

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MUNGIU'S MOVIE 432

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Abstract: This paper is focused on the historical and cultural background of the communist Romania, as it is seen in the movie 4 Months 3 Weeks and 2 Days (432), directed by Cristian Mungiu. The communist world with its laws, taboos and practices is unveiled in this movie, bringing in the foreground the issue of abortion. While abortion is the major theme of the movie, other aspects of the Romanian communist society unfold – difficult relationships, harsh living conditions, and some aspects of mentality. The paper presents the means of remaking the historical atmosphere and the filming techniques, pointing out other movies concerned with the theme of abortion, as well as some media reactions and reflections generated by Mungiu's movie.

Keywords: Communist Romania, abortion, pronatalist policy, historical atmosphere, Cristian Mungiu

Pronatalist Policy of the Nationalist Communist Regime in Romania. General considerations

Totalitarian regimes are generally obsessed with the control of the demographic growth, the provoked abortion being incriminated in totalitarian spaces¹. But in some historical periods and in some cultures where a male child presupposes less socio-economical costs and brings benefits on long term selective abortion is practiced in our times and even infanticide².

In Romania after the beginning of Nicolae Ceausescu's era there was imposed an unprecedented pronatalist policy in the space of the communist East. Through the Decree 770 on the 1st of October 1966 regarding the "pregnancy interruption", as well as through the modifications brought during the last 20 years³ there was practiced a demographic policy with genocidal effects. This decree ended up in affecting all the citizens, men and women alike,

¹ We make reference especially to Nazi Germany. The Soviet Union (1920) and Island (1935) were among the first countries to legalize abortion. In England, as a result of the demographic recoil due to the war, abortion was banished. Only the Law of Abortion in 1967 permitted the interruption of pregnancy for some situations. In 1973 the High Court of Justice of the USA abolished the laws that forbade abortion; a similar process took place in Canada between 1988-1993. In the USA and Canada the anti-abortions laws were considered to violate the security of the woman. See more details about the access to abortion and promoting the modern conception on contraception in after-war Europe, in *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu [Pronatalist Policy of Ceausescu's Regime]*, vol.I: *O perspectivă comparativă [A Comparative Perspective]*, ed. Corina Doboș, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010.

² In China or in poor countries from Far East. See <http://www.friesian.com/abortion.htm> (Accessed on 23.02.2013).

³ The Decree 770/1966 incriminated abortion, abolishing the Decree 463/1957 that liberalize this practice; it presented the exceptions from the law, institutionalized the stipulations and established the sanctions for trespassing the law (See "Decree 770/1966" in *Buletinul Oficial al RSR [Official Bulletin of SRR]* no. 60, October the 1st 1966). Ceausescu's demographic strategies were made in three legislative stages: 1966-1973; 1974-1984; 1984-1989.

regardless of their marital and/or reproductive status⁴. Pronatalist demographic policies had constituted the “political body” of Romania, a body in the political sense of the collocation abused by a regime that declared its paternalist care for the citizens, a finality determined by the project of the creation of a “new man”⁵ (the family as a “unity for reproduction”⁶ was legitimized only through the fertility of the couple, while the baby through the potential it could bring to the communist project). In this political and legislative context, the accent in the official discourse was laid on the idea of fulfillment of the woman through maternity; in real life, the reproduction of the labour force was carried on through which it was desired the perpetuation and eternalization of the nation. This communist axiology supposed the fact that the woman-mother exemplified the miracle of maternity, the patriotic exercise, the man who sacrificed⁷. But, although she was sublimed by the propaganda of the era, the woman was in fact brought into requisition and “nationalized”. Through the manipulation of woman’s body, through her deprivation of the right to plan her maternal moment, through the annihilation of the individual project and of the private life of the couple, through schism, the population was subdued to a collective violation⁸. The cult of the reproduction also implied among other effects the growth of infantile mortality, the “occultation” of the presence of the “defect-baby” become the burden-baby destined to abandonment⁹.

Through the implementation of the Decree 770, a whole system of institutionalized surveillance was realized, a functional system involving militia, prosecution, security, institution of committees of specialized doctors from sections of obstetrics-gynecology; repressive organisms as the National Committee of Demography (1971) and Sanitary Superiour Counsel (1975) were also established for the same purpose¹⁰. Thus, the demographic policy of the state became in practice synonymous with the policy of abortion¹¹. The communist past registered a big number of victims, as the opponents of the regime dead

⁴ See “Law 1/1977, Chapter III: The contribution of the people without children who work in socialist units of the state” in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 60, July the 8th 1977; “Decree 409/1985” concerning the increase of the contribution of people without children” in *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 76, December the 26th 1985.

⁵ Presidential Committee for the analysis of the communist dictatorship in Romania, *Final Report*, Bucharest, 2006, p. 510.

⁶ See the editorial in *Scanteia*, no. 7159, 1966.

⁷ See the article “The Miracle of Life” in *Femeia [The Woman]*, April 1973, p. 13. The grades offered to fertile women were the following: “Heroine mother” (if they gave birth and raised more than 10 children and still took care of them), “Maternal glory” (three prizes for mothers with 9, 8 and 7 children), “Medal for maternity” (for those with 6 children).

⁸ Zoe Petre, „Promovarea femeilor sau despre destructurarea sexului feminin” [„Promoting Women or on Destructuring the Feminine Sex”], in *Miturile comunismului românesc [Myths of the Romanian Communism]*, coord. Lucian Boia, Editura Nemira, 1998, p. 268.

⁹ I also assisted some funerals of women who died due to illegal abortions in those years (one of them was only 22 years old and she had a child). I remember a weird wake. I lived in a block of studio apartments in Slatina and the drying-room was on the 4th floor. I went to visit a friend who lived at the same floor and I saw something beyond imagination: in the middle of the hothouse was the coffin of a baby. Although there was a candle lit, there was no wake. I found out later that the baby was the fruit of an illicit relationship between a waitress and an administrator of a restaurant (who were the privileged category and transform their employees in sexual slaves). The baby died after some complications induced by a late and inefficient attempt to end the pregnancy.

¹⁰ Details on the institutional functioning of repression see in *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu [Pronatalist Policy of Ceaușescu’s Regime]*, vol. II: *Instituții și practici [Institutions and Practices]*, coord. Luciana M. Jinga, Florin S. Soare, Corina Doboș, Cristina Roman, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010.

¹¹ See Vladimir Trebici, „Demografia între știință și acțiune socială” [„Demography between Science and Social Action”], in *Viitorul Social [Social Future]*, nr. 81, 1988, p. 9.

in detention were followed by women deceased as the result of the illegal improper abortions (around 11,000 decease)¹². This reality was the sign of the most obvious duplicity of the “desideratum” of the equality between the sexes¹³.

Filmic Romanian “Antecedents” on the Pronatalist Policy

Marc Ferro managed to convince through his scientific transdisciplinary demarches¹⁴ that the study of the history of cinema and filmography connected to history is a necessity. The film as the art of synthesis, through its capacity of addressing a large and diverse audience from the socio-cultural perspective, through its influence under the phenomenon of modern reconstruction, at the imaginary level, of the past reality and historical as well, through its way it ended up to determine options, trends, cultural and political models, sensitivities and attitudes (being often instrumentalized that way) becomes inevitably a subject of interest for the research of the historian, especially of the one preoccupied by the field of cultural history. The film offers more than the historical documentation about a historical period and more than a historiographical discourse regarding a certain subject; the film offers more opportunities concerning the knowledge of an era, situated at the interference of the political imperatives and the horizon of expectations, of hopes of the people. When it comes to the recent history, especially the one that concerns communism, the official documents generated by the system present only the discourse of the party and state. Therefore, the subjective sources of the period – memoirs, oral historical enquiries, fictional literature, iconography and the feature film – offer opportunities to understand, interpret and “introduce” through the appeal to imagination into the emotional and mentality fields of the analysed period. The film challenges the rational understanding and the empathetic involvement of the culture consumer through the specific means of the cinematographic language, ensuring thus a superior perception of the essence of the era, of the manner in which the conflictual interaction among its axiological aspects generates the collective suffering.

*Illustrate cu flori de câmp*¹⁵ [*Postcards with Wild Flowers*] is a feature film from 1974, the year when Nicolae Ceausescu established the status of president of the Socialist Republic Romania, and his cult of personality became a certainty for every Romanian. Under these circumstances, Blaier, a director who seems to be complying with the directives of the

¹²See more on statistical data on categories “abortion” and “mortality” in Luciana M. Jinga, „Evoluția numărului de avorturi, 1966-1989”, în *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu* [*Pronatalist Policy of Ceausescu's Regime*], vol. II: *Instituții și practici...* [*Institutions and Practices*], p. 159-170; Cristina Roman, „Mortalitatea maternă în România, 1966-1989” [„Maternal Mortality in Romania, 1966-1989”], în *Ibidem*, pp. 172-183.

¹³Lavinia Betea, „Interzicerea avorturilor ca fapt de memorie socială (1966-1989)” [„Prohibition of Abortions as a Fact of Social Memory”], în *Viața cotidiană în comunism* [*Daily Life in Communism*], ed. Adrian Necolau, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 244.

¹⁴ See Marc Ferro, *Cinéma et Histoire*, Denoël, Paris, 1976 and later in *Le Cinéma, une vision de l'histoire*, Le Chêne, Paris, 2003. An interesting analysis concerning the relation between the social and political history, on one hand, and history of the film and cultural history on the other hand see Aurelia Vasile, „Filmul românesc în anii comunismului: surse, metode, problematizări”, in *Istoria recentă altfel. Perspective culturale* [*The Recent History Otherwise. Cultural Perspectives*], eds. Andi Mihalache and Adrian Cioflâncă, Ed. Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași, 2013, p. 499-500; p.504-508.

¹⁵ Script and director: Andrei Blaier; image: Dinu Tănase; music: Radu Șerban; setting: Vasile Rotaru; actors: Carmen Galin, Draga Olteanu-Matei, Eliza Petrăchescu, Elena Albu, Dan Nuțu, Gheorghe Dinică, George Mihăiță; a production of Casa de Filme Trei, 1974.

pronatalist propaganda, was about to realize an “ordered movie”¹⁶. Nevertheless, as the script was inspired by real events and propaganda wasn’t efficient as an offensive¹⁷, the cinematographic production transformed into a “...simple story, dramatically simple, of two brutally disrupted lives, at their beginning, in the most original film of a cinematographer generally known as a conformist”¹⁸. And today, *Illustrate cu flori de câmp* continues to impress through “its atrocious realistic description of the characters and of the investigated mentalities, through its gentle-bitter tone imprinted by the director in an «exemplary effort of self-improvement and sincerity» (Valerian Sava)¹⁹. The directorial formula “opted in favour of the play of out-of-time of situations, events and estates. The film is established on the sequence of the wedding, counterbalanced by the «illicit» events prior to the tragic end of the two young women from the film”²⁰.

The subject of the illegal abortion and of the alteration of the phenomenon of human reproduction is the context of pronatalist policy of the Romanian Communist Party was developed in the documentary *Născuți la comandă. Decreștii* [*Born by Order. The Little „Decreers”*]²¹. While in *Illustrate cu flori de câmp*, the feature film realized around an episode ended up tragically for two women involved in an illegal interruption of pregnancy, there are also burlesque characters, in the documentary film there are real dimensions presented, implicitly tragical, of the demographical policy, the individual traumas, the collective perception regarding this manner of suppressing the individual will and of lowering the standard of living during the ’70s-’80s. *Născuți la comandă. Decreștii* offers many testimonies.

Decreștii is a „mainstream documentary”, as the director stated in an interview, and it is a film that combined various documentary sources as archive images (the author had viewed 100 films from the archives of the Romanian Television and of the studios „Sahia Film”), fragmented interviews („testimonies” of 40 people), but also the sociological analysis, the investigation specific to oral history. In this context, director Iepan presented the real case that inspired Andrei Blaier and his feature film *Illustrate cu flori de câmp*, as well as the story of the worker from APACA company in Bucharest who died after an abortion. The administration of the factory had used the funerary event as a means to exemplify the pedagogy of death. Iepan’s film, the first one of this type in the Romanian filmography,

¹⁶ The film had a substantial budget and the authorities insisted that it should be filmed and be broadcast as soon as possible. It was considered a propaganda product. The filming took 45 days during the summer of 1974. After being watched by the C.S.C. A. on the 1st of November 1974, the film got the recommendation of additional filming, montage shortenings and remakes of the dialogues in two reels (and additional costs for two days of filming, two days of dubbing of dialogues and an input of 300 metres of image. The film was approved G.D.P.P. (General Direction of Press and Print) on the 19th of December 1974 and it obtained the approval of internal and external broadcast (Standard Copy: the 25th of December 1974). The film had a big number of spectators: 2,158,909 (until 2005). See <http://www.secvente.ro/2012/06/ilustrate-cu-flori-de-camp.html> (Accessed on 13. 02. 2013).

¹⁷ Party propaganda annexed the film, associating new dogmas, as in Stalinism, but in the spirit of national-communism after 1982. For details, see Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain dans la période communiste. Représentations de l’histoire nationale*, Editura Universității din București, București, 2011, p. 276-289.

¹⁸ Tudor Caranfil, *Dicționar universal de filme [Universal Dictionary of Films]*, Editura Litera, București, 2008, p. 431.

¹⁹ *Apud* <http://www.secvente.ro/2012/06/ilustrate-cu-flori-de-camp.html> (Accessed on 8.09. 2014).

²⁰ The action takes place in 48 hours.

²¹ Andrei Blaier had the experience of making documentaries.

concludes that „the Revolution from December 1989 was of the „decreers”, 70% of those buried in Ghencea-Militar cemetery were born between 1967 and 1972²². The documentary has generous empathetic finalities, unveiling the solitude of the woman facing the supposed risks of a pregnancy interruption²³.

We have to mention the fact that the subject of abortion inspired some other directors. A feature film of success in 2007 had the abortion as its secondary theme – a film with a moral and spiritual character. The film *Izgnanie/The Banishment* by Andrei Zviagintsev²⁴ proposes a profound meditation on some universal themes as Love, Faith, family and Hope.

Remaking the Historical Atmosphere in *Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days*

The film debuts with the image of a room in a hostel from the late '80s²⁵. We witness the end of a serious conversation between two roommates (Otilia and Gabita), a conversation that seems to have ended with a deal. It is interesting that although the first images seem to introduce us in a domestic universe in which we don't expect anything great to happen, the camera becomes alert and „follows” Otilia, the main characters of the feature film. The details of the first images remake in an inspired manner the „milieu” of a room in a hostel: a bottle of milk forgotten on the radiator, a jar of jogurt, a box of Amigo instant coffee, a jar with some dry flowers and some other trifles on the plinth of the window, the table with some plates and cups on it, a make-up remover Doina, and the aquarium with fish given to Gabita as a gift by an absent lover, three beds from the furniture items specific to every hostel room, several book shelves and the illicit heater. We may see through the window that it is snowing slowly and in a pictorial manner.

In order to remake the atmosphere of the students' life and to present aspects of the ubiquity of the black market during communism, some images with the common toilet are introduced, as well as the episode with the Arab student who had a sort of *souk* in his room. More specifically, on the background of the paucity of goods that are part of bare necessities, the Arab „provided” the Romanian students with soaps, coffee and foreign cigarettes. That episode is also an edifying detail for the transactional mentality of the era. In other sequences we see the coexistence of black marketers, receptionists and militoners, as well as the complicity/solidarity in case of infractions considered minor²⁶ ones. We witness the presentation of the way a specific attitudinal „culture” functions, namely the one of „coping” as a collective exercise. The bottle of wicky, the coffee, the Kent, the „luxury soap” were the expression of the barter, the lubricant of the system of public relations. The strategy of „coping” seems to be the second nature of people, an asset transmittable from generation to

²² Iulia Blaga, „Decreșii e un film despre generația mea. Un interviu cu Florin Iepan”, în *România Liberă*, decembrie 2003, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Decreteii-e-un-film-despre-generatia-mea.html> (Accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

²³ See also Iulia Blaga, „Decreșii e un film despre generația mea, Interviu cu Florin Iepan” [Decreers is a film about mz generation, Interview with Florin Iepan], in *România Liberă*, December 2003, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Decreteii-e-un-film-despre-generatia-mea.html> (accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

²⁴ Directed by Andrei Zviagintsev; script and adaptation by Artimon Melkumian after William Saroyan's story *The Laughing Matter*; image: Mikhail Kirchman; actors: Marie Bonnevie, Konstantin Lavronenko; music: Andrei Dergachev and Arvo Pärt, 2007.

²⁵ I lived in such a hostel in 1982.

²⁶ See how Otilia travels without a ticket in means of transport; as a matter of fact, for some students that was a source of adrenaline.

generation. Thus, there is a certain dominance of a culture of human coldness, even of a programmed rudeness (see how the receptionist of the hotel behaves awaiting for their bribe, the Kent cigarettes). This so-called „culture” is also expressed by the impression of cold, which is given by the symmetrical and unhospitable spaces of the hotel and the barrack-like spaces in university. The bleakness of the people and public spaces (lines made up of people waiting silently in queues at the corner shop, the silence on the buses) are other aspects to point out.

The characters are caught sometimes in a system of apparently irrational behaviour that has a justification in the economy of narration, contributing to the genuineness of the script; thus, before meeting with the one who was to perform the abortion, Gabita felt empty, like before the exams, but she prepares for the event as for a „trip to the mountains”, thinking of taking with her the courses to study for the exams. She wants to create the impression of normality, but she is numb and she has a „hesitant” voice. It is relevant that Otilia, an altruist being, names her roommate, Gabriela Dragust, Gabita, the diminutive speaks of her indecisive character and her unconsciousness.

Bebe „the Feldscher” is a representative character for the rapacity of the petty predators of the communist era and less for the industry of illicit abortion²⁷. He plays a role in order to dominate his clients less prepared for such transactions; thus, Bebe uses a diverse behavioral register: the cold superficial politeness, the low, calm or tensioned voice, fury, insults, threats and then, finally, the conciliatory and even paternalistic attitude. Bebe prefers the compromise that would have kept the complicity between him and the two young women and a possible repetition of the episode; „let’s come to an agreement”, he says after raping the two women and introducing the probe to Gabita. He plays the role of the most vulnerable in that situation, as he risked his freedom. Bebe doesn’t seem to desire to have sex at any price, suggesting that he only takes a reward for his „help”; by doing that, he also applies a sort of punishment to the young women, because they didn’t respect the conditions established earlier, affecting thus his safety and male authority. Bebe takes off his shoes and socks placidly, makes sex rapidly and with no protection. While the man takes Otilia, Gabita let the water fall in bathroom so that the water fall would cover the noises of the sexual act. The fragile woman deadens the shock and prepares herself for what awaits her. Otilia feels stained. After the rape, the camera seems to be obsessed with Otilia’s face – a vivid and devastated face. Her gestures become mechanical. After the rapes, the technical details of the pregnancy interruption follow as if the rapes weren’t enough and we witness brutal scenes in a tensioned silence. After that moment Bebe shows paternal affection and then gives Otilia instruction where to throw the aborted fetus – at a dumpster near the blocks. He offers his services to see if Gabita „is well”, but being refused categorically, he wishes them „good luck”. Then the silence and a „thank you” addressed to Otilia by Gabita. Otilia reproaches Gabita the fact that she lied and delayed the decision, as well as her being superficial, facts that brought them into that incredible situation.

²⁷ Lizica Dusa from Iepan’s film was saying about a mechanic who was a sort of serial killer, because all women whom he provoked abortion died shortly after the procedure. Bebe is part of the category of those who were making money on the side and also satisfying their sexual desires “helping” women in difficult situations. But clandestine abortions were actually performed by women with some medical knowledge. They were frequently denounced and condemned to prison according to the law of those times.

Otilia had to go to a family celebration at his boyfriend's, but the pressure was so high that her nose was bleeding on the bus. The girl was pale and overcome by contradictory states, shocked by what happened in the hotel room and oppressed by the role she had to play at the party at Rusu's family. The scenes regarding that moment are unforgettable through the way the capacity of adapting to different social milieus to the communist norm is captured, the capacity of comfortable cohabitation. First generation intellectuals, offsprings of communism, the guests unveil unconsciously their conformity, self-sufficiency and their parvenu status. See especially the mediocre discussions, the traditional menu (soup, beef salad and meatballs), taking off the shoes at the living room door, the bottle of whisky – the symbol of the communist „wealth”, the discussion about the repartition for work after graduating from college, the attitude of being used to influence traffic, the (deceiving) familiarity discussing about Ceausescu (the „All-knowing”) and about the relation between the Church and Securitate (the political police).

The episode of the feast synthesizes the material opulence of the world of physicians (some of them even professors at the university), their ostentatious life in times of austerity and food paucity. We present for comparison private celebrations of colleagues and friends as they take place in the German drama *Der Turm*²⁸. At one of these meetings, friends (all intellectuals) struggle to keep apparent the socio-professional tradition around a modest feast, dominated by a coconut that wouldn't break. Discussion on socialism are simple and even humorous, no conspirative attitudes.

Coming back to our film *432*, during the entire party Otilia seemed a mechanical doll. During one of the „breaks” Otilia and her boyfriend Adi discuss her attitude that affected the atmosphere of the group. Finding out about Otilia's involvement in her friend's abortion, Adi sustains the idea of getting married and not opting for an illegal procedure in such situations. Otilia understands the uncertain perspective on a marital project with Adi, given their different social backgrounds that may affect their relationship. The director considered important the voice of the guests at the table. The focal point of the image is Otilia and sometimes we see only the hands and the gestures of the others, while she seems absent. A long plan is dedicated to her, the same as in the scene with the aborted fetus on the floor of the bathroom. Otilia's face dominates vividly and tragically the feast of the conformists, while they are present only through the vocal symmetries.

The reconstruction of the historical reality supposes not only rendering the „scenography” of the era through material details, but also the reproduction of behavioral and linguistical clichés (see the small talks at the feast). The linguistical formulas are used in Mungiu's film, as well as in Blaiers' film because they are of traditional influence and they define the characters and their backgrounds. The stereotype is comfortable and it is part of the common language so that some dialogues take place, although they imply sometimes unfinished sentences. That is why many discussions from the film lack dynamism and are marked by boredom, anguish and abhorrence.

²⁸ *Der Turm* (script: Uwe Tellkamp and Thomas Kirchner; director: Christian Schwochow; 2012). The film describes the story of a family of intellectuals in Dresden during the last communist decade in the context when the policy of the East-German state became resented even by some of the privileged of the system (thus, the members of the Hoffmann family transform from obedient citizens to opposers of the communist regime). Their humanist axiology oppose them to the system.

While there's almost no soundtrack, the backgrounds filmed are accompanied by the specific noises²⁹, sounds that contribute to building the thriller milieu. The spatial symmetries are used for suggesting the constraint of the system and the pale color palette³⁰, the foggy light and the diluted darkness, the darkness inhabited by lonely and, apparently, dangerous shadows build the image of a crepuscular world. Only the last sequences of the film are completed, apparently in a deconstructive manner, by the music of that period – a pretended romantic music that forges and wipes away the dramatic perception of the episodes from the filmic narration.

According to the consecrated definitions, the neorealist film is the „story of the social conventions and responsibilities”³¹, which force the character into situations that change his conceptions, attitudes, and relationships, situations that make the character face some dramatic choices/options. Thus, Otilia ends up in black waters of a reality as a space with no way out: No flashiness, no pamphletary scenes, no hyperbolic caricatures, no direct attack on the communist system, no good or bad heroes, no Party, no slogans and demonstrations, no Revolution or dissidents – Cristian Mungiu has a huge capacity of bringing us 20 years ago [...]. In the end, *432* is Otilia's film, who drags after her this infectious world with no way out”³². From this perspective, Mungiu becomes almost mannerist (obviously, in the neorealist spirit), because his film is inspired by real events, respecting their contextuality. Besides, referring to the filmic narration of *432*, Mungiu states that his film isn't a chronicle of Ceausescu's times, but the fictional exposure of a story „that happened when I was around 20 years old”³³. He doesn't copy the reality, because, almost every time, the spaces presented as backgrounds for the events seem aseptic compared to the historical ones. It seems that, in fact, we have a contradiction to what was really septic or aseptic in the '80s. Thus, although in the presented communist spaces the aseptic reigns (although it is clean, the hotel is a place of promiscuity; the apartment where Otilia joins a family party is relatively friendly, but the people gathered there are immoral; although the room in the hostel seems more intimate and cleaner than in the poor and insanitary hostels of the times, it is the place of complicity that is confused with solidarity). Many of the spaces and ambiental contexts that seem aseptic are, in fact, septic. And here, in our opinion, Mungiu transgresses the consecrated spaces of neorealism.

Generally speaking, *432* is a „film about life”, its fundamental asset is genuineness. The success of the film is due to the fact that the director applied the ideal recipe summarized by the critic Yuri Gradilshchikov to several basic rules: 1) the film has to give the impression of reconstituting the reality; that is why there shouldn't be forged effects and useless details; 2)

²⁹ See the high sound of the telephones, the noise of the lighting in the hall of the hotel that is about to burn, the specific noises of a city from the last communist decade: unidentified voices from stations of transmissions (walkie-talkie) (a manifestation of a permanent surveillance), dogs barking, noises of broken bottles and jars.

³⁰ The blue of the militoners' uniforms, the red “Dacia”, Bebe's car are the only spots of colours from the chromatics of the film.

³¹ Cesare Zavattini, „Some Ideas on the Cinema”, in *Sight and Sound*, October 1953, pp. 64-69. Edited from recorder interview published in *La Revista del Cinema Italiano* 2, December 1952. Translated by Pier Lanza, p. 50-61.

³² Ovidiu Șimonca, „Drumurile Otiliei - 4 luni, 3 săptămîni și 2 zile”, in *Observator Cultural*, 2007, http://observatorcultural.ro/Drumurile-Otiliei*articleID_18336-articles_d...html (Accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

³³ <http://realitatea.net/cristi-mungiu-filmul-4-luni-3-saptamani-si-2-zile.html> (Accessed on 7. 10. 2014).

the actors have to seem natural and to play naturally (for this purpose pauses are introduced when characters are alone; thus, 432 has a long „psychological break” in which Otilia has the time to meditate on her existence); 3) the details shouldn't contain approximate elements³⁴. These are exactly the aspects that are surprising in the film – the characters talk and have natural attitudes; they are not heroic or demonic characters.

Mungiu paid attention to human relations, communism being the context. A repressive context. The constraints derived from the communist norm limit the options of the characters. These constraints are accepted and no one denounces the repressive character of society, the victims don't rise against the system; they accept in a fatalist way that society and culture of fear that affect the nowadays cinema-goer.

Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days. Film Technique

432 is filmed in pictures-sequences, the technique being determined by the director's intention to offer a „drama built and filmed so that it could be perceived as a documentary and lived as a thriller”³⁵. The camera adapts to the action and main character's feelings, building a fixed plan or it becomes alert, running after Otilia or at the same time with her. The long frames give the impression of real time and not a filmic time. The sequence frame, the medium front frame are used in order to follow the character's feelings. The tension is rendered with the help of the same sequence frame: see the sequence in the hostel room that creates the illusion of a benign status or the fixed frame on the table at the Rusu's party.

The sequence frame „also represents a general stylistic declaration – various lateral intervention – hands, profiles, cigarettes and other human active elements from the micro level, the dramatic key of the whole with lots of subplots that give life to the central epic line”³⁶. The mis-en-scenes build a discrete realism of spacial mobility, speculating especially the relations between characters and objects at the active level when interacting with various elements of furniture and in a very interesting key through the passivity of static compositions”³⁷.

In order to ensure the impact of the narration, canons and clichés of the thriller genre are used: the gradual suspense brought to paroxysm in the final sequence; all these small or big devices are borrowed from the classic instrumentation of a popular genre, although less appreciated by the art critics. „As one might say Thriller rules”³⁸. The slow style of filming reflects perfectly the torture and anguish felt by Otilia³⁹. The spectator is impressed by her attempt to get rid of the aborted fetus. Although Gabi wanted the fetus to be buried, Otilia waited for the last bus to get further from the hotel, reaching an end line and trying to abandon

³⁴ See the article “432” <http://ochiuldeveghe.over-blog.com/article-7247094.html> (Accessed on 8. 10. 2014).

³⁵ Andrei Gorzo, „Zdrobitor - 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile”, in *Dilema Veche*, September 2007, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Andrei-Gorzo/Zdrobitor-4-luni-3-saptamini-si-2-zile.html> (Accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

³⁶ Mihnea Columbeanu, „Neconvențional și extrem de exact - 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile”, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Mihnea-Columbeanu/Neconventional-si-extrem-de-e...html> (Accessed on 3. 10. 2014).
³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Andrei Crețulescu, „Nimicdespre minimalism - 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile”, in *Observator Cultural*, September 2007, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Andrei-Cretulescu/Nimic-despre-minimalism-4-luni-...html> (Accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

³⁹ Carmen Mezințescu, „Palme d'Or-ul lui Mungiu în sfârșit pe ecrane - 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile”, in *Timpul liber*, September 2007, <http://liternet.ro/autor/165/Carmen-Mezintescu.html> (Accessed on 9. 10. 2014).

the sinister package at a dumpster. At night the dogs were barking and some noise is heard behind the dumpster so that Otilia ran to the dark stores of a block and threw the bag with the aborted fetus.

Mungiu's masterpiece had a lot of eulogistic chronicles in the USA, Canada, France, Italy, Israel and a huge success. American and European critics – Jonathan Romney from *Independent on Sunday*, Shelia Johnston from *The Independent*, David Gritten from *Daily Telegraph*, Nick Roddick from *The Guardian*, Nick James from *London Film Festival*, Dave Calhoun from *Time Out*, Wendy Ide from *The Times*, Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian* - considered 432 a surprising and obsessive film, a challenging film, a masterpiece. In France 17 of 20 chroniclers considered the film either „very good” or „excellent” (see the reviews in *Libération*, *Positif*, *Le Monde*, *Ouest France*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*); similar reviews appeared in Italian press (*L'Espresso*, *L'Unità*, *Corriere delle sera*, *Il Messagero*). The cause for the success of the film in the West seems to be the honesty revealing the subject of illegal abortions, as well as the constant unseen negotiations to survive during the last communist decade⁴⁰. We would like to add the fact that the narration and „scenography” of the film, the subtextual discourse were according to the Western imaginary regarding communism.

Conclusion

We presented the way in which in socialist Romania the lack of contraceptives, the incrimination of abortion and the taboo of sex had tragical effects: genocidal aspects of Ceausescu's pronatalist policy, the general poverty, women haunted by remorse and the fear of damnation, the moral and spiritual crisis after 1989. We point out the fact that investigations of oral history on the subject of abortion are more difficult to realize (due to the traumas or the fear of reactivating the „stigma”); they being dominating by the journalistic investigation. Under these circumstances, the Romanian film on abortion offered several masterpieces, as well as the occasion to meditate on the act of justice; let's not forget that enough decesses were due to the zeal of the organs of investigation.

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⁴⁰ See Iulia Blaga, „Cronici super-elogioase pentru 4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile la Cannes 2007”, <http://agenda.liternet.ro/.../Cronici-super-elogioase-pentru-4-luni-3-saptamani-html> (Accessed on 8. 10. 2014).

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