Ramona Dima (University of Bucharest), “An Overview of Queer Romanian Contemporary Cultural Products and Practices”

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Abstract: Romanian society mostly rejects discussing issues concerning queer persons, culture and experiences. I therefore consider this topic necessary, both at academic and social discourse levels. In this lecture I will present and analyse the interconnected layers of sexual identity, media representation, affects and forms of discrimination in several Romanian cultural products such as theatre plays (După Traian și Decebal. Din filele istoriei gay în România – After Trajan and Decebalus. Pages of Gay History in Romania, 2012 and Gadjo Dildo, 2015), films (Beyond the Hills, Love Sick, Abreast), literature (such as Adrian Schiop's Soldiers. A Story from Ferentari, Mateiu Caragiale's Remember, Ioana Morpurgo's novel, Immigrants).

The focus of this presentation is placed on how the queer characters are built, in relation to the main discourses in the Romanian society, and to other cultural products on this topic, and how they are transformed (reduced, augmented, etc.) in these transmedia narratives.

The queer reflection in media products consists of two directions: how the queer persons are perceived and embodied as characters by the "majority" (usually, the general opinion of the society has a great negative impact) and the second one: how they perceive themselves and reflect their identities in the cultural products in which they take part. A secondary "reflection" mechanism that I will also discuss is how queer people can relate and read between the lines while being exposed to subtle hints about sexuality of a character or another. This queer gaze might stand at the core of the relation of various queer audiences and the media products they are exposed to – which are, most of the time, heteronormative and traditionalistic. Even in these cultural products, one could sometimes find traces of their identity which is usually diminished or violently negated by the oppressive groups.

When speaking about a queer culture, I will take into account various memorialistic sources (e.g. those found in Florin Buhuceanu's book, Homoistorii of in autobiographies such as Straja Dragonilor by Ion Negoițescu) which are of great importance in the narrative of this presentation; along with them, the characters which I encountered in my research can be read from a queer perspective, and through the interplay of these scarce fragments — of lives and of fictions — I aim to nuance the local expressions of queerness.

Bio: Having an educational background in Literature and Communication Studies, I am currently a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies (at the University of Bucharest). In the last years I have been actively involved in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity NGOs as well as in informal queer feminist women's groups. My research interest revolves around queer cultural products in Romania, the approach being placed at the intersection of cultural, literary and media studies using elements from queer and feminist theory.