ABSTRACT

ROSE HARTFIELD WILSON. Forced Labor: (Re)production under Ceausescu’s Communist Regime in 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. (Under the direction of Professor Ora Gelley, Ph.D.)

Cristian Mungiu’s 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days (2007) sets out to document the realities of communist Romania under the rule of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. The film is intended to be, in part, the counterpart to the more humorous and nostalgic portrayals of his childhood in Romania in the film Tales from the Golden Age (2009), which he directed along with Hanno Höfer, Constantin Popescu, Ioana Uricaru, and Razvan Marculescu (Scott 30). Reviews of the film have highlighted some of the larger political and social issues at play in the film, but (because of their brief length) do not offer a detailed analysis of the ways that the film comments on these larger structures. In their review, Valerie Palmer-Mehta and Alina Haliluc, drawing on the work of Gail Kligman, highlight the political and emotional implications of the film’s setting in communist Romania, noting that the director, “illuminates the trauma which Romanian women experienced during the reign of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (1965-1989), whose pronatalist policies endangered women’s lives and made them fear the reproductive potential of their bodies” (117).

Academic scholarship on the film, however, has largely failed to attend to these themes. For example, Emma Wilson examines the effect that the Ceausescu regime has on the relationship between the film’s two protagonists, Gabita and Otilia and, although she does not really “argue[e] that the chief concern of 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days is a friendship put under intolerable strain” as the tagline to her article suggests, her reading of the film somewhat ill-suited to the themes of the film in its emphasis on the personalities of the characters. For although there does seem to be some “pathos…in [Gabita’s] childlike gestures” (Wilson 20), the sympathy one feels for Gabita seems to emanate almost entirely from her situation rather than her character, and the narrative of the film
suggests that the sympathy that Otilia feels for her stems from her similar situation in the communist state as an assumed reproductive machine (ie. a potential mother).

In other words, “The situation of the abortion connects the two protagonists in their resistance to system and custom” (Cazan 102). The two characters are united as victims of the communist regime, but also as dissenters to that regime. My reading of the film, while it does not devalue the female solidarity that exists between Gabita and Otilia, will place the emphasis on the women’s similarity with regard to their recognition of and resistance to the (biologically based, reproductive) function of women within the communist state, rather than emphasizing a friendship rooted in some kind of affinity of personality.

To support this reading, I will examine the (visual) enunciations of the film, which, I argue, work to show the type and degree of demands placed on bodies by Ceausescu’s Romania. Theoretically, the project will be grounded in Foucauldian ideas of discipline and punishment (e.g. I will examine the ways in which Otilia is a self-disciplined subject while Gabita is less so) and will describe the ways in which the camerawork in the film enacts Foucauldian concepts of surveillance and the panopticon. Further, building on the work of Ioana Uricaru, I will examine the impact that this political atmosphere has on the relationships between characters in the film—friendships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships—and use this analysis to elucidate the film’s sympathetic stance toward the plight of all bodies during the Ceausescu era in Romania, be they female, male, or animal.