



FREEMASONRY AND MASS MEDIA

Rome, 16 April 2011

“Only by overlooking the initiatic character of Freemasonry can we deny that the purpose of the latter is the perfection of self, to be achieved through perfection of the Ritual, or rather to use Masonic terms, by the skilful hewing of the raw stone and its transmutation into cubic stone according to the rules of the Craft”

Arturo Reghini

Considerations on the Ritual of an apprentice Freemason.

I am often asked by the Brothers how an appropriate relationship should be developed between Freemasonry and the Mass Media.

I would like to begin this speech therefore by focusing on the title, which could undoubtedly be defined an evident “contradiction of terms”, perhaps even an oxymoron. You will be aware that an oxymoron is a rhetorical figure constituted by the concomitant use of two terms that are clearly in contrast one with the other.

This contradiction, the antithesis, should be plain for all to see, and consists in uniting two subjects that due to their very nature live in completely separate worlds, an *Initiatic Order*, exclusive by definition, and the so-called *Mass Media*, the means of “mass” communication.

An *Initiatic Order* is made up of and addressed to “initiates”, therefore to an “exclusive” circle of men who have “knowingly” chosen to undertake an esoteric-metaphysical journey, an initiatic

“method” that will allow them to establish an active process of inner transformation, to elicit a fully-fledged mutation of status. On the contrary, the *Mass Media* are directed at the “masses”, towards society as a whole, devoid of all distinctions; indeed, to achieve this “aim” they adopt appropriate methods and mechanisms.

An historic definition of the “masses” was provided by the Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset who, in his renowned essay “*The Revolt of the Masses*” wrote: “*Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not specially qualified..... The mass is the average man*”¹, adding “*In those groups which are characterised by not being multitude and mass, the effective coincidence of its members is based on some desire, idea, or ideal, which of itself excludes the great number. To form a minority, of whatever kind, it is necessary beforehand that each member separate himself from the multitude.....The division of society into masses and select minorities is, then, not a division into social classes, but into classes of men, and cannot coincide with the hierarchic separation of "upper" and "lower" classes*”².

Consequently, no association should exist between Freemasonry and Mass Media, as their dynamics and competences are radically divergent. Unfortunately, as I will now illustrate, things are not quite so simple.

In spite of the fact that in view of its singularities, an *Initiatic Order* is required to stand its distance from all forms of profanity, recently the Grand Masters of Masonic Obediences are becoming increasingly implicated in issues that are by no means of an

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José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, TEA, March 1988, page 37.
Original title: *La rebelion de las masas*,

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Ibidem, page 38.

initiatic nature, focusing rather on politics, social problems, and more besides. How did all this come about?

The process in question was certainly not started up recently, and a tendency of several Masonic Obediences to become involved in matters in no way associated with the “esoteric” activity of an Initiatic Order has long been manifested. In the present essay, in an attempt to analyse this degenerative phenomenon, I would like to trace historic research back into the past with the aim of better comprehending the origins and nature of the matter.

In my opinion this de generation likely originated at the time when the dynamics underlying the “transmission” of the initiatic “tool” of fundamental importance in the Masonic “method”, and here I naturally refer to the ritual, first started to change.

This process is marked by a specific starting date, namely the moment in which Masonic rituals were no longer guarded as they ought to be, and often through no fault of our own they started to be “savagely” disclosed in contexts widely diverse from the Masonic Temples, the sole context in which a ritual should be destined for use. From that time onwards Freemasonry has started to lose what the famed philosopher Walter Benjamin, in a wonderful work, subsequently termed its “aura”.³

It should however be clarified that the loss I refer to, caused by disclosure of the ritual, the loss of the “aura”, does not imply a loss of its “secrets”. Indeed, the secret of initiatic organisations had a substantially symbolic worth when compared to the true, exclusively *inner* initiatic secret that can only be achieved by means of a spiritual awareness and that, in view of its inexpressibility, is necessarily incommunicable, not as the result of convention, but rather due to the very nature of things. The inexpressible may be effectively conveyed and apprehended by means of intellectual intuition and in line with individual

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Walter Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, Einaudi, 1966.

intellectual skills, but is it can never be communicated. It constitutes the true essence of the initiatic secret. I am sure there is no need to highlight the fact that when referring to a Masonic secret, one refers to the very nature of a strictly incommunicable metaphysical reality that can only be achieved by elevation of the individual beyond the confines of a finite individuality and of human nature.

The lost “aura” is therefore intended as the “mystery”, “fascination”, “charm” that is brought with it as a “Form” of “Tradition”.

Historically, the first person to inappropriately publish Masonic rituals in October 1730 was Samuel Pritchard in his *Masonry Dissected*. A full-blown scandal ensued, with mention being made in the minutes of the Grand Lodge in December of the same year:

”... The Deputy Grand Master took notice of a Pamphlet lately published by one Pritchard who pretends to have been made a regular Mason: In Violation of the Obligation of a Mason which he swears he has broke in order to do hurt to Masonry and expressing himself with the utmost Indignation against both him (stiling him an Impostor) and of his Book as a foolish thing not to be regarded. But in order to prevent the Lodges being imposed upon by false Brethren or Impostors: Proposed till otherwise Ordered by the Grand Lodge, that no Person whatsoever should be admitted into Lodges unless some Member of the Lodge then present would vouch for such visiting Brother being a regular Mason, and the member’s name to be entered against the Visitor’s name in the Lodge Book, which Proposal was unanimously agreed to.

”]. This was the start of a perverse process that has now reached its apex with the publication of rituals on the most unlikely websites.

In referring to works of art, Walter Benjamin wrote that following the advent of technical reproducibility represented by photography, and particularly the cinema, this subject started to lose its “aura”, its authenticity. In Benjamin’s words: *“The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history*

which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.....One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition..... the processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements”⁴, the final outcome of these dynamics will lead, in the author’s opinion, to the “liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage”.

The “exploitation” of rituals, and the “mass” printing and disclosure of the same made possible through their publication in books and on the web, has thus resulted in the termination of their “secrecy”, thereby depriving the latter of their “aura” and giving rise to a never-ending degenerative process.

The other “Traditional Forms” which acted as forerunners to Freemasonry, numerous references to which are contained therein: the Mysterious Societies, and Hermetic, Gnostic and Rosicrucian groups were fortunate enough to not experience the same problem, with their rituals remaining unknown to the present time. However, on referring to Tradition, we should not make the mistake of thinking of something relegated to the past, as underlined by Alain De Benoist “Tradition is linked to the past in exactly the same way that it is associated with the present or the future. It is situated beyond the confines of time. It in no way refers to *ancient* things, to those we have “left behind us”, but rather to the permanent state, to whatever is contained “within”⁵.

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Ibidem, pag.23.

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Alain De Benoist, *Le idee a posto*, Akropolis, Naples, 1983, page 123. Original Title, *Les idée a l’endroit*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1980.

Communication today focuses increasingly on bringing things 2closer”, making them “more comprehensive” for the masses; accordingly, with regard to Freemasonry, rather than concentrating on the esoteric and metaphysical dynamics implicated, it is much simpler to comment on the “School reform”, “Dei Pax” or the del “150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy”, all topics on which, in the same way as football, everyone has something to say. On a series of issues that have nothing at all to do with an initiatic pathway, it is customary to see Grand Masters acting as opinion leaders, expressing their thoughts with overwhelming certainty and in no fear of being contradicted by others. To use the words written to this regard by Ortega Y Gasset: *“To-day, on the other hand, the average man has the most mathematical "ideas" on all that happens or ought to happen in the universe. Hence he has lost the use of his hearing. Why should he listen if he has within him all that is necessary? There is no reason now for listening, but rather for judging, pronouncing, deciding. There is no question concerning public life, in which he does not intervene, blind and deaf as he is, imposing his "opinions”*⁶ And one of the fiercest aphorisms of Nicolàs Gòmez Dàvila may contribute towards clarifying and rounding off the debate *“A pinch of perceptiveness is all that is needed to mistrust one's own ideas without necessarily displaying trust in the ideas of another.”*⁷

By doing so, the risk run by Freemasonry is that, on becoming closer to the profane dynamics and overlooking the “initiatic” significance, it may be open to attack by what Max Weber termed the “disenchantment”.

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José Ortega Y Gasset, op.cit., pag.79.

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Nicolàs Gomez Dàvila, In margine a un testo implicito, Adelphi, Milano, 2001, pag.59. Original Title, Escolios a un texto implicito.

Some could object that in this way, by shutting itself away, Freemasonry is at risk of failing to diffuse knowledge of its singularities, thus preventing many potential “initiates” from becoming part of the movement. It should be underlined how the latter fear is totally ungrounded as, particularly in recent years in Anglo-Saxon countries, Freemasonry has been able to rely on establishments of excellence who concentrate “solely” on carrying out studies to this regard.

Particular mention should go to the *Quatuor Coronati* Lodge in London, a point of reference for all those who undertake genuine studies into the history of our institution, to the *Cornestone Society*, the *Canonbury Centre* (for all studies of an esoteric nature), the *University of Sheffield* and the important *International Conference* on Freemasonry studies held in Edinburgh, to name the better renowned. All the above establishments have published proceedings of their conferences which are available to all, initiates or profane, who wish to further their knowledge. I have had the pleasure of being invited to speak and to represent, I trust worthily, the Obedience of which I am Grand Master, at all the above events: in the *Quatuor Coronati Lodge* in London (*Freemasonry and Fascism*), the *Cornestone Society* (*The Influence of Neoplatonic Thought on Freemasonry*), the *Canonbury Centre* (*Freemasonry and Alchemy*) and the *International Conference* in Edinburgh (*Julius Evola and Freemasonry*).

Another unexplainable phenomenon observed in some masonic Obediences is the ongoing race to increase the number of registered members; by means of a savage proselytism accompanied by loud proclamations and trumpet fanfares, thousands upon thousands of new “initiations” are announced. In a previous essay, I mentioned the need for an appropriate “qualification” in order to be deemed eligible for initiation, underlining the fact that the characteristics sought are, necessarily, hard to find. It is indeed this characteristic that makes Freemasonry an elite circle of “initiates”. Quite remarkably however, several

Obediences manage to find “thousands” of candidates for initiation each year, in this way increasing, in their opinion, their numbers exponentially.

At this point however, the spontaneous question that arises is: For what purpose? What is the true purpose of an Initiatic Order? To evolve into an enormous *Service Club* that bestows business, favours and political appointments?

As we well know, the truth is that a Freemasonry for the “masses” would clearly constitute a further contradiction of terms.

To once again quote the words of Walter Benjamin: *“The earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value..... But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics”*⁸ Benjamin presents art as a form of tradition, providing the impetus for a comparison with Freemasonry, which I hope is not too daring, whereby as things change, the perverse dynamic leads to the same conclusion: the degeneration of politics.

The Masonic Method is based substantially on metaphysical elements, on the pure intellectual knowledge of universal principles, a super-rational transcendent knowledge. As mentioned previously, the latter poses on a basis of intellectual intuition, which the great philosopher Massimo Scaligero brilliantly defined as follows: *“Intellectual Intuition is a form of gnoseologic experience which, although equally immediate as the act of intuition, is lacking the vague, confused elements that characterise*

the latter, being, on the contrary, unequivocal as the most impeccable of processes of logic and mathematics, and as clear as the clearest of mountain springs. This type of knowledge based on a super-sensitive and super-rational perception of Being in its “unadulterated” state, or rather of reality as it actually occurs, before the senses and individual reasoning make it appear to be divided into a myriad of “things” and manifestations which have (for human beings alone) a specific meaning.” Thus, we are in the field of “metaphysics”, the desire to lead our initiatic pathway into the “profane” territory, of a purely physical nature, separates us from our initiatic essence. Therefore, the aim of Freemasonry is to achieve a metaphysical awareness, the achievement of a union between Self and the Divine Principle within each of us. The supreme aim of man is to reunite with his principle and free himself of material bonds (leave the “metals” outside); with the aim of achieving this spiritual objective, Freemasonry affords numerous means of spiritual development in the context of its frequently heterogeneous rituals.

To focus once more on the main topic of this essay, I am thus persuaded that an Initiatic Order represents a completely separate world which operates beyond its own confines through the work of its initiates, and which has no reason to abide beyond the Masonic Temple, which is by no means a “social concern” competing with other types of “association”.

However, as stated above, recently in Europe the number of occasions on which the Grand Masters of several Obediences have been implicated in political issues has risen alarmingly. The highest positions in Masonic Obediences should regain a parvenu of sobriety. In particular, Obediences representing the Traditional forms, led first and foremost by UGLE, should continue to ensure that a correct initiatic rigour be maintained, in order to avoid the

risk of Freemasonry in Europe being transformed into something of an entirely different and hazardous nature.

All too often the Grand Master tends to forget that in the context of the Obedience he represents, he acts as “*primus inter pares*”, therefore lacking the authority to express “personal” opinions in the name of an entire Obedience. Should this occur, he displays a clear form of arrogance, and particularly of “ignorance” as to the basic concepts of Freemasonry and the “limits” of those who have had the honour of representing the same.

Therefore, the choice I made ten years ago to not give interviews on topics that were not strictly linked to initiatic issues, was based on the fact that by doing so I would have violated not only one of the main Landmarks of Freemasonry, but moreover would constitute a form of disrespect towards the brothers in my Obedience who were not in agreement with me, by including them in a strictly personal opinion.

To conclude therefore, the social function of Freemasonry may only be of an “indirect” nature. An Initiatic Order should not be mixed with battles beyond its control, it should not be dragged into the profane, and above all it should not make use of “mass” communication methods which necessarily imply the need to simplify communications to make them more readily understandable by all, to quote the above-mentioned Gómez Dávila “Trivialization is the price you pay for communication...”¹⁰.