



# MISA: An Overview

Massimo Introvigne (UPS, Torino, Italy)

CESNUR 2016 – Daejin University, Korea, July 7, 2016

# Sex, Lies, and Cult Controversies



- ▶ On 27 February 2016 Gregorian Bivolaru, leader of the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), was arrested in France following a request by the Romanian authorities. Media all around the world had a field day about “the yoga guru who tried to bed 1,000 virgins”. But who really is Bivolaru? And what is MISA?

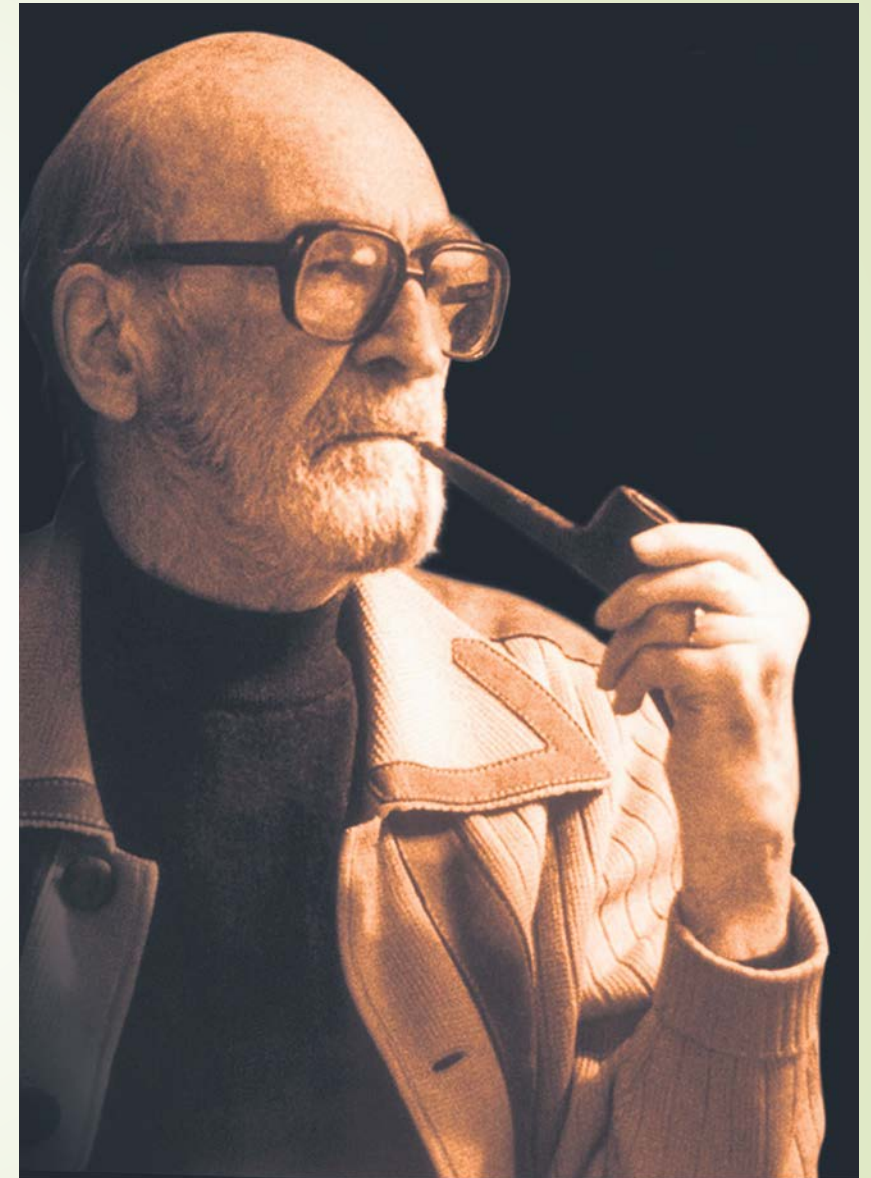
# Birth of a Yogi



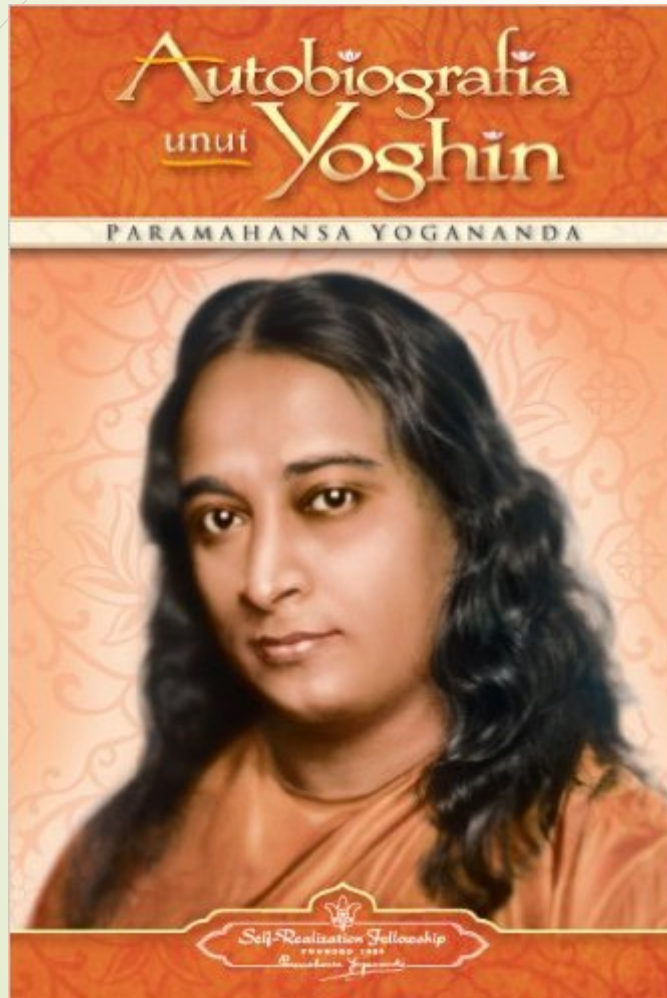
- Gregorian ("Grieg") Bivolaru was born on 12 March 1952 in Tărtășești, in the Romanian region of Muntenia. His biographers claim that he started experiencing altered states of consciousness as a young boy

# Searching for Yoga

- ▶ As a young man, Bivolaru developed his interest in Eastern spiritualities and yoga by reading texts by the well-known Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986, right) and corresponding with him



# Reading Yoga Books



- ▶ Not many books on yoga were available in Communist Romania, but Bivolaru managed to read texts from Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952), Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887-1963) and Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886)

# A Yogi in Communist Romania



- In 1970, at age 18, Bivolaru (left) started teaching yoga in Bucharest. Yoga was regarded with suspicion by the Communist regime, although attitudes varied and in the 1970s a “non-spiritual” teaching of yoga was tolerated. From 1972 on, Bivolaru was repeatedly investigated, interrogated, and arrested. He was also suspected, wrongly, of being the Romanian leader of Transcendental Meditation. Finally, in 1989, he was confined in the psychiatric hospital of Poiana Mare, the most feared political asylum in Communist Romania

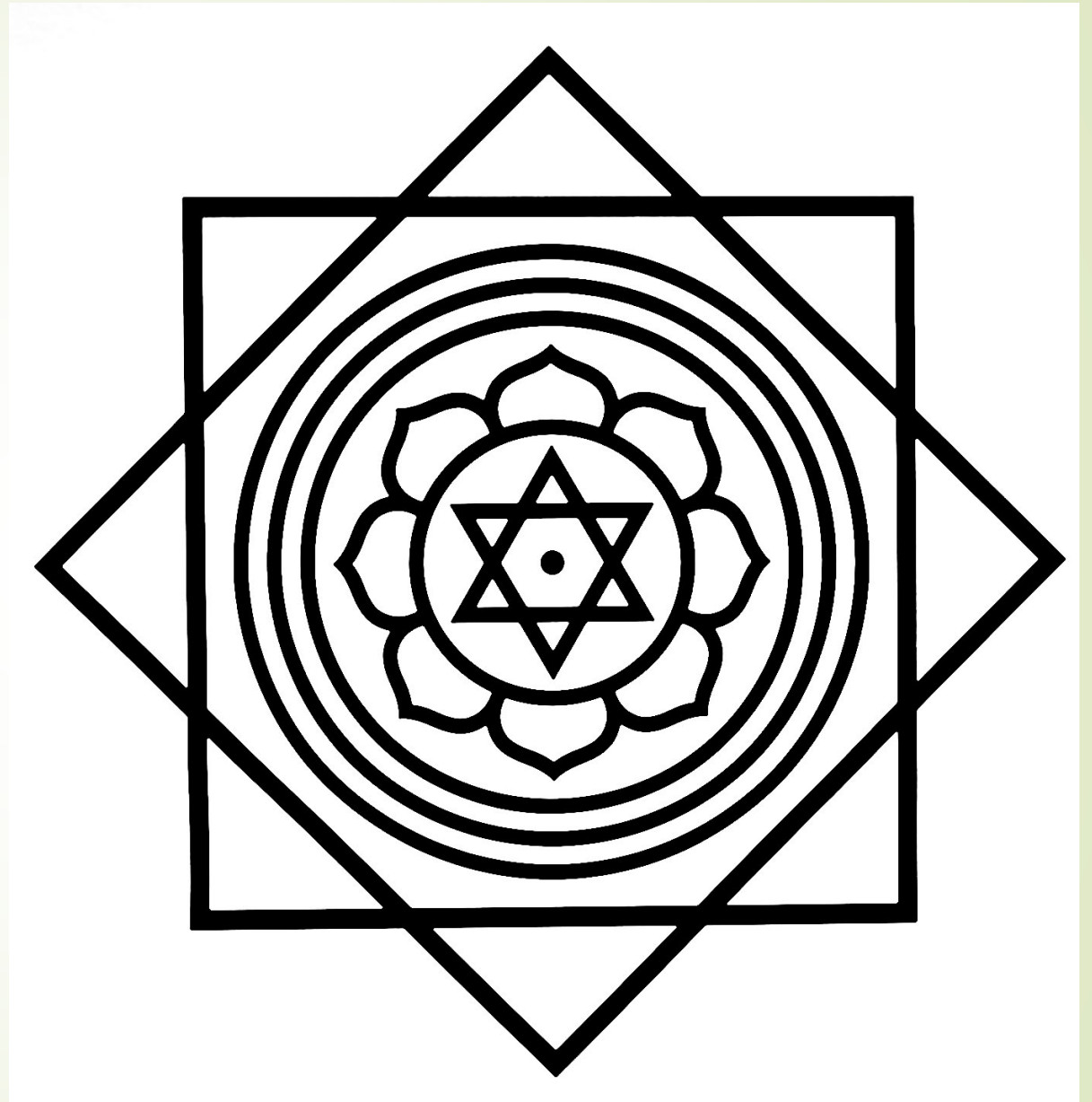
# Politics and Sexuality

- ▶ Bivolaru was accused by the regime of possessing and spreading pornographic materials, practicing a job without the proper license, and escaping from prison. The impression, however, is that the main reason for his persecution derived from his unconventional ideas



## The Birth of MISA

- At the end of 1989, the Communist Regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989) fell, and Bivolaru was freed from the psychiatric hospital. He started again teaching yoga and in 1990 founded the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA)







## A Success Story

- ▶ In the immediate post-Ceausescu years, the yoga taught by Bivolaru, which included a positive appreciation of sexuality as a way to the divine, appeared to many as a symbol of the new freedom. The success was spectacular. In a few years, there were in Romania forty ashrams of MISA, 750 full-time members, and a total membership of 37,000

# An International Movement



- Eventually, from Romania the movement spread internationally, adding, one after the others, chapters in Austria, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Ireland, Bosnia, Slovenia, Norway, Cyprus, the United States, South Africa, Argentina, Uruguay, India, and Thailand. They all belong to ATMAN - The International Federation of Yoga and Meditation, which serves as the global umbrella organization for MISA

# Romanian Intelligence Strikes Back

- Opposition to “cults” by media and the intelligence services in Romania survived Communism. Starting in 1990, the local media attacked Bivolaru, from 1993 on labeling him as “the sex guru”. The intelligence services and the police carried out investigations that led to his arrest during a massive raid against MISA in 2004



# Sex with a Minor?



- Bivolaru was accused inter alia of having had sex with 17-year old Madalina Dumitru (left) and eventually sentenced in 2013 for this crime to six years in jail, although the girl repeatedly denied the incident and stated that her initial “confession” was due to the pressure of the prosecutors. In Romania the sexual consent is legally established at age 15, but Bivolaru was accused to be her teacher (something both he and she denied) and sexual relations between teachers and students are regarded as a crime

# Asylum in Sweden, Arrest in France

- ▶ A complicate legal story\* followed the 2004 arrest. In 2005, Bivolaru decided to flee Romania and escape to Sweden, where he was arrested again following a request from the Romanian authorities. However, the Swedish Supreme Court in December 2005 rejected a Romanian request from extradition and ordered the immediate release of Bivolaru, who in 2006 obtained the status of political refugee in Sweden. In 2016, however, Bivolaru was arrested in France, a country not particularly friendly to “cults”, after Romania had obtained his inclusion in the list of Europol’s most wanted fugitives

\* For a detailed legal story of Bivolaru and MISA, see the paper of Prof. Gabriel Andreescu in this same session of CESNUR 2016



# Persecuted but Alive



- As a result of continuing harassment by the police, particularly – but not only – in Romania, MISA lost some members. It is however still very much active, and actually growing in several countries, with some 20,000 students and 1,000 full-time members

# International Meetings



- Each year MISA organizes in Romania two meetings in Herculane in May (above) and in Costinești in August. Each has an average attendance of 5,000. Meetings are also organized in other countries

The Psycho-Social  
Effects Of Yoga  
Practice

## EFECTELE PSIHO-SOCIALE ALE PRACTICII YOGA

CARMEN MARCUȘ

*The evolution of the romanian civil society after the 1989 events has created an interesting field of study for Romanian social sciences: association forms unsubsordinated to the state. The herein studied group (The Spiritual Movement for Integration in the Absolute) is such an association form, and it became in short time a subculture of certain proportions (over 20.000 members at the present time). The novelty of the study was provided by the fact that the public follows SMA's activity through the mass-media's mirroring, which created meanwhile an image including stereotypes and prejudices. In order to objectively deconstruct the system we consider that a sociological approach will be convenient.*

O subcultură propune un ansamblu de simboluri, norme, valori și moduri de viață neidentice cu cele ale culturii dominante într-o societate, dar nici în contradicție față de acestea, ci aditionate lor (de exemplu, Asociația pescarilor și vânătorilor poate reprezenta o asemenea subcultură). (Bryjak, Soroka, 1995). Spre deosebire de subculturi, o contracultură se manifestă în opoziție cu cultura dominantă în societate. "Adepții unei contraculturi resping unele sau majoritatea standardele și modelele comportamentale ale societății înglobante, dar nu resping toate normele și valorile culturii dominante" (I. Mihăilescu, 1993).

Cercetarea de față își propune o analiză a fenomenului Yoga în România, studiind dacă această practică este o simplă metodă de evaziune din societate sau are efecte mai profunde, constituindu-se într-o subcultură care propune noi simboluri, norme, valori și moduri de viață. Fenomenul este studiat prin intermediul celei mai extinse mișcări de acest gen - Mișcarea de Integrare Spirituală în Absolut - coordonată de profesor Yoga Nicolae Catrina. Cursurile organizate de M.I.S.A. sunt răspândite în majoritatea orașelor țării, numărând aproximativ 15 mii de persoane la data efectuării studiului (anul 1995), iar sediul mișcării este în București. Activitatea este organizată diferențiat, pe ani de curs, la data efectuării cercetării existând șase ani (anii I-VI). Menționăm că studiul s-a realizat exclusiv asupra persoanelor care practică Yoga în cadrul M.I.S.A., nereferindu-se în nici un fel la alte mișcări asemănătoare din România (cum sunt gruparea Sahaja Yoga sau mișcarea condusă de Mario Vasilescu).

# Multiple Sources

- What exactly does MISA teach? Its sources are many: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, Western Esotericism and also Christianity. In 1997, a survey by sociologist Carmen Mărcuș\* (1997) revealed that 62,5% of MISA students in Romania kept regarding themselves as "open" to the local Orthodox Church

\* "Efectele psiho-sociale ale practicii yoga", *Revista de Cercetări Sociale*, 3 (1997), 131-140 (139)



# A Charismatic Movement within MISA

## Mișcarea Charismatică Teofanică – prezentare generală

29 Apr 2013 20:23



Distribuți pe Facebook



Distribuți pe Twitter



**Mișcarea Charismatică Teofanică** este o comunitate spirituală inspirată de bunul Dumnezeu ce a fost fondată de către profesorul de yoga Gregorian Bivolaru în România, în cadrul Școlii de yoga *MISA*®. Această mișcare se bazează în principal pe descoperirea și experimentarea în universul lăuntric al ființei a prezenței tainice copleșitoare a lui Dumnezeu, prin intermediul unor modalități simple, pline de înțelepciune și bun-simț.

- In 2009, Bivolaru founded within MISA the **Mișcarea Charismatică Teofanică** (Theophanic Charismatic Movement), aimed at promoting an opening up to the Divine according to each believer's individual religious or spiritual beliefs

# “Unity in Diversity”

- MISA teaches a variety of paths and techniques, from the enneagram to alchemy to communication with angels, as part of an approach of “unity in diversity”. Each teaching is proposed apart from its historical and cultural context, in its essential “esoteric” core, which – according to MISA – is compatible with very different paths



# A Tantric Core



- There is, however, little doubt that a tantric form of yoga, mainly derived from tantric Shivaism of Kashmir and Siddha Yoga of Tamil Nadu, is at the center of MISA's spiritual proposal. "Vira" and "Shakti" groups impart tantric teachings respectively to men and women

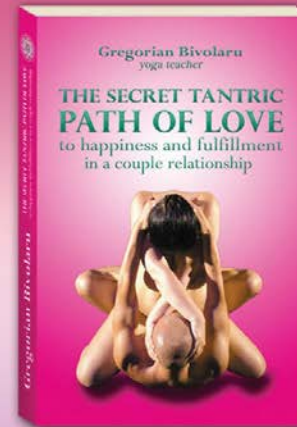
# The Tantric Path of Love

- ▶ Tantra as taught by MISA includes teachings on sexuality, not only “for amplifying femininity/virility and creating harmony and lasting attraction in a couple relationship” but also “for using sexual energy as a tremendous transformative force”

## THE SECRET TANTRIC PATH OF LOVE

to happiness and fulfillment in a couple relationship

by *Gregorian Bivolaru*



## Book Launch Event

**LONDON, Friday Nov 26th @ 6 pm**

Tara Yoga Centre & Natha Publishing House proudly present:

**FREE 2 hour Tantra Seminar** – “Introduction to Tantra and Oriental Sexuality” by renowned Tantra teachers Mihai and Adina Stoian – providing an inspired insight into the mysteries of Tantra



**The author and book signing**

**FREE CONCERT** of inspired electronic symphonic music – **DEVAS** – a delight for your heart ([www.devas.ro](http://www.devas.ro))

*Kindly note the hall is limited to 500 seats and priority will be given to those who have pre-ordered signed copies of the book from the website*

[www.tantrichpathoflove.com](http://www.tantrichpathoflove.com)



**DEVAS**

INSPIRATIONAL MUSIC FOR YOUR SOUL

Contact numbers: UK: (+44)7932057740, DK: (+45)23725455, RO: (+40)722144179

For more info, buying the book or registering for the event, email us at: [info@tantrichpathoflove.com](mailto:info@tantrichpathoflove.com)  
if you need help to find accommodation in London, phone: (+44)7932057740

# Sexual Continence



- ▶ A key teaching on sexuality of MISA is sexual continence, i.e. a form of sexual intercourse in which the man tries to avoid the emission of semen. The practice has a century-old history in both Eastern and Western esotericism\*

\* See Prof. J. Gordon Melton's paper in this same session of CESNUR 2016

# Tantra: Beyond Sexuality

- It is a common misconception that Tantra only deals with sacred sexuality. In fact, Tantrism is based on the correspondence between divine macrocosm and human microcosm. In order to channel the divine energy into the earthly plane, it uses a variety of techniques where microcosmic realities are regarded as a resource rather than as an obstacle. These realities include sexuality and the human body, but also the visual arts, music, dance, geometrical forms, colors, certain foods, and dreams



Tantric Feast (Indian watercolor, ca. 1790)

# The Yang Yogic Spiral



- MISA also teaches a variety of tantra yoga techniques not directly connected with sexuality. One of its most spectacular rituals is the Yang Yogic Spiral, where thousands of people hold hand and meditate in the open air. They are arranged according to their astrological signs and the Spiral is believed to enhance the beneficial effects of their respective ruling planets

# Objective Art

- ▶ Faithful to its Tantric roots, MISA also promotes “objective” art as yet another way of channeling divine energies through microcosmic material elements such as forms and colors. MISA also promotes dance and theater, and its care of the body led to initiatives in the field of ayurvedic medicine and organic food



*Red Space*, by Argentinian MISA artist Ines Honfi



# Art Awakens the Soul

- ▶ According to Mihai Stoian, MISA's second-in-command, art is a direct method to awaken the soul. True art comes from awareness and generates transformation by expressing general laws



# Resemblance and Resonance



- ▶ Stoian teaches that art works through resonance, i.e. transmission of vibrations from the source to the receiver. For resonance to work, there is, however, a condition: a certain resemblance between the source and the receiver

# Yantras



- Symmetrical figures are particularly easy to «resemble». Artists connected with MISA such as Ines Honfi (above) often produce yantras, i.e. Tantric diagrams with certain proportions and colors. We resonate easily with these works of art and our mind slowly takes the shape of yantra in meditation

# Objective vs Subjective Art



- Subjective "art" for MISA is an expression of the ego and communicates an unimportant "point of view", no more interesting than a CV or passport. Objective art (Ines Honfi again, above) comes from divine consciousness, and the higher the level of consciousness the better the art

# Technique and Consciousness



- ▶ Technique is important but consciousness is more important. Stoian explains that the Russian painter and esoteric teacher Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947: *Armageddon*, 1936, left) was probably less technically gifted than other artists, yet his work generate high resonance because of his high level of consciousness

# “Temporary Artists”

- ▶ Stoian adds that people genuinely in love, whose level of consciousness is high, may become “temporary artists” quite independently from their technical skills

Ines Honfi, *Angels in Love* (right)



# The Artist as Initiate



Ines Honfi, *Blue Lotus*

- ▶ Subjective art is horizontal. Objective art is vertical and becomes a form of initiation. But initiated art can be produced only by initiated artists and audiences also need to be educated to be receptive to initiation. MISA indicates that art is a part of the yoga teaching, because without art we would remain «people who know» rather than becoming «people who are»

# Training the Artists



- Successful artists need yoga training too. MISA claims that, if an artist is not evolving, he or she will not keep the same level of consciousness and, after a first success, the next works will become repetitious or not of the same level. Stoian gives the example of the less successful sequels of Michael Flatley's famous dance show *Lord of the Dance* (right)



# Visual Arts and Eroticism



- Combining different tantric teachings, MISA maintains that a healthy connection between visual arts and eroticism, particularly in dance and theater, is capable of generating powerful spiritual experiences. Genuine sacred erotic art, MISA insists, although involving nudity and a celebration of the body, should not be confused with “trivial and ordinary shows” proposed by today’s pornography, which only prove “the dramatic decrease of the level of consciousness”

# "Obscene Art" and Freemasonry

**: Incredible, deeply revolting but true.  
This is the obscene art that the  
freemasons are promoting! ::**

Incredible, deeply revolting but true. This is the obscene art that the  
freemasons are promoting!

**This is the obscene "art" being promoted by freemasons!**

**As the sublime artistic shows promoted by our Yoga School  
where nudity scenes were displayed have been debated in  
serious media controversy, not even a word has been said  
about a horrible spectacle of so called "art" recently  
performed in Paris.**

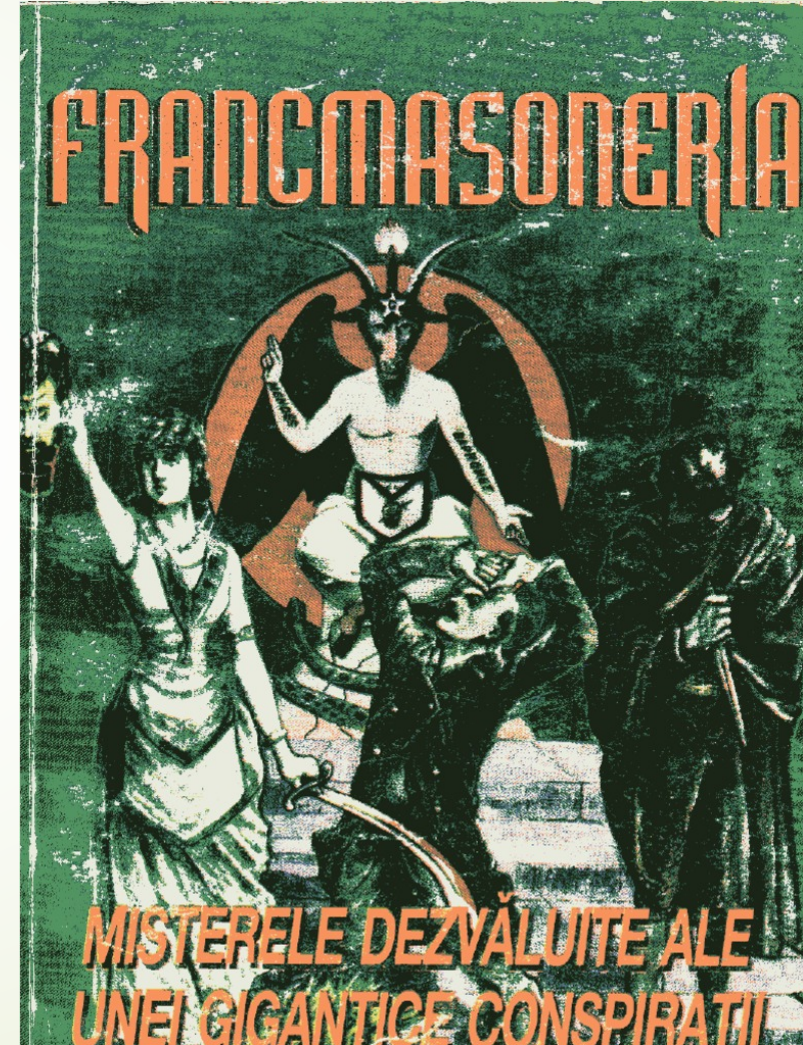
A subject verging on the very  
bottom of decadence, that's the  
show "The crying body"  
successfully performed in Paris  
in the beginning of this theatrical  
season. We wonder what will be  
the lowest level of abjection and  
nullity the modern art,  
particularly the theatre, can reach?



- Yoga practitioners from MISA have also produced what they consider to be erotic art. However, their critics call this production pornographic and obscene. Obviously, the difference is not always easy to tell, but MISA insists that objective criteria exist. While legitimate erotic art celebrates the beauty of the body and sexuality, "obscene art" shows the disgusting and the revolting. In some articles, MISA suggest that there is a connection between obscene or lower forms of art and concepts promoted by Freemasonry

# A Sustained Anti-Masonic Discourse

- Books by Bivolaru (right) consistently expose Freemasonry as the source of the Western World's contemporary decadence and a number of evils. As the very covers of MISA books show, traditional religious Roman Catholic and Orthodox criticism of Freemasonry remains a source, together with contemporary testimonies of hostile ex-Freemasons and what critics call "conspiracy theories"





*The UFO approaches the meteor:*



*It hits the meteor:*



*The meteor explodes and the UFO flies away and vanishes:*

## MISA and Extraterrestrials

- MISA is also interested in the existence of extraterrestrial life. Bivolaru suggested in a lecture in 2013 that benevolent extraterrestrials could have intervened to shatter into pieces a huge meteorite before it collapsed over the Russian town of Chelyabinsk, an incident which would have had catastrophic effects for the whole Planet Earth

# Esoteric Epistemology and “Conspirituallity”

## Freemasonry using esoteric knowledge for maleficent purposes

**The latest press campaign of Adevărul ordered by the masons is known to be under the influence of Mars**

by Emilia Kareva

*The campaigns of denigration and destruction of the Romanian yoga school, MISA, and its mentor, Gregorian Bivolaru, were ordered from the shadows by the satanic Masonic group. Freemasons manipulate from the shadows the press and television, misinforming systematically and inciting people to excessive hatred and violence.*



By a simple analysis of the latest press campaign handed down by the newspaper Adevărul against MISA, one can notice the occult manipulations of the freemasons which control the

- MISA students do not drink alcohol or coffee and do not eat meat, and respond to attacks with a non-violent attitude. As for conspiracy theories, Sara Møldrup Thejls, in one of the few scholarly articles on MISA, refers to the discussions between scholars (C. Ward, D. Voas, A. Dyrendal, E. Asprem) on “conspirituallity”, or conspiracy spirituality, and concludes that conspiracy theory “is inherently esoteric in its epistemology” and it is not surprising to find it in esoteric movements\*

\* S. Møldrup Thejls, “MISA and Natha: The Peculiar Story of a Romanian Tantric Yoga School”, in James R. Lewis – Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, *Handbook of Nordic New Religions*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015, 62-76 (72)

# Why the Controversies?

- ▶ Anti-Masonism and theories about the aliens normally do not make spiritual movements particularly popular. However, the fact that such a large part of Romanian anti-cultism focuses on MISA is connected with unsolved problems in post-Communist Romanian society about what degree of deviance from a traditional, Eastern Orthodox, and morally conservative public image of the country and the culture may be tolerated





# An International Controversy

- International anti-cultists often simply repeat the arguments of their Romanian counterparts, without being fully aware of the context of the controversy in Romania. On the other hand, one of the main arguments of anti-cultism has always been that “cults” are sexually deviant. MISA’s celebration of body, eroticism, nudity, and sexuality is rhetorically separated from its tantric roots and context, and used as an allegedly typical example of “cultic sexual abuse”

# A Deformed View

- ▶ The view promoted by international anti-cultists and the media is somewhat deformed, as it gives the impression that sexuality is the main subject of MISA's courses. In fact, courses on sexuality represent a very small percentage of MISA's total activities, teachings, and publications. Bivolaru's complete curriculum includes 2,100 courses, of which less than 100 refer to sexuality. Even the Tantra curriculum includes 600 courses, of which some 70 refer to sexuality, intimacy, or couple relationships. That Tantrism is mostly about sex is, as we mentioned earlier, a common misconception





# MISA 2.0?



- As the movement continues to expand internationally, it is perhaps time for scholars to pass to a second phase of the study of MISA, focusing not only on Bivolaru's court cases or in the teachings about sexuality – as interesting as they may be – but on the group's global approach to spirituality and yoga



For more information: [cesnur\\_to@virgilio.it](mailto:cesnur_to@virgilio.it)