomorphic objects and, according to Bendazzi,³⁹ references again McLaren, and in particular his short *Rhythmetic* (1956).

The 8mm camera was later substituted by a 16mm Bolex Paillard, the camera that was used to shoot *Tapum!*. Umberto set up a studio dedicated to his son’s filmmaking in a room of their apartment, where there was also a small moviola. Bozzetto improved his animation skills with it, by studying frame by frame some rented prints of American cartoons.⁴⁰

³⁶Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 29.

³⁷The theme of the story is vaguely similar to that of the first Donald Duck comic ever authored in Italy, *Paolino Paperino e il mistero di Marte* (*Donald Duck and the Mystery of Mars*, Federico Pedrocchi, 1937). However, it was reprinted only in 1938, the year of Bozzetto’s birth, and then no more until 1994; so, Bozzetto might have never read it.

³⁸Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 29.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁰Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

Before that, the 8mm camera was also put to use in a series of live-action shorts, with Bozzetto serving also as one of the actors. Those were mostly humorous caper movies, featuring chases, slapstick antics, and over-the-top disguises: *I ladri che mascalzoni* (*Thieves Are Such Troublemakers*) was shot in 1954, and so was *Il cerchio si stringe* (*The Net Is Closing In*). A later, unfinished instance of Bozzetto's trial run on live-action was *Due ragni nel piatto* (*Two Spiders on a Plate*, 1958). Bozzetto enjoyed a lot making those films with the collaboration of his classmates; he still believes that, if he were to continue down that path, he might have become a "pure" live-action filmmaker. However, the many difficulties he encountered (too few money, too much stress when covering simultaneously the roles of director, cinematographer, makeup artist, actor, etc.)⁴¹ tempted him to soothe his desire for film with the lonelier and more accessible ways of the amateur animator.

Insects Matter

Then, however, there were also the aforementioned "scientific" documentaries. They were a rethinking of yet another Disney model, the "True-Life Adventures," a series of live-action documentaries (1948–60) that dramatized edited footage of wild animals with a narrating voice and songs. While the narrative shorts prefigured the half-whimsical, half-grotesque tone that Bozzetto's live-action works would have always retained since their return in the director's filmography in the 1970s—with the interstitials of *Allegro non troppo* being a foremost example of them—the documentaries were an outlet to Bozzetto's conceptual and literal interest in using minuscule players on a vast stage. His entomological stance on mankind (see the Introduction) was born from his experiences with real insects; it was a matter of practical cinematography (how to shoot a mass of small creatures, while making them appealing and communicative),⁴² before than a metaphor of the relative irrelevance of mankind in respect to the vastity of nature. The trademark long shot of Bozzetto (Figure 1), which makes the proudest warrior look just as a meager ant (as seen in *I due castelli*, *The Two Castles*, 1963), has its roots there. The approach of the director to the animated anthropomorphic animal is also defined by this metaphor. The American "funny animal," exemplified by "stars" like Felix the Cat, Bugs Bunny, or Mickey Mouse, has almost no equivalent in Bozzetto's animation;

⁴¹Boscarino, *L'estetica di Bruno Bozzetto*, 129.

⁴²Bozzetto remembers that, among the many inventions of his father, there was a miniature hand-operated treadmill for insects, made to allow a fixed-focus macro shooting of a walking ant. Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

FIGURE 1 *A man leaves his cave and builds his own shack in the plain, from the Slavonic Dance no. 7 segment of Allegro non troppo. The “entomological” distance from the action and the essential drawing style make the shack feel like a lonely anthill, while the caves in the background seem some sort of bigger nest, teeming with crawling critters that are actually little men.*

the few exceptions are characters for commercials (Kuko, or Pildo, Poldo, and Baffoblù) or for children films, like Gastone, the talking dog that became Mr. Rossi’s sidekick in the 1970s full-length features (and that was never really liked by Bozzetto). There are indeed other animals with human semblances and behavior in his works, but they are mostly insects. Among those that have main roles in Bozzetto’s animations there are the bee of *Allegro non Troppo*’s *Concerto in C Major RV 559* episode, the mosquitoes of *Self Service* (1974), the whole cast of the TV serial “Lilliput-put” (1980), and the bug that loves a woman in *Baeus* (1987). It is as if Bozzetto, after having “zoomed out” on humans, revealing how much they look like insects from a distance, finds them turned into “real” insects when “zooming in”; after all, the 1967 short *L’uomo e il suo mondo* (*Man and His World*) is a single, continuous zoom out that ultimately reveals how the entire universe is just a colored spot on a butterfly wing. The human-insect allegory reaches an apex in the Oscar-nominated *Grasshoppers* (1990); notwithstanding its title, there are no grasshoppers among the insects that keep peacefully proliferating in the growing grass, after the umpteenth meaningless mutual

annihilation of human factions. They are stylized representations of the real animals and of the resilience of nature, and not human caricatures; it is instead implied that the “grasshoppers” are the humans themselves, whose fury periodically destroys the landscape that always regenerates, totally oblivious of their belligerent motives. The allegory of human vices through animals stays thus implicit in the title and in the destructive habits of the animated men.

Tapum! The Professional Debut

In the late 1950s, Bozzetto started to hear encouragements to consider a professional debut in animation. They did not primarily come from his family, which was actually more concerned with Bozzetto's university choice. He pursued a scientific career. He wanted to study biology, but he was puzzlingly and not-so-tastefully told by someone that it was a “faculty for women”;⁴³ so, he decided for geology. He later changed his mind and went for a law degree.⁴⁴ As the first exam sessions of geology came, though, Bozzetto was already dedicating more time to *Tapum!* on the ironing board than to studying for his tests. He did not have a specific ambition yet; he set a clearer goal for himself when some enlightened words of advice came into play. They were from Walter Alberti, head of the Milan Cinematheque and author of the very first Italian book on the history of animation, *Il cinema d'animazione, 1832–1956*, which was recently published at the time. Alberti, an acquaintance of Bozzetto, saw *Tapum!* and told to the young filmmaker about the Rencontres Internationales du Film d'Animation, a parallel branch of the Cannes Film Festival. He esteemed the film worthy of a submission; Bozzetto followed his advice. Not everyone had been as supportive as Alberti, anyway. For example, in the same period Bozzetto met with Nino Pagot, who energetically tried to dispel any dream of his about making animation into a real job: “For goodness sake, no way! At most it can be a pastime, but do something else!”⁴⁵

The events that unfolded in Cannes gave Bozzetto a real career chance. First of all, he met and made his work known to several animators who were already among his artistic models: Norman McLaren, Dušan Vukotić together with nine other directors from the Zagreb School,⁴⁶ and John

⁴³Di Stefano, “Bruno Bozzetto.”

⁴⁴Bozzetto in the documentary *L'arte è un delfino. Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto*.

⁴⁵“Per carità, neanche per idea! Al massimo può essere un modo per passare il tempo, ma fai qualcos'altro!” Nino Pagot in Bozzetto, “Adagio, accelerando,” 80.

⁴⁶Enrico Azzano and Raffaele Meale, “Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto—Parte Seconda,” *Quinlan. Rivista di critica cinematografica* (April 4, 2014), <https://quinlan.it/2014/04/04/intervista-bruno-bozzetto-parte-seconda/> (accessed July 24, 2019).

Halas.⁴⁷ Bozzetto remained in contact with Vukotić, who later advised him on how to make animated commercials; Halas became an esteemed friend of Bozzetto, who paid him several visits in London. The Italian filmmaker was even to spend a training period under his guidance, which resulted in Bozzetto's second short film, *La storia delle invenzioni* (*The History of Inventions*, 1959). Halas and Bob Privett's *How to Cartoon for Amateur Films* (1951) was Bozzetto's textbook in his self-teaching efforts, in a curious parallel with Disney's biography: the young American cartoonist educated himself on an animation manual too, Edwin Lutz's *Animated Cartoons: How They Are made, Their Origin and Development* (1920). The fourth Italian edition of Halas and Privett's book, in 1972, sported Mr. Rossi on its cover. In Cannes, Bozzetto understood that he needed a direct and personal contact with the artists he admired the most. In the following years, he would have cultivated friendly relationships with John Hubley, Yōji Kuri, Břetislav Pojar, and Jiří Brdečka:⁴⁸ all of them have been major stylistic references for the Italian author.

A major boost to Bozzetto's career was going to come from a film critic, though. Pietro Bianchi, a journalist of the newspaper *Il Giorno*, walked out in the middle of the screening of *Desire under the Elms* (Delbert Mann, 1958), a film part of the main Cannes competition, featuring Sophia Loren, Burt Ives, and Anthony Perkins. He heard some bouncy music and laughs coming from a smaller room nearby; *Tapum!* was playing there. The day after, *Il Giorno* published an enthusiastic review of the animated short; the title stated that Bozzetto was better than Sophia Loren. By complete chance, one of the editors of *Il Giorno* was a friend of Bozzetto; he was the one who decided to put Bozzetto's name in the title of Bianchi's review.⁴⁹

In hindsight, *Tapum!* was the best possible way to voice Bozzetto's distinct poetics of cinema for the first time, as it summed up some of its core characteristics. Humorous animated documentaries had appeared before (the film was made with *Toot, Plunk, Whistle and Boom* in mind, after all), and the use of flat, angular designs for characters and backgrounds, together with unrealistic color choices that fitted the mood of the scene, was barely a novelty; a part from the already-mentioned Zagreb School and UPA films, also Tex Avery, and the Warner Brother cartoons of Chuck Jones with eerily geometric landscapes by Maurice Noble were going down that path. However, it was the first time that such extreme stylization found its

⁴⁷Marina Paoletti, "Nota Biografica," in Giannalberto Bendazzi and R. De Berti, *La fabbrica dell'animazione. Bruno Bozzetto nell'industria culturale italiana* (Milano: Editrice Il Castoro, 2003), 151.

⁴⁸Bozzetto in Bendazzi, "Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto," in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 58.

⁴⁹Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

way to Italian animation. Bozzetto elaborated on those design references by means of storytelling and thematic choices. The humor of *Tapum!*, quite expectedly, mostly stems from the contrast between the solemn, educational tone of the voice-over, and the ridiculous pantomimic misadventures of the characters; as such, it is founded on irony and on a game played with the expectations of the audience. Along the lines of this, there is also the setup of a formally strict chronological progression from the stone age to present days to tell the history of weapons, which gets regularly disrupted by blatant and surreal anachronisms, like the beard of a medieval monk turning into a machine gun. However, Bozzetto gives new life to this comedy routine with a personal retooling of the idea of variation on a theme. In this, his comedy dynamics are similar to those of Tex Avery, which often sprung from a narrative archetype (a chase or a renowned fairy tale like *Little Red Riding Hood*) disrupted by a breathless sequence of absurdist and metareferential gags. Bozzetto took history, instead, as his main archetype—or, better, the historical results of the human behavior. His source is anthropological, more than fictional; the final result, anyway, does not have any pretense of scientific accuracy.

In *Tapum!*, the weapons are exaggerated and caricatured; the claim to be showing their actual evolution is just an excuse to introduce new characters and situations so that while the topic remains the same throughout, the screen action changes continuously. It also increases in absurdity and violence: the single visual ideas of Bozzetto are mostly unprecedented, unpredictable, but always visually clear and cleverly devised. For example, the long beard of the monk sprouts little walking legs when it touches the ground. The effectiveness of those touches of absurdity comes also from the fact that they are fueled by the two-dimensional design. Bozzetto does not try to hide the simplicity (and the shortcomings) of his drawing style, nor the very limited animation he is using, but boldly plays with it, making it an integral part of the comedy. This is the case of the medieval armor, which is vertically subdivided in two halves and worn by simply pushing those together over the silhouette of the knight. In this, the surrealism of Bozzetto differed from that of Avery, who, especially during his MGM years, used full animation and three-dimensional character designs.

In the end, the argument stays inexorably focused and monolithic, but the narration is made of separated fragments; within each one of them, anything could happen, from the aforementioned beard-gun to a caveman playing with a yo-yo. The underlying anthropological theme gives thus the audience a rational and relatable ground; after such premise has been presented in a way that is clear enough, the visual gags freely unfold. In fact, the longest- and slowest-paced fragment of *Tapum!* is the opening one, about prehistory. The pacing of the variations on the theme becomes exhilarating faster as the film goes on, but the acceleration pattern gets varied as well: Bozzetto, in fact, never reaches the speed extremes of Bob Clampett or Avery but

instead breaks down the apparently inexorable progression with long shots that usually offer pensive panoramic views, with no action. In those moments, *Tapum!* instates a figurative staple of Bozzetto's vocabulary: the contemplation of a landscape. Such views are sometimes populated by ancient and degraded artifacts that are not presented as things to marvel at but as a tragic testament to the dissipating fury of man's violence—or, alternatively, as enigmatic and accusatory remains of a tasteless invasion of the natural environment. They might have a positive value only when they signify a door to nostalgia, as in the *Valse triste* segment of *Allegro non troppo*; but also the concluding shots of the prehistoric segment of *Tapum!* are subtly tinged by this sentiment, as they mysteriously indulge in showing the peace of a lost world.⁵⁰

After each pause, anyway, the gag variations resume their *crescendo*, up to the merciless climax: civilization gets wiped out by a single drop of liquid explosive, which brings humanity back to the stone age, ready to reignite its self-destructive pulsion. The voice-over suddenly seems to break the fourth wall, as the film closes with a remark that suddenly uses a disconcerted tone and implicitly addresses Bozzetto: “Mamma mia che pessimista,” “My goodness, what a pessimist.” In addition to the anthropologic themes, the pacing variations, and the good intuition for surreal visual gags, pessimism is another distinguishing trait of Bozzetto's storytelling. Several of his works end with the defeat or even the death of the protagonists, who have often no redeeming qualities. The director, in the following years, would have quite frequently received criticism over this choice: he accepted it, though.⁵¹ As stated by *Tapum!*'s ending, Bozzetto is self-aware of his lack of faith in humanity and society. His films intend to present this opinion in a humorous way, without any kind of moral stance; this is why he refrains from indulging in idealized happy ends. His exposure of the contradictions and derangements of human life might hide, anyway, a secret hope for a listening and understanding ear; so, there could be a tasteful hint of optimistic moralism in his bleak apologues. In Anna Antonini's words, “Bozzetto bridges together Disney's dream of a better world, Avery's belief that such a thing does not exist and Cannon's wishful thinking that we may make it on Earth.”⁵²

Tapum!, however, lacked one important feature that would have contributed to define the mature style of the director: a meaningful interrelation between music and animation. The music by Mario Coppola

⁵⁰Similarly, wondrous dream visions of multicolored trees and plants temporarily relieve the tribulation of the little man trapped in the inescapable repetitiveness of everyday life, in *Una vita in scatola* (*A Life in a Tin*, 1967).

⁵¹Bozzetto in the video *L'intervista di Enzo De Bernardis*, 7 gennaio 1977, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ita/compie-50-anni--west-and-soda-/42645310> (accessed July 24, 2019), 6:23.

⁵²Anna Antonini, “Bruno Bozzetto: Wit and Wisdom,” *Animation Journal* 25 (2017): 38.

was not fitted to the action in any way (Bozzetto's official filmography refers to it as "repertoire" music)⁵³ and keeps getting repeated in cycles, like impassive muzak.

After Cannes, Bozzetto did not quit the university, but he invested a growing amount of time in animation, nonetheless. The decision of accepting John Halas's invitation to do a one-year training period in London, at the Halas and Batchelor Studio, tells a lot not only about Bozzetto's commitment but also about the surprisingly mature self-awareness that the young author already had about his own style, as Bozzetto did not refrain to clash with his mentor in respect to comedy strategies and storytelling. Halas, in fact, did not understand at all the anachronistic absurdities that Bozzetto used as variations to his narrative themes. While coproducing *The History of Inventions*, the second short by Bozzetto, Halas rejected several gags, including one that showed a primitive man falling in a river and saving himself by climbing over a floating tree trunk. The man then pulled an outboard motor from the water, started it, and rode the speeding trunk until a traffic policeman stopped him and fined him for speeding. Halas objected that there were no motors and policemen in that age; Bozzetto felt like his "arms, teeth, hair and the rest"⁵⁴ fell out of disappointment. *The History of Inventions*, another mockumentary⁵⁵ in the fashion of *Tapum!*, ultimately became Bozzetto's least favorite film;⁵⁶ he even refrained from uploading it on his YouTube channel. Anyway, Bozzetto and Halas remained on good terms and their reciprocal esteem never wavered. Halas defined his former student as "one of the outstanding creators of satirical and humorous animation"⁵⁷ in his 1987 book *Masters of Animation*.

⁵³https://www.bozzetto.com/pdf/synopsis_shorts.pdf (accessed July 24, 2019).

⁵⁴"Le braccia, i denti, i capelli e il resto." Boscarino, *L'estetica di Bruno Bozzetto*, 132.

⁵⁵The term "mockumentary" applies here, according with the definition of mockumentaries given by Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight: "fictional texts which, by varying degrees, represent a commentary on, or confusion or subversion of, factual discourse" (Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, *Faking It. Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001], 1). The referenced film are not documentaries: they purposely introduce anachronisms and imaginary devices. Their aim is not to educate, as they provide the viewer with wrong information. The comedy springs from the contrast between the notions the spectator is supposed to have (about the history of humanity) and the absurdities shown by Bozzetto. They use the documentary modes of representation (like a serious-sounding voice-over) only to play with the expectations of the audience, by providing content that is plainly unreliable. See Craig Hight, "Mockumentary: A Call To Play," in *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*, ed. Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Berkshire: Open University Press), 205.

⁵⁶Bozzetto in Bendazzi, "Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto," in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 64.

⁵⁷John Halas, *Masters of Animation* (London: BBC, 1987), 90.

Enter Mr. Rossi

The positive effects that *Tapum!* had on Bozzetto's career were not over yet. In 1960, the director submitted the film to a festival in Bergamo, the Festival internazionale del film d'arte e sull'arte (International Festival of Art Films and Films on Art), but its president, Nino Zucchelli, rejected it. Bozzetto reacted by creating his more famous character, Mr. Rossi. The 1960 short film *Un Oscar per il signor Rossi* (*An Award for Mr. Rossi*) was a creative and pacific "vengeance" over Zucchelli, who was caricatured as Rossi. There was however also a bit of Bozzetto in him, as the story introduced Rossi as an average man who develops a burning passion for filmmaking. He shoots a film in his living room and brings it to a festival, only to get almost immediately kicked out from it. In a fit of rage, he devastates the reel by stomping, scratching, and tearing it. The festival sees by chance the "new" version of the film and acclaims as art its jumbled editing and random imagery. This is how Rossi earns an Academy Award. The storyline was suggested to Bozzetto by the films he actually saw at the Bergamo festival, after his rejection; Rossi's film is a satire of those.

The protagonist is a middle-aged married man, stylized as to convey the impression of an insignificant average fellow. His name is telling, in this respect, as Rossi is the most common Italian surname. His geometric and stumpy build is in continuity with the character design seen in Bozzetto's previous film; his big head, with a large round nose and both eyes always visible from either side, apparently elaborates on two-dimensional graphic solutions already seen in the UPA films or in works by Vukotić, like *Piccolo* (1959), whose protagonists (especially the short one) look like two proto-Rossi, even in the way they dress (e.g., the papillon tie of the taller one). A similar character model would have reappeared in many international limited animations of the 1960s, like the De Patie-Freleng Enterprises series of theatrical cartoons "The Inspector" (1965–9), inspired by the inspector Clouseau from the live-action feature *The Pink Panther* (Blake Edwards, 1963). Mr. Rossi's design was slightly altered in the 1970s, in order to make him feel more three-dimensional, by means of solid drawing. Bozzetto, however, says that the main source of graphic inspiration for Mr. Rossi was the animated commercials he saw on TV during his stay in London.⁵⁸ An example of the style of such late 1950s–early 1960s commercials might be found in the advertisement by Richard Williams "Guinness at the Albert Hall" (1962).

Far from a lovable or role-model figure, Rossi is presented as an everyman who dreams big, but whose efforts to stand out are constantly frustrated by the merciless and homogenizing constraints of modern society.

⁵⁸Bozzetto in the documentary *L'arte è un delfino. Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto*.

However, Rossi is not really better than the crowd and its ruthless race to hedonism; he himself embraces the vacuous ideals of mass consumerism and can behave in questionable ways in order to achieve his goals. Personality-wise, he could be compared to a more pessimistic and unrulier version of Donald Duck. *An Award for Mr. Rossi*, for example, shows the character tyrannizing his wife to act in his amateur film. In later shorts, a frustration-maddened Rossi will reach extremes like whipping an old lady who he had previously run over at a zebra crossing (*Il signor Rossi compra l'automobile*, *Mr. Rossi Buys a Car*, 1966) or killing dozens of safari hunters in order to take a picture of wild animals (*Il signor Rossi al fotosafari*, *Mr. Rossi Goes to a Photo Safari*, 1972). Rossi was not going to retain those violent personality traits forever, anyway; he became quieter and more “politically correct” in the children TV series stemmed from three feature films during the 1970s, which adhere to the genre of the animated musical. According to Renato Candia,⁵⁹ there are at least three incarnations of Mr. Rossi: the first one is the more frustrated, wrathful, and mischievous, and pertains to the first seven theatrical shorts, but Bozzetto kept it alive also in the Mr. Rossi books and newspaper cartoons; the second tamer one, paired with the talking dog Gastone, is that of the TV serial, mostly depending on ideas from two of Bozzetto's close collaborators, Maurizio Nichetti and Guido Manuli; the last animated iteration of the character, which appeared in some TV commercials of the 1990s, returns under the control of Bozzetto and borrows traits from both the first and second versions. There is only one Mr. Rossi, though, in the perception of the general Italian audience; he is just a cartoon distillate of the worst traits of the Italian man, or better, of its archetype in the popular culture of postwar Italy. Characters of this kind started to populate the Italian mass entertainment, and especially cinema, on the wake of the so-called economic miracle, or economic boom: a period of growth spurt in market competitiveness, monetary strength, social security, and quality of life from the 1950s to the late 1960s. Its main reasons were the generous postwar reconstruction aids that came from the Marshall Plan (1948–52), the 1957 opening of the European Common Market, and the availability of low-cost labor force. The “miracle” increased the average income, and the Italian market capitalized on this by means of a broadened offer of commodities, as well as of aggressive communicative strategies intended to create new material needs and desires. “Carosello” was born out of those communicative and economic urgencies. A culture of leisure started to develop, also because, for the first time, Italians were granted the right to an annual paid leave from work, sanctioned by the article 36 of the 1948 Republican constitution. The summer holidays became a social ritual, whose

⁵⁹Renato Candia, “L’italiano senza qualità: il signor Rossi,” in Bendazzi and De Berti, *La fabbrica dell’animazione*, 109–10.

peak celebration was (and still is) August 15, a day known as *Ferragosto*, from the name of an ancient Roman holiday (*Feriae Augusti*, “Holidays of the Emperor Augustus”). Around that date, large masses of Italians reached for holiday resorts (mostly beaches) to spend their free time, while shops and offices closed down. Such national vacation became the annual goal of the average Italian man, and social success seemed to be proportional to the amount of owned goods that enhanced the fun during the breaks from work. However, some intellectuals saw a dead end approaching. Dino Risi’s *Il sorpasso* (*The Easy Life*), a 1962 live-action film that is among the best examples of the *Commedia all’italiana* genre (Italian-style comedy), was precisely set on the day of Ferragosto. A reckless young man, Bruno (Vittorio Gassman), forces a meek law student (Jean-Louis Trintignant) to join him on his convertible car. They keep speeding between beaches and unlikely carefree adventures, until, after Bruno’s favorite maneuver—an aggressive overtaking of other cars on the road—they end their ride over a rocky cliff. Pier Paolo Pasolini also argued that this easy ideal of success, while it momentarily appeased the self-esteem, was actually based on models that came from outside the individual, having been inculcated into the people by television and industry.⁶⁰ The film historian Gian Piero Brunetta said,

The most important thing was to show off: the cinema of the 1960 tells about the staging of an illusory wealth, built on quicksand. The low-class Italian, the petite and average bourgeoisie conceals more and more their poor origins and dashes into the consumer culture. The new status does not prevent them to be aware that the change was too fast, that the road behind them is strewn with sentimental ruins and the economic well-being is achieved at the cost of an emotional wasteland and the sacrifice of not few ideals and values.⁶¹

The Italian cinema translated this situation into a number of bitter comedies, whose lead characters were antiheroic average men, often

⁶⁰Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Una sfida ai dirigenti di Viale Mazzini,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 9, 1973.

⁶¹

Importante diviene l’apparire: il cinema degli anni Sessanta racconta la messa in scena di un’opulenza illusoria, costruita sulle sabbie mobili. L’italiano popolare, il piccolo e medio borghese, mimetizza sempre più le proprie povere origini ed entra di slancio nella civiltà dei consumi. Il nuovo status non gli impedisce di accorgersi che la rapidità del mutamento è stata eccessiva, il cammino alle sue spalle è disseminato di rovine sentimentali e il benessere economico è raggiunto al prezzo del deserto affettivo e alla rinuncia di non pochi ideali e valori.

Gian Piero Brunetta, “Il cinema italiano dal boom agli anni di piombo,” in *Storia del cinema mondiale*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta, vol. III, 2 (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 946.

confronted with a clash between their grandiosity and their ultimate ineptitude at life; they were mostly interpreted by Alberto Sordi (*Il boom, The Boom*, Vittorio De Sica, 1963), Ugo Tognazzi (*I mostri, The Monsters*, Dino Risi, 1963), or Nino Manfredi (*Il padre di famiglia, The Head of the Family*, Nanni Loy, 1967).

Mr. Rossi is a cartoon satire of that grotesque and sad archetype, and as such in perfect tune with the cultural sensibility of his times; he is also a forerunner to the film character that would have cemented the archetype of the inept, uncouth but resilient average man in the Italian popular culture, Ugo Fantozzi, played by Paolo Villaggio in a live-action film series that started with *Fantozzi* (Luciano Salce, 1975). The resemblances between the types of Rossi and Fantozzi are heightened in the TV series, as Rossi is given a humiliating job and a tyrannical boss.

Pasolini's warning about the conditioning power of consumerism finds a comedic counterpart in almost all of the Rossi shorts, as the misadventures of the protagonist usually start from the deceptive words of some sly seller, which fuel the flames of Rossi's ambitions. In *An Award for Mr. Rossi*, the desire to make films started as an innocent curiosity is dramatically implanted in Rossi's head by the rhetoric of a shop clerk (rendered as unintelligible gibberish from a mouth that even morphs into a record, to signify meaningless repetitiveness); this makes the camera grow in Rossi's imagination, until it resembles a marvelous hi-tech contraption. In the next Mr. Rossi films, Bozzetto subjected the character to several entertainment obligations of the average Italian citizen. Rossi will always end up enraged, disillusioned, or defeated: the first destination is a skiing resort (*Il signor Rossi va a sciare, Mr. Rossi Goes Skiing*, 1963) and then a beach (*Il signor Rossi al mare, Mr. Rossi Goes to the Beach*, 1964); in the 1966 short he has to buy a car, while 1970 is the time for camping (*Il signor Rossi al campeggio, Mr. Rossi Goes Camping*). He even indulges in an elite leisurely activity like a photo safari (*Il signor Rossi al fotosafari, Mr. Rossi Goes to a Photo Safari*, 1972), before reaching Venice, one of the standard tourist destinations in Italy (*Il signor Rossi a Venezia, Mr. Rossi Goes to Venice*, 1974), concluding the first stage of his existence and then mutating into a positive adventurer for the TV series.

The reasons of Mr. Rossi's success are multiple; the appealing character design and the clever visual gags contributed to their solid foundations. On top of that, as remarked by Bendazzi, there is the universality and relative innocuity of Mr. Rossi's satire. Even though the average Italian is portrayed as petty, violent, and ultimately a loser, Mr. Rossi is just too flawed to be relatable; so, the spectator ends up laughing at him without feeling personally attacked, but just enjoying the comic relief.⁶² It might be argued

⁶²Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 21.

that the director's aim was to entertain with an exaggerated view of reality, and not to accuse anyone; his tales are at most cautionary, without a moral purpose. Bendazzi again suggested that Bozzetto points out the symptoms but never really talks about the illness;⁶³ after all, Bozzetto's onlook to society came from the privileged point of view of the only child of a well-to-do and supportive family. Moreover, it was a family from Northern Italy, the richest area of the country. Implicitly, this is also the social-geographic territory satirically targeted in the Mr. Rossi shorts that never take into account the economical divide—and the difference in the quality of life—between the north and the south of the peninsula. This is one of the few questionable points in Bozzetto's aesthetics, which however does not hinder the sharpness of his observations of reality and their transfiguration into material that is tailored to his animation style. The only other sensible issue, in term of content, concerns the use of an insistently male and patriarchal gaze in his storytelling. Again, this is usually played for laughs, with no intention to advocate for a gender discrimination. Anyway, since his first film, Mr. Rossi himself is presented as a man who just “uses” his wife as an actress to reach his purposes; when, at the end, the woman manifests the intention to shoot her own film, Mr. Rossi just flees. In *Mr. Rossi Goes to the Beach*, the character leers at the girls on the beach, just like the old satyr—who resembles a senescent Mr. Rossi—does to the nymphs of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* from *Allegro non troppo*. In the same film, the bee of the *Concerto in C Major RV 559* is the caricature of a housewife. There are several instances of “damsels in distress” who need a prince charming to be saved; such is the (literal) case of the live-action cleaning girl at the end of *Allegro non troppo*, who flies away from her humiliating job when the animator (Maurizio Nichetti) turns her and himself into a fairy-tale cartoon couple, or of Clementina, the strong-willed but ultimately passive female lead of *West and Soda*. Lisa and Nervustrella from *Vip, My Brother Superman* fit into the same narrative trope. Women with an active role are a rarity in Bozzetto's stories; one of them is Eve, from the *Allegro non troppo* segment on the *Firebird Suite*, who, contrarily to her biblical counterpart, refuses to eat the apple. The others are no flattering testaments to female agency, as they are grotesque villains: Happy Betty in *Vip* and Sua Fertilità (“Her Fertility”), a giant overbearing monster from the sequel to *Vip*, the comic book *Minivip & Supervip: il mistero del viavai* (*Minivip & Supervip: The Mystery of the Come-and-Go*, 2018). In the same comic, though, Lisa, Supervip's girlfriend, is given the chance to voice her dissatisfaction with the overprotective attitude of her partner, which suffocates her career ambitions. The male-centric gaze in Bozzetto and Mr. Rossi is definitely a bias, but also a direct consequence of the society he

⁶³Ibid., 33.

was satirizing: the patriarchal and catholic Northern Italy of the economic boom years. Even though the story is seen from a point of view that is unmistakably male, the masculine stereotypes are often exposed as vain and laughable. Mr. Rossi is far from being a model of volitional masculinity. Just like many other Bozzetto's characters who reserve to women unwanted attentions, he gets chastised and ridiculed: the topic is developed further in the comic book *Il signor Rossi e le donne* (*Mr. Rossi and Women*, 1970).⁶⁴ Other characters with the same fate are Il Cattivissimo ("The baddest one") of *West and Soda* or the abusive husband of *Baeus. Ego* (1969), probably Bozzetto's most provocative and harsh film, elaborates on the violent and sexist dreams that at night populate the subconscious of the average "model husband," condemned to a repetitive and empty life.

The lack of a strictly circumscribed and accusatory satirical stance in the Mr. Rossi films had a strategically positive result on the character, as it made it funny also outside of Italy. For his theatrical shorts, Bozzetto has always envisioned an international audience—that of the animation festivals—as he knew that the circulation of animated shorts in Italian cinemas was marginal and subjected to the prejudice that animation should be exclusively for children; such misleading belief is still deep rooted in the Italian cinema industry, as proves one of the first questions Bozzetto hears whenever he proposes a new project to a production company in the present days: "How old is your target children audience?"⁶⁵ Mr. Rossi's shorts often enjoyed an Italian distribution only after they were acclaimed abroad, just like it happened to *Allegro non troppo*. The films had the potential to stay effective everywhere, as they were in pantomime (the character "spoke" in a farcical gibberish), and the character type of the inept but perseverant Rossi was prone to be promptly understood by anyone, because it was conveniently formulaic but not boringly predictable. He seemed a descendant of many serial characters of the American cartoons of the 1930s and 1940s, which in turn were building on the world-famous comedy routines of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. However, Mr. Rossi has in its humor also deep traces of the music hall, *café-chantant*, *café-konzert*, *teatro di varietà*, and so on: the European light theater (which was also the point of origin of Chaplin, after all), with its pungent attitude to social satire. Bozzetto himself noticed how versatile was his creation when he decided to reuse it after *An Award for Mr. Rossi*, which was supposed to be the

⁶⁴From the 1970s, Bozzetto started to draw cartoon series collected in books; the others were *Viva gli abominevoli sciatori* (*All Hail the Abominable Skiers* [Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 1970]), *Mille piccoli cretini* (*One Thousand Little Cretins* [Milano: Sperling & Kupfer, 1971]), and *Le avventure di Ventun Din Fotoamatore* (*The Adventures of Twenty-One Din, Amateur Photographer* [Milano: Il Castello, 1972]).

⁶⁵Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

only appearance of the character; the director's choice gave to Rossi another relevant quality, that is, being the protagonist of the first animated theatrical serial of Italy.

In 1972, before the three full-length features later broadcasted on TV, Bendazzi foresaw for Rossi “a fast evolution, or his abandonment.”⁶⁶ Bozzetto in fact decided to “kill” Rossi in one of the live-action interstitials of *Allegro non troppo*: the sheet where the character is drawn catches fire, and a desperate Rossi dramatically turns to ashes (Figure 2). His last appearance before his apparent demise was *Il signor Rossi e lo sport* (*Mr. Rossi and Sport*, 1975), a series of mini TV episodes of two minutes each, with a narrating voice by Walter Valdi—and also a few apparitions in the program “Gulp!”, which proposed new stories of famous cartoon or comic characters narrated with still images, with no animation. But then, during the production of *Allegro*, the three films for children happened, even if it was more an involution than an evolution, in many respects. However, three features and its derived TV series explored a side of the character that was never seen before: the lyrical and contemplative one. Mr. Rossi is probably Bozzetto's more personal and pondered creation; the short film that features him might be considered a compendium and a measure of the director's potential. The extremes of sadism and absurdity that Bozzetto sometimes reaches in other films are never as lucid and well-timed as in the Mr. Rossi universe; however, until the TV series from the three features, Mr. Rossi had never ventured into the slow-paced lyricism that is integral to Bozzetto's directing style, and that was going to be expressed at best in the *Valse triste* segment of *Allegro non troppo*. The TV series smoothened Mr. Rossi's rough edges, added to him a great deal of childish naivety, and also made him less universal by providing him with a speaking voice. But the character was also given the chance to finally indulge in the peaceful admiration of the beauty of nature, something that, in truth, had always been among the character's primary motives when looking for entertainment. This proved that Rossi was able to express the whole of Bozzetto's poetics; he brought this newly discovered potential to his 1990s third version of the character, which mixed together the first two. Mr. Rossi, in the end, seems destined to stay alive: from 1993 to 2015, he was a constant presence among the cartoons printed in a column of the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. As of 2021, Bozzetto and his studio are preparing a new TV series, the intention of which is to bring back something of the early personality of the character and to make him interact with the new technologies. The project has been conceived with the collaboration of Bozzetto's son Andrea and of Maurizio Nichetti.⁶⁷ A 1977 children book based on the feature film *Mr. Rossi's Dreams* was reprinted in 2018.

⁶⁶“Una rapida evoluzione, o il suo abbandono.” Bendazzi, *Animazione primo amore*, 21.

⁶⁷Bozzetto in the documentary *L'arte è un delfino. Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto*. Also, Nichetti in a personal e-mail to the author, September 6, 2020; he reported that Bozzetto's prompt for

FIGURE 2 Mr. Rossi on a food sneaking mission in *Allegro non troppo*, a few seconds before meeting the fate that awaits any cartoon creature exposed to fire. However, the “killing” of Mr. Rossi was just an inside joke of the film crew, which at the time was just quite fed up with the character. Mr. Rossi remained alive and well after that; Bozzetto and his studio are planning for him an animated comeback, as a follow-up to the celebrations for his sixtieth anniversary.

The Bruno Bozzetto Film and the “Carosello” Years

Between the success of *Tapum!* and its festival misadventures that brought to the debut of Mr. Rossi, Bozzetto's career experienced another poignant development. The opening titles of *An Award for Mr. Rossi* reveal that Bozzetto was no longer working alone: the animation is credited to Sergio Chesani and Giancarlo Bassi, the backgrounds are by Giancarlo Cereda, Roberto Scarpa and Luciano Marzetti are the camera operators, and the music is by Pier Emilio Bassi. It is possible to see several of them at work

the development of the series was the question “How would Mr. Rossi behave today, in such a technological society?” (“Il signor Rossi oggi come si comporterebbe in una società così tecnologica?”).

on the Mr. Rossi film in Bozzetto's documentary live-action short *Come si realizza un cartone animato* (*How to Make an Animated Cartoon*, 1961). That was the earliest production crew that Bozzetto gathered by searching among his friends and acquaintances (e.g., Cereda was the cousin of a former classmate of Bozzetto, Carlo Re);⁶⁸ when the young director accepted to do commercials for "Carosello" and for cinema, they worked at Bozzetto's studio in his parents' house. Other key artists who joined this early team, and who were destined to have a profound impact on Bozzetto's films, were Guido Manuli (1939), a lavishly creative animator and gagman, and the scenographer Giovanni Mulazzani (1941–2011), one of the most notable Italian illustrators.

In August 1958, in one of his first interviews, Bozzetto claimed that he absolutely did not want to work for the advertising industry.⁶⁹ As anticipated in the Introduction, he changed his mind by following the advice of a friend. The animated and live-action commercials he produced for "Carosello" and for theaters finally allowed him to make a living out of his hobby; when Bozzetto's advertisements got the first prize at a 1961 national competition in Trieste, his father suggested him to quit the university for good.⁷⁰

During the adventurous homemade production of his first five animated "carosellos" for the Innocenti firm, drawings and other production materials literally invaded all the rooms and available spaces. Bozzetto's work conditions decidedly improved when he opened a proper studio in Via Melchiorre Gioia, which is still in use today as one of the headquarters of his company. It never became a large facility, though: all the other Italian studios specialized in animated commercials remained bigger than the Bruno Bozzetto Film. Also, a formal pipeline for animation production was never implemented before the 1990s: Bozzetto was more at ease with a freely creative environment and no rigidly established roles. There were of course specialists, but anyone could provide a gag or an idea and have a say on general decisions; the only rule was that Bozzetto had final word on everything. Such an apparently dispersive strategy was made efficient by the fact that Bozzetto always worked with people he closely knew and completely trusted. He rarely did formal public selections for new collaborators; one of those cases was when he hired Maurizio Nichetti, who soon after became a friend of him. Some artists spontaneously applied to join the studio; some others were brought there by sheer coincidence. Giovanni Mulazzani, for example, came to Milan with the intention to pursue a career as illustrator.

⁶⁸Carlo Re is among the artists at work seen in the documentary *Come si realizza un cartone animato*; however, he was just acting, because he was not trained in drawing (he later became a lawyer). Nonetheless, Re contributed to several of Bozzetto's early productions, in various roles, including that of voice actor.

⁶⁹Bozzetto in Tirapelle, in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 16.

⁷⁰Di Stefano, "Bruno Bozzetto."

He stayed at a guesthouse where another young man, who had tried to get a job as scenographer from Bozzetto but had not received a reply yet, was renting a room. Tired of waiting, he left after a few days; soon after that, Bozzetto called the landlady and inquired if that applicant was still there. The landlady said that he had gone away and, on her own initiative, recommended instead Mulazzani to the director.⁷¹

"Carosello" brought Bozzetto on new ground. He had to further hone his aptitude to concision in humor and storytelling, and also to develop an animated character: a protagonist fit to return in several different films—it is maybe not by chance that Mr. Rossi was born in 1960, the same year when Bozzetto was prompted to this task. Also, the smaller and low-definition black-and-white TV image did not allow for Bozzetto's favorite "entomological" long shots but asked for close-ups and clean designs. The director answered to these requirements with the creation of Kuko, a "funny animal": a crossover between a lion and a rodent, with a hat and a tie that are identical to those of Mr. Rossi. Kuko was animated in a rush, as the first proposal by Bozzetto did not pass the RAI evaluation.⁷² The shorts had quite naïve plots: Kuko looks for peace but keeps being disturbed by other talking animals; they are actually little men in disguise who, when finally exposed by Kuko, declare themselves "not guilty." The Italian word for that is "innocenti"; at that point, Kuko disagrees, saying that Innocenti is instead the name of the advertised firm. The final payoff proceeds to introduce some of its products.

Bozzetto's production of commercials proceeded with no interruptions up to the end of Carosello, in 1977, and beyond. He was aware that the format limitations did not allow any character development or meaningful artistic exploration. Nonetheless, he created a gallery of protagonists that regularly encountered the favor of the audience, and that received numerous awards at festivals for film advertisements. For example, he returned to funny animals with Pildo, Poldo, and Baffoblù (1963) and Magno and Baffo (1972–3); he played with staple roles of popular narrative by inventing a magician (Guglielmone, 1964) and a ghost (Buc the Buccaneer, 1968–9). He even animated Zorry Kid, a famous character by one of the most renowned Italian comic artists, Benito Jacovitti (1923–1997). The foremost player in the cast of Bozzetto's "carosellos" was, however, Unca Dunca, an unlikely American Indian, quite stubborn and dimwitted, but of good nature. He did not have much to do with the goods he advertised—the Riello boilers—as was usual for many of the "Carosello" commercials that invested more in

⁷¹Giovanni Mulazzani in "I segreti di West & Soda," a documentary in the *West & Soda* DVD (Roma: Multimedia San Paolo, 2005).

⁷²Gianni Rondolino, *Bruno Bozzetto Pubblicitario* (Torino: STIP, 1969); reprinted in Bastiancich, *Bruno Bozzetto*, 43.

character or verbal appeal than in actual consistency between the narration and the final claim.⁷³ Unca Dunca's cluelessness and indolence were personality traits that paved the way to a big comedic potential, explored by Bozzetto in eight series and forty episodes, between 1961 and 1968. The 1965 series "Fantasia" stood out because it did not feature narration but free variations on lines and shapes that, according to film historian Gianni Rondolino, were redolent of the films by the animation pioneer Émile Cohl.⁷⁴ The name "Fantasia," however, probably hinted also at the 1940 Disney feature, as the visual rhythms were synchronized with music. The Bruno Bozzetto Film studio had invested since its beginning in sound and music production. Notwithstanding its small dimensions, it was the only Italian animation facility to have an in-house recording stage. After *Tico-Tico*, the Unca Dunca commercials were probably the second step along the path that was to bring Bozzetto to *Allegro non troppo*; the music was not classical, though. It was provided by a famous pop, jazz, and rock songwriter, Enzo Jannacci (1935–2013), who, together with the composer and saxophonist Paolo Tomelleri (1938), scored also several theatrical shorts by Bozzetto (like *Alfa Omega* [*Alpha Omega*] 1961, and the Mr. Rossi films of 1963 and 1964). Franco Godi took over from Jannacci from 1966 to 1968; before that, Jannacci even sung for the Unca Dunca shorts,⁷⁵ while the character delivered his farcical lines in a broken Italian,⁷⁶ intermingled with stereotyped expressions ("augh") associated with the comedic representation of American Indians in those years. Even if such verbal gags are questionable by today's standards, because of their racist implications, they contributed a big deal to bring Unca Dunca alive and to make it easy to remember between his many equivalents from other "Carosello" serials.

In the 1960s, Bozzetto and his collaborators pursued a continuous technical development by means of trial and error, while their stylistic approach remained consistently focused on geometrical and flat designs, limited animation, and communicative straightforwardness. In the shorts of Bozzetto from those years, a peculiar visual storytelling device emerged and the "entomological" feeling of the camerawork was perfected. Not only characters were seen from a distance, but the camera also became essentially

⁷³This was an imprint of the initial Carosello production rules. No reference to the advertised goods was supposed to appear in the opening short film (known as "pezzo," "piece"); the ending section, the "codino" ("small ending"), was the actual advertisement. See Piero Dorfles, *Carosello* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 16–17.

⁷⁴Rondolino, *Bruno Bozzetto Pubblicitario*, 52.

⁷⁵Francesco Riccardi, "La musica di Jannacci per i cartoni di 'Carosello'," *Linkiesta*, April 2, 2013, <https://www.linkiesta.it/it/article/2013/04/02/la-musica-di-jannacci-per-i-cartoni-di-carosello/12650/> (accessed July 26, 2019).

⁷⁶Carlo Re, a former classmate of Bozzetto, was the first to play Unca Dunca for "Carosello" (Carlo Re in a personal telephone conversation with the author, October 31, 2019).

still (except a few zoom-ins for emphasis), and editing tended to disappear, in favor of a single long take. The gaze of the spectator was firmly distanced from the action, as if the only possible role of the viewer was that of a passive witness. At the same time, however, it required an active viewership. The screen action occurred in selected portions of the screen, which changed throughout the film. The eye was thus invited to wander over a continuous comedic variation on the pristine fixed shot. In the 1969 short *Ego*, the relevant screen portions were inscribed into rectangles, while the rest of the screen went black; the encasing of the action into the small shape was also a visual commentary on the suffocating life routine of the protagonist, as opposed to the full-screen unleashing of his perverted night dreams. So, Bozzetto took the concept of variation that he used to propel the humor of his early shorts and made it essential to his directing style, which now rested strongly on persistent images subjected to some kind of mutation. He also created a rhythmic device: the gazes guided across the screen became a pulsation that articulated the timing of the story in a way that involved not only the perception but also the physical body of the spectator. The eyes needed to physically turn toward a certain region of the projected frame; such effect is of course rendered possible only by the generous dimensions of a cinema screen. Bozzetto's animation is intrinsically cinematographic; this is another reason why his style never found an ideal outlet in the "Carosello" commercials, notwithstanding their effectiveness in advertising.

Bozzetto probably took inspiration from Yōji Kuri, who also liked to use visual variations of a fixed shot (*Ningen Dōbutsuen, Clap Vocalism*, 1962); however, while Kuri mostly used this device to achieve a surreal image progression with no plot, Bozzetto adapted it to a linear narration. *Alfa Omega*, in 1961, is precisely an apparent fixed-camera long take of metaphoric incidents that happen to a naively drawn character, which stays still in the middle of the frame; it elaborates on the conditioning that society imposes on the individual from birth to death and Bozzetto animated it all on his own. The black and white *I due castelli* (1963) consolidated this idea. Two very stylized castles lie atop of two hills, on the two sides of the screen. Repeatedly, one or more warriors exit from the left castle and try to conquer the right one, but they get constantly wiped out. The back-and-forth visual motion continues until a giant head emerges from the right hill and reveals that the castle was just his crown.

“Why Don’t You Make a Full-Length Animated Feature?”

During this age of his professional affirmation, Bozzetto had never thought about making a full-length animated film. The fixed-camera style he was

exploring was very far from being exploitable in a work of one hour and a half; but, above all, he believed that he was not even remotely close to having the artistic and monetary resources to make a feature that could meet the Disney standards. However, as it happened for his Cannes debut, a well-thought advice from a respected person made him reconsider his position. It came from Attilio Giovannini,⁷⁷ a film history professor at the University of Milan, but also a director and screenwriter: he cowrote *The Dynamite Brothers*, the first and, in the early 1960s, only full-length animated feature that Italy had produced since 1949, together with *The Rose of Bagdad*. He was a close friend to Bozzetto and his family; during a seaside holiday in a city near Taranto, while they were having a walk on the beach, he said to the director, “Why don’t you make a full-length animated feature?”

After an initial resistance, Bozzetto considered Giovannini’s authoritative opinion. There were two major breakthroughs in the line of thought that convinced him of the feasibility of the project. First, he realized that, in order to follow Disney’s example, while finding an original perspective, he needed a story that was not only as universal as the narrative sources of the American features (namely, fairy tales) but also substantially different from them. It occurred to him that the Western films, a genre he was particularly into, could constitute a modern equivalent of fairy tales and myths, because of their epic and compelling storylines, their deep penetration into international popular culture, and their use of highly stereotyped narrative roles that make immediately evident to the spectator who is the good guy, who is the bad one, who is going to die, and so on.⁷⁸ The second turning point was his appreciation of Mulazzani’s artworks. In the first half of the 1960s, Bozzetto mostly assigned the scenography job to Giancarlo Cereda, who had a very graphic and clean approach, considered by the director close to that of the UPA films. Cereda would have provided with art several of Bozzetto’s films; however, the director’s sensibility found his drawings too flat and “cold” to stand a 90-minute character action with dialogues. Mulazzani’s approach was flat and stylized as well, but it relied on the creation of calculated “imperfections” in the color palettes and the perspectival construction, which gave to Bozzetto the feeling of a wholesome atmosphere. In the director’s view, Mulazzani’s backgrounds looked as believable dwelling places for two-dimensional characters.⁷⁹ From the technical point of view, Mulazzani created palette modulations by washing the half-dried paint under running water, so as to cause random darker areas. He also painted with tempera over surfaces colored with India ink and engraved with patterns, drawn

⁷⁷Bozzetto, “Adagio, accelerando,” 84.

⁷⁸Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

⁷⁹Bozzetto in “I segreti di West & Soda,” a documentary in the West & Soda DVD (Roma: Multimedia San Paolo, 2005).

by scratching the half-dried tempera with a steel nail; he then washed the artwork, and the water partially removed the water-soluble paint but left unscathed the scratched areas where the India ink emerged.⁸⁰

The extent of Bozzetto's confidence in the expressive value of Mulazzani's work is evident from the shape that the feature, *West & Soda*, finally took. Bozzetto clearly doted on his experience in the short format and fitted it into a wider story arc. This Western parody is replete with small separate gags. For example, there is an extended fight between the protagonist, Johnny, and his nemesis, Il Cattivissimo, rendered through an insistent long shot and a back-and-forth rhythmical orientation of the gaze, derived from *I due castelli*. That film is also referenced in a series of gags that see Johnny buried in the ground up to his shoulders, while a multitude of ants tries to attack his head; the scene was animated by one of the most influential artists who joined Bozzetto's studio in that period, Giuseppe Laganà (1944–2016), who previously worked at Gamma Film. The abundance of visual gags in *West & Soda* is preeminently due to Guido Manuli, who besides his animator duties had a fluvial talent for absurdist comedy; Bozzetto had often to limit his creativity in order to keep the film storyline in check. One of Manuli's gags was actually an attempt at bridging together the film scenes: the recurrent and showstopping appearance of a maddening chase between a stagecoach, a tribe of Indians, and a cavalry regiment.⁸¹ However, even though that chase actually interacts with the plot (the return of it overwhelms the bad guys and helps Johnny rescue Clementina), this idea actually feels like one of the many clever "accents" that stand out individually over the rest of the story.

Notwithstanding being gag-ridden, and its inheritance of a great deal of Bozzetto's short film language, *West & Soda* remains the more satisfyingly unitary of all the animated full-length features by the director. The production strategy chosen by Bozzetto contributed to this outcome, too, as for the one year and a half when the film was in the making the studio did not take commissions for advertisements; the downside of this was that, after the film release, almost all the contacts with their customers had to be rebuilt from scratch. This did not happen for *Vip* and *Allegro*, as the animators alternated between the work on film sequences and on advertisements. While *Allegro* was not affected by this production strategy, being subdivided into independent episodes by definition, *Vip*'s storyline ended up being quite discontinuous.

⁸⁰Mulazzani in "I segreti di West & Soda," a documentary in the West & Soda DVD (Roma: Multimedia San Paolo, 2005).

⁸¹Manuli was likely taking inspiration from similar recurring gags of Tex Avery's films, as the apparently incongruous appearances of the whistling Eggman, which periodically disrupted the story of *Little Red Walking Hood* (1937).

What unified *West & Soda* seems to be the attention that Bozzetto reserved to atmosphere, by taking inspiration from Mulazzani's backgrounds. The feeling of a scene, even when the events were farcical or absurd, was more important than the gags. The contemplative side of Bozzetto's storytelling guided his approach to directing: the landscapes were intended as vehicles for emotions. To bring out the "atmospheric" quality of the art, Bozzetto tried as much as possible to make his characters "live" in the backgrounds, in a follow-up to the intuition that made him choose Mulazzani over Cereda. To achieve this, he cared about using, for the first time in his animated productions, an editing that sometimes replicated that of live-action films. In particular, he rendered dialogues with a shot-reverse shot syntax, something that he learnt from Giovannini (who cowrote the screenplay). He also relied on the voice acting and the content of the dialogues themselves, which were not prerecorded but actually finalized in their writing and fitted to the moving mouths of the characters after the film was finished. The protagonists received a distinct vitality because of the contrast between the parodistic stereotypes that defined the roles (the bad guy's name means plainly "the very bad guy"; Clementina takes her name from the canon Western ballad *Oh My Darling, Clementine*; Johnny is inspired by Alan Ladd and his role in *Shane*, George Stevens, 1953; the good guy has a white hat, while the bad guys have a black one, and so on) and the original vocal characterization of each one of them, by professional actors with a long-standing experience in live-action dubbing (like Nando Gazzolo and Carlo Romano). Bozzetto also used camera movements in a more comprehensive way, in contrast with his fixed-camera trend. In respect to animation, he tried to assign each scene to the animator who was more in tune with its emotional tinge; for example, he gave a night exchange between Johnny and Clementine to Sergio Chesani, an expert RAI operator, who was able to create smoother and subtler slow movements.

The major unifier of *West & Soda*'s atmosphere is however the sequence Bozzetto considered the most important of all: the evening storm. He devoted several months to its animation, while the rest of the production proceeded. It does not contain gags or dialogue: it only depicts the slow approaching of menacing dark clouds, while the editing shows the environment and the characters. It makes an abundant use of sound effects and optical in-camera tricks (by Luciano Marzetti) that simulate lightning and color changes in the backgrounds. Bozzetto invested time and energies to make sure that the sequence had an enhanced atmospheric value: he also decided early about the music he wanted to hear during the buildup of the storm. His reference was a piece by Nino Rota for Federico Fellini's *8 ½* (1963), which played while Guido Anselmi dreamt about his dead parents. Bozzetto asked the composer Giampiero Boneschi to create new music inspired by the Rota piece; the result retained the same mysterious melancholy of its model. In the rest of the score, however, Boneschi mixed references to classic Western

films with original inventions that underscored the action with humor; the use of a vocal choir and a long melodic arc in the main theme, which plays during the opening titles, sound like a nod to the music Ennio Morricone had freshly written for *Per un pugno di dollari* (*A Fistful of Dollars*, Sergio Leone, 1964), the film that defined the “Spaghetti Western” genre. Bozzetto often remarks that *West & Soda* could have been the first in this new film genre, but it missed the record by a whisker:⁸² even if it started its production before Leone’s film, it was released later, as animation requires more time than live-action filmmaking.

All in all, Bozzetto’s solution to the problem of the long format resided in a marked detour from the Disney model, barely softened by a few concessions to it, mostly in the use of a cinematic language borrowed from live-action features (shot and reverse shot, camera movements, etc.). The absence of songs, the limited animation, the synthetic design, and the frequent visual gags repositioned the expectations of the viewers within a radically different aesthetics—a familiar one, given that it had a lot in common with the “Carosello” visual appeal, but also one that transcended the model of the comedic short film. The short film material was unified thanks to a quality work in the creation of atmospheres, mostly evoked by the backgrounds and the interaction of the characters with them. In *West & Soda*, all the characters are rigidly stereotyped: they are as limited as they should be in appearance and behavior, because their purposes are exactly those of spoofing the Western genre conventions and making each role immediately recognizable. What is vibrant with believable life is the landscape, which amalgamates the fragmentation of the plot and grounds the otherwise flat figurines into a consistent space. Conceptually, *West & Soda*—and the solution of the animated feature film dilemma—might be an elaboration on a recurring theme of Bozzetto, namely the insignificance of humans, and the destructivity inherent to their actions, in respect to the wholesome complexity of the events and emotions pertaining the environment, which could never be encased within the easy labels of a narrative genre.

Vip: Not-So-Super Man

Bozzetto decided to start the production of his second feature, *Vip, My Brother Superman*, a few months after the premiere of *West & Soda*. The intent was to capitalize on the extended crew of animation professionals formed during the previous production, and on the technical competences matured over about two year of work. The initial plan of the director was

⁸²Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

to make another parody, this time of a popular comic: Lee Falk and Ray Moore's *The Phantom*. He invented Minivip, a short and neurotic version of *The Phantom*, who imitated him down to his typical disguise: a trench coat with a hat and glasses, worn over his red⁸³ skintight costume. He was not far from Mr. Rossi, as a character type, but his need for psychotherapy spoofed a different set of malaises of the contemporary man.⁸⁴ By chance, in the feature film Minivip was voiced by Oreste Lionello, who later became the official Italian voice actor of Woody Allen; however, at the time Allen was just beginning his career, so the association between Minivip and the neurotic characters by the American director largely happened in retrospect.

Bozzetto wanted to confront Minivip with a story that mocked the advertisement market and its strategies. The director was not bitter against his work for "Carosello";⁸⁵ he just decided to talk about a topic he was a specialist of. Through his comical satire, however, he wished to present publicity as a product of malicious conspirations and violent attacks on unaware people.

The film ultimately took a different direction because of interferences from American coproducers, who came in contact with Bozzetto thanks to the international circulation of *West & Soda*. Among them there was Lady Stearn Robinson, a quite obscure figure, author of the book *The Dreamer's Dictionary* (1975) and screenwriter of the Halas and Batchelor TV series in limited animation "DoDo, the Kid from Outer Space" (1965). Halfway into the production of *Vip*, she urged Bozzetto to steer the story toward a superhero parody, and to add another character: Supervip, Minivip's brother, endowed with "traditional" superpowers. She also demanded to paint in green the faces of the many little Chinese men devotedly serving the villain, Happy Betty, in order to avoid racial jokes that could have been ill-received in the Asian market. Finally, she wanted the film to be a musical; while Bozzetto enjoyed the songs that mocked the jingles of "Carosello" (they were by the most prolific "Carosello" composer himself, Franco Godi, who had also already provided music to several of Bozzetto's shorts), he was dissatisfied by the musical numbers that did not add to the plot, like the song of the lion on the island.

Vip, My Brother Superman was more successfully received than *West & Soda*, both by critics and audience. The production troubles, and the necessity to regularly detour the film crew to the animation of "Carosello"

⁸³Bozzetto did not know that the original costume of *The Phantom* was purple; in Italian comic books it was always red.

⁸⁴A later animated work featuring the character, the 2009 TV series in 3D computer graphic animation "PsicoVip" ("PsychoVip"), based each episode on the stories told by Minivip in a therapy session.

⁸⁵Bozzetto in "Behind the Scenes," a documentary in the *Vip, My Brother Superman* DVD (Roma: Multimedia San Paolo, 2005).

commercials, gave however way to a less cohesive narration. Well aware of that, Bozzetto even let the animators indulge in a few sequences in a different and oversimplified style, as if they were independent experimental shorts; one of them is the visualization of Happy Betty's evil masterplan. In part by necessity, in part by his own will, in *Vip* Bozzetto embraced the possibility of an episodic structure within a full-length animated feature with a single continuing storyline; *Allegro non troppo* could be seen as a mature development of this constructive strategy.

After “Carosello”: A Twilight and a New Dawn

The 1970s were an eventful decade for Bruno Bozzetto Film. Apart from the huge effort of *Allegro non troppo*, the end of “Carosello” required a rapid repurposing of the creative goals, also because, from February 1977, color TV broadcasts officially started.⁸⁶ The production team specialized in commercials was regrouped into a separate facility (Bruno Bozzetto Film 2) and, apart from a lesser amount of advertisements, it found an ideal outlet to its skills in animated intros for TV programs as well as in TV series, like the Mr. Rossi one (that became especially popular in Germany) and “Stripy,” made from 1973 to 1984 for the Swiss broadcaster RTSI (now RSI: Radiotelevisione svizzera di lingua italiana). Other TV works for RTSI were “Lilliput-put” (1980) and “Mr. Hiccup” (1983). However, the revenues from the sales of those products were less substantial than the “Carosello” ones; moreover, they were sold to RTSI because the Italian market was saturated with cheaper animated series bought from abroad. The 103/1975 law, but more relevantly the Constitutional Court Resolution no. 202 of 1976, allowed private broadcasters, operating on a local level, to open their own TV stations. Private televisions proliferated to an impressive figure by the end of the decade; they were already 246 in 1977.⁸⁷ In 1980, the entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi aggressively created the first national private broadcaster, Canale 5, by syndicating twenty-four local channels.⁸⁸ The private broadcasters filled their afternoon programming slots, destined to children, with animation bought from Japan, because of the favorable exchange rate between the Yen and the Italian Lira. In this scenario, Italian animated TV series were hardly competitive. In 1985, the RAI rejected Bozzetto's pilot for the projected series “Il Corsaro nero” (“The Black

⁸⁶Dorfles, *Carosello*, 112.

⁸⁷Gian Luigi Falabrino, *Storia della pubblicità in Italia dal 1945 a oggi* (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 74.

⁸⁸Dorfles, *Carosello*, 113.

Pirate”), a humorous version of an adventure novel by Emilio Salgari. The first series that Bozzetto could produce for the Italian television came only in the late 1990s, when Italian animation enjoyed a relative renaissance after a prolonged crisis in the 1980s;⁸⁹ in that period, not even a single animated feature film was produced in the country. The good results of the full-length musicals by Enzo D’Alò, and the international affirmation of new studios whose series precisely targeted children (“Cuccioli,” “Pet Pals,” 2002–12, by the Gruppo Alconi)⁹⁰ or teenagers (“Winx Club,” 2004–ongoing, by Rainbow), encouraged domestic financial investments in animation. However, the target of such successful works reinforced the Italian stereotypes about animation being a “genre” for children. Anyway, Bozzetto benefited from this situation and had RAI produce the 1996 “La famiglia spaghetti” (“The Spaghetti Family”) and the 2009 “PsychoVip.” In 2008 he directed “Bruno the Great” for Disney Channel: the stick figure-like Bruno is a kind of new Mr. Rossi, unvaryingly inconclusive in his effort to impress his peers.

The main division of the Bruno Bozzetto Film remained devoted to the sole theatrical works of Bozzetto; however, at the end of the 1970s it suffered from two important defections as Guido Manuli and Maurizio Nichetti left the studio to pursue their own careers as directors. They always remained on good terms with Bozzetto, anyway.⁹¹

Nichetti was also instrumental to Bozzetto’s return to live-action films. He was hired as a screenwriter (see Chapter 3) but was also resourceful as an actor. He convinced Bozzetto to make a short comedy in just a weekend, *Oppio per oppio* (*The Household Drug*, 1972), which was soon after followed by *La cabina* (*The Cabin*, 1973). After the live-action sequences of *Allegro*, Bozzetto made this thread of his filmography peak in the 1980s, with a few more shorts (most notably the 1984 series “Sandwich,” made of twelve films of six minutes each) and, above all, a feature film, his fourth and last: *Sotto il ristorante cinese* (*Under the Chinese Restaurant*, 1987), which anyway included also sequences that mixed animated drawings with photographic footage. Bozzetto had plans for more animated feature films, but the self-production, with capitals from the sales of advertisements, was

⁸⁹See Bruno Di Marino, “Integrati e apocalittici. Appunti per una storia dell’animazione italiana prima del 2000,” in *Il mouse e la matita. L’animazione italiana contemporanea*, ed. Bruno Di Marino and Giovanni Spagnoletti (Venezia: Marsilio, 2014), 33–7; also Sabrina Perucca, *Il cinema d’animazione italiano oggi* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2008), 24–30.

⁹⁰Marco Bellano, “Il Veneto e l’animazione dopo il 2000: botteghe al centro del mondo,” in *Veneto 2000: il cinema. Identità e globalizzazione a Nordest*, eds. Antonio Costa, Giulia Lavarone, and Farah Polato (Venezia: Marsilio, 2018), 113.

⁹¹Nichetti in Roberto Tirapelle, “Conversazione con Maurizio Nichetti,” in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 50. Also Nichetti in a private e-mail to the author, September 6, 2020.

no more a feasible option. He applied for state cinema funds, but even if his projects sometimes received positive evaluations from the commissions in charge of the film grants,⁹² they were never greenlighted. Right after *Allegro*, Bozzetto developed another film with the same architecture, a live-action frame, and a compilation of animated episodes; each one would have been an adaptation of a science-fiction short story, watched by live-action characters from a distant future on an old TV. Bozzetto had already acquired the rights to works by Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury (the short story "There Will Come Soft Rains," 1950), and Robert Silverberg ("Neighbor," 1964), and selected other stories by Fredric Brown and Robert Sheckley.⁹³ However, the release of *Heavy Metal* (Gerald Potterton, 1981) stopped the development of the film, because of the similarities between the Canadian feature and Bozzetto's concept.⁹⁴ Another unachieved feature project, from the early 2000s, was *Mammuk*. The plot revolved around a mountain split in half; one side of it collapsed, isolating a tribe of cavemen, who were stuck there with no chance of technological progress. On top of the mountain they see Mammuk, a huge mammoth-like creature, who they desperately try to reach and use as food. Finally, the screenplay of the 2018 graphic novel *The Mystery of the Come-and-Go*, drawn by Gregory Panaccione, was originally intended for a full-length feature starring new characters: the grand-grandchildren of Supervip and Minivip.

In the same years, though, Bozzetto was saluted with the highest honors of his whole career. In 1995, for example, Bruno Bozzetto Film was chosen by Hanna and Barbera to contribute with a short film (*Help!*) to the TV serial "What A Cartoon" (1995–7); in 2007, Bozzetto received an honorary master's degree in theory, technique, and management of arts and entertainment, from the University of Bergamo.⁹⁵ Above all, though, he got international accolades such as the Golden Bear for the Best Short Film at the 1990 Berlin International Film Festival and an Academy Award Nomination for Best Animated Short Film in 1991. The films that received such recognition were foremost examples of Bozzetto's mature style in the short format; in particular, *Mistertao*, the Golden Bear winner, was just three minutes long. Its simple tale of perseverance, inspired by the mountain walks Bozzetto used to take in his youth with his father, is condensed into

⁹²Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

⁹³Bozzetto in Bendazzi, "Intervista a Bruno Bozzetto," in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 65. Also in Mario Querin, *Bruno Bozzetto* (Trento: Centro di Documentazione Visiva, 1992), 10.

⁹⁴Bozzetto in Alberto Crespi, "Sandwich e Il Corsaro Nero: e chissà che la tv non smantelli il ghetto ...," in Tirapelle, *Il cinema di Bruno Bozzetto*, 73.

⁹⁵<https://www.unibg.it/sites/default/files/documenti/26-05-2015/lhbozzetto.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2019).

the figure of a little hiker who climbs a mountain, slowly but relentlessly. After the summit, he keeps walking in the sky, until he reaches God in the heavens. He has a short chat with him (in the usual gibberish of Bozzetto's short films), and then he leaves, peacefully climbing even higher than God. The whole film is based on the typical variations on a persisting image (the hiker) that stays at the center of the frame; the final twist is underlined by the sole derogation to this pattern, since the hiker goes off-screen while the spectator sees God's incredulous disconcertment. The drawings are of extreme simplicity and are done by Bozzetto himself, who animated the short film on his own: the "idea with a line around it" motto found there one of its best concretizations. The close-knitted music was by Roberto Frattini,⁹⁶ a composer of academic training and vast musical culture, with a special talent for comedic timing and creative quotations of classical pieces; he scored all of Bozzetto's productions after 1985.

The consolidation and maturation of Bozzetto's take on short films in the 1980s was furtherly favored by a collaboration he started with Italy's most authoritative journalist of popular science, Piero Angela (1928).⁹⁷ Bozzetto has always been an eager reader of popular science books, like those of Desmond Morris and Konrad Lorenz. He noticed that the ones by Angela had a special "visual" quality and stimulated his knack for impromptu book illustrations like no other. The director approached Angela to see if he was interested in making a film with him: their encounter resulted in three illustrated books⁹⁸ and about two hundred animated clips spanning from thirty seconds to ten minutes (1981–8), which amounted to a total of about seven hours of animation. They explained in a humorous but scientifically rigorous way facts and figures pertaining to one of the topics of the day, during Angela's TV program "Quark." Their brevity and essential character design make those works very close to *Mistertao*, which in fact was released in 1988, when Bozzetto's contribution for "Quark" came to an end; the clips for Angela had surely been a major exercise in concision and visual appeal through stylization, as well as a confirmation that, in documentaries, "much factual information is communicated more efficiently via animation than the spoken word,"⁹⁹ as Annabelle Honess Roe noticed.

In 1999 Bozzetto released another very successful short film, which even surpassed *Mistertao* in graphic simplification, while reinstating again the "theme and variation" structure so typical of his works. The characters

⁹⁶<http://www.robertofrattini.it> (accessed July 30, 2019).

⁹⁷On this collaboration, see Fabio Toninelli, ed., *Bruno Bozzetto. La linea intorno all'idea* (Cremona: Tapirulan, 2019), 74; also Piero Angela, *Il mio lungo viaggio. 90 anni di storie vissute* (Milano: Mondadori, 2017), 173–6.

⁹⁸Piero Angela and Bruno Bozzetto, *Noi e la paura* (Milano: Garzanti, 1987); *Noi e la gelosia* (Milano: Garzanti, 1987); *Noi e la collera* (Milano: Garzanti, 1987).

⁹⁹Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8.

of *Europe & Italy* are neither humans nor animals: they are circles and squares, filled with the patterns and colors of the European or Italian flag. The short is segmented into binary episodes; each one compares how Italian and European citizens deal with common aspect of social life. The comedic effects spur from a playful exaggeration of the worst stereotypes on Italians, contrasted with the calm and proper demeanor of the people from the rest of the continent. The short is remarkable not only for its powerful visual synthesis but also for its distribution strategy and animation technique. *Europe & Italy* won several prizes at short film festivals (Lovere, 1999; I Castelli Animati, Genzano di Roma, 1999; Tehran, 2001; Anima Mundi, 2001), but it was released on the internet; and, for the first time, Bozzetto used 2D computer animation. The popularity of *Europe & Italy* steadily grew and peaked in the social network age; as of early January 2021, its official 2012 YouTube upload on BrunoBozzettoChannel has more than 1.9 million views. Bozzetto, in fact, elected YouTube and the social networks (mostly Facebook) as the preferred destination for his new short films. This happened gradually, after a long transition. In 2000, Bruno Bozzetto Film and Bruno Bozzetto Film 2 ceased their activities; the director moved back to Bergamo. However, Bozzetto was at the time learning how to make the most of software animation tools like Adobe Flash: he was delighted by the fact that it allowed him to animate an entire short film all on his own, like he did when he was very young. So, he entered a new stage in his career, now centered around self-produced 2D computer animation. During this period, Bozzetto cultivated also an interest in 3D animation, expressed, for example, in the conclusive short released by the Bruno Bozzetto Film: *I così* (*The Things*, 2000). He soon realized that, just like in the 1960s the Disney features were the benchmark for full-length hand-drawn animated films, in the early 2000s the expectations of the market and the audience were set on the quality of the Pixar Animation Studios works. He joked on this unfair competition in a 2004 3D computer animated short, *Looo*, which featured an unlikely muscular superhero auditioning for a role in a 3D film with “Pixar quality.” In that case, he joined forces with other artists, including Panaccione, who was later going to draw the comic sequel to *Vip*, *My Brother Superman*.¹⁰⁰ *Looo* was also a likely reference to *The Incredibles* (Brad Bird, 2004), a film that might have been loosely inspired by *Vip*. Also, in 2004, a hand-drawn Disney feature, *Home on the Range* (Will Finn, John Sanford), had a trio of cows as leading characters, which loosely resembled the three cows at Clementina’s farm in *West & Soda*. Bozzetto, anyway, was flattered by the coincidences and never found any conclusive evidence about those homages or borrowings; he just noticed, with grateful surprise, that John Lasseter had a very precise knowledge of his filmography,

¹⁰⁰Bozzetto and Panaccione later created another graphic novel, *Toajène* (Paris: Delcourt, 2020).

during a 2012 honorary visit to the Emeryville establishment.¹⁰¹ Bozzetto's efforts in 3D computer graphics found their more convincing expression in *Rhapsodeus* (2013), which mixed 3D rendered models (and spectacular camera movements, which partly disconfirmed the "fixed image" aesthetics) with a 2D hand-drawn feeling. It was a new take on his trademark satires about the worst aspects to the human civilization; this time, it showed the history of how people vainly massacred each other to get hold of the "light" of mystic truth. The use of classical music (Franz Liszt's second *Hungarian Rhapsody*, a staple of cartoon music at least since *The Cat Concerto* by Joseph Barbera and William Hanna, 1947) connected the film also with *Allegro non troppo*; however, while its predecessor mostly relied on unaltered original scores, the music of *Rhapsodeus* was comedically manipulated by Roberto Frattini to follow the animation, as it happened to classical music in Disney's "Silly Symphonies."

When *Rhapsodeus* was made, though, Bozzetto's studio had already reopened. It happened in 2007, thanks to two former freelance 3D animators: Piero Pinetti and one of Bozzetto's sons, Andrea. The latter had initially pursued psychology studies;¹⁰² however, in 2006 he helped in the production of a TV series derived from the 2000 short *The Things*, which Bozzetto outsourced to a 3D studio (The Animation Band) where Pinetti was working. In 2007, Andrea Bozzetto and Pinetti associated with and took the lead of the new Studio Bozzetto & Co.¹⁰³ The studio became soon competitive in the fields of TV series for children, commercials, corporate identity, video mappings, motion graphics, and augmented reality. Among their works, some of the most relevant are the preschool series "Topo Tip" ("Tip the Mouse," 2014 and 2018) and the animations for the Expo Milano 2015, in partnership with Disney. Bozzetto has never retired and still supervises all the projects of the Studio, but also leaves substantial creative autonomy to the young artists.

The main outlet to Bozzetto's most personal creations became the internet. Apart from the aforementioned YouTube channel, he posts videos and drawings on his Facebook profile, where the audience can also enjoy a few details that the artist occasionally spares about his private life. Bozzetto has finally settled back in Bergamo, a place he had never really left for good, anyway: when he lived in Milan, his family kept a house there and he regularly visited it in the weekends. His Facebook posts, however, are never indiscreet: the privacy of his wife Valeria "Wally" Ongaro, their

¹⁰¹Bozzetto during a class for the History of Animation course at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Padova, Italy, November 25, 2014.

¹⁰²"Quelli dello Studio Bozzetto. Vale a dire: la Disney bergamasca," *Bergamopost*, December 14, 2014, <http://www.bergamopost.it/vivabergamo/studio-bozzetto-disney-bergamasca/> (accessed July 30, 2019).

¹⁰³<https://studiobozzetto.com> (accessed July 30, 2019).

sons Andrea and Fabio (a videomaker and digital artist),¹⁰⁴ and their twin daughters Anita and Irene is always respected. The protagonists of his Facebook posts are instead mostly the pets and wild animals around his house. Bozzetto's advocacy for animal rights became stronger over the years; he mostly entrusted his ecological views to pictures and cartoons dedicated to Beeella,¹⁰⁵ a sheep that strayed from her herd and was adopted by Bozzetto. Even though Beeella's antics are told with the usual knack for satire, Bozzetto never tries to humanize her; she is by no means a "funny animal" but an aloof and dignified witness of man's maddening race toward self-annihilation. As a Bozzetto character, she is maybe the ultimate one: not a stylized creation but a real creature in casual resonance with an intimate creative desire, who Bozzetto sensibly found in the living environment his foremost source of inspiration.

¹⁰⁴<http://www.fabiobozzetto.com> (accessed July 30, 2019).

¹⁰⁵The name is a pun on the Italian onomatopoeia for the bleating of sheep, "beee," and the word "bella," which means "beautiful."