

# Turn the World Upside Down

*Each epochal passage in humanity's history has always been preceded by the overturning of ideologies, by a revolution in thought which begins in an individual and then spreads to the masses.*

*Tempo, December 2011*

## **When was it the last time you turned a somersault?**

Do you remember how was it in our childhoods? To somersault was then a strong and irresistible impulse. On the shore, at home, on our parents' bed. Looking back, I can now see how it was the candid stratagem that we devised in order to shake off the deadly serious world of the grown-ups, in a desperate attempt not to be caught by it, and used to break free from the hypnotic world-story which was rooted in the adults' system of convictions and beliefs. Children try to thwart the clipping of their higher senses, intuition and dreaming, and try to oppose that cramped description of existence which is called education, but their efforts are of no avail. It arrives in the moment when the child stops fighting his solitary and unfair battle against the shrinking of his vision, against the lessons of unhappiness and sorrow imparted by teachers of boredom, and by the prophets of doom and gloom – including his parents. The child eventually starts to grow tense and to stiffen, and slowly but surely becomes polluted and “adult-erated”.

## **The meaning of Adult**

We commonly say: when are you going to be an adult? And also: one day you will be an adult...

and in using these expressions we firmly believe, and in our turn we convince the children that to be an adult it is a superior status – a higher condition of existence. Surprisingly, we never lingered over the warning that is built into the very root of this word. “Adult” comes from adulteration/adulterated – something which has become stale, and has gone bad. The adult, in reality, is a child turned rancid – like some food which was once fresh but has been stored for too long.

The adult, on in his turn, is a child who has lost his capacity to dream. In spite of all modern scientific achievements and technological wonders, human societies have not yet invented a way to become an adult without being “adult-erated”. We have not learned how to grow up, but also to keep and protect the child in us – together with all of his amazing capacities for freshness and innocence, and his endless feeling of curiosity and surprise. This aspiration to harmonise wisdom and innocence has been compressed in the unequalled, millennia-old paradox: as cunning as snakes and as innocent as doves.

## **An Exercise for your Intelligence**

In bringing to light the real meaning of “adult”, and in re-discovering the warning that an eponymous intelligence has built into its root, we have accomplished the special task of overturning this concept. The upending of a word, of an idea or of a belief has an end in itself; it is well worth doing for its own sake. The thesis that this article seeks to prove is that “turning the world upside down” is a mental process capable of enhancing creativity and of heightening vision. It is an irreplaceable tool in the preparation of a future, more intelligent humanity. To turn outmoded ideas and obsolete, taken-for-granted concepts, upside down makes us see them rightside up, and

integrates our vision with a third dimension: depth, which must be forged, as we do not naturally possess it.

### **The sad army**

Now we can answer the question which was posed at the beginning of this article. When was the last time you turned a somersault? I assume that, more or less, it has happened to you as it was to most children that somersaults stopped at about the age of seven. This is the age at which a child has already been recruited into that sad army of adults, like a little Spartan, who at seven had to be separated from his mother and join the army.

Hitting seven, he has already received a complete set of all the beliefs, prejudices, superstitions and second-hand ideas that give him a lifetime membership in that planetary club of miserable souls. Moreover, he has received an inverted vision of the world which will never be corrected and straightened out in his entire life.

### **Psychological Overturning in History**

“Overturning” literally means: a movement which turns us head-over-hills, or shakes something out of us. In a symbolic language, it communicates a dialectical somersault which is a psychological revolution, and a change in one’s vision of the world. The idea of psychological overturning is a fertile ground for discussion, and a most interesting area of knowledge among all other theoretical subjects. We could rightly affirm that each epochal passage in humanity’s history has always been preceded by the overturning of ideologies, and by a revolution in thought which begins in an individual and then spreads to the masses.

Relocating man from the centre of the universe to its margins, Copernicus, with his notion of heliocentricity, shook the cornerstones of medieval thinking, and opened up humanity to the modern age. Protestantism radically changed man’s view of work from being a biblical condemnation into an instrument of human evolution, and thereby created the psychological conditions for the birth of the Industrial Revolution and rational Capitalism. Christopher Columbus discovered America turning upside down the geographic concept of his time – by pursuing an idea which was against the tide: to sail West to find East, in search of a new and swifter route to the fabulous Indies.

### **The Physiology of Overturning**

Our perception of the world – the way we see the reality surrounding us – is unimaginably far from our actual physical vision. We never linger over the fact that if we had to perceive only through the physical capacity of the eyes, we would see the world as a two-dimensional and upside down nightmare. Now get ready for the shocking news – we are depth-blind! We guess at depth; we have a description of it, but it is not one of our natural faculties, and we need an integration – a mental crutch – to perceive it. To put it very simply, our physiological organs cannot perceive the third dimension of depth, and by natural function, we should see the images of the world like the flat photographs on the screen of a film before the invention of 3D technology. Moreover, we would see them upside down. In the moment that an image of the world passes through our iris and crystalline lens, it falls onto our retina flat, and smaller than reality, and also inverted. It is then the task of the brain to reverse the image and integrate it through a special mental process which simulates an awareness of the third dimension, and adds depth to our perception. We should raise a monument to the unknown inventor of the software that is by now an integral part of our mental faculties, and

which allows us to perceive the world as we ultimately see it. Without us having any awareness of this process, in nanoseconds our brain performs the complicated operation of overturning the images any time, and every time we have our eyes open.

### **We are Depth-Blind**

Musing on this strange physiology of man's visual perceptions, an idea burst within me with an intolerable brilliance. If the human physiology, because of the limits of our physical visual system, requires our brain to overturn the information as it arrives on our retina, and to add depth, it is not unlikely that our psychology is depth-blind too, and perceives what is real and true as flat and upside down. If my theory is borne out, it would mean that we can receive any form of information about great ideas and enlightening concepts, and any truth or any wisdom, but they will stay on the surface of our perception and never arrive at depth – never become our flesh and blood. Just like the images caught by our physical eyes, immortal statements like "Know Yourself" or "Love Your Enemy", enter our conscience shrunken, flat and upside down.

That is how religion – which in the Latin root of the name, re-ligo, means to unify, and to tie together, becomes the pretext for persecutions and wars, and how Christianity became its own opposite, turning into The Inquisition, without even changing its name.

We need to develop a special organ – a psychological software – capable of bringing concepts, ideas and mental pictures back to their original size, and capable of overturning them in order to see them accurately, to add profundity, and to keep the glittering radiance of their original intelligence.

The capacity for overturning ideas is a vital function in both our individual and social lives. It is not by chance that throughout the entire history of mankind, the overturning of philosophical ground, or a subversion of ideas through a political-social revolution has resulted in a consequential radical change in a culture, or even in an entire civilization. Each epochal passage in human history has always been preceded by the overturning of ideologies, and by a revolution in thought which begins in an individual and then spreads to the masses.

### **Food for Thought**

At the end of this article, before saying goodbye and wishing you a happy New Year, let me suggest to you a concrete application of the concept of overturning. Take a common, universal belief – an incontrovertible truth. Turn it upside down and find out how much more clearly you are able to see and how much creativity and intelligence you can squeeze out of the turnaround. Take, for example, this statement: "Food is good for you, and is enjoyable" and turn it into its opposite – making a dramatic reversal.

Imagine a society which is substantially free from the need for food, and where on each package of foodstuff, like on a pack of cigarettes, you could read this warning: "This can damage you". Think of how – reducing the consumption of food – many resources could be devoted to beauty, art, music, entertainment, and the search for truth and self-knowledge. It would be a society free of most illnesses – first and foremost the endemic spread of obesity and related diseases. In a world which was not obsessed with the need to produce more and more food, extend cultivated fields, or raise billions of livestock, there would be a radical decrease in crime, poverty, ghettos, wars and conflicts... and less need for social workers.

A sober, frugal world would be a world with less ideological divisions, superstitions or religions. There would be no starving children or hospices. There would be a reduced number of tribunals

and hospitals. It would be a world where resources could be directed towards realizing humanity's greatest dream, and towards achieving the supreme aim of our existence: extended longevity up to – in a non-distant day -physical immortality.

### **A School for Overturning**

If you have a chance to be in the center of Rome, in Piazza del Popolo, one of its most beautiful and largest squares, take few minutes to visit a church overlooking the square. Passing between the transept and the altar – beyond the central nave – you come to a little chapel where there are two giant canvasses facing each other. Put a coin in the meter to have few minutes of light by which to admire these two masterpieces by Caravaggio. The painting on the left shows Peter being crucified upside down; the other illustrates Paul's fall from his horse on the road to Damascus, in which the Apostle is reversed and lying on his back. You will feel shivers run down your spine in finding yourself before the most powerful iconographic representation of the idea of 'overturning'. If you close your eyes, you will hear the voice – the hidden message of a millenary School of Overturning still passed down across the centuries through these two paintings: Turn your beliefs upside down, and the world will follow like a shadow. Reality will take the shape of a new vision.»