

Sex, Erotic Art, and the Repression of Alternative Movements: The Strange Case of an Esoteric Movie Director

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ABSTRACT: Students of MISA, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute, produced in the early 2000s several adult movies, some of them featuring female urination, which offered ammunition to critics calling for police action against what they considered a “pornographic cult.” Carmen Enache, under the pseudonym Bella Maestrina, directed most of these movies. After the 2004 police raid against MISA in Romania, the production of these movies ceased, although Enache still organized erotic theatrical shows and in the following decade started directing a new kind of movies under the pseudonym Aghora Vidya. The movies and shows do not appear to have generated significant income, nor did MISA use them as a recruitment tool. Based on interviews with Enache and others involved in the movies, the article concludes that presenting a Tantric approach to sexuality to consumers of pornography was not a purely utilitarian enterprise, and those MISA students who participated in it also had specifically esoteric motivations.

KEYWORDS: Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute, MISA, Gregorian Bivolaru, Tantra, Siddha Yoga, Carmen Enache, Pornography Studies, Sacred Eroticism.

A Sensational Affair

Ecstasy Water, a 2003 feature movie categorized as “adult” and featuring “pee games” (female urination), gathered more than 280,000 Internet views in the last few years according to the specialized Web site xvideos.com. This was not unusual: in July 2017, the largest world pornographic portal, youporn.com, was offering more than 1,700 movies featuring women caught in the act of urinating, evidencing that a large audience existed for such films.

More unusual about *Ecstasy Water* (which was pirated and distributed illegally) was the fact that the director and some actors belonged to an esoteric

movement and claimed that the movie's aim was to spread esoteric teachings. MISA, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA) founded by Romanian yoga teacher Gregorian Bivolaru, teaches a tantric form of yoga, mainly derived from Siddha Yoga of Tamil Nadu. Although reducing MISA's teachings to a collection of recipes about sexuality would be wrong, there is little doubt that the activities of some MISA members (commonly called "students" in the movement) in the field of adult movies and erotic shows attracted considerable negative attention, and became a main argument for anti-cultists claiming that authorities should take action against the Romanian group.

The article discusses the categories introduced by the growing academic literature of "porn studies," and applies them to the career of Carmen Enache, a MISA student who directed several erotic movies based on Bivolaru's teachings, including *Ecstasy Water*. In its final part, the article asks the question why exactly some MISA students got involved in movies and shows that offered easy ammunition to the movement's critics.

Porn and the Academy

In 1989, with her seminal book *Hard Core*, Linda Williams inaugurated a school of academic studies on pornographic and erotic movies (Williams 1989). Although often maligned and criticized, "porn studies" have matured into an established branch of popular culture studies, with hundreds of courses taught each year in universities throughout the world (see Williams 2004a).

In 1993, I introduced the distinction between religious ("counter-cult") and secular ("anti-cult") militant critics of new religious and esoteric movements (Introvigne 1993), now widely used. Similarly, a "counter-porn" movement (my terminology) opposed pornography for moral and religious reasons, and an "anti-porn" movement, dominated by feminists, because it was offensive to women. Representative of the second approach was feminist Robin Morgan, who launched the slogan "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" (Morgan 1980, 139).

Anti-cultists labeled those scholars who studied new religious movements (NRMs) with a value-free approach as "cult apologists." The anti-porn movement similarly labeled porn studies scholars as "apologists" for pornography. In fact, just as scholars of NRMs never denied that some religious groups commit crimes,

porn studies scholars such as Williams (a feminist herself) never denied that pornography *does* have certain harmful effects (see Williams 1989; Williams 2004).

The majority of adult Americans, men *and* women, watch at least occasionally porn movies: “porn doesn’t have a demography—it goes across all demographics” (Rich 2001, 52). Porn studies scholars argue that pornographic materials have become “fully recognizable fixtures of popular culture” (Williams 2004b, 1) and should be studied as a “cultural form” (Williams 2004b, 5) in its history, content, and evolution into a cluster of different subgenres

Williams and others also demonstrated that more than one third of pornography consumers are women, a situation that had already developed in the late 1980s, (Williams 1989, 164–165). Women have also increasingly emerged as successful directors of porn movies (Williams 2004b, 2), thus making obsolete the claim that porn is merely a “male gaze” on women.

According to Williams, porn conceptualizes sex as a *problem* that should be solved (Williams 1989, 228). However, even when porn movies are directed by women, sex is presented there as a problem *for the woman*, who should learn how to enjoy it. The limit of porn is that sex is never a problem *for the man*. Men are always performing and enjoying (Williams 1989, 153–183). In his early, widely used manual *The Film Maker’s Guide to Pornography*, Stephen Ziplow simply stated that “if you don’t have the come shots [i.e. scenes depicting ejaculation], you don’t have a porno picture” (Ziplow 1977, 34).

Williams and other porn studies scholars noted that the “solution” for the “problem” of female pleasure offered by porn was somewhat primitive: “more more more,” both in quantity and variety of intercourses (William 1989, 239; Gerli 2004, 201), according to the line who made famous porn star Marilyn Chambers (1952–2009), although it was her one-time colleague Andrea True (1943–2011) who made it into a hit song. Porn studies in the Williams tradition reject distinctions between a “good” eroticism and a “bad” pornography (Williams 1989, 6). They consider the notion of pornography as socially constructed and continually renegotiated, as what was once “obscene” (confined *out of the scene*) gradually becomes “on/scene” (i.e. the subject matter of legitimate representation) (Williams 1989, 332).

Quite apart from anti-porn crusaders, the mainstream of porn studies is criticized by those who follow the analysis of pornography by French postmodernist philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007). For Baudrillard, pornography is a “travesty of sex,” a capitalist-consumerist serialized “representation of a representation,” unable to reflect the real sexuality or to say anything significant about it (Baudrillard 1997, 146). Williams and other porn studies scholars answered that Baudrillard and others fail to recognize the differences between thousands of adult movies, which are very different from each other (Melendez 2004). Williams, however, admitted that the limit of pornography has largely been the incapacity to include “journeys to the male other” and to problematize “masculine desire and pleasure” (Williams 1989, 279).

The Story of Carmen Enache

As told to me in interviews in April 2017, the story of Carmen Enache (b. 1956) started in Communist Romania. She was trained as a theatre actress and a ballet dancer, and organized shows with puppets. In the last years of the regime, while pornography became widespread around young people, Enache and others also dared experimenting in theatres with eroticism and nudity. Almost concomitantly with the fall of the Romanian Communist regime, Enache joined MISA.

Enache has no formal education as a movie director. Noting the prevalence of porn in post-Communist Eastern Europe, she reports that she decided to “play the game” and offer “an alternative to pornography” by entering herself the world of adult movies. She claims that in the first “experimental” movies, “the esoteric content was limited to observing, recording, and studying the different states of consciousness during a sexual act and an orgasm.” By the early 2000s, Enache, under the pseudonym of “Bella Maestrina,” was ready to produce movies with titles such as *The Secrets of Seduction* and *My Hot Secrets*.

Both Enache and MISA insist that the movies were her private venture with some friends, an MISA as a movement was never involved. Several friends who were also MISA members collaborated with Enache, including one of the movement’s leaders, Mihai Stoian, who starred in some of the movies under the pseudonym of Paul Diamond (and also accepted to be interviewed for this article).

It is also clear that the movies embody the ideas of Enache's spiritual master, i.e. Bivolaru. "I must say, Enache stated about *Ecstasy Water II*, that the script enticed me a lot. It was written after the ideas of a Tantric master whose life principles I embrace. It was a challenge for me when he said: 'You don't think that Tantric teachings about sexual continence and pee games have extraordinary results? Well, you don't have to believe me. Just verify and experiment them yourself, and we'll talk later'" (*The Making of Ecstasy Water II* 2003).

Enache was among those prosecuted after the 2004 raid against MISA. She was accused inter alia of showing in her movies clips featuring MISA members realized during the movement's summer camps, including in the "Miss Shakti" events, and not intended for public distribution. Romanian police and courts, as Bivolaru's legal history shows and the European Court of Human Rights confirmed more than once, are extremely prejudiced against MISA (European Court of Human Rights 2014; European Court of Human Rights 2016; European Court of Human Rights 2017). However, Enache was finally acquitted of all charges.

After 2004, movies directed by Enache started appearing in dozens of movies sale and rental businesses and adult Internet portals, sometimes including clips Enache claimed (and the movies' original distributor confirmed: see Nicola 2008, which includes audio recordings of conversations with the distributor) were not part of the original versions but came from additional material offered to the distributor by third parties not connected with MISA. According to Stoian, this was part of the material seized by the Romanian police in the 2004 raid, the implication being that somewhat it illegally found its way from the police archives to companies distributing adult movies. While somebody's motivation might have been to discredit MISA, the illegal reproduction of films in breach of copyright for purely economic motives is common in the world of adult movies.

Interesting as the story of the (largely illegal) distribution of Enache's early movies may be, a content analysis is more important for our purposes. I would focus on the most popular films of her first period, *Ecstasy Water I* and *II*, both of 2003. Their abundant showing of male and female private parts, scenes of fellatio, and women kissing and caressing each other, seem to place the movies firmly in the most classic adult category. There were, however, peculiarities, and "ecstasy water," a word commonly indicating urine and "pee games," was expanded as a larger concept.

“I discovered, the main character of *Ecstasy Water* states, that some secret groups of ancient India cured many diseases, regained youth, and obtained psychic powers by using urine. The Tantric priestesses taught men to preserve their erotic energy and not to waste it through ejaculation.” This statement announces the key themes of both *Ecstasy Water I* and *Ecstasy Water II*. While porn movie manuals insisted that without showing ejaculation “you don’t have a porno picture” (Ziplow 1977, 34), the *Ecstasy Water* movies claim that “continence,” i.e. sex *without ejaculation*, is the key to ecstasy and enlightenment, a core teaching of MISA.

In the tradition of the Tantric *Damar Tantra*, the movies insist on the magic power of assimilating (through anointing or drinking) urine (*Damar Tantra* n.d.) and other bodily fluids (including tears). “Sacred water” is also connected with astrology, and the main male character drinks the urine of twelve women, each with a different astrological sign. Enache claims that in fact each actress was born under the appropriate zodiacal sign, and that the movie was, from that point of view, “realistic.”

According to MISA’s reading of *Damar Tantra*, continence, the practice of yoga, and a vegetarian diet amplify the quality of urine and other bodily fluids. By drinking one’s own urine, Enache explains, you amplify your own qualities, but by drinking somebody else’s urine, you assimilate his or her qualities. The result is “growth of one’s specific zodiac” and transfiguration.

To explain how “sacred water” works, Enache gives the example of the Ganges River, whose water is filthy yet does not contaminate the devotees who bath in it. Ganges’ water, Enache explains, is “continuously transfigured” by the prayers of priests and ascetics, just as the sacred waters in the body of the initiates are transfigured by yoga and continence.

Enache’s early movies, notwithstanding titles designed to appeal to specific segments of the adult market, such as *Exaltation of Pee* or *To Pee or Not to Pee for Ecstasy*, exhibited three unique features. First although there were male characters, there were no ejaculations, either simulated or real. Second, male characters were rarely mere “stallions” and they had their own sexual problems to solve. Third, perhaps to the annoyance of the average porn viewer, between one and another sexual number, rather than the tenuous narrative usual in adult movies, lengthy esoteric explanations were included.

Enache 2.0: From Continuamente Amando to Las Caras de la Diosa

After the police raid of 2004, Enache's production of movies with adult content slowed down and ceased, while MISA's opponents and tabloid media shifted their rhetoric from calling the group a "paramilitary organization" to labeling it "the cult of porno yoga." MISA, however, continued to teach among other things "sacred eroticism," and theatrical and other erotic shows never really ceased.

In 2011, while teaching yoga in Argentina, Enache started experimenting with a new kind of movies that, while dealing with eroticism, were not technically adult movies. Although local anti-cultists tried to prevent the shooting of the movie, this finally led to *Continuamente Amando*, which premiered in 2015.

Enache (who now signed Aghora Vidya) transformed a screenplay by a former pupil, a horror story about two sisters, into something completely different. Guided by the journal of her missing sister, Almira (played by Argentinian model and MISA student Maria Noelia Falco), whose own relationship with a stage magician (played by Noelia's real-life lover, in fact a stage magician) is in crisis, discovers a mysterious community where both she and, later, her lover, are initiated into the mysteries of sexual continence and ecstasy.

The community where Almira is initiated exists outside space and time. Its atemporality is symbolically represented by retro cars and clothing from the 1950s, and it disappears at the end of the movie. In parallel with this subtle world, another action is taking place on the physical plane, where the spiritual community is attacked by the mass media and a group having as spokeswoman an anti-cult lady (played by professional actress Noemí Frenkel), as it happened to MISA and other esoteric movements targeted by anti-cultists.

Compared with early movies by Enache, *Continuamente Amando* is different. Even the main anti-cult opponent of MISA in Latin America, Uruguayan psychologist Álvaro Farías Díaz, called it "not pornographic," although (not surprisingly) he found there "strange ideas difficult to understand" (Farías Díaz 2015). In 2017, Enache went on with erotic-romantic movies in the same vein, including *Hope St No. 6*, where a man seeks death and meets it in the shape of a beautiful woman, who gives him back his taste for life.

Las Caras de la Diosa (2017), starring again Maria Noelia Falco, is an important movie, where Enache, so to speak, settles her score with pornography. Gino and Luz are famous actors in the adult movie industry. They meet at a crossroad of their life and career. Although they fall in love deeply, they face a painful fact: their sexual habits acquired in the industry have seriously crippled their capacity to build a proper love relationship. The dramatic confusion they live in causes failure after failure both on the set and in their personal emotional lives.

Looking for a solution, the desperate Gino sets out on a journey of self-discovery that culminates with an unexpected mystical experience: he is initiated by a “tantric woman” in the art of “sacred love” and “divine eroticism.” This new perspective brings both the solution to Gino and Luz’s relationship problems and a transformation in his career.

For all their criticism of pornography, on the other hand, Enache and her friends continue to participate in what she herself calls “self-styled erotic festivals, which are in fact pornographic festivals,” where she proposes shows like *Extasia*, a thirty-minute introduction to sacred love and continence through erotic dances, and *Baroque 2017*, a new erotic show and workshop.

Playing the Game: A Conclusion

In a way, Enache is still “playing the game,” of seeking consumers of pornography and “taboo breakers,” and giving them something that speaks their language, yet is at the same time different. Why does she do this? She, and some of her friends from MISA, are aware that their movies and shows are a main weapon for the anti-cult opponents of the movement and those who want it banned as a “porno cult.”

The opponent’s argument is that Enache (or, they would say, MISA) made significant money with the movies. Enache denies it: she claims, and can show some good evidence, that most of her movies of the first period were “stolen” and distributed illegally, and a small legal distribution generated very little money, if any. As for the movies of the second period, they are made available for free in public presentations and will gradually be offered for free on the Internet too (although, in an initial launching period, viewers are requested to pay).

Concerning the motivations for the movies, a second possibility is that they were and are a recruitment tool for MISA. They are not. Enache claims (again, believably) that, although many, who at the erotic festivals and elsewhere got in touch with MISA, moved from their usual diet of porn to reading books on Tantrism, and asked for further information about continence or sacred sexuality, to the best of her knowledge none of them ever became a member of MISA. And the movies do not mention MISA, nor do they include references to its Web sites.

Enache proclaims that her aim is to share her own “marvelous experience” of sacred sexuality—“when you really experience it, you cannot keep it for yourself”—, go “to the very center of the porn world,” and offer to the millions who watch pornography what she sees as a radical alternative to porn. This answer may be very much sincere, but is only part of the story.

My own tentative answer to the question “why they do it” is that, without excluding secondary reasons, the main reason motivating members of MISA to produce and disseminate erotic movies and shows is, in fact, *esoteric*. They believe that current pornography and “obscene art” may be spread by dark forces, including certain brands of deviated Freemasonry and the Illuminati, and generate a cloud of negative energy dangerous for Planet Earth and its inhabitants (see “Incredibil, profund revoltător, dar adevărat: Iată care este ‘arta’ abjectă pe care o promovează francmasonii!” n.d.). Countering this negativity, the positive energy generated by sacred sexuality, continence, and “sacred water” transforms the world and may usher in a millenarian transmutation of the whole Planet.

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