



BEPPE GRILLO

BRACE FOR IMPACT

Text and photography: PHOTOLOGIX.NL / Bruno van den Elshout

>>> National celebrity, blogger and comedian Beppe Grillo is probably the least likely of all 60 million Italians to party over Italy's forthcoming 150th anniversary. "There's nothing to celebrate. Italy is an arbitrary collection of geographic regions. It's as little a country now, as it was 150 years ago."

After falling in disgrace with Italy's powerful media conglomerates, Grillo got banned from national television in the mid-1980s. Ever since, he has been performing his comedy shows live across the country. Grillo's blog www.beppegrillo.it was launched in 2005 and is reaching thousands of Italians every day.

"Blogging allows me to spread ideas that traditional media refuse to cover. The fact that our parliament counts no less than 25 convicted criminals, for example. The infrastructure of the web has helped me create my very own media platform, independent of mass media.

Out through the door, back in through the window. That's my story with Italian media. I don't have any stakes or prestige to protect - no institutions to satisfy. Many other Italians do, especially when they are esteemed to be influential. They constantly need to cover their backs, while all I do is being **sincere in my curiosity**, thinking about what I see and telling people about that. From an Italian perspective, that's a revolutionary approach to reality. I think that, within Europe, Italy is one of the few countries where the simple habit of consistently being honest is sufficient to become a celebrity. Sincerity in Italy is like a miracle."

***Italy is like Wile E. Coyote:
We refuse to look down,
just to keep us from falling***

Country on a bad trip

"My early career had little to do with politics. I organised small gigs, playing the guitar and singing songs, making jokes and telling funny stories. I studied economics for a while, but eventually quit university to dedicate my time to travelling and performing. Like an Italian version of Jacques Brel, slowly evolving into a full-grown comedian, then TV host.

Giuseppe Piero Grillo

62 years old, married, 6 children
lives in Genoa, works all across Italy

Career:

Student of Economics, Commerce and Law
Singer with guitar
Comedian with guitar but without actually playing it
Comedian without a guitar
Comedian and blogger

I only regained interest in economics in the 1980s. I was featured in a commercial campaign for a famous brand of yoghurt, then started thinking: what did it actually take to turn milk into a ready-to-eat product. I traced down the different logistical phases between the cow and my kitchen fridge, realising that it had taken 7 000 kilometers of travelling inbetween. I was shocked at what, to me, seemed like unforgivable inefficiency. Only then to find out, that almost every single part of our daily reality is made up out of such useless waste of value. Columbus, a Genovese, already did better in the 15th century, bringing home tomato seeds instead of the actual tomatoes. Which is what would happen today. Possession nowadays seems to prevail over opportunities: it's the world upside down.

If we improve our sense of timing and true understanding, we would **need a lot less to create a lot more**. Of virtually anything. And also, the type of creativity required to design such reality automatically makes us less dependent on something as corruptible as money.

Italy has fallen asleep. As if the entire country is on a bad trip, the majority of Italians spend their time fearing enemies who never show up. And in the meantime, they forget to think about the problems they're facing today. We are known as passionate and emotional, but we use our energy to fight the wrong battles. Our attention span has been reduced to merely five minutes, which is greatly insufficient to work on structural improvements. Our population is too old and if that's not enough: we're bankrupt. We're like Wile E. Coyote who just ran into a ravine. He keeps on running and only falls after he looks down and realises that he's hanging in the air. Wile E. Coyote is us, and we refuse to look down."

Protected by complexity

"The political system has been made so incredibly complex that nobody can even have a grasp of what is going on. And it's kept that way, because the more complex it gets, the more money it generates for the actors involved. Or wastes it - from a citizen's point of view. In many ways, the European Union and Italy are in similar positions. The Italian nation state survives because its political system is so complicated that people give up caring about it. The EU relies on the exact same principle: once conceived by visionary intellectuals, the storylines of Italian and European history have been reduced to a framework of short-term financial benefits for a small group of people.

The Italian political arena is a **bottomless pool of conflicting interests**. Presidents of the local councils are commissioners with banks, they own a couple of companies themselves and if they're Really Important Italians, they also have a TV channel or two and a portfolio of real estate property. As a result, all of Italian society is intermingled. Even the mafia has been corrupted by the infiltration of government officials, just as much as the reverse: mafia corrupting authorities.

Politicians use words to gradually turn the world into a cash cow that serves their personal interests. Take a look at the issue of drinking water. It's common for politicians to proudly declare: 'No, we are not going to privatise water supply, we just aim to select the best suitable commercial partner for the distribution part of the supply chain.' But that's all bullshit, they just patch their doubtful initiatives with comforting words. If we don't do anything about it, water supply in Italy is going to be a commercial project, *basta*."

Both Italy and the European Union operate under a license of complexity. As long as nobody understands their reasons for existence, they get away with whatever they do, simply because people stop caring

Heading for disaster

"Despite the poor situation Italy's in, we've got a history full of remarkable milestones. Banks in their current form were invented in Genoa, just like insurances, logistic science and marine navigation. Fascism is an Italian invention. The three biggest mafia organisations in the world are Italian. We had cars before the Americans, electrical cars before the Japanese. Italian ideas spread like viruses: the good ideas just as much as the bad ones.

Difficult to say whether I'm personally proud to be Italian. I'd say it depends. For now, I have no urge to live anywhere but in Italy. People know me here, they hug me, pat me on the back, talk to me. I'm popular, and my audience serves as my protection against people with political or economical ideas that are different from mine. I hardly ever need to pay any bills. A taxi driver will offer me the ride, a restaurant owner will invite me, just like most hotel managers. In Italy, people like to think of celebrities as their personal friends.

Who am I not to gracefully accept such hospitality? I wouldn't be able to if I were a politician, but I'm not. I don't owe anything to anybody, I have no accounts to settle. Every self-respecting Italian nowadays receives a bullet by the mail every now and then. I sent myself one, because nobody else did it for me...

The one thing I definitely take pride in is to see a growing countermovement of young Italians who are fed up with the ridiculous complexity of Italian politics. Who see that we're **heading for disaster** if things stay the way they are.



Also, I am proud of the creation of the Beppe Grillo Movement, a tremendously popular network of young, ambitious Italians united in local branches across the country. Although they have regular meetings and give rise to the creation of new political parties, the movement itself is not a political party. And I'm not their political leader. I am just nourishing their ambitions, serving as their loudspeaker into the world, providing a stage for their voice to get heard. Inspire them to make Italy a better country for the 150 years to come." <<<



Isaia, 29
about Beppe Grillo

"Internet is the only access to information about what's actually going on in Italy. Young people don't read newspapers, because they know they can't trust them. Many of them do trust what they hear on TV, though. And if you switch on TV, it will tell you that Berlusconi is doing great things. But guess who's the owner of the TV channel? Berlusconi. Few people Italians are willing to think ahead of what they hear and see.

The same goes for Beppe Grillo. His ideas are popular, but many of the people who adopt them, are unable to think for themselves. They copy and paste. That makes the entire movement a bit scary. I wonder how long it will take before power structures will prevail over good ideas.

Berlusconi is not Italy's major problem. We ourselves are the problem. We are a country of **eternal adolescents**. We want to possess beautiful things, the more the better.

We compare. We want more than the other. And we need a boss to restrain us, almost like a parent and somebody to continuously disagree with. We need bosses, we make bosses so we will have bosses. And it's hard to blame them for also wanting to possess beautiful things, even if it's at other people's expense."



Alessandro, 34
about Beppe Grillo

"Beppe Grillo was one of the first to write about who and why our political system doesn't make sense. On his blog, he publishes articles listing members of parliament who have been convicted for crimes, but who nevertheless manage to keep their positions because they cover up for somebody else, who covers up et cetera. A couple of years ago, Grillo collected four times the number of signatures needed to hold a referendum about kicking **convicts out of parliament**, limiting political careers to two terms, and direct voting for candidates instead of just for lists.

The referendum never took place. I nevertheless appreciate Grillo's commitment to telling the truth about our country, predicting and uncovering scandals. We can't expect any of today's political leaders to do this work in his place, no matter how sad that may sound."



Simona, 37
about Beppe Grillo

"The political system in this country is rotten and an entire generation is suffering. Italians who are now between 25 and 40 years old are called **Bamboccioni** - big babies - because many of us are jobless and, if it weren't for our parents support, homeless. I have studied to be a teacher, but since I graduated, laws have changed so that in order to be even allowed to teach, I need to re-attend university for another two years.

At the same time, today's language teachers don't even have to sit exams in the language they teach. The education system is preparing us for another lost generation behind us, and it's all because personal interests of politicians keep them from making decisions in the interest of the people. I won't vote for Beppe Grillo's movement because I find his ideas too extreme. But he is definitely right in claiming that our country should change."

Beppe Grillo 2011 European spring tour:

12 March - London (UK) - 14 March - Paris (FR)
16 March - Brussels (BE) - 18 March - Zurich (CH)
19 March - Basel (CH) - 21 March - Berlin (DE)
23 March - Karlsruhe (DE) - 29 March - Madrid (ES)
1 April - Barcelona (ES)

More info:

<http://www.beppegrillo.it>